



Peak Immigration Years 8th-12th Grade Activity Plan

Overview:

The purpose of this program is to use visually engaging contemporary primary source documents and also documents from Ellis Island's *Peak Immigration Years* (1892-1924) exhibit to help students contemplate, analyze, synthesize, and evaluate issues related to immigration today and in the past. In addition, this program encourages critical thinking about published images that promote a particular point of view or present one specific perspective.

Time Frame:

25-30 Minutes

Materials:

Images from the *Peak Immigration Years* exhibit, contemporary immigration images, pen and paper

Objectives:

By the end of the activity, students will be able to:

- Explore how illustrators like cartoonists use political cartoons to influence public opinion.
- Evaluate the cartoonists' apparent points of view.
- Consider different perspectives through dialogue and discussion.
- Discuss students' own ideas regarding the images, issues and perspectives.

Procedure:

1) Introduction:

Inform students that before we had video or films, political cartoons were used to galvanize people around issues. Explain that in this activity, students will be analyzing political cartoons in order to understand how images can be used to convey meaning related to a topic of importance in the past and today, immigration. They will consider the cartoonist's point of view, how the cartoonist makes his or her point and what perspectives are not considered or presented in the illustration. At the end, after analyzing the cartoons, synthesizing the information and evaluating from multiple perspectives, students will also think about and discuss their own ideas related to past and present cartoons related to immigration.

2) Activity:

Divide the students into groups of four. Instruct each group to analyze a specific set of cartoons (Set A) (*Note: These cartoons can be found at Ellis Island in the Closing the Door portion of the exhibit.*)

Additional historic cartoons on immigration can be retrieved on the following websites:

Latin American Studies website -- several key cartoons in one place:

<http://www.latinamericanstudies.org/puck.htm>

Library of Congress -- search for immigration cartoons: <https://www.loc.gov/collections/>

Cartoon Set A – Ideas about U.S. immigration past

Ask students to consider the following questions:

- What do you think that the cartoonist or illustrator was trying to communicate?
- List specific items in the image that are used to express an opinion or perspective?
- For each item on your list, or for key items, explain exactly what idea that item (person, place or thing) represents? For example, are the characters in the cartoon representations or symbols of a broader community, group of people or idea?
- What perspectives are NOT represented in this illustration?

3) Once finished, select a contemporary cartoon (from Set B) and reflect upon the same questions.

Cartoon Set B – Contemporary views of immigration¹

4) Lastly, compare and contrast past perspectives about immigration with present perspectives. When comparing the images, have the students consider the questions below:

- Why do you think people created and published these cartoons? What was each illustrator hoping to achieve? Who is the intended audience?
- How does each illustrator want the reader to feel about immigration?
- Whose interests do these viewpoints serve?
- What do you think about the contemporary cartoons? Do you agree or disagree with the cartoonist's point of view?
- How did the American society in the past express their concerns about newly-arrived immigrants? Do background research online if you want, to check immigration numbers during the years the cartoons were published. Check surrounding years, too.
- To what extent have these issues changed or not changed over time?
- When you compare the cartoons, what is the difference between the statements they are trying to make?

¹ Please note that the contemporary examples used on the next pages are just a small sample of a large collection of political cartoons available. Please consult other resources and use whatever material you find most effective.

- 5) After completing the two activities, ask each group to share their cartoons with the class and to summarize their answers to the two sets of questions. Encourage them to report any different, even conflicting, interpretations within their group.

Optional Follow-up Activity:

What is your perspective? What kind of cartoon or illustration would you like to make? Students who are interested could make their own political cartoons and try to publish them in the local paper.

SET A – Political Cartoons related to Past Immigration using images from Ellis Island’s *Peak Immigration Years* exhibit



SET A² *Puck* June 2, 1909

² Please note: All **SET A cartoons** can be found at the *Peak Immigration Years* exhibit.



SET A – Puck ca. 1905



SET A Los Angeles Times February 1921, Culver Pictures



SET A *Chicago Tribune* ca. 1921, Culver Pictures

SET B – Political Cartoons related to Modern Immigration

Use [this link](#) to find an appropriate modern immigration-related cartoon image for your class.





⁴SET B KAL, May 2007

COMPARABLE CONTENT FOR ACCESSIBILITY

Set A – *Puck* June 2, 1909

Uncle Sam in pantaloons with medieval city in background seems to be representing the pied piper with rats emptying out of the city and following him. Each of the rats has a human face and is carrying something in its mouth including torches, papers, tickets. The inhabitants of the city are watching the rats leave and appear to be cheering, dancing, and kicking up their feet. The city's inhabitants are dressed in clothing representing diverse European communities.

Set A – *Puck* ca. 1905

Uncle Sam is standing with crossed arms on a narrow spit of sand between two bodies of water. Uncle Sam appears to be tapping his foot impatiently in the middle of two motley men. The motley man on the left has a box and carrying bag with his belongings behind him on the sand; he appears to represent an Asian in native dress and a Western hat pointing a finger at the motley man on the right who is holding his hat in his right hand and standing as if ready to walk forward. The man on Uncle Sam's right has a bandana on his forehead, his shirt is open to the stomach and his coat is threadbare, holey, and with the arms ripping off. His left arm is hanging at his elbow, not in the sleeve, pointing at the Asian man. He has a large rucksack packed fully and

³ This image was retrieved in 2008 from now-defunct link at http://www.umass.edu/accela/lc/794d/sfl/images/Political%20cartoon_on_immigration%20tsunami%20statue%20of%20liberty.jpg

⁴ This image was retrieved in 2008 from <http://fairimmigration.files.wordpress.com/2007/05/immigration-cartoon1.jpg>

patched behind him resting on the sand. In the distance at the end of the sand spit appears to be the silhouette of Ellis Island.

Set A – *Los Angeles Times* February 1921, Culver Pictures

A large Uncle Sam in the center of the cartoon, wearing a white chef's hat and apron, is standing with his back turned to us on a round globe a newspaper with the headline "H.C.L." At the bottom right corner where the ocean and land meet is the word U.S.A. written on the land. In the top right foreground there is a huge cement mixer labeled "Europe and Asia's Teeming Millions." Out of the cement mixer is pouring tiny people labeled "Flood of Immigration." In the lower front center upon a high fire and kindling wood is an overflowing a black pot labeled "The Melting Pot."

Set A – *Chicago Tribune* ca. 1921, Culver Pictures

Uncle Sam stands tall upon a wall eloquently talking to two shorter men standing to his left. The wall under him extends to the right. The wall has two sections, on the left side of the wall is a sign labeled "Immigration Law 'to protect American labor from hordes of cheap foreign labor.'" On the right side of the wall is a sign labeled "Tariff Law to protect American manufacturers from the . . ." Both sections of the wall are being besieged by two separate angry mobs carrying signs. MORE DETAIL NEEDED WITH BETTER IMAGE

SET B – Political Cartoons related to Modern Immigration

Set B – *CNSNEWS.COM*, ca. 2008

Set B – On the entire left side of the cartoon is a huge wave with a big white foamy top and the words “3 Million Illegal Aliens Per Year.” At the bottom center of the cartoon in a neat rectangular box is the word “TSUNAMI.” To the right of the wave stands a small, vulnerable-looking Statue of Liberty holding her torch and tablet looks with eyes bulging with fear saying “Give me your tired, . . . your poor. . . Your huddled masses yearning to –um—yearning to—” and in a separate, lower right caption, she says “Holy &\$%*!!” There is a dark cloud above the statue in the top right corner.

Set B – *KAL*, ca. 2007

Set B – Larger than life, old harried-looking Uncle Sam stoops in the center of the cartoon with a trowel of mortar in his right hand building a wall of brick on which is written on the Mexican side “Illegals Stay Out!” On the top left where the wall has been built is a lookout tower, barbed wire, and a box with “America’s Attitude Toward Immigration in a Nutshell.” On the right side of the cartoon the wall ends in a dotted line with the word Mexico written in the ground. On the Mexican side is a crowd of dark-haired men and women drawn to look very small, almost like children, watching Uncle Sam build the wall. The word USA is written on the top right of the dotted line. On the US side there are two piles of bricks, a mass of wet mortar and barbed wire. Uncle Sam is whispering in two different captions; “Pssst!!” and “I’ll pay cash if you help me build this barrier”