

# The Pay Envelope



1. Look at the Number of the Colliery on the Pay Envelope. What is the number? Why do you think the mine has a number?
2. How was the miner paid - was it according to the amount of coal he loaded or the amount of days he worked? Why would they use a pay envelope instead of putting the money into a bank account?
3. What expenses were taken from his pay that he would not have had deducted today?
4. Under "Cash to Store for Goods", the store is the "Company Store", owned by the coal company. Keeping in mind that many miners had large families, answer these questions.
  - a) Are there any goods that they could produce at home and not have to buy at the store?
  - b) What goods do you think they would buy from the company at this time?
  - c) Do you think that the amount paid to the store is too much, considering how much he earned?
  - d) What do you think would happen if the miner didn't make enough that week to pay the company store?
5. During these times, there was no insurance, health care, or workers' compensation. Is there anything on the pay envelope that would tell you that miners paid for something that would provide assistance when they needed it? Explain why.
6. Why do you think "powder and oil" were used? Do you think that the company or the miner should pay for them? Why or why not?

7. Considering the amount of pay that the miner received, as well as what he had to pay for, compare the life of a coal miner's family with your family today. What do your parents have to pay for directly from what they earn? What can your parents afford that the miner could not? What do you think that the miner's children would do as a past time compared to what you and your friends do? Are there any advantages to living in these times instead of today? Explain.

## Challenge Activities

1. Have a classroom debate of a meeting of the local miners union. Some say that the coal companies are taking advantage of the coal miners. Pay is very poor, conditions are unsafe and unhealthy, and it's time to go on strike. The company says that they cannot afford it. Miners are worried that the company will cut off utilities, and put them out of their houses. It would be interesting to have one of the union members be a coal company supporter.
2. Write a poem describing your life as a miner's child. Use any form of poetry – ballad, couplet, haiku etc.
3. Interview a miner who has had many years of experience underground. See suggested questions. Ask him about the dangers of the job and why he started and remained as a miner all of those years.

Suggested Questions:

- When did you start working in the mines and why?
  - What kind of life were you able to provide for your family as a miner?
  - Do you think the union was good for the miners?
  - Were you involved in any strikes?
  - Did any of your children mine? Would you want them to?
  - Did you like being a miner or would you rather have had a chance to make a living doing something else?
4. The check weighman was paid by the miners to make sure they were given credit for the amount of coal they mined. There were problems with the coal company not giving full credit to the miners. Discuss other ways to ensure that the company would pay accurately. What do you think would happen today?