“The Hatfield Contract”
Student Handout

Background:
It is April 28, 1913. The miners along Paint Creek and Cabin Creek in Kanawha County, WV have been on strike for nearly a year. Their demands are:

1. That the operators accept and recognize the union
2. That the miners right to free speech and peaceable assembly be restored
3. That black-listing discharged workers be stopped
4. That compulsory trading at company stores be ended
5. That “cribbing” be discontinued and that 2,000 pounds of mined coal constitute a ton
6. That scales be installed at mines to weigh the tonnage of the miners
7. That miners be allowed to employ their own check-weighmen to check against the weights found by company check-weighmen, as provided by law
8. That the two check-weighmen determine all docking penalties

During the strike pro-union miners were evicted by the coal companies, and organizers were imprisoned without trial by the state government. Living in tents like the camp at Holly Grove, miners and their families had little food, shelter, and medical care for an entire year. Also, violence between the miners and mine detectives has led to over 50 violent deaths on both sides. During the previous winter, a new governor, Henry Hatfield, was elected who promised to end the strike. Without input from the miners themselves, he convinced union leaders and coal companies to accept the “Hatfield Contract” that consisted of:

1. a nine-hour workday
2. the right to select checkweighman
3. semimonthly pay
4. no discrimination against union miners

He gave the miners 36 hours to accept the “Hatfield Contract” and get back to work or face prison.

Assignment:
You are now going to play the role of the character described on your slip of paper. Read about who you are and think about how your character feels about the Hatfield Contract. Do you support it, or do you oppose it? Why does your character feel this way? Write your thoughts in the space below.
Now, walk around the room, and meet your classmates. You do not need to meet all of them, but meet as many as you can, and find out what they feel about the Hatfield Contract, and why. You will also be asked to play the role of your character and answer their questions. Remember, these are real people, when you play their role, play it respectfully, and think about who they were and what made them think about the world the way they did. Below are some questions to consider or ask them when you meet new people:

What is your name, what is your job, and where do you live?

Did any particular events during the strike cause you to feel this way?

How does your role in the community affect the way you feel?

Have you done anything particularly important during the strike?

Do you support the Hatfield Contract compromise? Why?