

Name: _____



Labor Day

Next Monday, we have a day off from school to celebrate Labor Day. Every year, on the first Monday in September—Labor Day—we have a holiday to honor all the workers in America.

It takes all kinds of people doing all sorts of jobs to make a great country. It is all the hard-working people in this country that make the United States a wonderful place to live.

The first Labor Day, in 1882, was actually a protest march by workers. The workers wanted a safer workplace, higher wages and a shorter work day.

Back then, working conditions were terrible for most workers. Workers worked up to 16 hours a day, under unhealthy conditions, for very little money. Often they were paid only a few dollars a month for their hard work.

Even little children worked to help support their families. Otherwise, the families would starve. Boys and girls—as young as 8 years old—worked all day long in factories, or coal mines, for just pennies a day. They were overworked, underfed, and never had a chance to play or go to school.

Finally, workers got together and stood up for themselves. They marched. They held protest rallies. They went on strike. People noticed. And eventually things changed.

Today, we have laws protecting workers. There are laws saying how much workers must be paid and how long they can be made to work. There are laws saying that workplaces must be safe for workers, and there are laws that say when and where children are allowed to work.

To celebrate Labor Day, and the Labor Movement, we are going to read a book about Clara Lemlich, one of the people who helped change everything.

Name: _____

Brave Girl

1. In the book, Clara's father could not find work, but Clara was able to get a job. Does this make any sense? Why would factories preferred to hire young girls than grown men?



2. A strike is when workers stop working until they get what they want—more pay, shorter hours, safer factories etc... Clara had led smaller strikes by the girls who worked in the same factory where she worked, but these didn't do much good. However, when the girls working at *all* factories went on strike *at the same time*, they got results. Why do you think the big strike worked, but the smaller strikes didn't?
3. When Clara's general strike ended, 339 garment factories agreed to shorten the workweek, to increase wages, and to let their workers form unions. A union is a group of workers that bargains for its member with business owners and managers. A union also plans strikes and stands up for its workers' rights. Why do you think the factories didn't want to let their workers form unions?
4. One of the largest factories, the Triangle Waist Factory, would not give in to the strikers and refused to improve working conditions. The next year, the dangerous conditions there led to a fire in which 146 workers were killed. What do you think happened after the Triangle Factory fire? If you had lived then, what would you have wanted to see happen?