



Creative Writing: Folklore & Folktales

folklore: the tales, beliefs, customs, or other traditions of a people, handed down from generation to generation

folktale: a story that is part of the folklore of a people and often appears in different versions

Choose one of the characters or groups of people who are associated with the early days of coal mining and industry in Pittsburgh and the region. Create and develop a character profile, especially heroic qualities.

Write a folktale about the character and his/her involvement in coal mining or early industry. Create a situation that demonstrates the heroism that led to the story becoming part of our folklore.

Draw a portrait of the folklore character. Illustrate the folktale you have written.

You have several choices for characters to develop.

- Choose from among the following list of characters:

Molly Maguires
Rosie the Riveter
Mother Mary Harris Jones
Pinkertons
Wobblies

- Research and find a character who was involved in the coal industry. Use that person's name and create his/her history and story.
- Use the title of a coal mining job and create a folklore character to fit his job. Some possible job titles include:

breaker	driver	nipper
butty	hewer	spragger
doorboy	knocker-up	trapper



Creative Writing: Poetry

couplet: a two-line poem or stanza that usually rhymes

tercet: add a third line with the same rhyme to the couplet

quatrain: a four-line poem or stanza that usually follows the rhyme scheme of *aabb* or *abab*

cinquain: a five-line poem written with twenty-two syllables that are arranged in lines that have 2, 4, 6, 8, and 2 syllables

senryu: written like a haiku poem, with three lines of 5, 7, and 5 syllables; the subject is usually human nature

clerihew: the poem is made up of two rhyming couplets; the subject of the poem makes fun of a celebrity; the first line of the poem is the celebrity's name

persona: written from the point-of-view of the subject of the poem

limerick: a five-line poem that follows a rhyme scheme of *aabba*; it is humorous and often has a bouncy rhythm

ode: written with no formal structure or rhyme; it can celebrate a person, animal, or object

acrostic: the first letter of each line spells out the subject of the poem; should be very descriptive

concrete: sometimes called a "shape poem"; the words are arranged to form a picture or shape that is identified with the subject of the poem

free verse: no formal structure; does not have to rhyme; should be descriptive and should elicit visual images

- Choose from among a variety of poetic styles, or find your own poetic style. Write a poem about coal mining and related industries in the Pittsburgh area.
- Choose several of the poetic styles. Write several different types of poems about one topic about coal mining.



- Working with the rest of the class, create a book of poetry. Choose different styles of poetry. Write the poems and critique each other's poetry. Choose the best poems to include in the book. Illustrate the poems using a variety of artistic styles:
 - work together to critique each poem
 - create a layout with the poems and illustrations
 - have the pages copied and bound
 - make enough copies for each student in the class to have a copy
 - make extras to give to special people (parents, teachers, administrators, friends, community members)
 - could be used as a fund-raising activity by selling the poetry books
- Have a class contest to vote for your favorite poems. Have students, especially those interested in art, create fun "poetic" awards (like special handmade ribbons).
- Have poetry reading day:
 - take turns reading your poems to the class
 - read each other's poems
 - schedule the poetry reading and invite special guests, such as school administrators, other teachers and classes, parents and relatives, community members
 - provide simple refreshments during the poetry reading
- Challenge:
 - write about other industrial topics
 - write about important people
 - create the book with sections for each topic, person, or style of poetry



Creative Writing: Letters

There are five parts to a letter. The five parts include:

HEADING --- street address
city, state zip code
month day, year

Dear (name), --- **GREETING**

paragraphs filled with information --- **BODY**

CLOSING --- Your friend,
SIGNATURE --- Your name

Choose two people or an important situation and write a letter. Decide who will write the letter, and decide to whom the letter will be sent. Include details and facts in the body of the letter. Some possible letters could be:

- the union leader of the AFL and the union leader of the CIO – one to the other to propose the merger of their two organizations;
- an immigrant coal miner to his parents in his home country to describe his work in the mine; he doesn't want to worry his family about the dangers of the mine;
- an immigrant coal miner to his sweetheart back home to describe his work in the mine; he should be careful to reassure her that he is working safely and he is not in danger;
- a coal miner to his government representative (state or federal) to describe some of the problems of coal mines that need to be changed;
- a coal miner's widow writing to the coal mining company to plead for assistance after her husband has been killed in a mining accident; the company has informed her that she and her children are going to be evicted, and she has nowhere to go;
- any other situation you think would be interesting – just be sure that you include accurate facts and details in the body of your letter.



Creative Writing: Speeches

Choose a topic to research and write about. Try to find something that is controversial or innovative. Write a short speech about the topic, including important details and accurate facts. Your speech should be 2-5 minutes long. After you have written your speech, practice it. Then, give your speech in front of your class. Be prepared to answer your classmates' questions about the situation and the people involved.

Some possible topics for a speech could be:

- the completion of the Pittsburgh to Connellsville Railroad line which started the coke boom and led to an increase in the steel industry;
- the beginning of the union system on the mill workers and the problems faced by workers who wanted to join the union;
- the announcement of the merger of the AFL and the CIO;
- the environmental impact of coal mining on land, air, or water in the region and throughout the country;
- the closing of the coal mines and the impact on the local economy;
- the demise of coal mining in the Pittsburgh and tri-state area;
- the importance of trying to save the coal mining industry in the United States;
- the problems caused by foreign imports of coal to the United States, and how the imports helped cause the demise of U.S. coal mining;
- the problems caused by environmental issues in the United States, and how attempts to clean up the environment caused the demise of mining in the U.S.;
- any other topic you feel would be of interest to others, especially one that is controversial and leads to discussion, disagreement, and exchange of information.



Creative Writing: Writing Styles

Descriptive Writing: using sensory details of sight, sound, smell, taste, or touch to describe a place or event; you should be able to create a clear and detailed picture for the reader; the beginning should identify the place or event and get the reader's attention; the middle should share details; the end should tell how you feel about the place or event you are describing.

Expository Writing: writing to explain how to do something and to share information about an activity; this is not a step-by-step explanation of an activity; your writing should tell what is done and why; the beginning should tell what the topic is; the middle should support the topic; the end should complete the explanation.

Narrative Writing: writing about a personal experience and making the experience come alive for the reader; this is a chance to use humor or other personal feelings to write a good story; the beginning should get the reader's attention and set the tone of the story; the middle should provide details to bring the story to life; the end should complete the story with the writer's feelings about the event.

Persuasive Writing: this uses details and reasons to convince others to agree with your opinion; in this style, the writer expresses an opinion and must use details and reasons to try to gain support from the readers; the beginning should state the opinion; the middle gives the details and reasons for the opinion; the end should repeat the meaning of the opinion in a different way, with different words.

Choose a topic or come up with a topic of your own. Follow the steps of Process Writing and research the topic. Choose a style of writing, and use your notes to write about the topic. Proofread your work carefully. Make sure that any facts you use are accurate. Read over your writing to make sure it makes sense and follows a good sequential order.

- Step 1: **Prewriting** – use a variety of activities to choose your topic;
- Step 2: **Drafting** – get your information on paper; write as much as you can, being concerned mainly with getting your thoughts on paper; this is sometimes referred to as the “sloppy copy”;
- Step 3: **Revising** – read your work aloud to find parts that need to be clarified, explained, changed, or rewritten; read the work aloud to others to get their opinions; make the writing changes to your work;
- Step 4: **Proofreading** – check your work carefully for capital letters, punctuation, spelling, complete sentences, and paragraph form; make all corrections;
- Step 5: **Publishing** – rewrite or type the final copy of your writing; your final version should be neat and clean, without any mistakes or corrections.



Topic Ideas

- describe what you see or your feelings while descending in the cage into an underground mine;
- describe what you see or your feelings if you have become trapped in the mine because of a cave-in;
- describe what you see or your feelings as you emerge from deep inside the dark mine into the light of day;
- explain why a person would choose to work in a mine;
- explain why a person would choose to return to work in a mine after having experienced a mining disaster;
- tell about a humorous incident that happened with another worker or one of the mules in the mine;
- tell about a scary incident or disaster that happened in a mine shaft;
- write to try to convince the mine owners to improve the safety of the mine;
- write to try to convince the mine company to allow a widow and her children to stay in their shanty;
- write to convince a family to let their son remain in school instead of working in a mine.



Creative Writing: Quotations

Choose a quote about coal mining, the coal industry, or a related issue. Think about what it means. Research the importance of the quote and its relationship to the coal industry. Write an opinion paper about the quote, and include facts and details to support your opinion. Your paper should have three parts:

- 1 – a short summary of the meaning of the quote
 - tell what the quote says
 - interpret anything important or necessary for understanding the quote
- 2 – your impression of the meaning of the quote
 - tell what you think about the words and meaning of the quote
 - tell how the quote makes you feel
- 3 – your opinion of the meaning and impact of the quote
 - interpret the impact of the words on the industry and economy
 - give your impression of the meaning behind the quote, and the event that may have impacted the people and industry

You may choose from the following quotes, or find one of your own:

- Epitaph for Condyl Brislin, Pennsylvania coal miner:

“Forty years I worked with pick and drill, down in the mines against my will: The coal king’s slave but now it’s passed, thanks be to God I am free at last.”
- John Mitchell, president of the United Mine Workers of America:

“The coal you dig is not Slavish coal, or Polish coal, or Irish coal. It’s coal.”
- Joe Hill, 1915, in a message just before his death, to Wobbly leader Bill Haywood:

“Good-bye Bill. I will die like a true blue rebel. Don’t waste time in mourning. Organize.”



- A song written after the Homestead Strike of 1892:

The Homestead Strike

We are asking one another, as we pass the time of day,
Why workingmen resort to arms to get their proper pay,
And why our labor unions should not be recognized,
Whilst the actions of a syndicate must not be criticized.
Now, the troubles down at Homestead were brought about this way.
When a grasping corporation had the audacity to say,
“You must all renounce your union and forswear your liberty.
And we will give you a chance to live and die in slavery.”

- Old mining refrain:

Preserve that old kettle so black, neat and worn.
It belonged to my father before I was born.
It hung on the corner beyond on a nail.
It's the emblem of labor, by dad's dinner pail.

- Samuel W. Boyd, Wilkes Barre, 1891:

I am a little collier lad
hard working all the day
from early morn
till late at night
no time I have to play
down in the bowels of the Earth
where no bright sun rays shine
you'll find me busy at my work
a white slave of the mines.

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- Ballad: “The Hard Working Miner” by Patrick O’Neil:

I work in the mines where the sun never shines
nor daylight does even appear
with me lamp blazing red on top of me head
and in danger I never know fear.



- Clarence Darrow, attorney who represented workers in the arbitration hearings during the 1902 strike:

“They (coal companies) are fighting for slavery, while we are fighting for freedom. They are fighting for the rule of man over man, for despotism, for darkness, for the past. We are trying to build up man. We are working for democracy, for humanity, for the future...”

- Old mining ballad:

“ I am a fire boss of renown.
At 3 each morning
I make my usual round.
I walk the open cross cuts
to get to the face
to find how much gas there is
in every miner’s place.”

- Anthem of the driver boys:

“My sweetheart’s the mule in the mines. I drive her
without reins or lines. On the bumper I sit, and tobacco I
spit, all over my sweetheart’s behind.”

- Old miner’s refrain, Pottsville, 1848:

“ Now don’t despise the miner lad
who burrows like the mole.
Buried alive
from morn to night,
to delve for household coal.
May miner lad ne’er blush for it
though black thy face be as the pit.”