



LESSON

Changing Values about Work, Workers and Progress

OVERVIEW

Today's students receive mixed messages about work: Your current education is vital to future work success, though many of you will eventually be employed in jobs that haven't yet been invented. Society respects those who work hard, but employers are replacing laborers with technology wherever possible.

To help students sift through the confusion, this lesson gives them an opportunity to reflect on society's values around work, workers and progress. By comparing a clip from the documentary film ***The Birth of Saké*** with other media depictions of workplaces, students will compare and contrast ideas about work and workers across cultures (U.S. and Japan) and across time. ***The Birth of Saké*** takes students behind the scenes at Japan's Yoshida Brewery, where a brotherhood of artisans, ranging in age from 20 to 70, spend six months in nearly monastic isolation as they follow an age-old process to create saké, the nation's revered rice wine.

POV offers a lending library of DVDs that you can borrow anytime during the school year—FOR FREE! Get started by joining our [Community Network](#).

OBJECTIVES

In this lesson, students will:

- Write (or create a multimedia) comparison of two video clips about work and workers
- Reflect on societal attitudes about work and workers
- Examine the influence of technology on the nature of work and definitions of progress
- Read and analyze informational text about technology transforming work and replacing workers

GRADE LEVELS: 9-11

SUBJECT AREAS

Careers
Economics
English/Language Arts

Global Studies (Japan)
History
Media Literacy

MATERIALS

Students will need Internet access to view clips and read the assignment. If Internet access is a challenge, you could download clips (and put them on an accessible school site) and print hard copies of the reading.

ESTIMATED TIME NEEDED

2 class periods plus homework

FILM CLIPS

The video clip provided with this lesson is from *The Birth of Saké*.

Clip: “The Craft of Making Saké” (15:22 min.)

The clip, which consists of approximately the first 15 minutes of the film, starts at the beginning of the film with a shot of snow falling on tree branches and workers walking to the brewery as a narrator says, “Saké-making is a living thing.” It ends at 15:22 with text that reads, “It is one of the few saké breweries that still uses the laborious and time-consuming traditional method.”

The clip introduces viewers to the Yoshida Brewery, a 144-year-old family-owned establishment whose workers range in age from 20 to 70. This is an artisan brewery, where technology and mechanization play very limited roles. The small group of workers and their brewmaster spend six months in nearly total isolation as they follow a precise, labor-intensive, and almost mystical process to create a world-renowned version of Japan’s national beverage. Traditions reign. Even the brewery owner’s son, who will one day inherit the business, shows deference to the brewmaster. Depicting everything from sharing meals to working the rice by hand and making decisions based on intuition, the clip offers a range of contrasts to typical U.S. workplaces.

ACTIVITY

Step 1: The Nature of Work

Ask students to envision themselves in ten years. They are at work. What do their workplaces look like? What do they do on a typical day? Who else is in the workplace and what are their relationships to those people? Do a quick pair-and-share so students can articulate their initial thoughts.

Then have them imagine what it’s like to work at the largest companies in the United States (or the world). Look at the list of largest employers and talk about what they do:

- United States: <http://fortune.com/fortune500/2015/> and/or <http://www.forbes.com/largest-private-companies/list/>
- World: <http://www.forbes.com/sites/niallmccarthy/2015/06/23/the-worlds-biggest-employers-infographic/>

You may need to supply some information (e.g., Foxconn is the Chinese company that assembles iPhones).

Step 2: Showing the Film Clip

Briefly review this *Business Insider* article by Sarah Gardner discussing the decline of full-time, lifetime employees: “Wall Street Does Not Value Having Employees’ and That’s Changing Everything About the US Workplace” (www.businessinsider.com/companies-dont-like-having-full-time-employees-2016-6?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=referral). Just address the issues the article raises long enough to make sure that students understand the gist.

Segue to the film clip by telling students they are going to see a very different depiction of work from a film about the traditional craft of making saké. If needed, provide general information about what saké is and the role it plays in Japanese culture. (See the **Resources** section below.)

As a prompt for viewing, ask students to watch for:

- attitudes toward work
- attitudes toward workers
- working conditions and the role of technology
- the relationship between bosses and employees

Play the film clip from *The Birth of Saké*. In the follow-up discussion, encourage students to respond to the viewing prompts and also to take notice of differences between practices depicted in the film and those typical in American workplaces (e.g., meal times).

Step 3: Practice and Progress

To provide students practice for the homework you are about to assign, show this clip, using the same viewing prompts as in Step 3.

Budweiser Beer Factory

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p9kBmg0lkqU>

In the follow-up discussion, guide students through a compare and contrast of the two clips.

Continue the discussion by inviting students to reflect on whether or not mechanization and technology (such as the type used in the Budweiser factory) represent “progress.” What is gained and what is lost by implementing these things? Who benefits from such advancements?

Step 4: Assigning the Homework—Clip Comparisons

Assign each student to compare and contrast the clip from *The Birth of Saké* with their choice of one of these clips:

Factory work scene from Charlie Chaplin’s *Modern Times*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DfGs2Y5WJ14>

“The American Factory Worker”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mot4USqFTOo>

Just the Job: “Production Worker” (New Zealand energy drink factory)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6UEojp7lCks>

Depending on the skills you want students to practice, comparisons may be written or they may be presented in a graphic or multimedia format.

Advanced students might be asked to compare and contrast more than one of the clips. In order for them to gain added context for such comparisons, you also might have them reread the *Business Insider* article provided above in greater depth and/or read the article “How Technology Is Destroying Jobs” by David Rotman, published in the *MIT Technology Review* www.technologyreview.com/s/515926/how-technology-is-destroying-jobs/.

Comparisons should address all the initial viewing prompts (attitudes toward work and workers, working conditions and the role of technology and the relationship between bosses and employees), as well as the degree of worker satisfaction and the relationship between co-workers.

They should also address differences in media and how media production choices and techniques influence messages about work and workers (e.g., media form/genre, pace of editing, who is telling the story, whose voices are left out).

Let students know when their comparisons are due.

Step 5: Synthesis and Reflection

If time allows, invite students to share their work with one another.

Wrap up the lesson by asking students what they learned about work from the *Business Insider* article and their comparisons. Invite them to reflect on what they want from their own work experiences.

EXTENSIONS / ADAPTATIONS

1. Use *The Birth of Saké* clip as a lens to examine the history of the Industrial Revolution and why artisanal production facilities (using processes like those used in the Yoshida Brewery) are being displaced by large factories using machines and assembly lines.
2. Use the film to kick off a unit on Japanese history and culture.
3. Host a screening of the film *Metropolis* and compare the alienation experienced by workers in the film with the relationship Yoshida Brewery workers have to their work.
4. Continue the lesson with an examination of who determines workplace practices and the historical role played by owners, labor unions and governments.

RESOURCES

POV: *The Birth of Saké*

www.pbs.org/pov/thebirthofsake/ - Resources include a discussion guide and filmmaker statement.

POV: Media Literacy Questions for Analyzing POV Films

www.pbs.org/pov/educators/media-literacy.php

This list of questions provides a useful starting point for leading rich discussions that challenge students to think critically about documentaries.

Background on Saké

Japan Sake and Shochu Makers Association

<http://www.japansake.or.jp/sake/english/index.html>

Japan Sake and Shochu Makers Association: "A Comprehensive Guide to Japanese Sake"

<http://www.nrrib.go.jp/English/sake/pdf/guidesse01.pdf>

Sake Guru: "History of Sake"

<http://sakeguru.com/all-about-sake/history-of-sake/>

Yoshida Brewery

www.facebook.com/tedorigawa1870English - This is the brewery's English-language Facebook page. Also see www.timelesswines.com/wineries/yoshida-brewing-company/ - This wine-selling site provides a brief history and overview of the Yoshida Brewery.

Work

Encyclopedia Britannica: "History of the Organization of Work"

www.britannica.com/topic/history-of-work-organization-648000 - This encyclopedia overview covers work and workers from pre-historic times to the present.

Library of Congress: "Rise of Industrial America, 1876-1900"

www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/presentationsandactivities/presentations/timeline/riseind/ - This is an overview of the Industrial Revolution in the United States based on documents in the Library of Congress. The section "Work in the Late 19th Century" www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/presentationsandactivities/presentations/timeline/riseind/work/ is especially relevant.

STANDARDS

Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects

(http://www.corestandards.org/assets/CCSSI_ELA%20Standards.pdf)

[SL.9-10.1](#) & [11-12.1](#) Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade-level topics, texts and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

[SL.9-10.2](#) Integrate multiple sources of information presented in diverse media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) evaluating the credibility and accuracy of each source.

[SL.11-12.2](#) Integrate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) in order to make informed decisions and solve problems, evaluating the credibility and accuracy of each source and noting any discrepancies among the data.

[SL.9-10.6](#) & [11-12.6](#) Adapt speech to a variety of contexts and tasks, demonstrating a command of formal English when indicated or appropriate.

[W.9-10.9](#) & [11-12.9](#)

Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection and research.

If students are assigned a multimedia comparison:

[SL.9-10.5](#) & [11-12.5](#)

Make strategic use of digital media (e.g., textual, graphical, audio, visual, and interactive elements) in presentations to enhance understanding of findings, reasoning, and evidence and to add interest.

If students are assigned a written comparison:

[W.9-10.1](#) & [11-12.1](#) Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

[W.9-10.2](#) & [11-12.2](#)

Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization and analysis of content.

[W.9-10.4](#) & [11-12.4](#) Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization and style are appropriate to task, purpose and audience.

Content Knowledge: (<http://www2.mcrel.org/compendium/>) a compilation of content standards and benchmarks for K-12 curriculum by McREL (Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning).

Language Arts, Standard 1: Uses the general skills and strategies of the writing process.

Language Arts, Standard 2: Uses the stylistic and rhetorical aspects of writing.

Language Arts, Standard 9: Uses viewing skills and strategies to understand and interpret visual media.

United States History, Standard 31: Understands economic, social and cultural developments in the contemporary United States.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Faith Rogow, Ph.D., is the co-author of *The Teacher's Guide to Media Literacy: Critical Thinking in a Multimedia World* (Corwin, 2012) and past president of the National Association for Media Literacy Education. She has written discussion guides and lesson plans for more than 250 independent films.