



## About the USA – Virtual Classroom Newsletter for English Teachers

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### Unions in the United States: The Oscars vs. the Writers Guild of America?

The [Writers Guild of America](#) (WGA) is a labor union representing the interests of the over 12,000 writers who write the television shows, movies, news programs, documentaries and new-media technologies, that inform and entertain American and global audiences. Among the Writers Guild's members are television writer-producers who earn up to \$5 million a year, as well as junior writers who – if they work at all – make \$50,000 or less.

In November 2007, the Writer's Guild of America (WGA) went on strike, forcing the delay or cancellation of a number of big-budget studio films and virtually halting the scripted television season, including the Golden Globes award telecast and a number of other televised award events which were boycotted by supportive actors. In January, the [Hollywood Foreign Press Association](#) replaced the traditional Golden Globe Awards ceremony with a news conference. The WGA decided to allow the Grammy music awards on February 10 to proceed with full union support. The fate of the February 24 Academy Awards still remains in question. [Oscar organizers](#) have said that they will stage some type of show, with or without union support. The academy says the show, regardless of the strike, will go on.

The WGA has reached interim agreements with selected film companies. One of the major points of contention in the strike is how to compensate writers for use and re-use of their work on the Internet and via other "new media." The studios have been insisting that programs be streamed online for a certain period, deemed promotional, during which writers would forgo residuals. Guild leaders have said they are fighting for a piece of the future, reflecting the widespread belief that Internet-delivered entertainment fare would inevitably claim an increasing and perhaps even dominant market share. The current strike is the first industry wide strike since writers walked out in 1988. That strike lasted five months and cost the entertainment industry an estimated \$500 million.

#### Background

- [Writers Strike FAQ \(Writers Guild\)](#)
- [Writers Guild Navigator \(New York Times\)](#)
- [The Carpetbagger - a seasonal blog that covers all things Oscar \(New York Times\)](#)
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#### Unions in the U.S.

"There are about 15.4 million union members in the U.S., 10 million of whom belong to unions affiliated with the AFL-CIO. Labor unions are made up of working people working together to solve problems, build stronger workplaces and give working families a real voice. Unions give workers a voice on the job about safety, security, pay, benefits—and about the best ways to get the work done. Union workers earn 30 percent more each week than nonunion workers and are much more likely to have health and pension benefits. Unions give working people a voice in government. They represent working families before lawmakers, and make sure politicians never forget that working families voted them into office." [Source](#)

**Article** Labor Unions' Future, CQ's Public Affairs Collection, September 02, 2005. **Please ask your IRC for a copy.**



© The [Writers Guild of America](#)

**AFL-CIO** - The American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO) is a voluntary federation of 55 national and international labor unions.



#### Links

- University at Albany: [U.S. Labor and Industrial History - World Wide Web Audio Archive](#)
- AFL-CIO: [Labor History Timeline](#)
- AFL-CIO: [Online Photo Essay - 100 Years of Struggle and Success](#)
- Library of Congress: [Labor Unions during the Great Depression and New Deal](#)
- Cornell University: [Labor Unions and the Internet](#)

**Did You Know?** - The [federal minimum wage](#) for covered nonexempt employees is \$5.85 per hour effective July 24, 2007. The federal minimum wage provisions are contained in the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA). The Fair Minimum Wage Act of 2007 increases the current federal minimum wage of \$5.85 per hour over two years: \$6.55 per hour on July 24, 2008; and then \$7.25 per hour on July 24, 2009. Many states also have minimum wage laws. In cases where an employee is subject to both the state and federal minimum wage laws, the employee is entitled to the higher of the two minimum wages. [U.S. Department of Labor](#)

#### The "Teachers' Union"

[National Education Association](#) (NEA), the nation's largest professional employee organization, is committed to advancing the cause of public education. It's 3.2 mill members work at every level of education—from pre-school to university graduate programs.



[uspolitics.america.gov/uspolitics/elections](http://uspolitics.america.gov/uspolitics/elections)

#### Links

- **America.gov:** Candidates on the Issues - [A quick look at the candidates' views on key international issues](#)
- **New York Times:** [The Candidates on the Issues](#) Where the candidates stand on [Abortion](#), [Climate Change](#), [Health Care](#), [Immigration](#), [Iran](#) and [Iraq](#).
- **Washington Post:** [Issue Coverage Tracker](#) - Review press coverage and opinion writing on the presidential candidates and the major issues of the 2008 campaign.
- **CNN:** [Issues](#) - [Abortion](#): The candidates in the race to '08 divide evenly among party lines on this emotional issue, except for Rudy Giuliani who goes against the rest of the GOP field in supporting abortion rights.
- **LA Times:** [American Values and the Next President](#) - A Times editorial series on the values and issues that will shape the 2008 election
- **Council on Foreign Relations (CFR):** [Candidate Positions on Foreign Policy](#)

#### CFR: [The Candidates on Immigration](#)

The rise of globalization, coupled with terrorism and security concerns have transformed immigration into an issue with foreign policy implications and major resonance for the 2008 presidential campaign.

#### USINFO Podcast: Economic Issues Prominent in 2008 Election [Download Podcast](#) (2 MB MP3)

Recent polls show that 82 percent of American voters consider economic issues very important. This week we discuss which economic concerns will affect voters' choices in 2008.



- **Washington Post:** [Candidate Quiz](#) - Which candidates do you agree with on the issues?
- **USA Today:** [Candidate Match Game](#) - 11 multiple-choice questions that will help differentiate the candidates and their stances.
- **GlassBooth:** A nonprofit organization that is creating innovative ways to access political information. [glassbooth.org](http://glassbooth.org)
- **America. Gov:** Candidates on international issues [America.Gov - Elections](#)

**THE LONG CAMPAIGN**  
ELECTIONS 2008



[usinfo.state.gov/journals/itdhr/1007/ijde/ijde1007.htm](http://usinfo.state.gov/journals/itdhr/1007/ijde/ijde1007.htm)

## ELECTIONS 2008 – Issues & Values

Throughout U.S. history, presidential candidates have stood or stumbled by their stance on political issues. Despite the powers of personality, popularity, and publicity, a presidential candidate who wants to win on Election Day must win on the issues as well. [Source](#)

This year's top issues — Iraq, economy, immigration and health care — will heavily influence the election. Immigration is one of the most common topics discussed on the 2008 presidential campaign trail. While presidential candidates debate how to make U.S. borders more secure and how to improve federal immigration guidelines, state and local governments are reviewing their own immigration policies. [More](#) (America.gov)

In 2008, 'family values' are lower on the agenda compared to previous years. Voters and candidates alike have more immediate concerns: the ongoing U.S. action in Iraq and Afghanistan, nuclear programs in Iran and North Korea, the threat of terrorism, immigration issues and the state of the U.S. economy.

However, the challenge for Americans voting in the caucuses, primaries and the general election is to select with care, acknowledging that electing the next U.S. President is not as simple as merely laying out a laundry list of issues and seeing who matches up best.

#### Opinion Poll

❖ **Democrats and Independents Feel the Economy Will Get Worse in 2008** - As Americans head to the polls in both the primaries and the November general election, one thing that almost certainly will be on their minds is the state of the economy, not only in general terms, but also and probably more importantly, how it is impacting them personally and how they feel about the future. ([The Harris Poll #3, January 7, 2008](#))

#### Experience & Character Issues

##### NPR Radio Interview

The next president will inherit a number of challenges abroad, including unstable oil supplies and the War in Iraq. What matters more – a candidate's foreign policy experience or character and judgment? Looking at the candidates on both sides, all of the major candidates seem to favor a vigorous role for the U.S. in the world right now.

*Richard Haass, President of the Council on Foreign Relations:* You're exactly right. And that's quite interesting because, historically, one might have suspected or predicted that given the fact that we've had this very costly, unpopular war in Iraq that has dominated so much of American foreign policy for, say, the last five or six years when it could have predicted that there would have been something of an allergy to foreign policy, an isolationist reaction, and the fact that we're not seeing one, the fact that all of the candidates are leaning forward when it comes to America's involvement in the world, albeit in different ways, is quite an interesting thing. It tells you that Americans have matured, and I think that the country understands that in a global world filled with various kinds of challenges and threats, as well as opportunities, there's no escaping behind our borders. [Listen Now](#)

#### American Values and the Next President

The Los Angeles Times started its election coverage with a nine-part editorial series on basic American principles and the issues that will define the 2008 campaign in the context of the values that shape the United States. [Los Angeles Times](#)

#### Political Debates: Naming the Issues or Winning Votes through Personality?

The top Democratic and Republican presidential contenders appeared in nationally televised debates in California before "Super Tuesday." For commentary on how the candidates fared in the debates, see:

- **NYT:** [Presidential Debates](#)
- **Poynter:** [Presidential Debate History and Resources](#)

#### Looking Back:

- **Teacher Resources:** [The Great Debate](#)
- **Commission on Presidential Debates** [Debate History](#)

## Teaching Literature: The Giver by Lois Lowry

Millions of readers have enjoyed Lois Lowry's *The Giver*. The book is written from the point of view of Jonas, an eleven-year-old boy living in a futuristic society. The book was awarded the acclaimed John Newbery Medal by the Association for Library Service to Children of the American Library Association.

Jonas's world is perfect; everything is under control. There is no war, no hatred or fear of pain. There are also no choices. At the age of 12, every member of the community is assigned a job based on his or her abilities and interests. Citizens can apply for and be assigned compatible spouses, and each couple is assigned exactly two children each. Everything is planned and organized so that life is as convenient and pleasant as possible. Since everyone looks and acts basically the same, there is no prejudice and there is very little competition.

When Jonas turns 12 he is singled out to become the apprentice to *The Giver*. *The Giver* alone holds the community's suppressed memories of the true pain and pleasure of life. Is this the price to pay for social stability? [Spark Notes Summary](#)

### The Importance of Memory

"One of the most important themes in the book is the significance of memory to human life. Lowry was inspired to write the story after a visit to her aging father, who had lost most of his long-term memory. She realized that without memory, there is no pain—if you cannot remember physical pain, you might as well not have experienced it and you cannot be plagued by regret or grief if you cannot remember the events that hurt you. At some point in the past the community in *The Giver* decided to eliminate all pain from their lives. To do so, they had to give up the memories of their society's collective experiences." [Spark Notes: Themes](#)

### Pre-Reading Activities

[Web resources](#) to create a Utopian community

- Have students create a "perfect" community, giving it a name, a system of government, a physical description, and an account of how its people spend their days.
- Discuss how that community would change and grow. What roles would history and memories of painful events play in the growth of the community?
- What would have to be added to our own society in order to make it perfect? What would be lost in this quest for perfection?

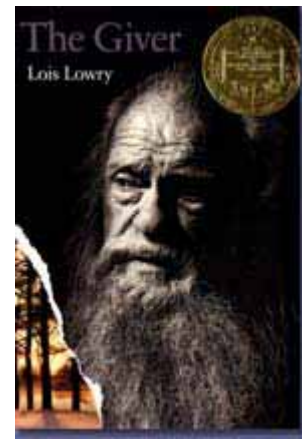
### Study Questions

- What must we give up in order to live in peace?
- How much should the individual give up of himself or herself for the collective good?
- Can we ignore and minimize pain in our lives--both physical and emotional--to live happier existences? (Source: [Random House](#))

**Film Version** - Watch for the film adaptation of Lois Lowry's novel "The Giver" by Walden Media, producers of "Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe." The film is scheduled to be released in 2009.

*"I do think that there is an important analogy that can be drawn from *The Giver*. Teachers, parents, and librarians become the givers of knowledge that children will carry with themselves on whatever journey they take in life."*

An interview with Lois Lowry.  
The Reading Teacher, Dec 1994 \* [Download article](#)



© Random House

*"It was almost December, and Jonas was beginning to be frightened. No. Wrong word, Jonas thought. Frightened meant that deep, sickening feeling of something terrible about to happen."* ([Excerpt](#))

### Links

- ❖ Lois Lowry's [Official Biography](#)
- ❖ Lois Lowry: [Newbery Acceptance Speech, 1994](#)
- ❖ Bookrags: [Notes on The Giver](#)
- ❖ Spark Notes: [The Giver](#)
- ❖ Random House: Authors - [Lois Lowry](#)
- ❖ Random House: [A Message from the Author](#)
- ❖ Random House: [Booknotes - PDF file](#)
- ❖ Teachers @ Random: [The Giver](#)
- ❖ Scholastic: [Lois Lowry Biography](#)

### Articles

- **The Unpredictable Lois Lowry: The Author Talks About The Giver's Controversial Past and, Yes, its Enigmatic Ending.** Anita Silvey, June 2007, School Library Journal, v53, #6 - "It's never wise to second-guess Lois Lowry. In the early '90s, in a radical departure from her previous 20 novels for young readers, Lowry wrote *The Giver* (1993), the tale of a futuristic society that appears to have everything under control, including war, poverty, and old age.
- **Lois Lowry.** Contemporary Authors Online, Thomson Gale, 2007. - "Never one to shy from controversy, her novels deal with topics ranging from the death of a sibling and the Nazi occupation of Denmark to the humorous antics of a rebellious teen named Anastasia Krupnik, and to futuristic dystopian societies. Although Lowry's books explore a variety of settings and characters, she distills from her work a single unifying theme: "the importance of human connections." **Ask your IRC for copies.**



© Illustration by Lois Lowry  
[Lois Lowry Official Web Site](#)





© [National Center for Juvenile Justice](#)

See the [National Center for Juvenile Justice's State Juvenile Justice Profiles](#) for descriptive information and analysis regarding each state's juvenile justice system. The site illustrates the uniqueness of the 51 separate juvenile justice systems in the United States.

#### Links

- ❖ Justice Learning: [Juvenile Justice](#)
- ❖ About the USA: [Crime and Justice](#)
- ❖ Office of [Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention](#)
- ❖ [Juvenile Law Center](#)
- ❖ [Youth Law Center](#)
- ❖ [Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative](#)
- ❖ [National Center for Juvenile Justice](#)
- ❖ PBS Frontline: [Juvenile Justice](#)
- ❖ Washington Post: [Juvenile Violence](#)
- ❖ Washington Post: [Juvenile Justice](#)

#### Reports

- ❖ U.S. Department of Justice: Juvenile Justice Bulletin: [Juvenile Justice: A Century of Change](#)
- ❖ U.S. Department of Justice - Juvenile Offenders and Victims, 2006 National Report: <http://ojjdp.ncjrs.gov/ojstatbb/nr2006/index.html>

## In the News: Juvenile Justice in the United States

The United States does not have one federal juvenile justice system; instead it has 51 separate state juvenile justice systems. Each system has its own history and set of laws and policies and delivers services to juvenile delinquents in its own way.

How a state organizes and administers its juvenile and family court, detention, probation, and post-dispositional services is an ongoing topic of discussion. Since the first juvenile court system was created in the late 1890s, these arrangements have generated great debate, with the ability and appropriateness of the juvenile court to administer probation services at its heart.

The analysis of the [National Center for Juvenile Justice](#) shows that a 16-year-old comes under juvenile court jurisdiction in Pennsylvania, but is an adult next door in the state of New York. One of the first actions taken during the juvenile court process is determining whether a case should be processed in the criminal justice system rather than in juvenile court. All states have in place judicial mechanisms through which certain juvenile offenders may be tried as adults in the criminal system.

### How is juvenile detention organized and administered from state to state?

- The organization and administration of juvenile detention varies from place to place more than any other juvenile delinquency service. Beyond the observation that detention is more often than not a matter of executive administration, it is difficult to make any valid generalization.
- In 13 states, all juvenile detention is administered by state-level executive agencies, and in 13 others, it is subject to local executive administration. In the District of Columbia, an executive agency also administers detention. Local courts administer detention in 3 states, while a state judicial agency controls it in 2 other states. In all the rest, the system for administering judicial detention varies to some extent from one part of the state to another.
- Fourteen states have variable or mixed systems, with detention administered by local courts in some places, by local executive agencies in others, and by state level agencies in others.

### ASK AMERICA WEBCHAT: Elections '08: Super Tuesday & Beyond



[Register](#)

[Ask America:  
Info, Registration & Transcripts...](#)



### America.Gov - February is Black History Month

See the new [America.gov](#) website created by the U.S. Department of State. The section on [American Life and Diversity](#) provides useful information and resources on Black History Month.



### usa.usembassy.de

*About the USA* is a digital collection of background resources on American society, culture, and political processes. In addition to featuring selected websites, it provides access to documents in full text format (E-Texts) on topics ranging from the history of German-American relations, government and politics to travel, holidays and sports.

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