

A Miner's Life



Following are sources of information that give two different glimpses of a miner's life.

Part 1

Cape Breton's Magazine "Cape Breton Miners Speaking" (p.54), Magazine No. 46
This could be an individual or a class project, with students working in small groups to answer one or more questions and report back to the class.

1. Research the article and comment on information under the following headings
 - a) pay per ton of coal
 - b) taxes
 - c) family expenses
 - d) hours of work
2. Find what the miner says about the comparative cost of goods in the company store or private "cash" stores. For what reason would a miner deal at the company store?
3. Draw a picture, based on the description, of a company house. What do you think a "row" would look like?
4. Give your opinion of a doctor's care at this time. Give evidence, based on what you have read. Comment on whether you think the doctor would have any say in the care provided to miners.

5. Find out the age of the youngest miners. Why would someone go to work at such a young age? Comment on what you see as the education levels of most of these young miners. How would this level of education affect their lives as they got older?

6. At the Miners Museum, you will have the opportunity to visit a company house, which would be owned by the coal company and rented to the miners.

Give your reaction to visiting this house under the following headings:

- a) Size of the home
- b) Comfort of the home
- c) Typical day for the wife of a miner
- d) How the miners neighbourhood would be the same or different from your own.
- e) How would your own life be different by living in this home?

Challenge Activity (both articles)

1. Debate whether it was to the miner's advantage or disadvantage to live in a company house. Discuss what the alternative would be to living in a company house.
2. Compose a song, or write a poem entitled "My Life as a Miner", or "Living in a Miner's Family". This could be an individual or class project.
3. There were a number of strikes over the years against the coal company in Cape Breton. One of them, in 1925, resulted in the death of William Davis, a New Waterford coal miner. After completing learning activities in this section as well as the section on "The Pay Envelope", and "Mining Disasters", give reasons why you think miners would support strike action.