

The Four Kinds of Coal

ACTIVITY 6

Objective:

To learn about some of the folklore that came from the coal mining industry.

Vocabulary:

anthracite, bituminous, lignite, sub-bituminous

Materials:

- *The Four Kinds of Coal* song
- Copy of *Tommy Knockers* poem for each student

Check for Understanding:

Have the students perform the choral reading of *Tommy Knockers*.

Extensions:

- Create a puppet show based on one of the pieces of literature. Share with other classes and/or parents.
- Research a coal mine disaster and prepare a brief report to the class on it. Write in newspaper style, several paragraphs in length.
- For additional resources, check your local research library. George Korson collected much of the coal folklore that we have today. He wrote a number of books that include stories, legends, songs, poems, and ballads.

Introduction:

Coal is a very important resource, but it is different from other resources because it came from organic matter. Millions of years ago most of America was covered with huge, swampy forests. When these forests died, they were covered with layers of mud and sand. As centuries passed, pressure and heat changed these decaying plants into coal.

There are four types of coal; from hardest to softest, they are: **anthracite**, **bituminous**, **sub-bituminous**, and **lignite**. Anthracite is the oldest of all, and it is used mostly for home heating. Bituminous is the most common type, and it is used for powering electricity and industry. Sub-bituminous, found mostly in the West, and lignite, the softest, are used to produce electricity and synthetic natural gas.

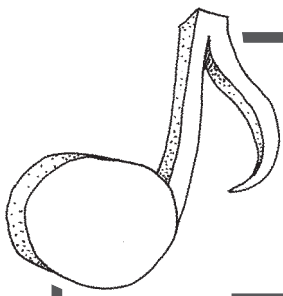
Coal is the United States' most abundant energy source, and is found in 36 states and mined in 26 of them.

Folklore about mines and miners was shared in coal mining operations throughout the world. Many songs, ballads, and stories were passed down from generation to generation. They were collected and preserved by folklorists in the 1920s, '30s, and '40s.

Procedures:

1. Play *The Four Kinds of Coal* song and have the students sing along. Give the students background information about the four types of coal. Tell the students that folklore came out of all types of mining.





The Four Kinds of Coal

2. Introduce coal folklore to the students with the *Dai Tap-Toe* poem.
3. Explain that the miners used songs and stories to express their feelings about how difficult their life could be.
4. Pass out copies of *Tommy Knockers* to the students. Read through it together. Ask the students who they think the 'Tommy Knockers' were. Explain that they are believed to be the ghosts of miners who "found death" in the mines.
5. Break the students into four groups. Have each group practice one stanza of the poem. Present it as a choral reading, with each group taking their appropriate turn. Add movement and rhythm instruments to the presentations if desired.

DAI TAP-TOE

Why is my Uncle Dai called "Tap-Toe?" the little boy asked his dad,
I wish somebody would tell me, for not knowing is driving me mad.
Come sit by me here son and I'll tell you,
said his father starting to grin,
I'll tell you the tale of your uncle, so if you're ready, then I will begin.

Now Dai was a tough coal miner, with muscles as hard as steel,
Cuts and bruises wouldn't bother him, the pain he didn't feel.
One day while he was at the coal face, cutting timber for a prop,
The hatchet slipped from his grip and onto his foot he felt it chop.

But from Dai came no cry of pain, although it must have hurt,
His big toe had been cut clean off and was lying in the dirt.
Dai picked it up and washed it clean with water from his jack,
Then onto his injured foot, he quickly stuck the big toe back.

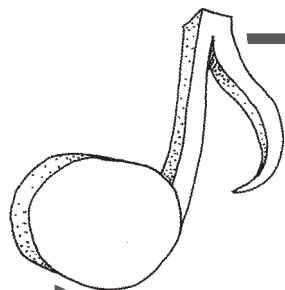
No painkilling pills or anti-septic spray, for these he had no use,
He just grit his teeth and spat on it some well-aimed tobacco juice.
With his toe bound up in an old piece of rag, his boot he did replace,
And just as if nothing had happened, Dai continued working at the face.

Some days later his toe had healed and was no longer hidden from sight,
Dai scratched his head as he looked at it, for it didn't seem quite right.
When he realized what he had done, he said, "Dai you silly clown,"
For in his hurry at the face, he had stuck his toe back upside-down.

From that day in the pit-head baths walking barefoot on the ground,
Against the tiles, his toenail would make a sort of tapping sound.
Now Dai is well known all over, his big toe has brought him fame,
So son now you know the true story, how "Dai Tap-Toe" got his name.

—J.H. Smith





The Four Kinds of Coal

TOMMY KNOCKERS

Have you 'eard of the Tommy Knockers in the deep dark mines of the west?
Which all Cornish miners can hear and it is no bloody jest.
For I'm a Cornish miner and I'll tell you of it today.
Of the tap, tap, tap of a tiny pick as we work in the rock and the clay.

We go down in the shafts with our buckets with 'earts which nothing fazes,
Each man with a candle to light the way through the drifts and winzes and raises.
And the stale air smells 'o powder and the mine is full 'o sounds,
But 'tis only the tap of a Knocker that makes our hearts rebound.

It's their tap, tap, tap-like sound of tiny liners,
Just a tap, tap, tap from souls of dead miners.
For they're locked in the rock wall, those who've found death down there.
And 'tis the tap, tap, tap of tiny picks which makes on end stand our 'air.

So we'll leave the 'aunted place for we won't work where they be,
And wherever we hear their knocking we sure will always flee,
For it means whoever hears it will be the next in line,
For the tap, tap, tap of the Knockers is a last an' awful sign.

