

Title of Lesson: *Yellow Journalism*

(Suggested grade level(s): 6, 11)

This lesson was created as a part of the Alabama History Education Initiative, funded by a generous grant from the Malone Family Foundation in 2009.

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Background Information:

- The Spanish-American War era is an interesting period of time in which two Alabamians, such as 'Fightin' Joe Wheeler and Richmond Pearson Hobson played important roles. You may want to read pages 337-342 of *Alabama: The History of a Deep South State* for extensive information regarding the impact of the Spanish-American War on Alabama (see bibliographic information below). The [Encyclopedia of Alabama](#) provides excellent biographical information on [Joseph Wheeler](#), a powerful and outspoken advocate for the war in the U. S. House of Representatives.

Rogers, William W., Robert D. Ward, Leah Rawls Atkins, and Wayne Flynt. *Alabama: The History of a Deep South State*. 1st edition. Tuscaloosa, AL: The University of Alabama Press, 1994. 337-342.

- The following Web site from the Library of Congress provides a complete history of the Spanish-American War: [The World of 1898](#).
- A comprehensive overview of the Spanish-American War can be found at: <http://www.loc.gov/rr/hispanic/1898/trask.html>
- A definition of yellow journalism and its connection to the Spanish-American War can be found on *The Crucible of Empire*, PBS Web site: http://www.pbs.org/crucible/frames/_journalism.html

Overview of lesson: This lesson will define yellow journalism, and its effect on the United States becoming involved in a war with Spain over its territories in the Caribbean Sea and the Philippine Islands. By viewing primary source documents of newspaper articles from Alabama, the students will make judgments as to the effectiveness of the newspaper articles.

Content Standards

[Alabama Course of Study: Social Studies](#) (Bulletin 2004, No. 18)

Sixth Grade: Standard 3, p. 42

Eleventh Grade: Standard 3, p. 76

[Social Studies Item Specifications for the Alabama High School Graduation Exam](#)

(Bulletin 2000, No. 49)

Standard VI-1 Evaluate the causes of World War I

- Identify and explain American imperialism and territorial expansion prior to World War I.
 - Search for raw materials
 - Global balance of power
 - Hawaiian Islands

- Spanish-American War
 - Examples: Yellow press, Rough Riders, Cuba and the Philippines
- Open Door Policy
- Panama Canal
 - Example: William C. Gorgas
- Roosevelt's Corollary

National Standards for History, 1996

Era 6: The Development of the Industrial United States (1870-1900), p. 108

4B The student understands the roots and development of American expansionism and the causes and outcomes of the Spanish-American War.

Primary Learning Objective(s):

- Students will be able to describe causes and consequences of the Spanish-American War.
- Students will define yellow journalism with emphasis on how this journalistic method played a role in bringing the United States to war with Spain.

Additional Learning Objective(s):

- Students will write a newspaper article using the elements of yellow journalism.

Time allotted: 50 minutes

Materials and Equipment:

- T-square critical thinking chart
- Paper
- Pen or pencil
- Assessment rubric
- USS *Maine* newspaper articles

Technology Resources Needed:

- Computer
- Projector screen
- LCD projector

Background/Preparation:

- Prior to this lesson the teacher will have provided background information on the economic situation in Cuba and on the United States' relationship with this small Caribbean nation.
- The teacher will have also presented information about Cuba being a Spanish colony and how badly the people of Cuba had been treated by Spain. An excellent Web site providing background information on the Spanish-American War and yellow journalism can be found at [*Crucible of the Empire: The Spanish-American War*](#) by PBS.

- **Procedures/Activities:**

- **Engagement/Motivation Activity:**

- Teachers will assign the following:

- Think of an event that has happened during your life that made you think the United States government should take a particular action. Share your response with another student.

Step 1	Project and read Alabama newspaper article from 1898 on the sinking of the USS Maine in Havana Harbor in Cuba (Q25033-Q25034). Then project and read the <i>New York Journal</i> article found at: http://historicalthinkingmatters.org/spanishamericanwar/0/inquiry/intro/ . If you are unable to project this article, a transcription of the article is attached, as well as a digital copy of the front page.
Step 2	Ask the students what emotions were triggered by reading these articles and why. Allow time for discussion.
Step 3	Explain and define the term <i>yellow journalism</i> . Clarify that yellow journalism was sensationalized reporting designed to cause an emotional reaction in people. Be sure that students understand that newspapers were the medium in 1898. There were no other means of mass communication.
Step 4	Using the attached T-square critical thinking chart, have the students make a judgment as to whether or not the articles could be classified as yellow journalism.

Assessment Strategies:

- The students will write a newspaper article using yellow journalism techniques, with the aim of making readers want to go to war with Spain. The article will be graded by the use of a rubric (attached).

Extension:

- Students can identify or provide current examples of yellow journalism.

Remediation:

- Direct students to the emotion-laden words in the article, list them, and discuss the power of those words.

Accommodation:

- The teacher or a peer may read the newspaper articles for students with accommodation requirements.

Modification:

- Individual IEP requirements should specify acceptable modifications and should be followed. Modification could include the extension of time for completion of the assignments.

Attachment 2: Transcript of *New York Journal* article on the sinking of the USS *Maine*, Feb. 17, 1898

***New York Journal* (Transcript of original newspaper article)**

DESTRUCTION OF THE WAR SHIP MAINE WAS THE WORK OF AN ENEMY

Assistant Secretary Roosevelt Convinced the Explosion of the War Ship Was Not an Accident.

The Journal Offers \$50,000 Reward for the Conviction of the Criminals Who Sent 258 American Sailors to Their Death. Naval Officers Unanimous That the Ship Was Destroyed on Purpose.

NAVAL OFFICERS THINK THE MAINE WAS DESTROYED BY A SPANISH MINE.

George Eugene Bryson, the Journal's special correspondent at Havana, cables that it is the secret opinion of many Spaniards in the Cuban capital, that the Maine was destroyed and 258 men killed by means of marine mine or fixed torpedo. This is the opinion of several American naval authorities. The Spaniards, it is believed, arranged to have the Maine anchored over one of the harbor mines. Wires connected the mines with a... magazine, and it is thought the explosion was caused by sending an electric current through the wire. If this can be proven, the brutal nature of the Spaniards will be shown by the fact that they waited to spring the mine after all the men had retired for the night. The Maltese cross in the picture shows where the mine may have been fired.

Mine or a Sunken Torpedo Believed to Have Been the Weapon Used Against the American Man-Of-War---Officer and Men tell Thrilling Stories of Being Blown into the Air Amid a Mass of Shattered Steel and Exploding Shells—Survivors Brought to Key West Scout the Idea of Accident—Spanish Officials Protest Too Much---Our Cabinet orders a Searching Inquiry—Journal Sends Divers to Havana to Report Upon the Condition of the Wreck. Was the Vessel Anchored Over a Mine?

Assistant Secretary of the Navy Theodore Roosevelt says he is convinced that the destruction of the Maine in Havana Harbor was not an accident. The Journal offers a reward of \$50,000 for exclusive evidence that will convict the person, persons or government criminally responsible for the [destruction] of the American battleship and the death of 258 of its crew.

The suspicion that the Maine was deliberately blown up grows stronger every hour. Not a single fact to the contrary has been produced....

Source: Excerpt from New York Journal and Advertiser, February 17, 1898. Purchased by William Randolph Hearst in 1895

Attachment 3: Assignment for Yellow Journalism

Directions: You will write a newspaper article using yellow journalism techniques, with the aim of convincing readers of the need for America to go to war with Spain.

The article must have the following elements:

- a headline that captures the reader's attention;
- a byline (The **byline** on a newspaper or magazine article gives the name, and often the position, of the writer of the article);
- a graphic to illustrate the article;
- a caption for the graphic that adequately describes the action;
- a lead paragraph; two (2) informational paragraphs that have details, facts, and figures; and a concluding paragraph (TOTAL- 4 paragraphs)

Your article will be graded according to the attached rubric.

Attachment 4: Rubric for Yellow Journalism Newspaper Article

Yellow Journalism Newspaper Article Rubric

Name _____ Date _____

CATEGORY	4 points	3 points	2 points	1 point	Score
Layout – Headline & Caption	The article has a headline that captures the reader's attention and accurately describes the content. The article has a byline. The graphic has a caption that adequately describes the people and/or action in the graphic.	The article has a headline that accurately describes the content. The article has a byline. The graphic has a caption.	The article has a headline that describes the content. The article has a byline. The graphic does not have a caption.	The article has an incomplete or inadequate headline and it does not have a byline. The graphic does not have a caption.	
Article - Purpose	The article establishes a clear purpose in the lead paragraph and demonstrates a clear understanding of the topic.	80-89% of the article establishes a clear purpose in the lead paragraph and demonstrates a clear understanding of the topic.	70-79% of the article establishes a clear purpose in the lead paragraph and demonstrates a clear understanding of the topic.	Less than 70% of the article establishes a clear purpose in the lead paragraph and demonstrates a clear understanding of the topic.	
Article - Supporting Details	The details in the second and third paragraphs are clear, effective, and vivid 90-100% of the time.	The details in the second and third paragraphs are clear and pertinent 80-89% of the time.	The details in the second and third paragraphs are clear and pertinent 70-79% of the time.	Fewer than 70% of the details in the second and third paragraphs are clear or pertinent.	
Article - Interest	The article contains facts, figures, and/or word choices that make the article exceptionally interesting to readers.	The article contains facts, figures, and/or word choices that make the article interesting to readers.	The article contains some facts or figures but is marginally interesting to read.	The article does not contain facts or figures that might make it interesting to read.	
Article- Punctuation and Grammar	There are no punctuation or grammatical errors	There is one punctuation or grammatical error.	The article has three punctuation or grammatical errors.	The article has more than three punctuation or grammatical errors.	

Total _____

Analyzing Newspaper Articles for Evidence of Yellow Journalism

After reading each newspaper article, identify words in the articles that are facts and words that are opinions. Write the words under the appropriate column heading.

Alabama Newspaper Article

Facts

Opinions

New York Journal Newspaper Article

Facts

Opinions

What similarities and differences do you discern between these two articles?

Where do you find examples of yellow journalism in either or both of these articles? Give evidence to support your response.

List those words that trigger emotions in the article(s).