

American Industrialists: Robber Barons or Captains of Industry?

America's Industrial Transformation

Roger Jackson, Ryan Rahhal, Tanner Lusher
Published by *K20 Center*

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons CC BY-SA 4.0 License

Grade Level	11th Grade	**Time Frame**	85 minutes
Subject	Social Studies	**Duration**	1-2 class periods
Course	U.S. History		

Essential Question

What impact did American industrialists have on the U.S. economy in the 19th century and beyond?

Summary

In this lesson, students will investigate the careers of four major business leaders from the late 19th century to discover how their actions and ideas transformed the U.S. economy. Students will consider the distinction between "Robber Barons" and "Captains of Industry," two terms that historians have frequently used to evaluate the positive or negative effects that these individuals had on the United States. To extend their learning, students will create a brief presentation about a business leader or philanthropist from modern society and explain how they were able to rise to the top of their industry. Students will then complete an Exit Ticket considering the ethical responsibilities of industry leaders.

Snapshot

Engage

Students analyze an image from the Gilded Age and complete an I Notice, I Wonder activity.

Explore

Students explore the impact of American industrialists by completing a Jigsaw reading activity.

Explain

Students examine the distinction between the terms "robber baron" and "captain of industry."

Extend

Students create a brief presentation over the history and practices of a modern-day business leader.

Evaluate

Students complete an Exit Ticket reconsidering the distinction between "Captain of Industry" and "Robber Baron," as well as questioning the ethical responsibilities of industry leaders.

Standards

Oklahoma Academic Standards (Social Studies: United States History (9th through 12th grade))

USH.2.1A: Analyze the impact of capitalism, laissez-faire policy and the role of leading industrialists as robber barons, captains of industry and philanthropists including John D. Rockefeller and Andrew Carnegie and his Gospel of Wealth essay on American society.

Attachments

- Graphic Organizer—American Industrialists - Spanish.docx
- Graphic Organizer—American Industrialists - Spanish.pdf
- Graphic Organizer—American Industrialists.docx
- Graphic Organizer—American Industrialists.pdf
- I Notice, I Wonder—American Industrialists - Spanish.docx
- I Notice, I Wonder—American Industrialists - Spanish.pdf
- I Notice, I Wonder—American Industrialists.docx
- I Notice, I Wonder—American Industrialists.pdf
- Jigsaw Readings—American Industrialists - Spanish.docx
- Jigsaw Readings—American Industrialists - Spanish.pdf
- Jigsaw Readings—American Industrialists.docx
- Jigsaw Readings—American Industrialists.pdf
- Lesson Slides—American Industrialists.pptx

Materials

- Lesson Slides (attached)
- I Notice, I Wonder handout (attached; one per student)
- Jigsaw Readings (attached; one per student)
- Graphic Organizer (attached; one per student).

10 minutes

Engage

Introduce the lesson using the attached **Lesson Slides**. **Slides 3–4** contain the Essential Question and Learning Objectives to display as needed. Display **slide 5** and introduce the I Notice, I Wonder strategy**.** Distribute the **I Notice, I Wonder** handout to students and have them pair up with an Elbow Partner. Go to **slide 6** and display the political cartoon from the Gilded Age.

With their partner, have students record on their T-Chart what they notice and what they wonder about the image. After giving students time to discuss their answers in pairs, invite a few students to share what they noticed and wondered about the image. Their responses can be used to generate a class discussion over the intended message that the artist is trying to convey through the image.

20 minutes

Explore

Display **slide 7** and introduce the Jigsaw strategy. Divide students into groups of 4 and distribute the attached **Jigsaw Readings** and the **Graphic Organizer.** Have each group member read a different section and fill out the corresponding section of the graphic organizer. Give students around 10 minutes to complete their reading and notes, then have each student share what they learned with their group, allowing group members time to fill out the appropriate sections in their graphic organizer.

15 minutes

Explain

Display **slide 8** and introduce the following terms: *Robber Baron* and *Captains of Industry*. Make sure to check for student understanding of the similarities and differences between these terms before moving to the next activity.

Robber Baron is a derogatory term applied to powerful, wealthy industrialists. They monopolized the railroads, the steel industry, the tobacco industry, the oil industry, and the financiers who controlled the banks and used unfair business practices.

Captains of Industry is a term applied to a group of entrepreneurs, inventors, and businessmen in the 1800's who acquired great wealth and success from their endeavors. Compassionate men, they used their wealth and influence in a positive way, making important contributions to improve the lives of the American people.

Advance to **slide 9** and introduce the Four Corners discussion strategy to the class. Divide students into groups based on the industrialist that they read about during the Jigsaw activity and tell them to prepare to make an argument about whether their industrialist was a Captain of Industry or a Robber Baron. (Ex. If you read about Rockefeller, then go to this corner. If you read about Carnegie, go to this corner, etc.).

Go to **slide 10**. Have each group present their conclusion, arguing why their figure was a Captain of Industry or a Robber Baron. Make sure students justify their answers using the research they did in the Jigsaw activity.

Possible Student Response

"Andrew Carnegie was a captain of industry because he donated a large amount of his wealth in an attempt to improve American society."

30 minutes

Extend

Display **slide 11**. Have students choose a figure from the list below and create a short presentation using the Research Posters strategy. Proceed to **slide 12**. Explain to the students that the presentation should include details about their industry, some history of their business practices, their net worth, and other information about their lives and careers. This can be completed on a poster or using a presentation program such as Google slides. Have students consider the figure they chose in light of the concepts discussed in the earlier portions of this lesson. Have students prepare to share their findings with the class.

Business leaders: Jeff Bezos, Bill Gates, Warren Buffett, Mark Zuckerberg, Elon Musk, Shawn Carter (Jay-Z), LeBron James, Julie Sweet, Abigail Johnson, or Oprah Winfrey.

10 minutes

Evaluate

Advance to **slide 13**. Have the students complete an Exit Ticket at the end of class that asks them to consider the following question:

- *What responsibilities do millionaires/wealthy people have to society?*

Resources

- History.com Staff. (n.d.). Rockefeller's standard oil. [Video]. http://www.history.com/topics/john-d-rockefeller/videos
- History.com Staff. (n.d.). The rise of J. P. Morgan. [Video]. http://www.history.com/topics/john-pierpont-morgan/videos/the-rise-of-j-p-morgan
- History.com Staff. (n.d.). The men who built America: Andrew Carnegie. [Video]. http://www.history.com/topics/andrew-carnegie/videos/the-men-who-built-america-andrew-carnegie
- History.com Staff. (n.d.). The rise of Cornelius Vanderbilt. [Video]. http://www.history.com/topics/cornelius-vanderbilt/videos/the-men-who-built-america-the-rise-of-cornelius-vanderbilt
- K20 Center. (n.d.). Bell ringers and exit tickets. Strategy. https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/125
- K20 Center. (n.d.). Elbow partners. Strategy. https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/116
- K20 Center. (n.d.). Four corners. Strategy. https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/138
- K20 Center. (n.d.). I notice, I wonder. Strategy. https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/180
- K20 Center. (n.d.). Jigsaw. Strategy. https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/179
- K20 Center. (n.d.). Research posters. Strategy. https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/49
- Keppler, J. (2020, November 13). *The bosses of the Senate.* U.S. Senate: The Bosses of the Senate. Retrieved October 10, 2022, from https://www.senate.gov/art-artifacts/historical-images/political-cartoons-caricatures/38_00392.htm
- Maryville University. (n.d.). America's gilded age: Robber barons and captains of industry. https://online.maryville.edu/business-degrees/americas-gilded-age/