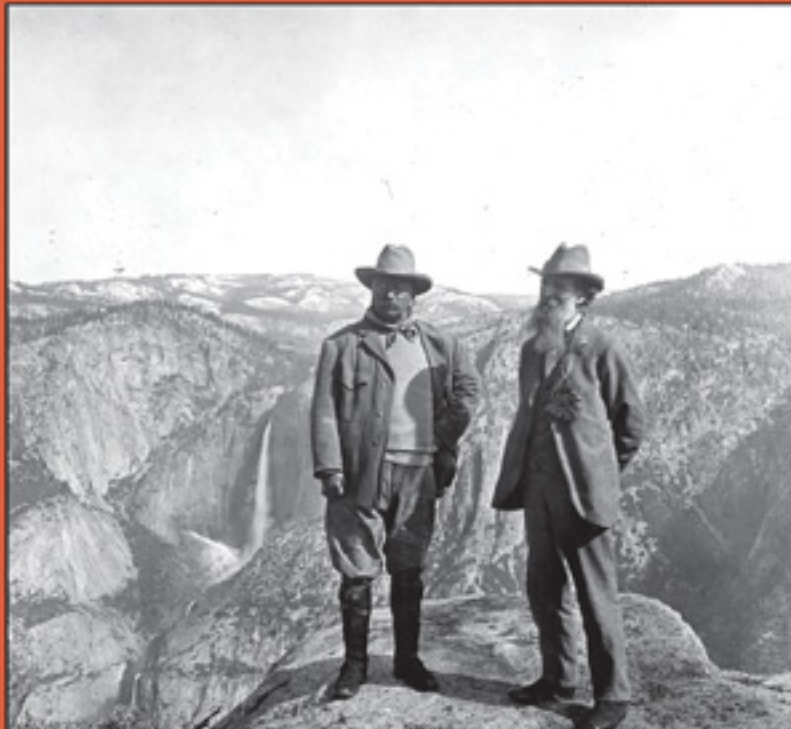


History
UNFOLDING

THE PROGRESSIVES



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MindSparks
CHALLENGING STUDENTS TO THINK HISTORICALLY

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Introduction

Progressive Reform in an Industrial Age

After the Civil War, a less formal, smaller-scale America seemed to fade away rapidly. Rails and telegraph wires bound Americans together into a truly national society. These developments also made a nationwide market easily available to the giant corporations and trusts now evolving.

All this meant greater wealth for a growing middle class and fabulous riches for a few powerful families. At the same time, this new America left many, in the middle class and among the very poor, with a growing sense of vulnerability to vast forces beyond their control.

On the prairies, this sense of unease erupted in the Populist movement of the 1890s. A brooding anger at unchecked corporate power moved farmers to revolt in the face of unpredictable international markets, costly railroad rates and a banking system that seemed rigged against them. But in urban America, Populism never caught fire. Instead, a different set of concerns gave birth to a very different reform movement—Progressivism. Largely urban and middle class, it responded to the poverty and disorder of the rapidly growing cities. And its reforms reflected its desire to bring both greater equality and greater efficiency and order to a national society that seemed increasingly out of control.

The 12 visual displays in this booklet focus on key aspects of this Progressive era. They are presented in four lessons. Each lesson uses three displays to explore one broad topic in the overall story. Briefly, the four lessons are as follows:

The Disorderly World of the City

The city of the late 1800s, with its thousands of new immigrants, its tenements and sweatshops, its squalor and political corruption, provided the context and the focus for the spirit of Progressive reform. These problems are also the focus of the illustrations in this lesson.

Corporate Power in the Industrial Age

Another central issue for Progressives was the enormous power of the unregulated corporation. Its dealings with its workers and with consumers seemed arbitrary and exploitative. The illustrations here capture the Progressives' sense of a world of corporate arrogance and irresponsibility.

Radicals and Progressives

Progressivism was largely a middle class movement seeking a new basis of order and "social efficiency" (a favorite Progressive phrase) in a corporate age. But other strands of Progressivism offered more radical visions of the future. Some of these strands are the focus in this lesson.

Progressivism Goes National

Progressive reform on the national stage revolved around two figures, above all—Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson. Roosevelt's "New Nationalism" and Wilson's "New Freedom" together raised the question of how to use the state to check corporate power while preserving individual liberty. The question is still with us.

Using Photos, Cartoons, and Other Visuals to Teach History

Many textbooks are full of colorful visuals. However, all too often these visuals function primarily as window dressing. They make the text more entertaining, or at least more palatable. Only occasionally do the visuals in textbooks do more than offer simple pictorial reinforcement of ideas already presented in the text. In many cases, they pander to the visual orientation of the young while doing little to help young people master the challenges of the visual media that dominate their lives.

By way of contrast, our approach to using visual materials emphasizes their unique strengths as historical documents. The lessons in this booklet focus students on the visual symbols and metaphors in editorial cartoons, the dramatic qualities of certain photographs, the potential of many images to make abstract ideas more specific and concrete, the implicit biases and stereotypes in certain images, their emotional power, and their ability to invoke the spirit of a time and place. In the process, we make every effort to strengthen students' visual literacy skills in general, as well as their ability to think critically and engage in spirited but disciplined discussions.

How to Use This Booklet

The booklet is divided into four lessons, with three illustrations per lesson. Each lesson consists of the following:

A BACKGROUND INFORMATION SHEET This page provides brief summaries explaining the three illustrations on which the lesson is based and their relevance to the lesson's objectives.

DIGITAL IMAGES The booklet's PDF allows you to project the images for use in your class discussions.

DISCUSSION-ACTIVITY SHEETS

Each sheet displays one illustration. It includes a sequence of questions to help you plan an all-class discussion while using the projected images. The questions take students step by step through an analysis of the illustration. If you wish, you may reproduce these pages and hand them out. In addition to the discussion questions on the illustration itself, one or two follow-up activities are suggested. Some of these can be made into individual assignments. Others will work best as small-group or all-class activities.

*The Progressives***OBJECTIVE**

1. Students will better understand the chaotic conditions in urban America that contributed to the concerns of those who called for “progressive” reforms in the early years of the 20th century.

The Disorderly World of the City

Use the background information on this page to help your students better understand the three illustrations making up this lesson. The questions and activities presented in the rest of the lesson can be used to help students clarify meanings and debate important issues.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION**Illustration 1**

Until the second half of the 19th century, America was largely a collection of rural communities and small towns. But industrialization after the Civil War quickly turned America into a much more urban and nationally interconnected society. A massive influx of immigrants starting around 1880 also soon began changing the social makeup of cities like New York, Boston, Philadelphia and Chicago. As these cities became more ethnically diverse, they also experienced huge problems of poverty, social disorder and overcrowding—as these scenes help to make clear. Such problems awakened the anxieties of a new urban middle class. And in those anxieties can be found the origins of the Progressive Movement.

Illustration 2

Child labor was one central concern of the Progressives. The industrial expansion of the late 19th century increased the demand for workers. After the Civil War, large numbers of women and children entered the labor force, often working in huge factories to produce clothing, shoes and all kinds of other products. But the family on the right is shelling pecans in its tenement apartment. Children often worked long hours in poor conditions for low pay. Many of them were disfigured or even killed in factory accidents. The term “sweatshop” came to describe these miserable work places. It seemed to many urban reformers that all this was evidence of a serious unraveling of society. Many blamed profit-hungry employers as well as corrupt urban politicians.

Illustration 3

Progressives saw political corruption as both a cause and a symptom of the growing urban disorder. In this Thomas Nast cartoon, a pack of vultures waits out a storm. The vultures have the heads of the infamous “Boss Tweed” and his gang. “Boss Tweed” was William Marcy Tweed, leader of the Tammany political organization that controlled the Democratic Party in New York City in the late 1800s. The “Tweed Ring” grew rich and powerful through its control of New York City expenditures and the patronage jobs it could give loyal Democrats. But in part because of Nast’s cartoons, public anger was roused over Tweed’s criminal activities. In time, this “storm” of outrage on the part of Progressives and others drove Tweed from power and, ultimately, to prison.

Lesson 1 – The Disorderly World of the City

Illustration 1



Courtesy of the Library of Congress



Courtesy of the Library of Congress

Discussing the Illustrations

1. What aspects of these two photos suggest the way America was changing in the late 1880s?
2. The arrival of millions of immigrants in the late 1800s, and the growth of the cities created a great deal of disorder and chaos. This was frightening to many citizens. But to the immigrants themselves, America held out hope for a good life. What do you suppose immigrants like the two Italian street vendors shown here felt about life on the streets of New York?
3. Many immigrants lived in hot, stuffy, crowded tenements. What do you know about such tenement buildings? Why do you think the people slept on their rooftops, as they are doing here? What else do you know about the challenges and problems facing newly arrived immigrants in the late 1800s?
4. What do you think poor immigrants felt about life in the cities? How might wealthier Americans in the late 1800s have felt when they saw photos like these? What do you suppose rural Americans thought?

Follow-up Activities

1. **Small-group activity:** How did the Progressives feel about immigrants? Learn more about the following people and their attitudes towards immigrants:

Jane Addams	Theodore Roosevelt
Eugene Debs	Francis Willard
Samuel Gompers	Woodrow Wilson

Hold a panel discussion in which each member of the group plays the role of one of these figures. In class, with these two images as a backdrop, debate the following statement: “The new immigrants are as much a threat to as an opportunity for the nation.”

2. Demands to reform housing and working conditions in urban America got a boost from a tragic event, the Triangle Shirtwaist Company fire on March 25, 1911. Learn more about this fire. Ask your teacher or librarian to help you find accounts of it. Based on what you learn, give a brief talk to the class on the fire, its outcome and the longer-term effect it had on efforts to reform city life.