

# OPEN BOOK

Student  
Guide

## Why Do People Unite?

Rose Schneiderman and the Labor Movement



NATIONAL MUSEUM OF  
AMERICAN JEWISH HISTORY  
A Smithsonian Institution Affiliate

Discovering  
American  
Jewish History  
Through  
Objects

## NOTES

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**Read the texts around the image. Beginning in the upper left corner, follow the commentary counter clockwise. Read each text out loud and discuss it with your partner. Make sure you carefully look at the image and use its details to support your opinions. You can choose whether to use the following questions to guide your discussion:**

### **01 MISHNAH PIRKEI AVOT**

The Mishnah is a compilation of Jewish oral law from the first and second centuries CE that supplements and clarifies the commandments found in the Torah. Pirkei Avot (*Ethics of the Fathers*) is devoted to the principles of character, faith, divine providence, and justice taught by our sages.

1. What do you think is the relationship between flour and the Torah?
2. What do you think this has to do with daily life?
3. How does this phrase relate to the idea of “bread and roses”?

### **02 BREAD AND ROSES**

The phrase “bread and roses“ originated from a speech given by Rose Schneiderman (1882-1972), a labor activist, during a 1912 strike in Lawrence, Massachusetts.

1. What is the significance of “bread” and of “roses” in the statement “The woman must have bread, but she must have roses, too”?
2. Give some examples of “bread” and “roses” in your life. Where can you find these, and who provides them to you?
3. Can you think of any other examples of phrases or metaphors that have been used as a call to action?

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### 03 INDUSTRIAL POINT OF VIEW

Morris Rosenfeld (1862-1923) was the most prominent member of a school of Yiddish writers known as the “Sweatshop Poets.” These poets were themselves workers, laboring for long hours under difficult working conditions, only getting sporadic chances to compose and record their poetry. Many works of the “Sweatshop Poets” were widely read, and they were even put to music and sung by Jewish workers. Rosenfeld focused on dramatizing the pain and everyday suffering of the Jewish worker.

1. Sometimes we say that somebody is “like a machine,” and we mean that he or she gets a lot of work done. What did Rosenfeld mean when he wrote, “My self is destroyed, I become a machine”? What phrases from the poem make this clear to you?
2. According to Rosenfeld, what happens to a person who works in a factory?
3. What did Rosenfeld suggest might change this feeling?

### 04 SWEATSHOP COMMUNITY

Pauline Newman (1887-1986), a labor pioneer and union organizer, was the first woman ever appointed general organizer by the International Ladies’ Garment Workers’ Union (ILGWU). Newman spent more than seventy years working for the ILGWU—as an organizer, journalist, health educator, and government liaison. Newman played a leading role in organizing activists among tenants, laborers, socialists, and members of the working class.

1. What did Newman mean by “inhuman working conditions,” and why might Newman and others have continued to work in garment factories despite the “inhuman working conditions?”
2. If Newman and her female coworkers had lived in Milwaukee, do you imagine they would have attended Schneiderman’s speech? Why or why not?
3. Why do you think Newman believed it important to explain her willingness to work in the garment

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industry, despite its horrible conditions?

**05 THE WOMAN WORKER**

Clara Lemlich (1866-1982) was a radical socialist, women’s rights, and labor advocate who organized countless demonstrations throughout her lifetime including the landmark women workers strike the Uprising of the 20,000 in 1909. Her efforts played an integral role in getting women the right to vote, and regulating the length of the work day, factory conditions, and prices of necessary products.

1. Why is voting important? Why do you think women could not vote in the United States until 1920?
2. Think about all ways Lemlich and Schneiderman mentioned for voicing your opinion. What is the difference between voting, meeting with politicians to explain what you want, and having “street meetings”? What are the advantages and disadvantages of each?
3. Think of something you want to change in your community. What strategy would you use to create that change? Why?

**06 AUDITORIUM**

Harvard political scientist Robert Putnam observed in 2000 that more Americans went bowling but fewer people joined clubs or leagues. Bowling, for Putnam, became a metaphor for an increase in individualism among Americans and a decrease in a sense of community, what he called “the loss of social capital.” Putnam defined “social capital” as the extended social networks of support and care that sustain individual and communal relationships.

1. What surprised you in this text?
2. Do you belong to any group or organization— anything from knitting clubs to political parties? If so, what role do you play in this group? What role does this group play in your life?
3. Robert Putnam once said that “[w]e tend to pray with people like us, but we can play with people quite

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unlike us.” What might “play” include? What might stop you from doing that? What might stop you from “praying” with people unlike you?

4. Is it possible to build “social capital” through social media networks? Are they just as good, or better, because we can reach and include more and more diverse people?

## 07 INDIVIDUALISM

Rudyard Kipling (1865–1936) was an English writer, poet, author, and journalist. He was considered to be one of the great English writers and also a major innovator in the art of the short story. Kipling was famous for an array of works like *Just So Stories* and *The Jungle Book* and received the 1907 Nobel Prize in Literature.

1. What did Kipling refer to by saying “the tribe?”
2. What might be some disadvantages of being connected to a larger group of people?
3. How would you respond to Kipling?

## 08 ADMISSION FREE

Mike Antonucci is the owner and director of the Education Intelligence Agency, a private, for-profit research firm specializing in teachers’ unions. He writes and publishes blog posts about public education, often criticizing national teachers’ unions and public school financing.

Here is a word you might want to know when reading Antonucci’s quote:

*Detriment* – harm or damage

1. What was Antonucci’s concern about unions? Underline what you think are the most important words in this text. Why did you choose those words?
2. Reread the other texts and imagine all of the authors are in a union together. Do you think it would be easy or difficult for them to agree on what their union should do? Explain your answer.
3. How do you feel about working on group projects?

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What do you do if people in the group want different things?

**09 STREET MEETINGS**

Joshua Weishart is an associate professor at West Virginia University in the College of Law and the School of Policy and Politics. His research focuses on education law and policy, specifically on constitutional rights to education. He also conducts policy research for the West Virginia Public Education Collaborative.

1. What options did Weishart identify for creating change in your community? What other options can you think of? How many people does it take to achieve each of these options?
2. What do you think Weishart meant by “a political or social movement?” Why do you think Weishart preferred this method of change over lawsuits?
3. What is the difference between a union and other types of social movements, like a march? Who is involved in each? What is each trying to accomplish?

**IF TIME PERMITS:**

After you have explored the poster with your classmates, look at it again with your partner and share: What else do you see that was not mentioned before? What questions do you have about what you see?

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