

The Newsies' Strike of 1899
8th Grade U.S. History
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Directions:

1. First, read the essay question below, so you have the end goal in mind as you complete this assignment.
2. Second, read the historical background of the Newsboys' strike of 1899 in New York City, and keep these facts in mind as you complete the third step.
3. Now look at each of the primary source documents and answer the questions that follow. Your answers to these questions will help you write your essay.
4. Finally, re-read the essay question and begin writing your response. Use examples from the background information and the information from the primary sources to back up your statements. The only wrong answer is one that is not supported with facts.
5. Use the rubric as a guide to understanding what is expected from this assignment.

Essay Question:

Imagine that you are a newsboy (or girl) during the 1890's. The owner of your paper has been charging you more for your papers without raising the price for the customers. You hear that a group of newsies is going on strike to get the price put back at 50 cents per hundred papers. Write a persuasive argument encouraging all newsies to join the strike, throughout the city.

Historical Background:

In 1899, newspapers were the only source of news. Modern newsstands did not yet exist and neither did home delivery. The main distribution method was the newsboy, who would stand on streets yelling, "Extra! Extra! Read all about it!" and would shout out headlines to catch people's attention.

Traditionally, a newsboy would pay 50 cents for a hundred "papes" and sell each paper for a penny. However, during the Spanish-American War of 1898, the owners of two major New York papers, the *New York Journal* and the *New York World*, upped the price for the newsies to 60 cents per hundred papers, leaving the price for the customers at a penny a paper. This meant that the newsies would lose profit.

At the time, the trolley workers in New York were on strike for higher wages. This strike may have been the inspiration for the newsies' strike. However, not all newsboys wanted to strike. Those who tried to continue selling papers were called "scabs." Throughout the city, wagon loads of papers were available for any newsboy who dared to sell them. Those who were on strike would often overturn the wagons, destroy the papers, and sometimes beat up the "scabs."

By the second day, the strike had spread throughout Manhattan and had even crossed into the Bronx and Brooklyn. Some of the Brooklyn newsies formed a union, with hats and badges stating their cause. Many groups printed handouts to give to people instead of a newspaper, hoping to spread awareness. They organized demonstrations in front of the World and Journal offices, carrying banners and yelling until police were sent in to disperse them. Some of the boys were even arrested. On the third day, they held a rally, at which a senator and a former alderman made statements. One of the more successful newsies even bought 1,500 pretzels and handed them out to the hungry boys.

In the end, the owners of the World and Journal, Joseph Pulitzer and William Randolph Hurst, came to an agreement with the newsies. They left the price at 60 cents per hundred papers, but they agreed to buy back whatever papers the newsies couldn't sell. This had never been done before. After more than two weeks, the strike was over.

Document A:

“Please don't buy the Evening Journal and World, because the newsboys has striked.
'I ain't a scab.'

These and similar notices were pinned on the hats and coats of newsboys all over the city yesterday, for the strike has spread from the Battery to the Bronx, and even across the Brooklyn Bridge. The Harlem newsboys have organized into a union, and a number of newsdealers there and in the Bronx have also refused to handle the barred 'extries' or 'uxtras.'

'Dere's t'ree t'ousand of us, and we'll win sure,' one of the boys declared.”

“The Strike of the Newsboys”

New York Times, Saturday, July 22, 1899

1. Why were the newsboys on strike? (see “Historical Background”)
2. What does it mean to be a scab? (see “Historical Background”)
3. How far had the strike spread in a single day?
4. How many newsies had joined so far?
5. How can this information encourage others to join the strike?

Document B:

“Spasmodic attacks on so-called ‘scabs’ were made during the day, notably in proximity to the World and Journal offices. The few weary-looking women who sell newspapers on Park Row and at the entrance to the Brooklyn Bridge apparently are not participating in the strike, for they offered all the evening papers for sale, as usual. They passed unmolested through the lines of strikers, and, indeed, mingled with the boys and offered the barred papers for sale.

This was noticed by a passerby, whose inquisitiveness gave him a wholly unexpected insight into the chivalry that evidently enters into the make-up of the newsboys. He inquired of one of them why a woman was calling extra Worlds and Journals while none of the boys was selling them.

‘That’s all right, boss,’ was the reply. ‘We’re sorry, but we can’t help it. We ain’t fightin’ women.’ The man gave him a dime.”

“The Strike of the Newsboys”

New York Times, Saturday, July 22, 1899

6. How were these women able to continue selling the barred newspapers?
7. Why did the passerby give the newsie a dime?
8. How can this information encourage others to join the strike?

Document C:



“A group of newsies selling evenings in saloons and stores.”
Taken in alley back of City Jail at 10pm.



Jo. Lehman, a 7 year old newsboy.
824 Third Ave., NY City.

9. How old do the newsies look in these pictures?
10. What odds do you think these children would have against the millionaire owners of the World and Journal?
11. How do you think these boys feel about their jobs, judging by the pictures?
12. How can this information encourage others to join the strike?

Document D:

"The striking newsboys held a rousing mass meeting in New Irving Hall, on Broome Street, near Norfolk Street, last night. They were to have had a parade with a band of music prior to the meeting, but for reasons explained at the meeting by "Racetrack Higgins" this feature of the demonstration was abandoned. Chief of Police Devery had refused to give the necessary permit.

"Racetrack Higgins," known to race-goers, got the floor at the meeting toward the middle of a program which developed no little oratorical talent among the boys. "Friends, Ladies, and Fellow-Strikers," the lad began. And then he related how he had gone to the Chief of Police for a permit to parade with band music.

"Mr. Devery says to me," said he, "'go away, you slob,' and I says, 'Mr. Devery, don't call me a slob. I'm trying to make my living. I ain't so high in office as you, but some day I may be higher.'"

"Newsboys Act and Talk"
New York Times, Tuesday, July 25, 1899

13. Why didn't the newsboys go ahead with the plan to have a parade with a band prior to the meeting?
14. What did Chief of Police Devery call "Racetrack Higgins?"
15. What was Racetrack's reply to the chief?
16. How can this information encourage others to join the strike?

Document E:

"A dozen big, strapping boys began calling The Evening World and Journal in a little after 11 o'clock yesterday in Forty-Second Street at Vanderbilt Avenue, when they were suddenly surrounded by about fifty young strikers, who soon overcame them and tore up their papers into pieces. A little later two wagons loaded with Worlds and Journals drove up. They were accompanied by about thirty men and big boys, who had come to sell the papers, and also by several big-sized inspectors to distribute the papers.

The numbers of the strikers had also increased to about 100, and the combined force of the strikers soon made an attack upon the wagons. The defenders made a vigorous resistance and struck the boys with sticks and their fists, and repeatedly repulsed them, but the youngsters as often rallied and renewed the attack.

Several of the boys got badly handled by the defenders, but nevertheless they persisted and pressed the anti-strikers sorely."

"Violent Scenes During Day"
New York Times, Tuesday, July 25, 1899

17. Who defied the strike to continue selling the papers and how many of them were there?
18. How were the boys able to overpower the scabs?
19. Were any of the boys injured? If so, how?
20. How can this information encourage others to join the strike?

Essay Question and Instructions:

Write a five paragraph persuasive essay answering the following...

Imagine that you are a newsboy (or girl) during the 1890's. The owner of your paper has been charging you more for your papers without raising the price for the customers. You hear that a group of newsies is going on strike to get the price put back at 50 cents per hundred papers. Write a persuasive argument encouraging all newsies to join the strike, throughout the city.

Use the answers to the questions for each document and the information in the historical background to support your argument. Follow the rubric below as a guide.

Rubric:

A:

- stays on topic throughout the essay, answering the question presented
- supports all opinions with historical and primary source information

B:

- mostly stays on topic and answers the question presented
- supports most of the opinions with historical and primary source information

C:

- strays somewhat from the topic and original question given
- uses some historical and primary source information to support his or her opinions

D:

- frequently gets off topic and loses sight of the overall question
- uses only a few facts from the historical background or documents provided to support his or her opinions

F:

- does not answer the question given at all
- uses opinions only, does not support statements with any facts