

**Film Title**     *Woodsmen and River Drivers*            **Running Time** 28 minutes

**Filmmakers**   Michel Chalufour, Karan Sheldon, and David Weiss

**Copyright Date**     1989

**Grade Level** 10-12

**Curriculum Areas** English Language Arts, Social Studies, American History, Visual Art, Media Literacy, Filmmaking, Career Studies, Business, Service Learning

**Topics** Labor, Industrialization, Oral History, Environmental Studies, Economic History, Primary Sources, Great Depression, American Studies, Filmmaking, Sense of Place, Family Businesses, Mill Towns, Labor Songs

**Literary Links** *Working*, by Studs Terkel

**Time Required**     1-3 class periods (Use the film or film excerpt in one class period, or use the film to introduce an extended lesson on occupations and work in your community, American history, literature, film.)

**Overview**     Occupational folklife reveals not only the realities and complexities of the workplace but also the history and culture of entire communities as well as historical eras. Remarkable documentary footage from the 1930s illustrates the dangerous and exhausting work of men and women who worked in the logging industry in Maine. By encountering vivid firsthand accounts of arduous physical labor and the seasonal round of old-time logging, students gain perspective on work and occupations in their own lives and community and how occupational folklife contributes to a sense of place.

Useful in English Language Arts and Social Studies, the film can also help students conduct local occupational folklife fieldwork research, which contributes to career planning, service learning, and intergenerational and multicultural education. Economics and Environmental Studies classes can use the film to launch comparisons of family-owned businesses and large corporations, logging practices, and changing conservation techniques.

Use Resources listed at the end of the lesson to emphasize a topic or extend the lesson.

**Objectives**     *Students will:*

Study documentary films as literary texts and primary sources

Analyze filmmaking techniques in documentary films

Learn about occupational folklife and history

Reflect on their own cultural groups, traditions, sense of place, and beliefs about work

Examine the logging industry within American history and literature

Investigate and document occupational folklife in their communities

Consider how occupations contribute to a sense of place

**Adaptation Strategies** If you have only one class period or part of a period, screen a film excerpt. The first 10 minutes, ending with "The only power we had was manpower," will give students the heart of the film.

### **Standards**

Link to your state's standards in all disciplines [www.educationworld.com/standards/state](http://www.educationworld.com/standards/state)  
Common Core Standards are being implemented in many states [www.corestandards.org](http://www.corestandards.org)

### **NCTE and IRA Standards for English Language Arts** [www.ncte.org](http://www.ncte.org)

1. Students read a wide range of print and non-print texts to build an understanding of texts, of themselves, and of the cultures of the United States and the world; to acquire new information; to respond to the needs and demands of society and the workplace; and for personal fulfillment. Among these texts are fiction and nonfiction, classic and contemporary works.
3. Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts. They draw on their prior experience, their interactions with other readers and writers, their knowledge of word meaning and of other texts, their word identification strategies, and their understanding of textual features (e.g., sound-letter correspondence, sentence structure, context, graphics).
6. Students apply knowledge of language structure, language conventions (e.g., spelling and punctuation), media techniques, figurative language, and genre to create, critique, and discuss print and non-print texts.
7. Students conduct research on issues and interests by generating ideas and questions, and by posing problems. They gather, evaluate, and synthesize data from a variety of sources (e.g., print and non-print texts, artifacts, people) to communicate their discoveries in ways that suit their purpose and audience.
8. Students use a variety of technological and information resources (e.g., libraries, databases, computer networks, video) to gather and synthesize information and to create and communicate knowledge.
9. Students develop an understanding of and respect for diversity in language use, patterns, and dialects across cultures, ethnic groups, geographic regions, and social roles.
11. Students participate as knowledgeable, reflective, creative, and critical members of a variety of literacy communities.

### **NCSS Curriculum Standards for Social Studies Thematic Strands** [www.socialstudies.org](http://www.socialstudies.org)

#### **I. Culture**

Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of culture and cultural diversity.

#### **II. Time, Continuity, and Change**

Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of the ways human beings view themselves in and over time.

#### **III. People, Places, and Environments**

Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of people, places, and environments.

#### **VII. Production, Distribution, and Consumption**

Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of how people

organize for the production, distribution, and consumption of goods and services.

## VIII. Science, Technology, and Society

Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of relationships among science, technology, and society.

### **Worksheets**

Folkstreams Film Analysis Framework

Occupational Folklife Worksheet

Sense of Place Worksheet

Interview Form

Release Form

### **To Prepare**

- Preview the film to help frame it for students.
- Review and adapt activities, extensions, worksheets, and resources for your students. Students may take notes on notebook paper or use the worksheets. [The Film Analysis Framework](#) provides scaffolding to cue students to look for elements of filmmaking. [The Occupational Folklife Survey](#) helps the viewer analyze occupational culture. The Release Form is for students' interviews. Print out and copy any worksheets students will use.
- Think about businesses and occupations in your community and how they reflect a sense of place and historical changes. Bring copies of the local Yellow Pages to class so students can scan them for businesses and business names unique to the your region.
- Use the [Occupational Folklife Survey](#) to consider your job so you can share some experiences with students. What does being an educator mean to you? How much have you learned from college, colleagues, students? What would be the title of a documentary about your teaching?

### **Procedure**

#### **1. Before Viewing**

Prepare students by brainstorming how documentaries differ from feature films

Ask students what they know about work in your community. For those who have jobs, how did they learn what to do, what is the work environment, who's in charge, what's difficult, how did they get the job?

Review elements on the Occupational Folklife Survey to help students record relevant information while viewing the film. Share examples from your occupational culture.

If they are not from New England, students may not understand the Down East accents easily. Our speech patterns are one marker of place, so students should listen for how voices contribute to this film and compare the narrator's voice with the voices of people telling their stories.

**Self-Inventory** Tell students that the film is about the hard work of logging in Maine during the 1930s. Ask them to write briefly what they expect to see and hear in a logging camp of that era.

#### **2. During Viewing**

Prompt students to write down the basic film information (title, etc.) and to take notes as they watch the film. To organize observations they may take notes on notebook paper or use any or all these worksheets: Folkstreams Film Analysis Framework, Occupational Folklife Worksheet, Sense of Place Worksheet.

### 3. After Viewing

Open discussion by asking students to review their self-inventories. How did the film differ from what they expected? What surprised them? What tensions and contradictions did they sense? What values were expressed? What is the main message? What are subtexts? What would they ask the filmmakers? Someone in the film?

Use one of these quotations spark discussion.

*"It was a helluva place, but nevertheless you couldn't help but like it."*

*"Keep your tools in good shape."*

*"After dinner the men played cards, told stories, sang songs. I didn't want to be in the kitchen. I wanted to be with the crew."*

*"About 8 o'clock you was ready to hit the bunk. You was tired."*

*"My brother-in-law died. . . .That could easily happen on a log drive."*

*"They come in and plucked it [the forest] like a crop."*

*"The only power we had was manpower."*

*"Change spelled the end, not only of the company but of a way of life."*

In addition to the worksheets, the questions below also offer ways of unpacking the film. Students may refer to their notes.

- What jobs today are as physically demanding as logging? As dangerous?
- What are the implications of a work force that is largely sedentary and an economy that produces more services than goods?
- How did woodsmen and river drivers learn their jobs?
- What was the seasonal round of Maine logging industry before 1930? What is the seasonal round of local businesses?

*At the first snowfall, men went deep into the woods to logging camps, where they spent the winter. They used horse and oxen teams to cart millions of logs to the banks of the frozen Machias River. Right after the spring thaw, river drivers drove the logs many miles downriver to the Ames family's sawmill in the company town of Machias. Some loggers chose to work in the mill, which ran all summer turning logs into building materials such as boards, shingles, and lathes. Schooners sailed the finished wood to Boston or New York City markets.*

- What are some clues to sense of place in the film? Ask students to compare them with markers of place in your region.

*Accents, moose, place names, geography, climate, landscape, seasonal round, types of boats (batteaus and schooners), music, tools such as the Peavey (invented and made in Bangor, Maine), foodways such as the bean hole beans, the soundscape.*

- What were the pros and cons of working for a family company? How does the Ames family's business compare with a modern corporation? What family-owned businesses can students identify in your community?

•Folklorists and oral historians used film footage of loggers and logging commissioned by a family-owned company in addition to archival research and interviews with retired workers of the company. What do students think the filmmakers' point of view is? How does such a documentary augment the study of history and economics? Where could they find primary sources to research occupations in your community?

•In addition to technology, how have jobs changed since 1930? What were jobs for women? The retired loggers' wages ranged from \$1 to \$2.25 a day. What would that buy in 1930? How does buying power compare with salaries today? What safety laws protected workers in 1930?

### **Suggested Activities**

**English Language Arts:** Assign students to write a personal narrative about their experiences with work or work in the life of their family or community. Students may also write a film synopsis or choose words or phrases from this film to use in writing a poem about work.

About 15 minutes into the film, a man sings a ballad, "The Jam on Gerry's Rock." Ballads are songs that tell stories and are usually in four-line stanzas. Ask students to listen to the ballad and then research disaster ballads, which came to North America from the British Isles. Do they consider such ballads primary sources? How do ballads contribute to the understanding of history? Assign students to write a ballad about a local occupation or historical event. They may borrow the tunes of traditional ballads.

Over 200 recorded versions of the folk song "[John Henry](#)" speak to its enduring popularity. The main theme of man versus machine is always central to the song, but this African American folk hero also symbolizes racial struggles against inequities in this country. Students can collect versions of "John Henry" and use them as a basis for classroom discussions about race, class, labor, and heroes or research other songs about work: disaster ballads, African American work songs, shanties, and labor movement songs. After playing some examples, the class can debate the use of folk songs as historical primary sources or analyze lyrics as literary texts.

The Maine loggers in this film use colorful language and terms specific to their community and occupation. The description of how a log jam might reach from bank to bank and the full depth of a river underscores the meaning of the phrase, "We were in a real jam." By finding and removing the "key log," river drivers could break a jam, which might last days or weeks. Ask students to write about a jam they were in and the key idea or action that got them out of it. They may illustrate their stories or tell them in a storyboard, as a filmmaker would.

**Social Studies, Environmental Studies:** With students, find Machias, Maine, on a map, and describe the term [Down East](#), which refers to a geographic and cultural region of New England. In class discussion or as homework, ask students what made the town a good place for the Ames family to establish a logging company and sawmill and to compare old-time logging with contemporary logging in the United States. Some may want to research and report on where our wood comes from today and how we use it. Maine lumber once shipped by schooner went for building supplies, today wood from China might be used. Contemporary corporations manage many forests for pulpwood and paper production. How has per capita paper consumption changed over time? What percentage of paper comes from recycled materials? Other students may want to compare forest conservation practices across time and place and how industrialization and technology have affected logging as well as conservation. Teams can make multimedia presentations of their findings.

**Social Studies, English Language Arts, Economics, Career Studies, Business, Service Learning:** After a class discussion about the role of work in students' lives, families, and your community, students may investigate further by conducting fieldwork research. What better way to learn about work? Occupational folklife is a rich topic for meaningful connection across generations and cultural groups. If your school has a Service Learning program, documenting occupational culture is a great project. People are experts at their jobs and enjoy talking about their work. The people interviewed in this film were in their 80s and their memories of logging remained vivid. Working individually or in teams, students may use the Occupational Folklife Survey and Release Form to interview, photograph, or make a film about occupations and work in your community. They will be creating primary sources that they can give back to the community through an exhibit, web site, film, or contribution to local archives. A local business or the Chamber of Commerce might be willing to underwrite documentation and presentation costs. Public domain resources in Unit II of Louisiana Voices [www.louisianavoices.org](http://www.louisianavoices.org) include all students need to learn, practice, and conduct fieldwork, including interview forms that they can adapt. Worksheets in Unit VIII are for documenting occupational folklife. Students should make multimedia presentations of their fieldwork.

How would students fare in a logging camp? What jobs are available in your community? What do students believe is important about work? Use this film to discuss students' career options and dreams. Ask each student to interview someone about his or her job using the Occupational Folklife Survey and Release Form. Students may choose someone at school, home, or in the community. The Yellow Pages or Chamber of Commerce can help them identify interviewees.

**Visual Art, Media Literacy:** How do students think this documentary film compares with other documentaries? Popular movies? Ask them to analyze this film in class discussion or a short essay using elements from the Film Analysis Framework relating to filmmaking techniques and aesthetics. They can also make a storyboard or write a review of the film.

### **Extensions**

Invite someone who works in a local business for an in-class interview.

Plan a field trip to a local business. Using the Occupational Folklife Survey will give students scaffolding for observing and documenting a business.

Working in teams, ask students to examine the Yellow Pages to find examples of local and regionally specific businesses and business names, which often reflect local culture and history. Students may also calculate and graph the number of businesses in the community. Teams should share their findings in a class discussion.

Screen a commercial film about work such as *Norma Rae* and have students compare it with this film.

Ask students to keep vocabulary lists for all the occupations they research and compare terms with those they listed for this film. What do the words say about sense of place, work, special tools or processes, customs?

Show an excerpt from *Afro-American Work Songs in a Texas Prison* on Folkstreams to illustrate the difference between the solo Anglo American ballad sung in the film and the rhythmic, improvisational communal singing of African American work songs.

## Assessment

**Products Completed** worksheets, personal narratives, synopsis, poetry, storyboards, ballads, multimedia presentations, interviews, occupational fieldwork, reviews

**Process** Class discussions, reflections, interviewing, creating presentations

**Vocabulary** Students will encounter these terms and words while viewing the film. They can make a list of unfamiliar words or special use of words for class discussion. Go over the list to see how many students have. Do they have others not listed below? If so, add them. For a short exercise, ask each student to could choose five words and write a poem that includes all five and read it aloud to the class.

Batteau  
Bean hole beans  
Chopper  
Company store  
Cookee  
Cross cut saw  
Down East  
Driver  
Filer  
Log jam  
Mill town  
Occupational folklife  
Peavey  
River drive  
Schooner  
Selective cutting  
Stamping ax  
Teamster

## Resources

### Publications

Terkel, Studs. *Working*. New Press, 1997.

Green, Archie. *Calf's Head and Union Tale: Labor Yarns at Work and Play*. University of Illinois Press, 1996.

Down East Magazine [www.downeast.com](http://www.downeast.com)

### Web Sites

Working in Paterson: Occupational Heritage in an Urban Setting

<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/wiphtml/pthome.html>

Local Learning virtual guest artist residency of National Heritage Fellow John Celphas features the Piedmont songster singing his version of "John Henry" along with lyrics and activities

<http://locallearningnetwork.org/guest-artist/john-cephas>

Community Works [www.communityworksjournal.org](http://www.communityworksjournal.org) promotes exemplary Service Learning programs, resources, and models.

Louisiana Voices [www.louisianavoices.org](http://www.louisianavoices.org) see especially Unit VIII Occupational Folklife and Unit IV, Lesson 3 Sense of Place

Montana Heritage Project [www.montanaheritageproject.org](http://www.montanaheritageproject.org)

Peavey Manufacturing Company <http://peaveymfg.com> Eddington, ME

Ranney Lakes Region Logging Museum [www.rlrlm.org](http://www.rlrlm.org)

The Story of Movies [www.storyofmovies.org](http://www.storyofmovies.org) is an online interdisciplinary curriculum introducing students to classic cinema and the cultural, historic, and artistic significance of film. The site provides many tools for studying film and the National Film Study Standards.

### **Related Folkstreams Films**

[Pilebutts](#) (see middle and high school study guide)

[Afro-American Work Songs in a Texas Prison](#)