



WHEN THE BORDER VANISHES

Be the Historian: Working with Primary Documents: Political Cartoons

Historians look at primary sources as ways to put together an accurate picture of the who, what, where, when, and how that has shaped U.S. history and relationship with other countries. In this lesson, working with primary documents is not only an exciting way to learn content knowledge, but also to look closely at events that have shaped U.S. foreign policy.

You will examine this cartoon and delve deeply into its meaning. You will question and have more questions. Only when you have the answers will you have the tools to be the historian.

Standard:

- II. Time, Continuity, and Change
- III. People, Places, and Environment
- V. Individuals, Groups, and Institutions
- VI. Power, Authority, and Governance
- VIII. Science, Technology, and Society
- IX. Global Connections

Grade Level: 9–12

Objectives:

The student will:

- Analyze political cartoons for tone, purpose, and theme
- Link particular cartoons to specific historical events
- Explore relationships between diplomatic events
- Identify exaggeration, satire, irony, and/or caricature in political cartoons
- Analyze trade routes and American interest in them
- Research individuals such as Walter Reed, and methods—successful and unsuccessful—used to fight yellow fever
- Research the technology used to build the Panama Canal
- Write a persuasive essay on the necessity of the Panama Canal to American business interests
- Develop and apply research skills to locate, gather, and organize information
- Use presentation skills to report to the class

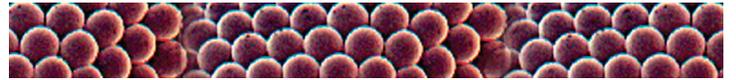
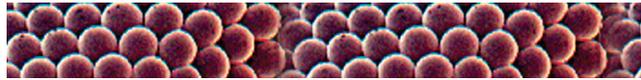
Time: 1–2 class periods per set of documents

Materials: Photocopies of *Political Cartoons: The First Mountain to be Removed* for each class member
Newsprint
Markers (different colors)
Photocopies of the *Graphic Organizer: Be the Historian* (one for each student)

Procedures:

Students may work in pairs, teams, or individually
Distribute copies of the Political Cartoon and the Graphic Organizer

1. Write an “Item of Focus” (from the Graphic Organizer) across the top of each piece of newsprint.
2. Divide students into groups or teams. Give each group/team or individual a different “Item of Focus” to answer the Guiding Questions on the Graphic Organizer.
3. Give each group a different colored marker.



4. Give each group 3–4 minutes to brainstorm what they know about the “Item of Focus.”
5. When the brainstorming session is completed, a representative of the group will write answers on the hanging newsprint.
6. Give each group an opportunity to visit each of the hanging pages. Teams or individuals should read the information written by others and decide whether they agree. If they agree, the team should place a check with their color marker.
7. If there is a disagreement with the answers of other teams, a new answer should be written on the newsprint in the group’s marker color.
8. Once groups have had time to confer on each topic, students will take their initial topic sheet back to their group.
9. When all groups have finished all the sheets, each group will fill in the last line of the conclusion: The Cartoonist’s tone, purpose, and theme. Students should present their answers. Discuss.

Extension Activities:

1. Research the new science and technology used to build the Panama Canal. Present your findings in a PowerPoint presentation to your class.
2. Research and analyze the process of shipping and handling goods from a port city such as New York City to China prior to the opening of the Panama Canal. Identify the route of the trip, modes of transportation, and length of time. Share your findings with your class.
3. There were several reasons why the Panama site was chosen over other suggested sites. Research the other contenders for the canal. Develop a chart of the pros and cons of each site. Develop a presentation to give to the class “selling” Panama as the canal’s location.
4. Write a persuasive essay explaining why Panama must be chosen for the canal. [Include contentions why some industries would benefit from the Panama location in terms of length of travel time and less hazardous conditions.]
5. Research the life of Walter Reed. Analyze his life and the lives of other yellow fever heroes such as Dr. William Crawford Gorgas. Report to the class. Ask your school librarians if you might display your findings in the library. ■