



LESSON PLAN:

A SPLENDID LITTLE WAR?

Middle School (6-8)

OVERVIEW:

Students use primary sources and a worksheet to analyze historical opinions on the Spanish-American War and America's expansion as a world power.

Resources include personal accounts and historical commentaries. As written, students complete a worksheet individually, with a group, and through a teacher-led discussion (as time allows). Resources are flexible and can be used in a variety of ways.

Estimated time: 1 class period, 40-50 minutes total

STANDARDS:

Social studies standards vary by state. This lesson can be used to teach the following standards and similar wording may be found in your state standards.

Common Core State Standards

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.2: 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.

National Council for the Social Studies Standards

- NCSS.D2.His.4.6-8: Analyze multiple factors that influenced the perspectives of people during different historical eras.
- NCSS.D2.His.14.6-8: Explain multiple causes and effects of events and developments in the past.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

- Students will analyze a primary source in order to identify the author's opinion of the Spanish-American War and American expansion as a world power.
- Students will describe historical arguments for and against American participation in the Spanish-American War and the subsequent American worldwide expansion.

RESOURCES NEEDED:

- Copies of "A Splendid Little War?" Student Worksheet (six different versions, 2 pages each; only need one worksheet per student)



LESSON ACTIVITIES:

- Introduction: 5 mins
 - Explain that the title of this lesson comes from a letter that Secretary of State John Hay wrote to Teddy Roosevelt in July 1898, saying “It has been a splendid little war, begun with the highest motives, carried on with magnificent intelligence and spirit, favored by that Fortune which loves the brave.” Not all viewed the war so positively, however, and opinions differed about the reasons the United States declared war on Spain and whether the subsequent American expansion worldwide was justified. In this lesson, students will explore these differing historical viewpoints.
- Individual Activity: 10-15 mins
 - Pass out the worksheets, one to each student (there are six different versions, but each student will only need one). Explain that students will independently read their excerpt and answer the questions on the front of their worksheet.
 - After all students have completed the questions, explain that some students read excerpts that presented a viewpoint that was supportive of the Spanish-American War, and some presented a viewpoint that was critical. Explain that Worksheets 1, 2, and 3 presented a supportive viewpoint, and Worksheets A, B, and C presented a critical viewpoint. Allow students to check their responses, ask clarifying questions, and make any necessary changes on their worksheet before moving to the next step.
- Group Activity: 15-25 mins
 - Explain that students will now explore viewpoints similar to the one in their excerpt so they can identify multiple reasons why Americans were supportive or critical of the Spanish-American War. Instruct students to form groups of 3-4; each Supportive Viewpoint group needs a student with Worksheet 1, Worksheet 2, and Worksheet 3, while each Critical Viewpoint group needs a student with Worksheet A, Worksheet B, and Worksheet C. Once in groups, students should take turns summarizing the arguments presented in their excerpts, and each student should record the reason for either supporting or not supporting the war in the table on the back of their worksheet.
 - After discussion ends, explain that students will now explore the viewpoints opposite the one in their excerpt. Instruct students to pair up with someone who read an excerpt from the opposite viewpoint (each pair will have a numbered worksheet and a lettered worksheet). Once paired up, students should take turns sharing the reasons for supporting or not supporting the war and record them in the table on their worksheet.



- Once students have completed their lists of reasons to support or not support the Spanish-American War, instruct them to complete the reflection question on the back of their worksheet.
- *Depending on time, you may choose to lead a class discussion to check understanding prior to asking students to complete the reflection question.*
 - *Suggested discussion questions:*
 - ✓ Who read [Text Title]? Do you think it was supportive or critical of the Spanish-American War? Why?
 - ✓ Can you think of other reasons Americans may have supported or been critical of the Spanish-American War and expansionism at this time?
 - ✓ What do you think were the most convincing arguments at the time?

Student responses will vary, but make sure the following concepts are addressed:

- Reasons to Support War:
 - ✓ Desire to support Cuban Revolution and end Spanish atrocities
 - ✓ Need for far-flung bases to support Navy ships
 - ✓ American right/duty to govern other peoples instead of European powers
- Reasons to Not Support War
 - ✓ Expansionism contrary to American principles of self-government
 - ✓ Human cost of war

LESSON EXTENSIONS:

- If your class represented Congress in 1898, would the United States have gone to war? Tally your students' opinions on the Spanish-American War and share with Arlington National Cemetery on Twitter using the hashtag #ANCEducation or #SpanAmWarANC.
- Invite exploration of depictions of the Spanish-American War on the Library of Congress website:
 - The Spanish-American War in Motion Pictures: <https://www.loc.gov/collections/spanish-american-war-in-motion-pictures/about-this-collection/>
 - Selected images from the Collections of the Library of Congress: <https://www.loc.gov/rr/print/list/picamer/paSpanAmer.html>
- Invite additional exploration of personal accounts of the Spanish-American War on the Spanish-American War Centennial Website: <http://www.spanamwar.com/action.htm>



Planning a Visit to Arlington National Cemetery?



Despite conflicting opinions about the reasons for and outcomes of the Spanish-American War, the United States government went to great lengths to properly honor the soldiers, sailors, and nurses who died during the war. In 1898, Congress enacted legislation to disinter and repatriate the remains of Americans who had died abroad, and many were buried at Arlington National Cemetery. Most of the graves of those who served in the Civil War or Spanish-American War feature a large shield emblem (this design was not used for subsequent conflicts).

The cemetery also has multiple memorials commemorating the Spanish-American War, including:

- Spanish-American War Memorial
- USS Maine Memorial
- Spanish-American Nurses Memorial
- Rough Riders Monument
- Buffalo Soldiers Centennial Memorial

If you are interested in more information and discussion questions to use with your class during a visit to the cemetery, a detailed walking tour is available here:

<https://www.arlingtoncemetery.mil/education>



A SPLENDID LITTLE WAR?

1

Alfred T. Mahan, [The Influence of Sea Power Upon History: 1660-1783](#)

Alfred T. Mahan was a United States naval officer and historian. [The Influence of Sea Power Upon History: 1660-1783](#) was published in 1890 while he was president of the US Naval War College.

...Having therefore no foreign establishments, either colonial or military, the ships of war of the United States, in war, will be like land birds, unable to fly far from their own shores. To provide resting-places for them, where they can coal and repair, would be one of the first duties of a government proposing to itself the development of the power of the nation at sea.... it may safely be said that it is essential to the welfare of the whole country that the conditions of trade and commerce should remain, as far as possible, unaffected by an external war. In order to do this, the enemy must be kept not only out of our ports, but far away from our coasts.

READING QUESTIONS

1. The author claims that American warships will be like **land birds** in times of war.
2. During a war, would it be good or bad for a country's ships to *only* be able to sail close to land? Why do you think so? **Bad, because ships would be unable to fight or support fighting from shore.**
3. The author says one of the first duties of the government is to provide places for ships to **coal and repair.**
4. One outcome of the Spanish-American War was that the United States gained possession of Guam and the Philippines, which could be used to support American ships. Based on this outcome, do you think this author would have supported the United States going to war? Why or why not?
The author would have supported going to war, because he believed the United States needed foreign possessions in order to support the Navy.



A SPLENDID LITTLE WAR?

2

Senator Redfield Proctor, Speech to the US Senate on March 17, 1898

Senator Redfield Proctor was a Republican senator from Vermont who had previously served as Secretary of War. In 1898 he visited Cuba and delivered a speech to the Senate describing the conditions he saw there.

It is not within the narrow limits of my vocabulary to portray it. I went to Cuba with a strong conviction that the picture had been overdrawn; that a few cases of starvation and suffering had inspired and stimulated the press correspondents, and that they had given free play to a strong, natural and highly cultivated imagination.

I could not believe that out of a population of one million six hundred thousand, 200,000 had died within these Spanish forts, practically prison walls, within a few months past, from actual starvation and disease caused by insufficient and improper food....

....To me the strongest appeal is....the spectacle of a million and a half of people, the entire native population of Cuba, struggling for freedom and deliverance from the worst misgovernment of which I ever had knowledge.

READING QUESTIONS

1. Did the author expect to see the conditions he saws in Cuba or was he surprised?
He was surprised. He thought the press had been exaggerating, but he could not believe what he saw.
2. Why did so many Cubans die in the Spanish forts? **Starvation and disease from bad food.**
3. One outcome of the Spanish-American War was that Cuba gained its independence from Spain. Based on this outcome, do you think this author would have supported the United States going to war? Why or why not?
The author would have supported the war, because he saw the Cuban people were being treated very poorly by Spain and believed it would be better for them to be independent.



A SPLENDID LITTLE WAR?

3

Albert Beveridge, *The March of the Flag*

Albert Beveridge was a Republican senator from Indiana, serving from 1899-1911. The following excerpt comes from a campaign speech delivered September 16, 1898.

...The Opposition tells us that we ought not to govern a people without their consent. I answer, The rule of liberty that all just government derives its authority from the consent of the governed, applies only to those who are capable of self-government. We govern the Indians without their consent, we govern our territories without their consent, we govern our children without their consent. How do they know what our government would be without their consent? Would not the people of the Philippines prefer the just, humane, civilizing government of this Republic to the savage, bloody rule of pillage and extortion from which we have rescued them?

And, regardless of this formula of words made only for enlightened, self-governing people, do we owe no duty to the world? Shall we turn these peoples back to the reeking hands from which we have taken them? Shall we abandon them, with Germany, England, Japan, hungering for them? Shall we save them from those nations, to give them a self-rule of tragedy?

READING QUESTIONS

1. The author claims that a government needs the consent of its people only if those people are capable of **self-government**.
2. The author claims that if the United States doesn't govern the Philippines, which other three countries will try to take them over? **Germany, England, and Japan**.
3. One outcome of the Spanish-American War was that the United States gained possession of Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Philippines. Based on this outcome, do think this author would have supported the United States going to war? Why or why not?

This author would have supported the war, because he believed the United States would govern those places better than they would govern themselves, or that they would be taken over by other imperial powers.



A SPLENDID LITTLE WAR?

A

William Graham Sumner, *The Conquest of the United States by Spain*

William Graham Sumner was a social scientist and professor. The following excerpt comes from a speech he delivered at Yale University on January 16, 1899

...Spain was the first, for a long time the greatest, of the modern imperialistic states. The United States, by its historical origin, its traditions, and its principles, is the chief representative of the revolt and reaction against that kind of a state. I intend to show that, by the line of action now proposed to us, which we call expansion and imperialism, we are throwing away some of the most important elements of the American symbol and are adopting some of the most important elements of the Spanish symbol.

We have beaten Spain in a military conflict, but we are submitting to be conquered by her on the field of ideas and policies. Expansionism and imperialism are nothing but the old philosophies of national prosperity which have brought Spain to where she now is. Those philosophies appeal to national vanity and national cupidity. They are seductive, especially upon the first view and the most superficial judgment, and therefore it cannot be denied that they are very strong for popular effect. They are delusions, and they will lead us to ruin unless we are hardheaded enough to resist them....

READING QUESTIONS

1. The author says the United States represents **revolt** and **reaction** against imperial powers.
2. The author describes Spain as following the philosophies of **expansionism** and **imperialism**.
3. One outcome of the Spanish-American War was that the United States expanded and gained possession of Guam and the Philippines. Based on this outcome, do you think this author would have supported the United States going to war? Why or why not?

This author would not have supported the war, because he believed expansionism and imperialism opposed American ideals and would lead to ruin.



A SPLENDID LITTLE WAR?

B

William Jennings Bryan, *The Paralyzing Influence of Imperialism*

William Jennings Bryan was a prominent Democratic politician and orator from Nebraska who served in the House of Representatives, Secretary of State, and ran for president three times. The following excerpt is from a speech delivered at the Democratic National Convention in July 1900.

....Those who would have this nation enter upon a career of empire must consider not only the effect of imperialism on the Filipinos but they must also calculate its effects upon our own nation. We cannot repudiate [reject] the principle of self-government in the Philippines without weakening that principle here....

Some argue that American rule in the Philippine Islands will result in the better education of the Filipinos. Be not deceived. If we expect to maintain a colonial policy, we shall not find it to our advantage to educate the people. The educated Filipinos are now in revolt against us, and the most ignorant ones have made the least resistance to our domination. If we are to govern them without their consent and give them no voice in determining the taxes which they must pay, we dare not educate them lest they learn to read the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the United States and mock us for our inconsistency.

READING QUESTIONS

1. The author claims that if the United States builds an empire in the Philippines, it will weaken the principle of **self-government** in America.
2. Why do you think the author claims that Filipinos who read the Declaration of Independence and Constitution would “mock us for our inconsistency?” **Those documents were written to establish the American principles of self-government, which were not being supported in the Philippines.**
3. One outcome of the Spanish-American War was that the United States gained possession of the Philippines, who had already been fighting for independence from Spain. Based on this outcome, do you think this author would have supported the United States going to war? Why or why not? **The author would not have supported the war, because he believed the United States should not govern the Philippines, but should give them their independence.**



A SPLENDID LITTLE WAR?

C

Ella Wheeler Wilcox, *When the Regiment Came Back*

Ella Wheeler Wilcox was an author and poet. The following poem was published in her collection Poems of Power, in 1902.

All the uniforms were blue,
All the swords and rifles new,
When the regiment went marching down the
street.
All the men were hale and strong,
As they proudly marched along,
Through the cheers, that drowned the music
of their feet.
Oh! the music of their feet,
Keeping time to drums, that beat,
Oh! the splendor of the sight,
As with swords and rifles new,
And in uniforms of blue,
The regiment went marching to the fight.

When the regiment came back,
The guns and swords were black
And the uniforms were faded into gray.
And the faces of the men,
Who marched through the street again,
Seemed like the faces of the dead, who lose
their way.
For the dead, who lose their way
Cannot look more gaunt or gray.
Oh! the sorrow and the anguish of the sight.
Oh! the weary lagging feet,
Out of step with drums that beat,
When the regiment came marching from the
fight.

READING QUESTIONS

1. In the first half of the poem, does the author describe the soldiers positively or negatively?

Positively

2. In the second half of the poem, does the author describe the soldiers positively or negatively?

Negatively

3. One outcome of the Spanish-American War was that 385 Americans died in battle and more than 2,000 died from disease. Based on this outcome, do you think this author would have supported the United States going to war? Why or why not?
The author would not have supported the war, because of the negative effect it had on soldiers who went to fight.



A SPLENDID LITTLE WAR?

Reasons to Support War	Reasons to Not Support War
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The United States needed to gain far-flung possessions to support bases and coaling stations for Navy ships • Desire to support Cuban Revolution and end Spanish rule • Belief in America's right or duty to govern other peoples, especially in order to compete with European powers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expansionism and imperialism were contrary to American principles of self-government • The United States should have granted independence to the Philippines instead of gaining it as a possession • The human cost of war

REFLECTION QUESTION

Now that you have read different viewpoints on the Spanish-American War, what is your opinion? Would you have supported the United States going to war? Why or why not?



RUBRIC

Use this rubric to assess student achievement of expectations.

Criteria	1	2	3	4	Feedback
Student correctly answered questions about material in their primary source excerpt.					
Student correctly identified historical arguments that were supportive and critical of the Spanish-American War.					
Student used historical arguments to inform their own opinion of the Spanish-American War.					
	Total:				

1 = criteria not met; 2 = criteria partially met; 3 = criteria met; 4 = exceeds expectations



SOURCES

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