

# The Yellow Kid

## INTRODUCTION

Following the Civil War, the Gilded Age brought industrialization and economic growth to America. Unfortunately, along with this growth came social and political corruption. As a result, over the next several years a variety of social and political reforms were put forward. This period was known as the Progressive Era. Prohibition, restrictions on monopolies, the implementation of income tax, voting reforms, immigration control, and the rapid growth of labor unions began to take shape. A common thread among the various reform movements was the desire for a merit-based society that gave all citizens a fair chance to compete in the marketplace and to participate in the polity. In this lesson, students will learn about the anxieties of the rich, the critiques of the reformers, and the changing urban environment through R.F. Outcault's newspaper cartoon "The Yellow Kid."

## GRADES 10-12 MATERIALS

- » Primary Source Documents: Two cartoons.
- » Investigative Worksheet.

## STANDARDS

### NY State Standard 1: History of the United States and New York

Students will use a variety of intellectual skills to demonstrate their understanding of major ideas, eras, themes, developments, and turning points in the history of the United States and New York.

### Common Core: CC6-8RH/SS2

Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of the source distinct from prior knowledge or opinions.

### AASL Standards for the 21st Century Learner: 2.1.1

Continue an inquiry-based research process by applying critical thinking skills (analysis, synthesis, evaluation, organization) to information and knowledge in order to construct new understandings, draw conclusions, and create new knowledge.

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Using primary sources related to "The Yellow Kid," students will:

- » Learn about primary sources, what they are and how they can be used to help understand the past.
- » Apply critical thinking skills in order to draw conclusions about the Progressive Era.

- » Creatively transfer knowledge about “The Yellow Kid” and the Progressive Era into a cartoon that satirizes an aspect contemporary society.

### ASSESSMENT

Assessment should be largely based on the student’s cartoon, which demonstrates their ability to:

- » Decipher primary source documents.
- » Expand their thinking about the social reform movements of the Progressive Era and relate this knowledge to their own lives today.
- » Apply critical thinking skills to make a meaningful and creative cartoon.

*Have students complete the Investigative Worksheet based on their analysis of “The Yellow Kid” cartoons. For homework, students should use what they have learned during the lesson to create their own satirical cartoon about society today.*

### GETTING STARTED

- » Explain that primary sources are original documents that tell us about the historical moments in which they were created. Ask the following questions: How can you tell that you are looking, touching, or listening to a primary source? What is a secondary source? Explain that secondary sources are interpretations of primary sources.
- » Introduce the skill of the lesson. In this lesson students will interpret two of R.F. Outcault’s newspaper cartoon “The Yellow Kid” within its original historical context. Each student will be expected to *identify* the message of each cartoon and *explain* how that message is communicated through both words and images. The teacher should introduce the history of editorial cartoons and their role in providing commentary on society and culture. Explain that the students will be expected to apply the knowledge they gain in analyzing these cartoons by creating their own satirical cartoon about society today for homework.

### DIRECT INSTRUCTION

1. Show the students the two cartoons by R.F. Outcault: “Yellow Kid Dealer In Apples An Things” and “Hully Gee! Sussiety is Rite in My Line.”
2. Have each student complete the Investigative Worksheet for each cartoon.
3. After the students have completed the worksheet, ask the class: What is the message of “Yellow Kid Dealer In Apples An Things”? What stands out to you about this cartoon? What techniques are used to grab the viewer’s attention? How would you describe in the “Yellow Kid”? What kind of person do you think he is supposed to represent? What does the text say? What do you notice about the text? What information can you gather about the location depicted? What kinds of messages can you draw out from this cartoon? Is the cartoon funny? Ask the students the same questions regarding the second cartoon: “Hully Gee! Sussiety is Rite in My Line.” Ask the students to compare the two cartoons. How is the “Yellow Kid” depicted differently in each cartoon? How has his context changed?
4. Have the class brainstorm about the Progressive Era using their text books. Ask the class: What were the major reform movements? What was changing about the way people worked and lived? What were the concerns of the poor, the rich, and the middle class? (See Teacher’s Notes). After you have written down the

students' ideas on the board, have the students look at the two cartoons again. Ask the class: Can you see any of these concerns articulated in the cartoons? Where? How?

5. For homework, tell the students that they will be individually creating an editorial cartoon about today's society that uses the same visual and textual strategies that they found in "The Yellow Kid." They should think about word choice, vernacular and slang, location, color, and the meaning of objects and clothing within their own cartoon.

### TEACHER'S NOTES

- » For more background information on the Progressive Era see *The Progressives: Activism and Reform in American Society, 1893-1917* by Karen Pastorello. For more information on "The Yellow Kid" see *R. F. Outcault's the Yellow Kid: A Centennial Celebration of the Kid Who Started the Comics* by R.F. Outcault.
- » For more images of "The Yellow Kid" see the San Francisco Academy of Comic Art Collection and The Ohio State University Cartoon Research Library website:  
[http://cartoons.osu.edu/digital\\_albums/yellowkid/index.htm](http://cartoons.osu.edu/digital_albums/yellowkid/index.htm).

### Primary Source Investigative Worksheet

Use the “Observe, Analyze, Infer, and Interpret” strategy to unwrap primary sources.

<p><b>Primary Source Name (or Date):</b></p>	
<p><b>Observe</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» What do you see?</li> <li>» What stands out to you?</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Analyze</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Is the primary source presenting factual information? How do you know? If not, what is it presenting?</li> <li>» When was the primary source created?</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Infer</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» What is the purpose of the primary source?</li> <li>» What is the point of view of the creator?</li> <li>» How does the primary reflect on the historical time period in which it was created?</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Interpret</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Who would have found this funny?</li> <li>» How would you change the primary source to change its audience or message?</li> <li>» List new questions you have from your investigation.</li> </ul>	



R.F. Outcault, "Yellow Kid Dealer In Apples An Things," n.d., Street and Smith Records, Special Collections Research Center, Syracuse University Libraries.



R.F. Outcault, "Hully Gee! Sussiety is Rite in My Line," n.d., Street and Smith Records, Special Collections Research Center, Syracuse University Libraries.