

NEWS BREAK

Article: **Union says REI is abandoning its co-op values with board picks**

Section: **BUSINESS, C5**

Sunday's News Break selects an article from **Sunday, March 9, 2025**, of The Seattle Times print replica for an in-depth reading of the news. Read the selected article and answer the attached study questions.

You are encouraged to modify this lesson to fit the needs of your students. For example, some teachers might use this as a take-home assignment and others might read and answer the questions in a small group or larger, class discussion.

****Please be sure to preview all NIE content before using it in your classroom to ensure it is appropriate for your students.***

Standards:

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.4.1

- Refer to details and examples in a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.4.2

- Determine the main idea of a text and explain how it is supported by key details; summarize the text.

Objectives:

Students will learn about the current issues surrounding REIs union and board picks. They will learn more about union and labor rights, living wages, corporate governance v. co-op values, consumerism, and civic engagement.

Pre-Reading Discussion:



- What do you think the article will be about, using this picture?
- Are there any clues? What can you infer?

Vocabulary Building:

Read this sentence, what do you think the highlighted words mean using *context clues*? A **context clue** is a word or words that are hints and refers to the sources of information outside of words that readers may use to predict the identities and meanings of unknown words.

“Exceptional judgment and decision-making skills honed by proven business **acumen**.”

Acumen Guess:

Acumen Definition:

Comprehension Questions:

1. The union representing hundreds of REI workers has a simple ask for the Issaquah-based co-op’s members-what is it?
2. REI members began voting Monday on the outdoor gear retailer’s candidates for its _____.
3. The election runs online through _____.
4. The union, United Food and Commercial Workers Union, describes the candidates as what?
5. Any REI member can self-nominate, but the board selects who will be on the _____.

6. The clash is the latest in a continuous relationship between financially struggling REI and its unionized workers who have been trying to reach a contract since _____.
7. Other issues brought up by the union include what three main things?
8. On its website, REI says board directors must have what skills and experience?
9. REI's current board has directors with decades of experience as executives for large companies. Give the 3 companies that were listed in the article.
10. Board directors serve _____-year terms. _____ people sit on the board in addition to the company's CEO.
11. Workers at a store in _____ are represented by the Seattle local chapter of the UFCW; it is the only unionized location in Washington.
12. What are the union's primary demands?
13. After the company announced in early January that it was cutting its outdoor classes and events business, laying off more than 400 employees in the process, the union said it was just more evidence that the company has moved away from its what?
14. To survive, REI needed to focus on what?

Class Discussion Questions:

- What surprised (or stood out to) you in the article?
- At first, I thought _____, but now I think _____?
- What things did you already know from prior experience?

Does your family shop at REI? What has your experience been and have you seen any changes in customer service, etc. when you've been there recently to shop?

If you don't shop at REI for your outdoor gear and clothing-why don't you?

Understanding Unions and Labor Rights:

- What is the process of collective bargaining, and why is it proving difficult for REI and its unionized workers to reach an agreement?
- How do the worker's stories about needing food banks and struggling with rent illustrate the concept of a "living wage"? What factors contribute to the debate over what constitutes a living wage?

Corporate Governance and Co-op Values:

- What is the role of a board of directors in a company like REI? How does the union's criticism of the board's composition relate to the concept of corporate governance?

- REI claims to be a cooperative. What are the key principles of a cooperative? How does the union argue that REI is straying from these principles?
- Why does the union object to the board's selection process for candidates? How does this process contrast with democratic elections? *Was their selection process fair?*
- What does the term "corporatization" mean in the context of this article? How does the pursuit of profitability potentially conflict with the original values of a co-op?

Consumerism and Civic Engagement:

- As REI members, what rights and responsibilities do consumers have in influencing the company's decisions? How can consumers express their concerns and advocate for change?
- Why did Margaret Cary, a long-time REI member, express disappointment in the company's actions? How does her perspective illustrate the concept of consumer loyalty and expectations?
- What are the various ways that the members of REI can affect change within the company? How can consumers impact corporate change? Are we seeing examples of that right now in American society? How?

Broader Societal Issues:

- How do the issues raised by the REI union and its members relate to broader debates about income inequality and worker rights in the United States?
- How does the article portray the balance between a company's financial needs and its social responsibilities? Is it possible for a company to prioritize both?
- What are the implications of a company like REI, which promotes outdoor recreation and environmentalism, facing criticism for its labor practices? How does this affect the company's credibility and public image?

News Break is posted to the Web on Tuesday. Please share this NIE News Break program with other teachers. To sign-up for the print replica for your class, please [register online](#) or call 206/652-6290 or toll-free 1-888/775-2655.

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