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## Labor Day: Workers Take a Stand

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### Before Reading Poll

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On September 5, 1882, workers gathered in a large group to take a stand against long work hours, dangerous conditions, and low pay. Eventually they accomplished their goal and conditions improved. What do you think of this quote by poet Ryunosuke Satoro?

**"Individually, we are one drop. Together, we are an ocean."**

Agree

Disagree

Explain why you voted the way you did.

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## Article

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**NEW YORK, New York** (Achieve3000, September 1, 2020). A cookout or a campout. A parade or a picnic. A beach day or a ballgame. For many Americans, Labor Day is a chance to rest, relax, and say, "So long, summer!" Because it falls on the first Monday in September, Labor Day has become linked to the end of the summer season. And people have the day *off* of work or school. So why, one might ask, isn't the holiday called "No Labor Day"? Or how about "Autumn Eve" or "You-Do-You Monday"?

Because Labor Day is about *so much more* than fun in the sun. It's about celebrating a time in American history when workers banded together, stood up for what they believed, and changed the world.

The story of Labor Day reaches all the way back to the 1700s. But it's safe to say that the real story began in the late 1800s. At that time, many Americans worked in factories, mills, and mines. Workers often toiled 12 hours a day in difficult, unsafe conditions. Many didn't get any breaks or days off. The machinery was dangerous, and the lighting was poor. Workspaces were crowded and unclean. For a lot of people, the pay was as terrible as the conditions.

For many workers, enough was enough. They wanted a better life. As time went on, more and more people in the U.S. spoke out in favor of reforms.

Alone, workers had little power to bring about change. But *together* they were a force to be reckoned with. They joined labor unions, which are groups of workers with the shared goal of protecting workers' rights and interests. In the late 1800s, labor unions became more outspoken and stronger in number. That led to what would become known as the *labor movement*. As part of this movement, labor unions planned strikes and rallies. They demanded better pay and safer working conditions.

The movement took a big step forward on September 5, 1882. About 10,000 people did not go to work that day. Instead, they joined together for a parade in New York City. They gave up their day's pay to march together. The parade called attention to the importance of workers' rights.

In the years that followed, workers' voices were heard. And the idea of a holiday in honor of workers picked up steam. In 1894, the U.S. Congress made it official, declaring Labor Day a national holiday. Congressional leaders chose the first Monday in September to mark that day in September 1882 when thousands of people took to the streets. Ever since, most Americans have had a three-day break as summer begins to wind down.

Over time, people in the labor movement continued to use their power to improve working conditions and pay. Labor laws were passed to establish fair wages, protect workers' safety, and limit the hours that people had to work.

So enjoy your time off on Labor Day! And think about the workers who took a stand and banded together to create change. Thanks to them, *every* workday is better for workers across the U.S.

*Video credit: PBS LearningMedia © 2015*

### Dictionary

**movement** (*noun*) a series of organized activities in which many people work together to do or achieve something



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ProStockStudio/Shutterstock  
*Labor Day is a celebration of the  
workers of the United States—both  
past and present.*

**right** (*noun*) something that a person is or should be morally or legally allowed to have, get, or do

**strike** (*noun*) a period of time when workers stop work in order to force an employer to agree to their demands

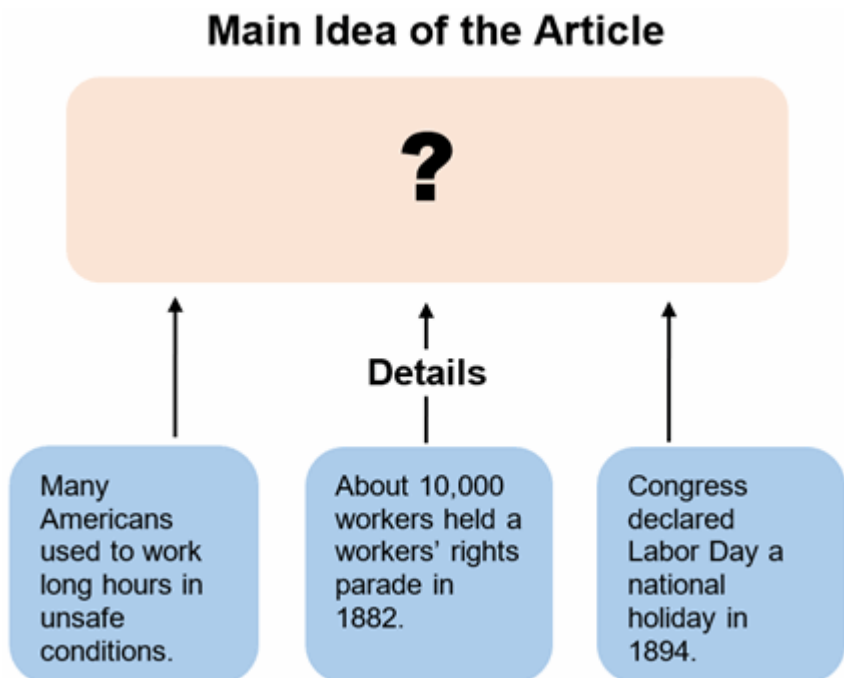
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## Activity

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### PART 1

#### Question 1



Based on the Article, which best replaces the question mark in the diagram above?

- (A) Labor Day gives people a three-day break at the end of the summer season.
- (B) Labor Day celebrates U.S. workers and the fight for workers' rights.
- (C) During the late 1800s, many workspaces were crowded and unsafe.
- (D) During the late 1800s, labor unions planned rallies to demand better pay.

#### Question 2

Which sentence from the Article helps you understand the meaning of the word *rights*?

- (A) They demanded better pay and safer working conditions.
- (B) The movement took a big step forward on September 5, 1882.
- (C) Alone, workers had little power to bring about change.
- (D) In the years that followed, workers' voices were heard.

#### Question 3

Which question is **not** answered by the Article?

- A When were labor laws passed to protect workers' safety?
- B When did Congress declare that Labor Day was a national holiday?
- C How many hours a day did many people work in the late 1800s?
- D How did the parade in September of 1882 affect the labor movement?

Question 4

According to the Article, which of these happened *before* the workers' parade in 1882?

*This question asks about when events happened. It does not ask where in the Article the events appear. Reread the Article for clues, such as dates.*

- A Labor unions became more outspoken and stronger in number, leading to the start of the labor movement.
- B Congressional leaders declared that Labor Day would be on the first Monday of every September.
- C Labor laws were passed that established fair wages and limited the hours that people had to work.
- D Workers' voices were heard, and the idea of a holiday to honor workers began to pick up steam.

Question 5

According to the Article, why was the first Monday in September chosen for Labor Day?

- A Congressional leaders wanted to honor the day in September of 1882 when workers marched for their rights.
- B Many Americans worked in factories, mills, and mines for 12 hours a day without days off.
- C Many Americans joined labor unions every September to demand better wages and safer workspaces.
- D Congressional leaders wanted to celebrate the end of summer by giving people a day off of work or school.

Question 6

Read this passage from the Article:

**For many workers, enough was enough. They wanted a better life. As time went on, more and more people in the U.S. spoke out in favor of reforms.**

**Alone, workers had little power to bring about change. But *together* they were a force to be reckoned with.**

Which is the closest **synonym** for the word *reforms*?

- A communities
- B preparations
- C improvements
- D traditions

Question 7

Which of these is an opinion?

- A Labor Day honors an 1882 parade in which thousands of workers marched in New York City.
- B People should honor the labor movement's work by holding parades every Labor Day.
- C Labor Day became a holiday in 1894 and is celebrated every year in September.
- D People often worked in crowded spaces with poor lighting during the late 1800s.

Question 8

This Article would help a student write an essay on \_\_\_\_\_.

- A the machinery used by workers in the 1800s
- B unsafe conditions in today's workspaces
- C end-of-summer holidays around the world
- D the history of the labor movement in the U.S.

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## After Reading Poll

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Now that you have read the article, indicate whether you agree or disagree with this statement.

**"Individually, we are one drop. Together, we are an ocean."**

Agree

Disagree

Explain why you voted the way you did. Then read and respond to what others have to say.

Sorry, comments are not available at this time. Please try again later.

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## Thought Question

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Explain how individual workers came together to fight poor working conditions and create positive change. *Use facts and details from the Article in your response.*

Type your answer in the text box below.



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## Poll Results

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OPINION STATEMENT: "Individually, we are one drop. Together, we are an ocean."

BEFORE READING	AFTER READING
<b>HOW YOU VOTED</b>	
Agree	Agree
Disagree	Disagree

WORLDWIDE RESULTS					
Agree	<input type="text" value="95"/>	95%	Agree	<input type="text" value="97"/>	97%
Disagree	<input type="text" value="5"/>	5%	Disagree	<input type="text" value="3"/>	3%

**3%** changed their opinion after reading the article.

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## Math

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### PART 1

Suppose a factory has 120 workers. If  $\frac{3}{8}$  of the workers joined a union, how many of the workers joined a union?

- A 50 workers
- B 45 workers
- C 40 workers
- D 35 workers

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## Stretch Article

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**NEW YORK, New York** (Achieve3000, September 1, 2020). A cookout or a campout. A parade or a picnic. The beach or a ballgame. For many Americans, Labor Day is a chance to rest, relax, and say, "So long, summer!" Because it falls on the first Monday in September, Labor Day has become linked to the end of the summer season. And people have the day *off* from work or school. So why, one might ask, isn't the holiday called "No Labor Day" or "Autumn Eve" or even "You-Do-You Monday"?

Because Labor Day is about *so much more* than fun in the sun. It's about celebrating a time in American history when workers banded together, stood up for what they believed, and changed the world.

The story of Labor Day reaches all the way back to the 1700s. But it's safe to say that the real story began in the late 19th century. That was during the height of the Industrial Revolution.

At that time, new developments in manufacturing and transportation brought about major social and economic change. For workers, much of that change was for the worse. Many Americans worked in factories, mills, and mines. Workers often toiled 12 hours a day (or more) without days off or regular breaks in grueling, unsafe conditions. The machinery was dangerous, and the lighting was poor. Workspaces were cramped and unclean. Ventilation was often inadequate, so for many laborers, even *breathing* wasn't easy. For the majority of workers, the wages were as dismal as the work conditions.

For many workers, enough was enough. They wanted a better life. As time went on, more and more people in the U.S. spoke out in favor of reforms to secure rights for workers and improve working conditions.

As individuals, workers had little power to bring about change. But *together* they were a force to be reckoned with. They joined labor unions, which were (and still are) organized groups of workers with the shared goal of protecting workers' rights and interests. In the late 1800s, labor unions became more outspoken and stronger in number. That led to what would become known as the *labor movement*. As part of this movement, labor unions organized strikes and rallies. They demanded better wages and safer working conditions.

The movement took a big step forward on September 5, 1882, when about 10,000 people did not go to work. Instead, they joined together for a parade in New York City. They marched together, giving up their day's wages to call attention to the importance of workers and workers' rights.

In the years that followed, workers' voices were heard. And the idea of a holiday in honor of workers picked up steam. In 1894, the U.S. Congress made it official, declaring Labor Day a federal holiday. Congressional leaders chose the first Monday in September to mark that historic day in early September 1882 when thousands of people took to the streets. Ever since, most Americans have had a three-day break as summer begins to wind down.

Over time, activists in the labor movement continued to use their power to improve working conditions and wages. Labor laws were passed to establish fair wages, protect workers' safety, and limit the hours people were required to work.

So enjoy your time off on Labor Day! And think about the workers who took a stand and banded together to create positive change. Thanks to them, *every* workday is better for workers across the U.S.

*Video credit: PBS LearningMedia © 2015*



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ProStockStudio/Shutterstock  
*Labor Day is a celebration of the  
workers of the United States—both  
past and present.*

**Dictionary**

**economic** (*adjective*) relating to an economy: relating to the process or system by which goods and services are produced, sold, and bought

**grueling** (*adjective*) very difficult: requiring great effort

**ventilate** (*verb*) to allow fresh air to enter and move through (a room, building, etc.)

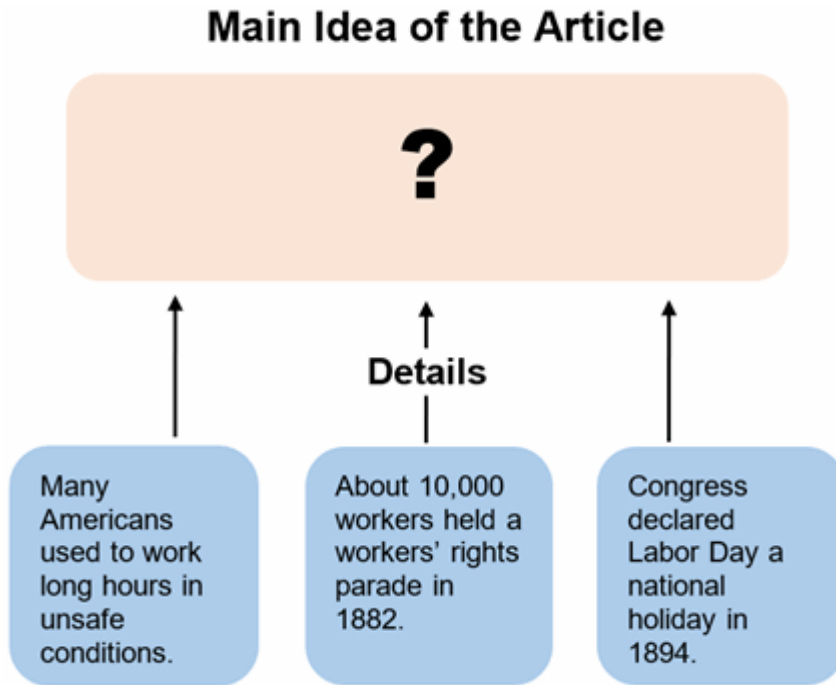
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## Stretch Activity

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### PART 1

#### Question 1



Based on the Article, which best replaces the question mark in the diagram above?

- (A) Labor Day is a federal holiday that celebrates U.S. workers and the fight for workers' rights.
- (B) Labor Day is a federal holiday that many people celebrate with cookouts and picnics.
- (C) During the Industrial Revolution, labor unions held strikes, rallies, and parades for better wages.
- (D) During the Industrial Revolution, many workspaces were poorly lit, cramped, and unclean.

#### Question 2

Which is the closest **antonym** for the word *grueling*?

- (A) unchallenging
- (B) dismal
- (C) unpredictable
- (D) complex

#### Question 3

Which question is **not** answered by the Article?

- (A) When were labor laws passed to establish fair wages and protect workers' safety?
- (B) When did Congress declare that the first Monday in September was Labor Day?
- (C) How did the workers' parade in September of 1882 affect the labor movement?
- (D) How many hours a day did many people work during the Industrial Revolution?

Question 4

According to the Article, which of these happened *before* the workers' parade in 1882?

*This question asks about when events happened. It does not ask where in the Article the events appear. Reread the Article for clues, such as dates.*

- (A) Workers' voices were heard, and the idea of a federal holiday to honor workers began to pick up steam.
- (B) Congressional leaders declared that Labor Day would be celebrated on the first Monday of every September.
- (C) Labor laws were passed that established fair wages and limited the hours that people were required to work.
- (D) Labor unions became more outspoken and stronger in number, leading to the start of the labor movement.

Question 5

According to the Article, why was the first Monday in September chosen for Labor Day?

- (A) Congressional leaders wanted to give workers an end-of-summer celebration by closing most schools and offices.
- (B) Congressional leaders wanted to honor the day in September of 1882 when workers marched for workers' rights.
- (C) Many Americans joined labor unions every September to demand better wages and safer workplaces.
- (D) Many Americans worked in factories, mills, and mines for 12 hours a day or more without days off.

Question 6

Which two words are the closest **synonyms**?

*Only some of these words are used in the Article.*

- (A) organize and cancel
- (B) reform and improvement
- (C) majority and minority
- (D) historic and unremarkable

Question 7

Which of these is a statement of opinion?

- Ⓐ Labor Day was made a federal holiday in 1894 and is celebrated every year on the first Monday in September.
- Ⓑ Labor Day honors an 1882 workers' rights parade in which thousands of workers marched in New York City.
- Ⓒ People often worked in cramped places with poor lighting during the Industrial Revolution.
- Ⓓ People should honor the labor movement's work by holding parades and rallies every Labor Day.

Question 8

This Article would be **most** useful as a source for a student research project on \_\_\_\_\_.

- Ⓐ the work of the labor movement in the United States today
- Ⓑ end-of-summer holidays and celebrations throughout the world
- Ⓒ unsafe working conditions in the modern workplace
- Ⓓ the history of the labor movement in the United States