

# High School: Finding Bias in Primary Sources

Curriculum and tools

## **Finding Bias in Primary Sources**

This lesson plan was developed to teach high school students to identify bias in sources. It begins with an analysis of John D. Rockefeller. The students will be given two different sources that detail the life of the oil tycoon. These examples are meant to highlight bias. The bias in these sources is not subtle. One paints him as a money-hungry businessman who will go to any measures to ensure an increase in profit. The other paints him as a generous philanthropist who gave most of his hard-earned money to charity. Neither of these creates a full picture of who he was. He had aspects of both.

This activity shows students how writers will often manipulate information to further their point. The activity at the museum or using the online tools will require students to examine their articles more carefully. The bias will not be blatantly obvious. Since it is harder to detect the bias in these sources, the students will be provided with a worksheet to help them with analysis. The worksheet has students analyze evidence, source, context, audience, purpose, and execution. Each of these elements has several questions alongside it to guide students. At the end of the worksheet they are asked to explain if they think the source is biased or not and explain their conclusion.

The assessment for this lesson requires students to present their findings through a paper, video, or presentation. In this report they will explain their topic, summarize each source, highlight the bias found, and provide evidence for bias (specific quotes/ images).

## Finding Bias in Primary Sources (10th Grade)

### Materials Needed:

Teacher:	Student:
Identifying Bias Worksheet	Pencils
John D. Rockefeller Articles	

### Summary:

Students will read multiple sources from the Lake Forest Lake Bluff History Center and will assess each looking for evidence of bias using the provided graphic organizer.

### Standards:

- D2.His.10.9-12.** Detect possible limitations in various kinds of historical evidence and differing secondary interpretations
- D2.His.6.9-12.** Analyze the ways in which the perspectives of those writing history shaped the history that they produced.
- D2.His.13.9-12.** Critique the appropriateness of the historical sources used in a secondary interpretation.

### Learning Objective:

Students will be able to identify bias in primary sources.

### Introductory Activity

Teacher	Students	Time
Distribute “John D. Rockefeller-Robber Baron” article. Give students time to read.	Read Article	10 minutes
Ask students what they think about Rockefeller. Was he a good person or a bad person?	Answer question/ Provide evidence to support their answers	10 minutes

Distribute “John D. Rockefeller-Philanthropist” article. Give students time to read.	Read Article	10 minutes
Ask students once again if they think that Rockefeller was a good or bad person?	Discuss how/ if their perceptions have changed	10 minutes
Show video to explain historical bias. <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aelyTshp7Lw">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aelyTshp7Lw</a>	Watch Video	5 minutes

### **Instructional Procedures:**

<b>Teacher</b>	<b>Students</b>	<b>Time</b>
Discuss introductory activity: Ask students what the activity taught them about sources and their use in historical research.	Discussing the introductory activity.	5 minutes
Introduce “Bias through History: Analyzing Historical Documents” graphic organizer, explaining the “ESCAPE” mnemonic device.	Listening to teacher instruction	10 minutes
Let students work in the History Center archive (or with online resources) and find their own primary sources (topic can be for an independent research project or of teachers choosing). Have students analyze at least two primary sources (about the same topic) using the provided graphic organizer.	Researching in archive and analyzing primary sources.	30-50 minutes

<p>Once they have assessed their documents, come back for a class discussion: What documents did they find, and what bias was present? How will they conduct research differently going forward? What viewpoints do they need to include in their research to ensure they have the full historical narrative?</p>	<p>Discussing sources they found and engaging in class discussion.</p>	<p>10 minutes</p>
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**Assessment(s):**

<p>Presentation of student findings</p>	<p><b>Description:</b> Students will present their findings in a presentation, paper, or video. Their reflections must:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Explain their topic</li> <li>● Summarize each source</li> <li>● Highlight the bias found</li> <li>● Provide evidence for bias (specific quotes/images)</li> </ul>
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**Adaptations or Accommodations needed:**

Learners	Adaptations/Accommodations
Highly Proficient	Students can analyze more than one document
ELL	Students can choose the source to analyze, whether that is a manuscript, image, etc.
Struggling Learners	Same as ELL

**FAQs:**

<p><b>What is a primary source?</b>  A primary source is any source of information, including an artifact, document, diary, manuscript, autobiography, recording that was created within the time period under study.</p> <p><b>What is the “ESCAPE” mnemonic device for analyzing primary sources?</b>  This is a way for students to remember the things they need to have/do in order to analyze a primary source for bias.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● E: Evidence</li> <li>● S: Source</li> <li>● C: Context</li> <li>● A: Audience</li> <li>● P: Purpose</li> <li>● E: Execution</li> </ul>
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This is provided within the graphic organizer

**Extended Learning:**

Once students have learned how to analyze primary sources for bias, they can use the same technique for secondary sources. This will help them to better evaluate sources for their own independent research and for other classes.

**Resources:**

**Graphic Organizer:**

<https://newseumed.org/tools/lesson-plan/bias-through-history-analyzing-historical-sources>

**John D. Rockefeller- Robber Baron:**

<https://www.history.co.uk/biographies/john-d-rockefeller>

**John D. Rockefeller- Philanthropist**

<https://www.philanthropyroundtable.org/almanac/people/hall-of-fame/detail/john-rockefeller-sr>

**Understanding Bias Video-**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aelyTshp7Lw>

Name:

Date:

## Bias Through History: Analyzing Historical Sources

Use the E.S.C.A.P.E. strategy to closely analyze your historical source. Use the information within the source and its accompanying information to answer the questions below.

Name of article:

Date of article:

<p><b>Evidence</b></p> <p>What information does this source present?</p> <p>Does it seem to be presenting facts (things that can be proved) or opinions (ideas or beliefs)?</p>	
<p><b>Source</b></p> <p>Who created this source?</p> <p>Who published/distributed it?</p> <p>Does the source seem reliable? Explain.</p>	
<p><b>Context</b></p> <p>What can you tell about what else was happening at the time this source was created?</p> <p>What questions do you have about the “big picture” surrounding the information in this source?</p>	

Name:

Date:

<p><b>Audience</b></p> <p>Who was the intended audience for this source?</p> <p>How did the intended audience affect the format and/or content of this source?</p>	
<p><b>Purpose</b></p> <p>Why was this source created?</p> <p>How did the purpose affect the format and/or content of this source?</p>	
<p><b>Execution</b></p> <p>What do you think is notable about how this information is presented? Consider the word and image choices and how the information is laid out.</p> <p>How do these execution choices affect the impact of this source?</p>	

**Do you think this article is biased? If so, how? If not, why not?**

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## **John D. Rockefeller- Robber Baron**

Those he couldn't beat, he broke. Born poor, Rockefeller believed his riches demonstrated God's endorsement. He became so powerful he could tip a country into collapse.

"The business of creating monopolies, crushing opposition...he made a bloody fortune out of it."

Senator JAY ROCKEFELLER John D. Rockefeller's Great Grandson

### **RAGS TO REFINERIES**

In 1839, John Davison Rockefeller is born into a poor Cleveland family. As a young boy he sells sweets to local children to help his family as his father, a conman known as 'Devil Bill', doesn't. He quits school early, becomes a bookmaker, works in dry goods, and bored, determines to risk all. He enters the oil business. He finds prospecting unpredictable and wasteful. He believes refining the crude oil into kerosene, the clear liquid that will light America, is where the money is.

In 1863, at just 24, he invests everything into his first refinery. By 27, he's on the verge of bankruptcy. To not only survive, but thrive, he agrees to meet with the rail road magnate Vanderbilt, hoping to secure competitive transport rates. But Rockefeller narrowly misses his 6:25am train to New York.

The train crashes. Rockefeller would probably have been among the many dead. Already a religious man, he now sees his mission as ordained. When he does meet with Vanderbilt, he promises him 60 barrels a day in exchange for cheap shipping rates.

It's a risky business; literally. Kerosene explosions are common. In 1870, to alleviate concerns, he creates Standard Oil, guaranteeing uniform quality. Rockefeller becomes the largest producer of refined kerosene in the country.

Rockefeller wants bigger and better shipping rates. He meets with Vanderbilt's rival, Tom Scott, president of one of the largest rail lines, and his protégée, Andrew Carnegie. An oil and rail cartel is agreed. No paperwork is exchanged. Rockefeller relies on a man's word.

### **THE FIRST US MONOPOLY**

With his increased profits, Rockefeller, aged just 33, buys up his competitors, and creates the country's first monopoly. He now controls 90% of the North American oil supply. And his lawyers come up with the infamous 'trust' solution.

"Holders of stock in the various oil companies handed over their shares to Rockefeller and his associates acting as a board of trustees; in return they got 'trust' certificates which paid dividends but gave no power"

Hugh Brogan, Historian

His 1872 takeover of competitors is so intimidating it's recorded as 'The Cleveland Massacre.' Rockefeller's rapid rise makes unlikely allies out of Scott and Vanderbilt who try to force better rail rates on him. In response, he blasts through the countryside building a 4,000 mile pipeline that delivers his oil from Ohio to Pennsylvania, ending his dependence on the railroads.

His oil had accounted for 40% of rail cargo and his withdrawal helps precipitate a crash that bankrupts one third of the country's 360 railroad companies.

"Whether it's 2008 or 1873...a necessary condition for a crisis is nobody expects it."

Alan Greenspan, Former Chairman of the US Federal Reserve

### **THE FIRST COLLAPSE**

The 1873 crash panics the New York Stock Exchange so much that for the first time, it shuts

down. It's the start of the Great Depression. For the first time in the country's short explosive history, large numbers of workers are jobless. The rich remain largely untouched.

In fact, Rockefeller sees the slump as an opportunity to buy out his remaining competitors at knock-down rates. By the time the Great Depression finishes, Rockefeller has formed the largest corporate empire in America.

Tom Scott and Andrew Carnegie build their own pipeline. But two thirds of the oil they'll transport comes from Rockefeller and rather than endure competition, he shuts down his Pittsburgh refineries.

Scott loses half of his business, forcing him to lay off tens of thousands of Pittsburgh workers. They turn, not against Rockefeller, but Scott. In just one night of rioting 39 of his buildings and 1,200 of his train cars go up in smoke.

### **ROOSEVELT V ROCKEFELLER**

Rockefeller now controls 98% of all Kerosene and in today's money is worth \$225 billion. His Standard Oil comes to symbolise big, bad business. Roosevelt is re-elected and files dozens of law-suits against dozens of trusts. Rockefeller is subpoenaed and runs all over the country to avoid being served. But then his first grandson is born. So, to see him, he turns himself in and agrees to go to court.

### **ROCKEFELLER V CARNEGIE**

Rockefeller buys the Mesabi mines threatening Carnegie's dominance in the steel industry. At first, Carnegie isn't worried as the iron ore from the Mesabi mines is like dust and clogs up the blast furnaces. But steel manufacturers quickly figure out how to use the iron ore and Rockefeller immediately begins supplying it to Carnegie's competitors at rock bottom prices. And then

Rockefeller starts planning to build a new steel plant to rival Carnegies. To end the competition, Carnegie buys up Rockefellers steel in return for his rival's exit from the industry.

### **HIGHLY TOXIC, HIGHLY FLAMMABLE: THE FUTURE**

As Morgan's electricity lights America, it reduces the need for the Rockefeller supplied kerosene in traditional oil lamps. Rockefeller needs an alternative use for petroleum. The highly flammable, highly toxic substance by-product of refining, gasoline, has previously been a problem, a pollutant. Now, it will power the new internal combustion engine that will drive the vehicle of the 20th century, the car.

### **THE PEOPLE VS STANDARD OIL**

The Roosevelt court case concludes. It has heard of kickbacks, political bribes, predatory pricing and when all else fails, straightforward intimidation. After 444 witnesses and 12,000 pages of testimony, the court rules that Standard Oil's unreasonable business practices violate the Sherman Anti Trust Act. Standard Oil has six months to break up.

In its place, 34 smaller companies are formed. These will later become Exxon, Mobil and Chevron but for now, the age of monopoly is over. The defeated Rockefeller is still left with a net worth, in today's money, of \$660 billion.

## **John D. Rockefeller- Philanthropist**

John Rockefeller Sr.

After starting life in humble circumstances, John Rockefeller came to dominate the burgeoning petroleum industry by the time he was 40 years old. He became the richest man of his time, and indeed has a good claim to perhaps being the richest self-made man who ever lived. At its peak, Rockefeller's net worth was around 1.5 percent of the country's total annual economic output—the equivalent of about \$280 billion today, or about three times the wealth controlled by Bill Gates.

He was equally distinguished as a philanthropist. A natural businessman with a strong moral sense and intense religious convictions, he dedicated unprecedented resources to charity. Within his lifetime, Rockefeller helped launch the field of biomedical research, funding scientific investigations that resulted in vaccines for things like meningitis and yellow fever. He revolutionized medical training in the United States, and built China's first proper medical school. He championed the cause of public sanitation, creating schools of public health at Johns Hopkins and Harvard, and helped lead major international public-health efforts against hookworm, malaria, yellow fever, and other maladies. He vigorously promoted the cause of education nationwide, without distinction of sex, race, or creed. He created the University of Chicago, virtually from scratch, and within a decade turned it into one of the world's leading universities.

Born in upstate New York in 1839, Rockefeller was the son of a strait-laced, deeply devout Baptist mother and a boisterous, fun-loving father who called himself a travelling salesman but was really a flimflam man. (Amidst his many long business trips, Rockefeller's father would

eventually contract a bigamous second marriage and have a second family while still returning periodically to his first.) The young Rockefeller, serious and somewhat humorless by nature, was much more influenced by his mother. A lifelong adherent of the northern Baptist church, he neither drank nor smoked.

As a boy, his family moved frequently. In 1853 they settled in Strongsville, Ohio, a suburb of rapidly expanding Cleveland. Rockefeller attended a local high school and took a 10-week course in bookkeeping. At age 16 he got his first job, as a bookkeeper at a brokerage of fresh produce. From the beginning, he gave six percent of his salary (which at first was a mere 50¢ per day) to charity. He was soon tithing to the Baptist church.

In 1859, Edwin Drake drilled the first oil well, in northwest Pennsylvania, and one of the world's greatest industries was born. That year Rockefeller and a partner opened a brokerage of their own, Rockefeller and Clark, that traded not only produce but petroleum products as well. Cleveland, with its proximity to the Pennsylvania oil fields and its excellent transportation network, quickly became the center of petroleum refining. In 1863, Rockefeller and partners opened their own refinery.

In 1865 Rockefeller bought out his partners and established a new firm with the chemist Samuel Andrews. Needing capital, he approached Stephen Harkness, who invested \$100,000 and became a silent partner in the firm, requiring that his relative, Henry Flagler, be taken in as a partner as well to oversee the Harkness interests. Flagler proved an inspired choice, with organizational and creative business skills that neatly matched Rockefeller's careful money management.

In 1870, Flagler convinced Rockefeller to transform the partnership of Rockefeller, Andrews, and Flagler into a corporation named Standard Oil. Standard Oil expanded rapidly, both

horizontally by buying up other oil refining companies, and vertically by acquiring oil wells and transportation routes and selling products at the retail level. Standard Oil pursued a monopoly position, pursuing many techniques—such as secret rebates from railroads and predatory pricing—that are today illegal but were not then. It also invented the trust form of organization in order to circumvent out-of-date incorporation laws. It paid a fair price for the companies it wanted to acquire, often paying in Standard Oil stock and taking in valued executives. By 1880, Standard Oil controlled 90 percent of the oil business in America.

Rockefeller had a clear conscience about how he won his fortune. “God gave me the money,” he often said. Believing that, he felt a profound obligation to put the money to good use. By the early 1880s, he was receiving thousands of letters a month asking for help. Rockefeller regularly gathered his family after breakfast to review the merits of the petitions. “Four-fifths of these letters,” Rockefeller noted years later, were “requests of money for personal use, with no other title to consideration than that the writer would be gratified to have it.”

In these first years of large-scale philanthropy, Rockefeller favored a few causes close to his heart. He was the single-most generous donor to the northern Baptist conventions, and he underwrote the work of missionaries and relief workers at home and abroad. He also took a deep interest in higher education for African Americans. In 1882, he began a series of gifts to the Atlanta Baptist Female Seminary, a struggling school for African-American women. As Rockefeller’s contributions grew, the school took the maiden name of Rockefeller’s wife: Spellman. Similar gifts were soon directed to two other black colleges—the Tuskegee Institute and Morehouse College.

“About the year 1890 I was still following the haphazard fashion of giving here and there as appeals presented themselves. I investigated as I could, and worked myself almost to a nervous

breakdown,” Rockefeller noted in his 1909 memoirs. “There was then forced upon me the necessity to organize and plan this department of our daily tasks on as distinct lines of progress as we did with our business affairs.” It marked an important turning point in his career as a philanthropist.

Rockefeller made his fortune through canny consolidation, careful cost management, and economies of scale. Those instincts were reflected time and again in his charitable giving. Rather than make thousands of small, scattershot contributions, he preferred to make large donations to institutions that he believed had great promise. “The best philanthropy,” he wrote, “is constantly in search of finalities—a search for a cause, an attempt to cure evils at their source.”

Higher education was the first major beneficiary of Rockefeller’s more focused philanthropic efforts. A project of lifelong interest to him was the creation of a distinguished Baptist university. Rockefeller considered several options before pairing with William Rainey Harper to establish the University of Chicago. In 1890, he made his first contribution—for \$600,000—to the school. Over the rest of his life, he would give it a total of \$35 million, making it possible for the upstart school to instantly rank among the world’s leading institutions of higher learning.

Rockefeller insisted that his name not be used anywhere on campus, even rejecting an image of a lamp on the university seal, lest it be taken as a suggestion of the influence of Standard Oil. The University of Chicago, he later said, was “the best investment I ever made.”

At the urging of Frederick T. Gates, perhaps his most trusted philanthropic adviser, Rockefeller became increasingly devoted to medical research. In 1901, he funded the Rockefeller Medical Research Institute in New York City. Modeled on the Institut Pasteur in France and the Robert Koch Institute in Germany, it was the country’s first biomedical institute, soon on a par with its European models. The results were dramatic. Within a decade, it created a vaccine for

cerebrospinal meningitis and had supported the work of America's first winner of a Nobel Prize in medicine. Today, known as the Rockefeller University, it is one of the leading biomedical research centers in the world. Twenty-four Nobel Prize winners have served on its faculty.

Like many wealthy industrialists of his era, Rockefeller was scandalized by the poverty and deprivation that still afflicted the American South nearly half a century after the conclusion of the Civil War. He created the General Education Board in 1902, charging it with a ranging mission that included improving rural education for both whites and blacks, modernizing agricultural practices, and improving public health, primarily through efforts to eradicate hookworm, which debilitated many Southerners and dragged down productivity of all sorts. The General Education Board helped establish hundreds of public high schools throughout the South, promoted institutions of higher education, and supported teacher-training efforts for African Americans.

Rockefeller's work to eliminate hookworm was related to a broader effort to improve public health generally. Starting in 1913, the campaign against hookworm was exported globally. It was soon followed by similar efforts against malaria, scarlet fever, tuberculosis, and typhus, all under the auspices of the Rockefeller-funded International Health Commission. Rockefeller created the first school of public health and hygiene at Johns Hopkins University in 1918, which he then duplicated at Harvard in 1921. In all, he spent \$25 million introducing public health programs at scores of universities across the globe. Rockefeller took a special interest in China, (second only to the United States as a destination for his funding), and the China Medical Board he created can be credited with first introducing the country to modern medical practices.

Throughout the first decade of the 20th century, Rockefeller was thinking seriously about founding a perpetual grantmaking foundation. By 1909, he had given away \$158 million of

personal funds to various causes. That year he donated 73,000 shares of Standard Oil, worth \$50 million, as a first installment to establish what would become the Rockefeller Foundation. It was not the first such foundation, but it quickly became the largest. It was chartered by New York State in 1913 with a mission “to promote the well-being of mankind throughout the world.”

The benefactions of the Rockefeller Foundation have been many and varied, from funding the research that led to the yellow-fever vaccine, to the Montreal Neurological Institute, to a new building that holds five million books at Oxford’s Bodleian Library. The foundation was a pioneer funder of the Green Revolution, which dramatically increased agricultural yields across the developing world, and may have saved as many as one billion lives. For decades, the Rockefeller Foundation distributed more foreign aid than the entire U.S. government.

As impressive as the legacy of the Rockefeller Foundation is, however, it is not clear that it has yet caught up with the accomplishments of its founding donor. John D. Rockefeller gave away \$540 million (unadjusted for inflation) before his death in 1937 at the age of 97. With that money, he created two of the world’s greatest research universities, helped pull the American South out of chronic poverty, educated legions of African Americans, jumpstarted medical research, and dramatically improved health around the globe. It is not surprising that his biographer Ron Chernow concluded that Rockefeller “must rank as the greatest philanthropist in American history.”

*~ John Steele Gordon*