

Lesson Plan from [Contemporary History](#)
Lesson Plan

“The Spirit of Empire”: America Debates Imperialism

Length

2 periods

Grade Level

High School

Learning Objectives

Students will be able to

- Analyze primary sources
- Summarize the meaning of primary sources
- Infer subtle messages from primary sources

[Complete Lesson Plan with Handouts](#)

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Overview

****Click the link above for the full plan with readings and handouts.****

This unit has been developed by the Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History in partnership with CFR Education from the Council on Foreign Relations. These lesson plans were developed to enable students to understand, summarize, and evaluate original documents of historical significance. Students will learn and practice skills that will help them analyze, assess, and develop knowledgeable and well-reasoned points of view on visual and textual source materials.

In the two lessons in this unit the students will analyze and assess political cartoons, newspaper and magazine articles, opinion pieces, government documents, speeches, and a diary entry from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The objective is to have students recognize the contrasting views of the pro- and anti-imperialist arguments and analyze key elements of primary sources surrounding the debate over US imperialism. Using these key elements students will examine, evaluate, and discuss the meaning and message of each document to determine if it is a pro- or anti-imperialist document. As an assessment, students will use phrases from the documents in the first lesson to create “found” speeches that express both sides of the debates over US imperialism at the turn of the twentieth century.

Lesson 1: America Debates Imperialism

****Click the link above for the full plan with readings and handouts.****

In the first lesson, students will identify, examine, and analyze the language and imagery in primary sources related to the debate on US imperialism after the Spanish-American War in 1898. Students will work with a variety of documents including political cartoons, newspaper and magazine articles, opinion pieces, government documents, speeches, and a diary entry. Students will identify the pro- or anti-imperialist message(s) in each document and support their identification with evidence from the documents. At the end of the lesson, the class will come together to discuss the documents and present evidence-based arguments to support their decisions.

Note

In this lesson there are three different activities to choose from. Please read through each before deciding which option is most appropriate for your students.

Option 1

1. Optional: You may choose to incorporate the Historical Background (and the Important Phrases activity sheet) at any point throughout the two lessons in this unit, or you may discuss the information in the essay by Robert Cherny with the class.
2. Place students into pairs or small groups and hand out, provide a digital copy of, or screen share the four “Analyzing Imperialism [Political Cartoon]” activity sheets.
 - o Students will analyze the primary sources and determine if the messages are pro- or anti imperialist. Students will cite evidence from the primary sources to support their answers.
3. Lead the students through the analysis of one of the political cartoons as a class. Have students conduct a brief 30-second analysis on their own. Have them volunteer ideas about the message(s) of the cartoon. It is perfectly fine if they disagree. Next, have them cite evidence from the political cartoon that supports their answer. The discussion and analysis of evidence is crucial to a deeper understanding of the primary source.
4. Have students complete the analysis of the remaining political cartoons. If you are working remotely, you may choose to place students in breakout rooms.
5. Upon completion of the four activity sheets, hand out, provide a digital copy of, or screen share the rest of the Analyzing Imperialism activity sheets.
6. Lead the students in a “share read” of one of the texts before they complete the rest of the activity sheets. To share read the text, have the students follow along silently while you begin to read aloud, modeling prosody, inflection, and punctuation. Ask the class to join in with the reading after a few sentences while you continue to read aloud. This technique will support struggling readers and English language learners (ELL).
7. Have students complete the remaining activity sheets.
 - o As with the political cartoons, students will analyze the primary sources and determine if the messages are pro- or anti-imperialist. They will cite evidence from the primary sources to support their answers.
 - o Optional: Some of the primary sources refer to the Declaration of Independence. You may choose to distribute the Declaration (provided) and focus some of the class discussion on how pro-imperialists and anti-imperialists used the rhetoric of the Declaration.
8. When students have completed all the activity sheets, have them discuss which primary sources had the greatest impact and the most effective message.
9. Have students answer the essential question: What did the United States gain and lose as a result of imperialism? This may be completed as a wrap-up discussion or an exit-ticket activity. They may use the “Imperialism Debate: What Is Gained? What Is Lost?” activity sheet to outline their arguments.

Option 2

1. Optional: You may choose to incorporate the Historical Background (and the Important Phrases activity sheet) at any point throughout the two lessons in this unit, or you may discuss the information in the essay by Robert Cherny with the class.
2. Place students into pairs or small groups and hand out, provide a digital copy of, or screen share all the primary sources without the activities.

3. Lead the students through the analysis of one of the political cartoons as a class. Have students conduct a brief 30-second analysis on their own. Have them volunteer ideas about the message(s) of the cartoon. It is perfectly fine if they disagree. Next, have them cite evidence from the political cartoon that supports their answer. The discussion and analysis of evidence is crucial to a deeper understanding of the primary source.
4. Lead the students in a “share read” of one of the texts before they complete the rest of the activity. To share read the text, have the students follow along silently while you begin to read aloud, modeling prosody, inflection, and punctuation. Ask the class to join in with the reading after a few sentences while you continue to read aloud. This technique will support struggling readers and English language learners (ELL).
5. Have students complete the analysis of the cartoons and text by dividing the documents into two categories, identifying each as either pro- or anti-imperialist. If you are working remotely, you may choose to place students in breakout rooms.
6. When students have completed their categorization, have them cite evidence from each primary source to support their decisions on the “Imperialism Debate: Categorizing the Sources” activity sheet.
7. When students have completed the activity sheet, have them discuss which primary sources had the greatest impact and the most effective message.
8. Have students answer the essential question: What did the United States gain and lose as a result of imperialism? This may be completed as a wrap-up discussion or an exit-ticket activity. They may use the “Imperialism Debate: What Is Gained? What Is Lost?” activity sheet to outline their arguments.

Option 3

If time or student learning level is a consideration, the following modifications may be considered.

1. Optional: You may choose to incorporate the Historical Background (and the Important Phrases activity sheet) at any point throughout the two lessons in this unit, or you may discuss the information in the essay by Robert Cherny with the class.
2. Place students into pairs or small groups and hand out, provide a digital copy of, or screen share the following primary sources. You may use either the Analyzing Imperialism activity sheets (starting on page 18) if using Option A in Procedure 4 below or the pages without the activities (starting on page 38) if using Option B in Procedure 4.
 1. Political Cartoon: “His 128th Birthday”
 2. Political Cartoon: “We Must Finish the Nicaragua Canal”
 3. Newspaper Article: “A Definition of Imperialism”
 4. Newspaper Article: “Only a Bugaboo”
 5. Political Platform: Platform of the American Anti-Imperialist League
 6. Speech: The Retention of the Philippine Islands: Speech of Hon. Henry Cabot Lodge.
3. Lead the students through the analysis of one of the political cartoons as a class. Have students conduct a brief 30-second analysis on their own. Have them volunteer ideas about the message(s) of the cartoon. It is perfectly fine if they disagree. Next, have them cite evidence from the political cartoon that supports their answer. The discussion and analysis of evidence is crucial to a deeper understanding of the primary source.
4. Lead the students in a “share read” of one of the texts before they complete the rest of the activity. To share read the text, have the students follow along silently while you begin to read aloud, modeling prosody, inflection, and punctuation. Ask the class to join in with the reading after a few sentences while you continue to read aloud. This technique will support struggling readers and English language learners (ELL).
5. Choose Option A or B to analyze the primary sources.
 - Option A: Students will analyze the primary sources using the specific “Analyzing Imperialism” activity sheets listed above and determine if the messages are pro- or anti-imperialism. Students will cite evidence from the primary sources to support their answers.
 - Option B: Have students identify each document as either pro- or anti-imperialist. When students have completed their categorization, have them cite evidence from each document to support their decision using the “Categorizing the Sources” activity sheet.
6. When they have completed either of the activities, have students discuss which primary sources had the greatest impact and the most effective message.
7. Have students answer the essential question: What did the United States gain and lose as a result of imperialism? This may be completed as a wrap-up discussion or an exit-ticket activity. They may use the “Imperialism Debate: What Is Gained? What Is Lost?” activity sheet to outline their arguments.

Lesson 2: Pro- and Anti-Imperialist “Found” Speeches

Click the link above for the full plan with readings and handouts.

In the second lesson, the students will use the materials from Lesson 1 to create “found” speeches. At the end of the lesson, the class will come together to discuss their speeches and the pro- and anti imperialist arguments, and answer the essential question for the unit.

1. Place students into pairs or small groups and hand out, provide a digital copy of, or screen share the “Pro-and Anti-Imperialist Speeches: What Is Gained? What Is Lost?” activity sheet.
2. Students will synthesize the materials from Lesson 1 to create a pro-imperialist speech and an anti-imperialist speech. They will choose a total of five sentences or phrases for each speech, one sentence/phrase per document. They will insert each sentence/phrase into the activity sheet, one phrase per line, to create a coherent speech on each side of the debate. Give the students some latitude in their selection of sentences or phrases and the order in which they use them. See the example provided.
3. Students will provide a title that summarizes the message of each speech.
4. Have students discuss the essential question: What did the United States gain and lose as a result of imperialism?