

Lessons in Looking: Imperialism Cartoons

This activity teaches you how to break down different elements of a political cartoon. You will examine how different symbols and images can be combined to convey meaning. Then students analyze a 1902 political cartoon about U.S. expansion overseas and the acquisition of new territories in the Philippines in Cuba.

Essential Questions/Objective:

- How are images and symbols combined by political cartoonists to convey ideas?
- Students will analyze a political cartoon about U.S. imperialism in the 1890s.

Instructions

1. **Step 1:** Look at the projection screen where the elements of the political cartoon "**Uncle Sam Watches Over Cuba and the Philippines**" have been divided up. I will need three volunteers to come to the Smart board.....Umm...I mean laptop. Each volunteer should choose two elements from the cartoon and move them above the line.
2. **Step 2:** For each pairing, we will discuss what the symbols mean and what message is conveyed by putting them together.
3. **Step 3:** Please look at the complete projection of the cartoon "**Uncle Sam Watches Over Cuba and the Philippines.**" Now, I will pass out copies of the cartoon. Also please locate the **U.S. Imperialism Cartoon Analysis worksheet**. In groups, work on Part 1 of the worksheet.
4. **Step 4:** As a class, we will discuss and complete Part 2 of the worksheet.

Historical Context

During the United States' imperialist efforts at the turn of the twentieth century, cartoon illustrators used their canvases to convey the arguments for and against the Philippine-American War. Some artists highlighted the "primitive" civilization of the Filipinos as a reason for U.S. intervention, while others bemoaned the intervention as anti-democratic and un-American.

Uncle Sam Watches over Cuba and the Philippines

This 1902 political cartoon, from the conservative *Judge* magazine, portrays the supposed benefits of American imperialism. Both Cuba and the Philippines are depicted as young children under the guiding hand of a kindly Uncle Sam. While a well-behaved "Cuba" plays with a toy Statue of Liberty and military equipment, a savage-looking "Philippines" looks on in shocked surprise. As a result of the Spanish-American War (1898), Cuba had recently gained independence from Spain but remained firmly under the influence of United States. The Philippines also successfully rebelled against Spanish rule. The United States, however, refused to recognize Filipino independence and invaded the country in 1899.



Now, Will You Be Good? Uncle Sam (to Filipino) — "See what I do for a good little boy?"

Focus Questions

How does the cartoonist portray Uncle Sam?

How does the cartoonist portray Cuba and the Philippines? What are the similarities and differences?

What message or ideas about U.S. imperialism does the cartoon convey?

SOURCE | Grant Hamilton, *Judge*, chromolithograph, 14 December 1902.

CREATOR | Grant Hamilton

ITEM TYPE | Cartoon

US Imperialism Cartoon Analysis Worksheet

Part I. Objective Observation

<p style="text-align: center;">Objects/People</p> <p>List objects and people you see in the cartoon</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Words/Phrases</p> <p>List 3 words or phrases that appear in the cartoon</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Composition</p> <p>Describe what you see in the foreground and background, and the relative size of objects and people, etc.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Actions</p> <p>Describe any actions depicted in the cartoon</p>

Part II. Subjective Observation

1. How does the cartoonist portray the United States?
2. How does the cartoonist portray other countries or peoples?
3. What message or ideas about U.S. imperialism does the cartoon convey?