

Living Here in Allentown: The Effects of Deindustrialization

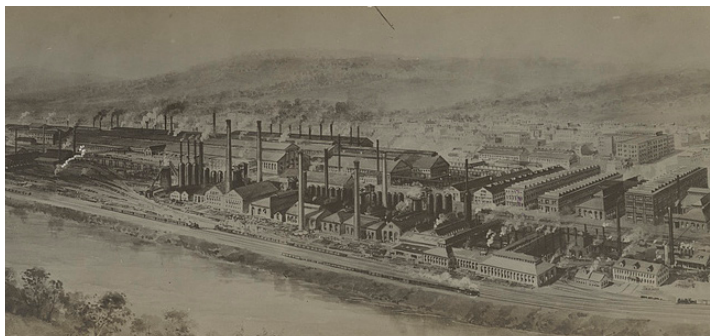
OVERVIEW

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

What is deindustrialization, what are its effects, and how is that process illuminated in the Billy Joel song “Allentown”?

OVERVIEW

In this lesson, students will explore the economic impacts of deindustrialization by examining the history of Bethlehem Steel, reading testimonials from people affected by the plant closure, and analyzing the lyrics to Billy Joel’s song “Allentown.”



Rummell, Richard, Artist. Bethlehem Steel. Pennsylvania Bethlehem United States, ca. 1908. Photograph. <https://www.loc.gov/item/2013646256/>.

The Bethlehem Steel Corporation began as the Bethlehem Iron Company in 1863. For more than 100 years, it produced steel in the Lehigh Valley region of eastern Pennsylvania at its primary steel mill in Bethlehem. During this time, it employed tens of thousands of local workers who produced steel products used to build many iconic buildings and bridges in the United States, including the Chrysler Building, Madison Square Garden, and the Golden Gate Bridge. Bethlehem Steel was also instrumental in producing armaments the United States military used in World War I and World War II, as well as countless products used to make automobiles and other consumer goods.

At one point, Bethlehem Steel was the second-largest steel producer in the world and the 14th-largest industrial corporation in the United States. However, this began to change in the late 1950s as poor management decisions, adversarial relations with its unionized workforce, and the availability of lower-cost foreign steel took a toll on Bethlehem Steel’s bottom line.

By the late 1970s, Bethlehem Steel was experiencing declining sales, massive worker layoffs, and obsolescence within the steel industry. The Bethlehem Steel Corporation produced steel at its flagship Bethlehem, Pennsylvania facility for the final time in 1995. Its declaration of bankruptcy in 2001 marked the end of an era for steel production in the United States, and serves as an example of the effects of deindustrialization.

Bethlehem’s decline and its effects on the surrounding towns was artistically captured, perhaps most notably by Billy Joel’s. In his song “Allentown,” Joel attempts to capture the deindustrialization of the U.S. steel industry in Pennsylvania’s Lehigh Valley in the 1970s and 1980s, symbolizing working-class hardship, fading opportunities, and the

uncertain future of American laborers. Joel wrote “Allentown” as a reflection of “real America,” symbolizing towns hit by industrial decline and a generation whose once limitless future was abruptly constrained when factories closed.

OBJECTIVES

Upon completion of this lesson, students will:

1. KNOW (KNOWLEDGE):

- The definition of deindustrialization
- The history of the Bethlehem Steel Corporation
- The adverse economic effects the demise of Bethlehem Steel had on a city, its people, and its community
- How the Billy Joel song “Allentown” illustrated deindustrialization in the United States

2. MASTERY OBJECTIVE:

- Students will be able to describe the adverse economic effects of deindustrialization on a city, its people, and its community by examining the impact of the Bethlehem Steel Corporation’s bankruptcy on the local economy and community of Bethlehem, Pennsylvania while analyzing the lyrics to Billy Joel’s song, “Allentown.”

ACTIVITIES

PREPARATION

1. Display images from **Gallery Walk - The People and Businesses of Bethlehem** around the room.

MOTIVATIONAL ACTIVITY

1. Explain to students that in class they will be learning about deindustrialization. Write “Deindustrialization” on the board. In groups, individually, or as a class, ask students to write a short definition of “deindustrialization” (*if helpful, suggest to students to break the word apart [“De/industrial/ization”] in order to develop a definition*).
2. Display **Image 1, Deindustrialization Definition**. Ask students to compare their definition with the definition in the image, and share any differences or similarities they notice. Then ask students:
 - Could you provide a possible example of deindustrialization?
3. Display **Image 2, “View of works from Lehigh River...”** Ask students:
 - What do you think this is a photograph of? (*The photograph is of a steel plant.*)

- What other images come to mind when you think of steel plants?
 - How do you imagine a typical steel plant and steel plant worker looked like in the 1970s – 80s?
 - Where might have this photograph been taken? Do you think that is a common region for the production of steel in the United States in the 20th century?
4. Inform students that the photograph is of the Bethlehem Steel Factory, in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. Tell students that for the rest of the lesson, they will examine the economic ramifications of a major corporation filing for bankruptcy, resulting in a Pennsylvania steel plant closing, and how that closing relates to the process of deindustrialization in the United States.

PROCEDURE

1. Explain to students that to look at the effects of deindustrialization, they will be analyzing the Billy Joel song “Allentown.” Distribute **Handout – “Allentown” Lyrics**. In groups or individually, instruct students to answer the questions on the handout. If possible, ask students to listen to the song “Allentown” by Billy Joel on YouTube while they read the lyrics on the handout (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BopLuwJJEkY>). After they have finished, ask students to share their answers from the handout.
 2. Display **Image 3: Map of Pennsylvania & Lehigh County**. Ask students:
 - Using the map, describe the geographical location of Allentown and Bethlehem. (*The cities are in the eastern portion of Lehigh County, which is in eastern Pennsylvania.*)
 - About how far away is Allentown from Bethlehem? What might this say about the relationship between these two places? (*They are about 5-6 miles apart; the close proximity might say that the two places share*
- an economy, workers, etc.)*
3. Have students form groups of two or three and distribute **Handout – Bethlehem Steel Timeline**. Instruct students to review the handout and answer the questions. Then discuss the handout questions in class.
 4. Explain to students that they will next examine the impact the 1995 closing of the Bethlehem Steel plant had on the local economy and community of Bethlehem, Pennsylvania by participating in a gallery walk. Distribute **Handout – Gallery Walk Graphic Organizer** and review the handout directions with students. Instruct students to visit each of the gallery stations from **Gallery Walk – The People and Businesses of Bethlehem** to complete the handout. Once students have completed the activity, ask them to share their answers with the class.
 5. After students have reported their answers, review the implications of the closing of the Bethlehem Steel plant in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. Then ask students:

- Why does the closing of a major industry in a city have the potential to do so much damage to a local economy?
- What can happen to a tax base and city services when the leading employer in a community ceases operations?
- What steps would the former steel workers of Bethlehem Steel have had to take to find new employment?
- How might deindustrialization affect other cities? What happens when deindustrialization spreads across a country?

SUMMARY ACTIVITY

1. Ask students to re-examine the lyrics to “Allentown” and instruct them to update the lyrics to include two or three more verses that summarize how the closure of the Bethlehem Steel plant impacted people and businesses in the Lehigh Valley area of Pennsylvania.

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

1. Read more about the rise and fall of Bethlehem Steel here: <https://pa-history.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Roth-Marcus-prize-pdf.pdf>
2. Research other popular songs that focus on the economy or specific economic concepts.

STANDARDS

COLLEGE, CAREER, AND CIVIC LIFE (C3) SOCIAL STUDIES STANDARDS

Economics

D2.Eco.1.9-12. Analyze how incentives influence choices that may result in policies with a range of costs and benefits for different groups.

GEORGIA STANDARDS OF EXCELLENCE SOCIAL STUDIES

SSEMA1b. Explain the differences between seasonal, structural, cyclical, and frictional unemployment.

SSEMI1. Describe how households and businesses are interdependent and interact through flows of goods, services, resources, and money.

SOCIAL STUDIES – NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR THE SOCIAL STUDIES (NCSS)

Theme 1: Culture

Theme 2: Time, Continuity, and Change

Theme 3: People, Place, and Environments

Theme 5: Individuals, Groups, and Institutions

Theme 7: Production, Distribution, and Consumption

Theme 8: Science, Technology, and Society

Theme 9: Global Connections

VOLUNTARY NATIONAL CONTENT STANDARDS IN ECONOMICS

Standard 19: Students will understand that: Unemployment imposes costs on individuals and the overall economy. Inflation, both expected and unexpected, also imposes costs on individuals and the overall economy. Unemployment increases during recessions and decreases during recoveries.

COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

College and Career Readiness Reading Literature Standards for Grades 9-12

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.1 Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn

from the text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.2 Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze in detail its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details; provide an objective summary of the text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone (e.g., how the language evokes a sense of time and place; how it sets a formal or informal tone).

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.1. Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including words with multiple meanings or language that is particularly fresh, engaging, or beautiful.

College and Career Readiness Reading Information Text Standards for Grades 9-12

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.9-10.1 Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.9-10.2 Determine a central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details; provide an objective summary of the text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.9-10.3 Analyze how the author unfolds an analysis or series of ideas or events, including the order in which the points are made, how they are introduced and developed, and the connections that are drawn between them.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.9-10.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings; analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone (e.g., how the language of a court opinion differs from that of a newspaper).

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.1 Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.3 Analyze a complex set of ideas or sequence of events and explain how specific individuals, ideas, or events interact and develop over the course of the text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings; analyze how an author uses and refines the meaning of a key term or terms over the course of a text.

College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Writing for Grades 9-12

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.1 Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.2 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.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.3 Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.4 Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience. (Grade-specific expectations for writing types are defined in standards 1-3 above.)

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and audience. (Grade-specific expectations for writing types are defined in standards 1-3 above.)

College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Speaking and Listening for Grades 9-12

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-10.1 Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 9-10 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.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.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-10.4 Present information, findings, and supporting evidence clearly, concisely, and logically such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, substance, and style are appropriate to purpose, audience, and task.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.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 grades 11-12 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.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.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.11-12.4 Present information, findings, and supporting evidence, conveying a clear and distinct perspective, such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning, alternative or opposing perspectives are addressed, and the organization, development, substance, and style are appropriate to purpose, audience, and a range of formal and informal tasks.



RESOURCES

HANDOUTS

- Handout - “Allentown” Lyrics
- Handout - Bethlehem Steel Timeline
- Handout - Gallery Walk Graphic Organizer
- Gallery Walk - The People and Businesses of Bethlehem