

LESSON 1

An Introduction
to Trade Unions



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An Introduction to Trade Unions

Subject: History

Strand: Politics, Conflict and Society

Strand Unit: Ireland, Europe and the World, 1960 to present.

Learning Objectives:

The child will be enabled to:

- explore, discuss, compare and develop some simple understanding of the attitudes, beliefs, motivations and actions of differing individuals and groups of people in the past;
- acquire insights into the attitudes and actions of people in contemporary Ireland;
- develop a growing sense of personal, national, European and wider identities.

Resources:

- PowerPoint Presentation 1 – *Trade Unions Explained*
- Whiteboard and marker / Flipchart
- See PowerPoint slide notes below

Introduction:

Explain to pupils that they are going to learn about trade unions, and in particular focus on trade unions in Ireland – how they operate and what they do.

The word “**UNION**” will be written on a flipchart / whiteboard to initiate a brainstorm of the meaning of this term. This activity will take place in a whole-class context. Pupils will share their thoughts on what they think a union is and what it might do. Their contributions will be added to the display.

Pupils’ explanations will be discussed, highlighting that a union is a collective group with common aims and interests.

Development:

Teacher introduces the PowerPoint, explaining its content and questioning the children on their understandings and observations of its content. See the accompanying Resource Guide which gives a detailed account of the PowerPoint content together with suggested prompts and questions for discussion and exploration of content.

This will stimulate discussion to enhance their understanding of unions and their role. The following prompt questions could be used:

- What do you think are the aims of a union?
- How do you think a union can achieve such goals?



Display new vocabulary on a Word Wall. This will prove to be a useful (evolving) resource for the duration of this series of lessons based on trade unions.

Activity:

Ask pupils if they know anyone who is in a union.

Explain that you are in a union called the INTO (Irish National Teachers' Organisation). Talk about the INTO (the notes below can be used) and encourage pupils to ask questions about the union.

Pupils are given the opportunity to ask the teacher questions about his/her Trade Union.

Teacher will begin by providing some background to the Irish National Teachers' Organisation.

- Oldest and largest teachers' trade union in Ireland, celebrating 150 years in 2018
- Founded by Vere Foster in 1868
- 45,881 members (as of December 2018)
- Members from Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland
- Island of Ireland is divided into 16 Districts. Each District elects a representative to sit on the Central Executive Committee and other National Committees

- Each school is assigned to one of the Organisation's 180 branches. On joining the INTO, each member becomes a member of the branch to which her/his school is assigned.
- Annual Congress is held at Easter and is the supreme governing body of the Organisation. Organisation policy is determined by Annual Congress (or by Special Congresses which may be called from time to time if an urgent issue arises)
- Teacher should provide some examples of publications from INTO –
 - [InTouch Magazine](#)
 - [10 reasons to join INTO](#)
 - [INTO School Year Planner](#)

Pupils may ask questions such as...

- Why do you think it is important to be a member of the INTO?
- Can you describe some campaigns or programmes that your union have been involved in?
- If you have a problem or need advice how do you go about contacting your union?
- What, in your opinion, is the future of the trade union movement?
- What changes would you like to see happen in the trade union movement in the next five to ten years?

Conclusion:

Ask pupils to write out two things that they have learned about the role and work of a trade union.

Assessment:

- Teacher Observation.
- Comprehension Questions.



Suggested Linkage and Integration:

- English – oral language; discussion on the benefits of union membership.

Reading Comprehension: look out for articles in national newspapers pertaining to trade union matters.

Writing: survey/questionnaire; create flyers “10 good reasons to join a union”

- Gaeilge: [Slíte beatha/gairmeacha beatha](#)
- Mathematics – data (conducting a survey and collating results)
- SPHE – Myself and the Wider World, media education
- Visual Arts – drawings, painting (e.g. creating logos or posters for a trade union)
- Drama – thought-tracking/hot-seating (why should I join a union?)

PowerPoint Slide Notes

Slide 1

Discuss the title “Trade Unions”.

Pupils will brainstorm any previous-related knowledge associated with this topic.

Slide 2

“Unity is strength”

On this slide, pupils will look and respond to a black and white picture of a group of workers from the past. The banner behind the group bears the words “Unity is Strength”.

Pupils discuss this motto – come up with other instances that justify this slogan. In what scenarios is it beneficial to work together? What are the advantages of working together as a group?

Slide 3

Tesco Workers

This slide depicts an image of Tesco staff members on strike, displaying a banner which reads “fighting for decent jobs and fairness”.

Pupils will engage in discussion based on the need for “fairness” and equality.

- Why must an employer ensure that all workers are treated fairly?
- Talk about the school setting – how do Principals and Teachers ensure everyone is treated fairly? What happens if a pupil feels that they have been treated unfairly?
- Have they ever witnessed a “strike” (demonstration similar to that on the slide)? Where? When? What do they know about the situation / outcome?

Slide 4

The teacher will then explain to the students the meaning of the term “Trade Union”.



Slide 5

This slide comprises a range of logos of Irish Trade Unions.

Pupils will be asked to identify any logos that they may recognise.

Some pupils may be able to name / describe other trade unions / symbols / logos (from media or family members involved in a union).

Slide 6

Teacher should draw pupils' attention to the picture of "Bunreacht Na hÉireann" and explain its' significance.

Employees have a right set down in the Constitution to join a trade union. Each worker has the right to join the union of their choice and the right to leave a union. An employee cannot be dismissed from their job because they are a member of a union.

Slide 7

This slide illustrates some of the main areas that trade unions are involved in.

Teacher should elicit the pupils' understanding of the term "negotiations" and explain how trade unions are involved in discussions on a range of issues to create positive working conditions for members (e.g. wages, facilities, holiday leave etc.)

Slide 8

This slide contains a video message for pupils from ICTU General Secretary Patricia King to introduce them to the series of lessons on trade unions. Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) is the collective representative body for trade unions in Ireland – north and south.

Slide 9

This slide outlines the benefits of joining a trade union. Teacher should talk about these positive aspects of trade union membership with the class and ask if there are any additional points that pupils could add to the list.

Slide 10

Teacher will explain the meaning of the term "activist". An activist is an individual union member who becomes involved in the work of their union beginning at the local workplace.

Trade union activists:

- Encourage fellow workers to join a union
- Provide support and advice to members
- Represent views and concerns of members to management
- Negotiate changes to working conditions and practices

Slide 11

Discuss the meaning of the term "shop steward" / "union representative".



Teacher will explain the role and duties of this individual.

Slide 12

Having discussed the role of a union representative, the pupils will be asked what characteristics and skills they think a union representative may have.

e.g. What skills would a captain have? What skills should an effective union representative have?

Slide 13

Talk about the term Collective Bargaining.

Collective bargaining is one of the most important tools for unions and their representatives. It is a process by which unions collectively negotiate agreements with employers affecting all workers. It is important because the bargaining position of a group of workers is far stronger than that of an individual.

This relates back to “unity is strength” – the power of a number of voices working together is much stronger than individuals trying to make a point.

Pupils will be asked to relate this to their own experiences (on sports teams, in playground games, reaching a resolution if there are disagreements with siblings etc.)

Slide 14

Concluding slide – final question – What have we learned?

Teacher will ask pupils to recap on what new information they have learned over the course of the lesson. (These can be recorded on a whiteboard / flipchart and may be referred to in subsequent lessons)

