



UNION

DELVE DEEPER READING LIST



This list of fiction and nonfiction books, compiled by Ann Howard, Library Branch Manager, MIS, provides a range of perspectives on the issues raised by the POV documentary *Union*.

UNION chronicles an unlikely group of warehouse workers as they launch a grassroots union campaign at an Amazon fulfillment center in Staten Island, New York. The odds are stacked against them, as they find themselves up against a tech industry giant with unlimited resources, without major support from national unions or politicians, and while navigating internal divisions within their own ranks.

Contributors



Ann Howard / MIS

I began my journey with the Bay County Public Library, Panama City, Florida in 2017 as an entry-level circulation staff member. Over the years, I advanced to Circulation Department Manager, Interlibrary Loan Librarian, and now serve as Branch Manager. I earned my Master's of Information Science from Florida State University in 2024. Working in the library has been my true passion, and my library stories always make for the best conversations at parties.

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For a more extensive list of resources, please see the film's [Discussion Guide Reference Materials](#) list.

ADULT NON-FICTION

Blanc, Eric. *We Are the Union: How Worker-to-Worker Organizing Is Revitalizing Labor and Winning Big*. University of California Press, 2025.

This is the book to read when you're ready to take a deep look at decades of union decline. A recent surge in workplace organizing—from Starbucks stores to Amazon warehouses to southern auto factories—has put unionization back in the national spotlight. *We Are the Union* explores the efforts of grassroots and other organizations that are transforming the American labor movement. In it, Blanc argues that traditional union strategies often rely on top-down leadership, while highlighting the “worker-to-worker” model—a more peer-led approach to organizing. He uses the Starbucks Workers United (SBWU) campaign to illustrate how this model empowers co-workers to organize together and build the numbers needed to petition the court. SBWU’s success has inspired other stores to unionize and has secured bargaining rights at 525 locations across the United States.

Levitt, Martin, and Terry Toczynski. *Confessions of a Union Buster: New Activist Edition*. Xandland Press, 2021.

Levitt experienced a moral awakening and chose to come clean, exposing the inner workings of the union-busting industry, one that thrives on fear and deception to keep employees from organizing. This book serves both as a cautionary tale and a guide for labor activists. As a former union buster, Levitt planned and executed anti-union campaigns at more than 250 businesses across the country, from coal mines and factories to airlines and nursing homes. He reveals the manipulative and unethical tactics he used to prevent workers from organizing. In this book, Levitt explains how psychological manipulation and misinformation were used to divide workers. He also spied on employees and exploited their personal lives and fears to persuade them against unionizing.

Milkman, Ruth. *Rebuilding Labor: Organizing and Organizers in the New Union Movement*. ILR Press, 2004.

This collection of scholarly essays explores labor organizing and offers insights into how unions can be revitalized. The central argument is that unions must fundamentally transform their internal organizational practices to rebuild power. The book provides examples of “business unionism”—a model primarily focused on servicing existing members—and contrasts it with more dynamic approaches aimed at organizing new members and growing collective power.

McCallum, Jamie. *Global Unions, Local Power: The New Spirit of Transnational Labor Organizing*. ILR Press, 2013.

Global Unions, Local Power tells the story of one of the most ambitious cross-border labor campaigns ever undertaken. It began in 2007, when the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) struggled to organize private security guards at G4S, a global security company. When the U.S. campaign stalled, SEIU turned to international allies in countries where G4S also operated. The result: wage increases, new union formations, better benefits, and an end to management reprisals across much of the Global South. McCallum draws on more than two years of fieldwork in nine countries and extensive historical research. He explores the paradoxes of global unionism—how efforts to create universal labor

standards often depend on, and are shaped by, local conditions. The book argues that shifts in the political economy have pushed unions to develop new organizing strategies and offers a hopeful vision for reshaping labor rules on a global scale.

McAlevey, Jane. *A Collective Bargain: Unions, Organizing, and the Fight for Democracy*. Ecco, 2021.

Jane McAlevey, a veteran labor organizer and environmental activist, makes a compelling case that unions are one of the few institutions equipped to take on today's corporate power. She argues that strong, democratic unions are essential, not just for protecting workers' rights, but for revitalizing American democracy itself. McAlevey contends that decades of systemic racism and political attacks on labor laws have weakened democratic institutions. She advocates for unions that fight not only for better wages and working conditions, but also for racial and gender equity, climate justice, and improved public services like education and healthcare. The book is a call to action—a blueprint for how to rebuild worker power through deep, sustained organizing rooted in worker empowerment. *A Collective Bargain* is both practical and hopeful, showing how unions can make a powerful comeback and deliver real, lasting change.

ADULT FICTION

Steinbeck, John. *In Dubious Battle*. Penguin Press, 1936.

This novel carries deep meaning and remains relevant across various societal contexts. It explores themes of social justice, class struggle, and group behavior. *In Dubious Battle* is a powerful portrayal of American labor history and the fight for workers' rights. The main character, Jim, becomes disillusioned with society and searches for purpose. He is mentored by Mac, and together they attempt to unionize a group of apple pickers. After one worker falls from a ladder, the dangerous conditions in the orchards become impossible to ignore. The pickers launch a strike, sparking violence and stretching already scarce resources during the Great Depression. Though their cause is just, the novel underscores that creating change often comes with a steep cost. *In Dubious Battle* shines a light on the dehumanizing effects of poverty and exploitation and the systemic resistance to labor organizing.

Shreve, Anita. *Sea Glass*. Little, Brown, 2002.

Sea Glass is a historical fiction novel set in New Hampshire during the Great Depression. A young newlywed couple buys a dilapidated beach house, dreaming of rebuilding it and starting a life together. But their dreams are quickly derailed when the stock market crash creates economic hardship. Forced to work at a textile mill for low wages, the husband witnesses growing unrest among his co-workers. As the workers begin to organize, the beach house becomes a meeting place, setting off conflict with mill management. Shreve paints a vivid portrait of how financial pressure affects a marriage. Each character undergoes emotional transformation—like the sea glass collected along the shore—shaped by struggle, resilience, and disillusionment.

Cash, Wiley. *The Last Ballad: A Novel*. William Morrow, 2017.

The Last Ballad is inspired by the true story of Ella May Wiggins, a labor activist in 1929 North Carolina. A single mother working in a textile mill for just nine dollars a week, Ella joins the union to fight for workers' rights and racial integration. She writes ballads about the workers' struggles, becoming a powerful voice in the labor movement. The novel portrays the harsh realities of union organizing in the Jim Crow South and the extraordinary sacrifices made by ordinary people seeking dignity, justice, and basic human rights.

Tax, Meredith. *Riverton Street: A Novel*. University of Illinois Press, 2001.

This historical novel follows four courageous Jewish women on their journey from Russia to New York's Lower East Side. Each woman forges her own path while grappling with the harsh realities of sweatshop labor and the fight for women's rights. Drawing on rich historical research, Tax weaves themes of family, political activism, and justice into a compelling narrative. Set against the backdrop of the women's suffrage movement and the rise of the garment workers' union, *Riverton Street* explores female independence, labor struggles, and Jewish identity in early 20th-century America.

Kennedy, William. *The Ink Truck*. Penguin Books, 1985.

The Ink Truck tells the story of Bailey, a former newspaper columnist who leads a strike against his employer, a local newspaper company. As the year-long strike loses momentum, Bailey, driven by stubbornness and personal grudges, takes matters into his own hands by sabotaging the ink truck that delivers supplies. What begins as a collective effort for fair treatment spirals into a personal obsession that detaches Bailey from reality. Darkly humorous and satirical, the novel explores themes of failed heroism, rebellion against authority, and the eccentricities of human behavior.

Walter, Jess. *The Cold Millions*. Harper, 2020.

Set in Spokane, Washington, during the early 20th century, *The Cold Millions* follows two orphaned Irish immigrant brothers who become involved in the labor movement led by the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW). The story centers on their participation in the 1909 Free Speech Fight, a real historical protest for the right to organize and speak publicly. Walter blends rich historical detail with a gripping plot that explores idealism, corruption, violence, and loyalty. The novel highlights issues of wealth inequality, social unrest, and the transformative power of collective action.

YOUNG ADULT NON-FICTION

Marrin, Albert. *Flesh and Blood So Cheap: The Triangle Fire and Its Legacy*. Knopf Books for Young Readers, 2011.

Flesh and Blood So Cheap explores the evolution of American labor laws and safety regulations through the lens of the 1911 Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire in New York City. Marrin vividly illustrates the appalling conditions of “sweatshops,” where immigrant workers endured low wages, long hours, and unsafe environments. The fire, which claimed 146 lives, became a catalyst for the International Ladies Garment Workers Union (ILGWU) and broader labor reforms. Marrin describes the harrowing scene, including desperate escape attempts and the fire department’s tragic shortcomings. He continues the story with the public outcry, the factory owners’ trial, and the workers—many of them women and immigrants—who stood up to power and changed the nation’s labor laws. This book portrays an unimaginable yet avoidable disaster and the lasting legacy it left behind.

Forrant, Robert, and Susan Grabski. *Lawrence and the 1912 Bread and Roses Strike*. Arcadia Publishing, 2013.

Lawrence, Massachusetts, became a landmark in labor history during the 1912 “Bread and Roses” strike. More than 20,000 immigrant textile workers—mostly women and children—walked out in protest of wage cuts following a new law that reduced the workweek from 56 to 54 hours.

Faced with unsafe machinery, unsanitary working conditions, and widespread poverty, workers demanded fair treatment. The Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) helped form a 50-person strike committee representing all ethnic groups, uniting a diverse workforce. The strike lasted nine weeks and was a defining success for industrial unionism. This powerful example of grassroots activism continues to inspire labor movements today.

Bartoletti, Susan Campbell. *Kids on Strike!*. Clarion Books, 2003.

Kids on Strike! highlights the role children played in the American labor movement from the 1830s to the early 1900s. Each chapter focuses on a different group of child laborers who organized or joined strikes to fight injustice. Using historical photographs and firsthand accounts, Bartoletti brings to life the brutal conditions children faced—and the courage they showed despite police violence, negative press, and government indifference. Their activism helped spur the formation of the National Child Labor Committee and the eventual passage of child labor laws. This is a powerful, inspiring book about young people who helped shape social justice movements that still resonate today.

Zinn, Howard, Dana Frank, and Robin D.G. Kelley. *Three Strikes: Miners, Musicians, Salesgirls, and the Fighting Spirit of Labor’s Last Century*. Beacon Press, 2002.

This collection of essays by prominent historians examines three pivotal labor struggles of the 20th century. Zinn covers the 1913–1914 Colorado coal strike against the Rockefeller-owned Fuel and Iron Company, revealing the violent repression workers faced. Frank recounts the 1937 Woolworth’s sit-down strike in Detroit, where underpaid young women demanded better wages and working conditions—and won. Kelley explores the failed resistance of live movie theater musicians against the rise of “talkies,” showing how technological change can threaten labor stability. Together, these stories

illustrate the enduring fight for workers' rights, the economic inequalities that drive labor activism, and the importance of collective action.

Mann, Albert J. *Shift Happens: The History of Labor in the United States*. HarperCollins, 2024.

Shift Happens traces major milestones in U.S. labor history, spotlighting both well-known and overlooked events that shaped the fight for workers' rights. Mann takes a witty, conversational approach to show how work has always been central to American life—and how workers have consistently been exploited. With a focus on “organizing heroes” and the power of solidarity, this book connects past struggles to present-day labor issues. It offers a modern, engaging take on how collective action has driven lasting social change.

YOUNG ADULT FICTION

Doctorow, Cory. *For the Win*. Tor Teen Press, 2010.

For the Win unfolds in a vast online multiplayer gaming world, where millions of players across the globe quest and battle to earn virtual “gold,” jewels, and artifacts that translate into real-world money. The story follows three teenagers from different countries whose lives become entangled in this virtual economy. They are drawn together by “Big Sister,” a mysterious union organizer determined to help exploited “gold farmers”—workers in electronic sweatshops run by ruthless warlords in impoverished regions. These gold farmers are forced into long hours of digital labor under threats and abusive contracts. Big Sister uses her knowledge of labor history and global networks to build a borderless labor movement within the game world. Together, they devise a plan to disrupt—and potentially crash—the corrupt virtual economy. *For the Win* offers a thought-provoking look at labor organizing in the digital age and explores how virtual worlds mirror real-world class struggles and global capitalism.

Haddix, Margaret Peterson. *Uprising*. Scholastic Press, 2011.

Uprising follows three young women whose lives converge at the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory in early 20th-century New York. Each chapter unfolds from a different perspective, offering an intimate look at the challenges faced by immigrant women seeking better lives. When the factory catches fire, their fight for improved working conditions becomes a call for justice. The novel gives voice to the women of the labor and suffrage movements and shows how tragedy can expose social injustice—and ignite collective action. *Uprising* is a powerful tribute to immigrant workers and the enduring fight for dignity and safety in the workplace.

Paterson, Katherine. *Bread and Roses, Too*. Clarion Books, 2006.

Told from the perspective of two children during the 1912 Lawrence Textile Strike, *Bread and Roses, Too* explores the human cost of labor conflict. As violence escalates, the union organizes to send children to live with sympathetic families in other cities, sparking a national conversation. Through this experience, the children confront hard truths about family, justice, and their place in a world shaped by class divisions. The novel offers a unique and emotional perspective on the labor movement, portraying the impact of protest and solidarity through a child’s eyes.

Duberman, Martin. *Haymarket*. Seven Stories Press, 2005.

Haymarket offers a gripping retelling of the 1886 Chicago Haymarket Riot, when a peaceful rally for an eight-hour workday turned violent after a bomb was thrown. Duberman explores the diverse labor coalitions of the time and the deeply entrenched exploitation of immigrant workers. He highlights both the unity and ideological divisions among activists and follows the dramatic trial and public hysteria that followed the event. This novel presents a nuanced view of a defining moment in American labor history, steeped in political conflict, social inequality, and the urgent demand for justice.

Crowder, Melanie. *Audacity*. Philomel Books, 2015.

Audacity is a poetic novel in verse based on the true story of Clara Lemlich, a Russian-Jewish immigrant who moved to New York seeking a better life. Working in brutal garment factory conditions, Clara faces poverty, anti-Semitism, and restrictive gender roles. Outraged by the injustice, she becomes a passionate labor organizer and a leader in the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union (ILGWU). Her fiery speeches inspired thousands of women to strike, making her a central figure in the fight for fair wages and safe working conditions. Through Clara's inner voice, *Audacity* becomes a testament to resilience, courage, and the power of one young woman to spark a movement.

BOOKS FOR YOUNGER LEARNERS AND CHILDREN

Cronin, Doreen. *Click, Clack, Moo: Cows That Type*. Atheneum Books for Young Readers, 2000.

In *Click, Clack, Moo: Cows That Type*, farm animals discover an old typewriter and begin making demands of Farmer Brown, starting with an electric blanket. When he refuses, the hens and other animals join the cows in solidarity and go on strike. This playful and imaginative story offers a humorous look at how cooperation and speaking up can create change. Through clever text and expressive illustrations, Cronin introduces young readers to themes of labor organizing and negotiation in a fun, age-appropriate way.

Brown, Don. *Kid Blink Beats the World*. Roaring Brook Press, 2004.

This picture book tells the true story of the 1899 newsboys' strike in New York City. Kid Blink and his fellow "newsies"—mostly poor children—refused to sell newspapers when prices were raised, organizing rallies and picket lines that disrupted distribution across the city. Despite their youth, the newsboys' collective action led to negotiations with powerful newspaper publishers and ultimately a victory. With expressive illustrations and accessible language, *Kid Blink Beats the World* shows how even kids can take a stand and make a difference through solidarity and determination.

Miller, Connie Colwell. *Mother Jones: Labor Leader* (Graphic Biographies series). Capstone Press, 2007.

This graphic biography introduces readers to Mary Harris "Mother" Jones, one of the most influential labor leaders of the 19th and early 20th centuries. It traces her difficult early life, her transformation into an activist, and her decades of tireless work organizing strikes, protests, and public marches. Known for her fierce opposition to child labor and dangerous working conditions, Mother Jones traveled the country inspiring workers to fight for justice. This engaging, visual format helps young readers understand her legacy and the broader impact of labor organizing in American history.

Cohn, Diana. *¡Sí, Se Puede! Yes, We Can! Janitor Strike in L.A.* Cinco Puntos Press, 2005.

Told from the perspective of a young boy whose mother is a janitor, *¡Sí, Se Puede!* recounts the 2000 Justice for Janitors strike in Los Angeles. As his mother and her co-workers organize for fair wages, the boy learns about union power and joins the effort by helping make protest signs with his classmates. This empowering story highlights how community action—and even the voices of children—can contribute to social justice. Through a simple, heartfelt narrative, the book introduces young readers to the values of solidarity, activism, and hope.

Brewer, Heather. *Love Is Powerful*. Candlewick, 2024.

Inspired by real events, *Love Is Powerful* follows a young girl named Mari as she prepares to participate in a Women's March with her mother in New York City. When Mari stands tall and shouts "Love is Powerful," the crowd takes up her chant—amplifying her small voice into a collective call for change. The story doesn't focus on the politics of the protest, but rather on the emotional power of showing up, speaking out, and believing in your voice. It's a touching reminder that even the smallest voices can make a difference.