

SKILLED WORKER

You are proud to be a member of the Amalgamated Association of Iron and Steel Workers. With 24,000 members, it is the most powerful craft union in the United States. Nobody pushes around a member of the Amalgamated!

You've worked here in Homestead for about fifteen years. You have a highly skilled job as a puddler in the steel-making process, a skill taught you by your uncle. You generally work an eight-hour day, six days a week. You earn from \$35 to \$70 a week, depending on the price of steel. (If steel prices go up, your wages go up—when prices go down, wages go down.) But even \$35 a week is great compared to what those unskilled workers earn: they make less than \$10 a week.

In some ways it's really the skilled workers who run the Homestead works. We say, "Carnegie may know how to make money, but the skilled workers know how to make steel." Even if you don't own the mill, you're proud of the control and independence that skilled workers have. It's your skill and control that keep wages up.

For a lot of reasons, you're glad to be an American. For one thing, you speak English, like most people in the country. Sometimes you feel there are about a thousand different languages at Homestead. But mostly you're glad because all the good jobs go to the Americans. If you were an unskilled Hungarian or Rumanian, not only would you have the heaviest, dirtiest job, but you'd live in the most crowded, unsanitary housing. If the unskilled were permitted to join the union, not only might they outnumber you, but they might make it easier for the bosses to lower the wage scale.

Even though you look down on the unskilled foreigners, you depend on them. As a skilled puddler you need unskilled helpers. Home stead is a dangerous place for *everybody*, so all the workers—skilled and unskilled—need to look out for each other. Hundreds of people are killed or injured in the steel industry every year.

You will soon be attending the mass meeting called by the Amalgamated. It will be your job to convince the unskilled workers to support the strike. *At the conclusion of the mass meeting there will be a vote to determine if the unskilled workers will support the strike*, you will meet with other skilled workers so that you can come up with arguments as to why the unskilled should join the strike. In your discussion, consider the following questions:

- (1) What do you have in common with the unskilled workers? What differences are there?

- (2) Try to anticipate the doubts the unskilled may have about the strike. What might these feelings be?

- (3) What arguments could you give to convince the unskilled to support you?

- (4) What changes could you make in your behavior or in your strike plans that might convince skeptical unskilled workers? Think about what you could reasonably offer to persuade them to join you on strike.