



## Teaching Guide

### SEGMENT 4, WEBISODE 9

Please note: Each segment in this Webisode has its own Teaching Guide



#### Segment Overview

During the Gilded Age, John D. Rockefeller brought business practices to new heights—or depths, depending on one’s ethical standards. Amassing huge personal fortunes, often through unscrupulous means, Rockefeller dominated the entire oil industry. Rockefeller’s Standard Oil was ruthless; it bought off politicians, made secret deals with railroads to obtain favorable rates, and destroyed the competition through bribery and other unethical means. Standard Oil became one of the most hated companies of its time, earning mammoth profits by preventing competition, keeping wages low, and setting prices high. By 1879—a time when America’s appetite for oil to fuel its expanding industry was reaching new heights—Standard Oil controlled over ninety percent of America’s refining capacity. Sitting on top of this pile was John D. Rockefeller.

But the Rockefeller of the boardroom was not without a less rapacious side; ever the orderly bookkeeper, he gave away exactly half of his wealth. Rockefeller created a university, an institute for medical research, and several foundations.

#### Teacher Directions

1. Students, in small teams, discuss the following questions.
  - How did John D. Rockefeller earn his money?
  - Which business practices were good? Which were unethical?
  - What did Rockefeller do during the last forty years of his life?
2. Make sure students understand the following points in discussing the questions.

John D. Rockefeller became one of the richest men in the world in the oil business. He founded Standard Oil. While some of his business practices were good (he was organized and efficient), some were unethical. He put other companies out of business, prevented competition, and demanded kickbacks. During the last forty years of his life, Rockefeller gave away half his fortune, doling out nearly half a billion dollars to schools and charitable foundations.



#### Let's Discuss



## History Sleuth

**Teacher Directions**

1. Distribute the Student Sheet: *Gilded Age Gent: John D. Rockefeller*. Working in small learning teams, students record information about Rockefeller's background, character traits, how he made his fortune, and how he used his money.
2. Explain that an *epitaph* is a brief statement found on a tombstone. It often sums up the person's life or describes him. Students create an epitaph for Rockefeller. You may want to share some possible suggestions with students.
  - The Oil King – In Death, Equal to his Workers
  - Ruthless Rockefeller – Rest in Peace?
  - Oil for All Means Money for Me
  - The Two Sides of John D. Rockefeller: Kickbacks and Gifts
3. Give students an opportunity to share their epitaphs with the class.

**Note to the Teacher:** This activity may be expanded to include a comparison of the three Gilded Age tycoons profiled in Webisode 9 (Carnegie, segment 3; Rockefeller, segment 4; and J. P. Morgan, segment 5). For students to compare the three men, distribute the Student Sheet: *Gilded Age Gents*.

**Teacher Directions**

1. Help students understand the differences between the words tycoon and robber baron. After considering both the honest and dishonest business practices Rockefeller employed to build Standard Oil, students discuss the following question.

Was Rockefeller a Gilded Age tycoon or a robber baron?
2. Allow students to share their responses. Accept any supported opinions.

What do you  
Think?



Moving Toward  
Freedom

### Teacher Directions

1. Distribute the Student Sheets: *After the Feast* and *Cartoon Analyzer Worksheet*. Working with teammates, students examine the cartoon and complete the Cartoon Analyzer Worksheet.
2. Students discuss the meaning of the cartoon. Use the following questions as a guideline.
  - How does the cartoon show the great inequality of wealth that marked this period?
  - What role did John D. Rockefeller play in creating this gap between the rich and poor?
3. Explain to students that an investigative newspaper reporter, Ida Tarbell, wrote a story exposing the corruption of Rockefeller's Standard Oil Company. (If possible, have students read Chapter 24, "A Boon to the Writer" of Joy Hakim's *An Age of Extremes*, Book 7 in *A History of US* and view the political cartoons of Ida Tarbell and John D. Rockefeller.) The corruption of Standard Oil caused such a public outcry that the government took action against the company. The Supreme Court dissolved the trust of the Standard Oil Company, and Congress passed legislation to prevent further abuses of the trust system.
4. Students discuss the pros and cons of Rockefeller's business practices. Students answer the following question.

How did Rockefeller move America toward freedom?

### Teacher Directions

Use the following activities with your students.

**Local History** — Students research local entrepreneurs and businesses that gained prominence during the Gilded Age.

**Local History** — Students research whether Rockefeller or Carnegie made any charitable gifts to their community.

**Media Center/Science** — Students research alternatives to using oil and other fossil fuels for energy.

**Math** — Students learn how the stock market works by buying imaginary stock in a real company and following its progress over time in the market.

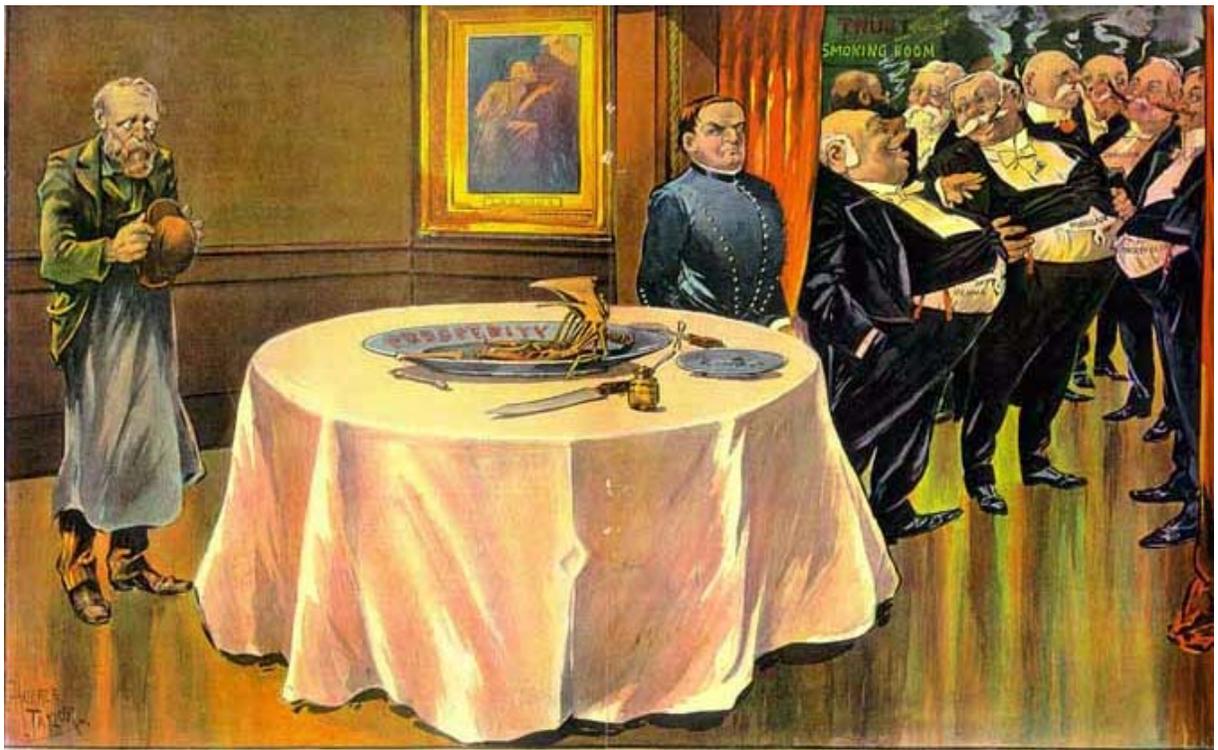
**Math** — Students draw up a business plan in which they design, produce, and market a product. Students should document their profits, losses, and expenses.

**Local History** — Students research local businesses that had or may have a monopoly on certain goods or services.



Connections

# After the Feast. The Working Man Gets What is Left!



AFTER THE FEAST.  
THE WORKING MAN GETS WHAT IS LEFT!

Ohio State University Department of History

# Cartoon Analysis Worksheet

Visuals	Words (not all cartoons include words)
Which of the objects or characters in the cartoon are symbols?	Which words or phrases in the cartoon appear to be the most significant?
What do you think each symbol means?	Why do you think so?
Describe the action taking place in the cartoon.	
Explain the message of the cartoon.	

Adapted from a design by the Education Staff, National Archives and Records Administration

# Gilded Age Gent: John D. Rockefeller

My Back- ground	
My Character Traits	
My Money: How I Made It	
My Money: How I Used It	
My Epitaph	

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# Gilded Age Gents

	<b>Andrew Carnegie</b>	<b>John D. Rockefeller</b>	<b>J.P. Morgan</b>
<b>My Back-ground</b>			
<b>My Character Traits</b>			
<b>My Money: How I Made It</b>			
<b>My Money: How I Used It</b>			
<b>My Epitaph</b>			