



## **Ida Tarbell: Writer, Journalist, Pioneer Social Studies Lesson Plan**



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### **Lesson Focus:**

During her career as an investigative reporter, Ida Tarbell explored the corruption in big business, taking on one of the biggest of them all, the Standard Oil Company and its owner, John D. Rockefeller. Tarbell's tenacious investigation of Rockefeller's monopoly within the oil industry included intrigue, crime, and corruption, all the elements a great story needs. Tarbell's personal connection to the story, moral outrage, and passion for justice helped her to expose Rockefeller's business practices to the world. And her work helped the U.S. government win a Supreme Court case against Standard Oil which led to the dissolution of the monopoly.

This lesson focuses on Tarbell's passion for the truth, tenacious nature, and historian's eye for detail. In order for students to develop an understanding of the significance of past events, people, and places, they must acquire historical comprehension skills and be able to evaluate historical perspectives. To achieve this, students must be provided with opportunities to analyze, evaluate, and discuss historical events, issues, people, and places using primary and secondary sources.

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### **Lesson Synopsis:**

Teaching students to analyze visual images and historical text encourages them to think and work as historians by drawing meaning from the image and/or text and connecting their analysis to a larger historical landscape. By engaging in critical analysis of an image or text, students develop and enhance observational, interpretative, and critical thinking skills, which can then be combined with additional resources to provide a more complex understanding of historic relevance. Teaching students to read critically requires that students become investigators of history. By understanding that time, place, audience, and purpose matter, and by asking questions of an image or text, students are given the opportunity to learn how to identify ambiguity and weigh evidence to make reasonable judgments regarding the validity of an author's claim.

A text-dependent analysis presents students with a passage or set of passages and asks a question about the passage(s) that requires students to write an essay response to the prompt, using evidence from a passage(s) to draw inferences in order to support analysis. Using text-dependent analysis (TDA) as the focus of this lesson, students will use provided documents to engage historical thinking skills such as comparison, contextualization, synthesis, and continuity and change over time as they work to find connections between documents, apply acquired knowledge, develop a thesis statement and use evidence from the documents to support it. A TDA activity puts students in an historian's shoes, where they become the interpreter of historical material.

### **Note:**

Text-dependent questions are those that are answered by referring back to the text(s) being read. TDAs require students to read closely to determine what the text specifically states and to make logical inferences from it. Students must glean relevant evidence from the text when responding to the prompt. In a TDA, answering the question does not require prior knowledge about the text. On the other hand, document-based questions (DBQ), are addressed in an essay or series of short-answer questions using prior knowledge combined with support from several provided sources. This lesson will work with either of these formats, depending on the age and ability level of the students.

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**Grade Level:**

Grades 7 - 12

**Timeframe:**

Two 80 minute periods plus additional time for essay writing

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**Essential Understandings:**

*Students will understand that:*

- Ida Tarbell's family moved from Erie County to Rouseville, where her father hoped to make his fortune manufacturing tanks to hold oil once it was drilled.
  - As a teenager, Ida Tarbell witnessed what became known as the Cleveland Massacre, where dozens of small oil producers in Ohio and Western Pennsylvania, including Tarbell's father, were faced with the choice of either selling their businesses to the Standard Oil Company or attempt to compete with the large company and potentially face ruin.
  - Ida Tarbell was part of a group of journalists that investigated and exposed corrupt business practices during the Progressive Era, from the 1890s through the 1920s.
  - These journalists became known as muckrakers, a moniker given by President Theodore Roosevelt because he believed that their main purpose was to emphasize the bad in order to sell papers.
  - Muckrakers provided accurate, detailed accounts of corruption and social ills caused by big business' practices in a rapidly industrializing nation.
  - Ida Tarbell began writing for McClure's Magazine, first writing biographies on historical figures such as Abraham Lincoln, then moving on to issues of the period such as the Spanish American War, and then writing her famous expose on Standard Oil, where she both praised Rockefeller and chronicled the corrupt practices that made Standard Oil the largest company of its time.
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**Objectives:**

*Student will:*

- Conduct a close read of provided documents, identifying supporting details to demonstrate understanding of a topic.
  - Understand the difference between explicit information found in the text and making inferences based on information from the text.
  - Analyze how multiple documents address similar historical topics in order to effectively answer a prompt.
  - Show understanding of a prompt by restating it in an essay.
  - Construct a text-dependent response to a prompt using evidence from several provided documents to support the analysis.
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**Anticipated Outcomes:**

*Students will be able to:*

- Read the prompt thoroughly to gain an understanding of how the documents relate to the prompt.
- Answer the prompt using evidence from the text and inferences supported by specific text evidence.
- Use paraphrasing and direct quotes to demonstrate a connection between the texts and the prompt.
- Use and cite evidence from the documents (facts, quotes, data, etc.) in the essay to support thoughts and opinions.
- Use precise language, a variety of sentence types, and transitions in the essay to answer the prompt with clarity.

- Organize the essay with an introduction, body, and conclusion.
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## **Content Standards:**

### PA History Standards:

- 8.1A** Evaluate patterns of continuity and rates of change over time, applying context to events.
- 8.1B** Evaluate the interpretation of historical events and sources, considering the use of fact versus opinion, multiple perspectives, and cause and effect relationships.
- 8.1C** Analyze, synthesize, and integrate historical data, creating a product that supports and appropriately illustrates inferences and conclusions drawn from research.
- 8.3A** Evaluate the role groups and individuals from the U.S. play in the social, political, cultural, and economic development of the world.
- 8.3B** Evaluate the impact of historical documents, artifacts, and places in U.S. history that are critical to world history.

### PA Geography Standards

- 7.3A** Analyze the human characteristics of places and regions using the following criteria: population, culture, settlement, economic activities, and political activities.

### PA Economics Standards:

- 6.1D** Predict how changes in incentives may affect the choices made by individuals, businesses, communities, and nations.
- 6.3B** Assess the government's role in regulating and stabilizing the state and national economy.

### PA Civics and Government Standards:

- 5.2B** Examine the causes of conflicts in society and evaluate techniques to address these conflicts.
- 5.3F** Analyze landmark United States Supreme Court interpretations of the Constitution and its Amendments.
- 5.3G** Evaluate the impact of interest groups in developing public policy.

### Pennsylvania Core Reading Standards for History:

#### Reading Informational Texts

- 8.5A** Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, connecting insights gained from specific details to an understanding of the text as a whole.
- 8.5B** Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary that makes clear the relationships among the key details and ideas.
- 8.5G** Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, as well as in words) in order to address a question or solve a problem.
- 8.5I** Integrate information from diverse sources, both primary and secondary, into a coherent understanding of an idea or event, noting discrepancies among sources.

#### Writing in the Social Studies

- 8.6A** Write arguments focused on discipline-specific content.
- 8.6C** Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
- 8.6E** Use technology, including the Internet, to produce, publish and update individual or shared writing products in response to ongoing feedback, including new arguments or information.

- 8.6 F** Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.
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### Lesson Activities:

#### Introductory Activity: Introduction to Ida Tarbell and Rockefeller/Standard Oil

- Option one: Inquiry
  - Think, Pair, Share - Working with the July 2012 Smithsonian Magazine article, “The Woman Who Took on the Tycoon”, by Gilbert King, partner groups will use a graphic organizer to identify Ida Tarbell and describe her involvement with John D. Rockefeller and Standard Oil.  
<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/the-woman-who-took-on-the-tycoon-651396/>  
(See Appendix A for samples of graphic organizers)
    - In addition, Allegheny College has a section on Ida Tarbell on its website that can be used as additional reference: <https://sites.allegheny.edu/tarbell/>
- Option two: Video
  - Think, Pair, Share - While watching the 2009 Erie Hall Of Fame video, No Man More Dangerous (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Yog7FyAFyA> , Length: 3:03), students will take notes on Ida Tarbell. Students will then form partner groups and discuss what they saw/heard in the video. As a whole class discussion, create a list of facts about Ida Tarbell from the notes/discussion of partner groups.
- Option three: Editorial Cartoon Analysis
  - Think, Pair, Share - Partner groups will use a Political Cartoon Analysis Guide to analyze a political cartoon about Standard Oil, such as the 1884 cartoon, ‘*Monster Monopoly*’:  
(See Appendix B for samples of political cartoon analysis guides)



- A gallery of Standard Oil political cartoons can be found at:  
<https://energyhistory.yale.edu/library-item/political-cartoons-and-standard-oil-gallery>

*Activity One: Introduction to Text Dependent Analysis (TDA)*

- Divide students into groups of 3 - 4.
- Provide student groups with the TDA prompt:

Evaluate the impact of Ida Tarbell’s investigative reporting on the Standard Oil Company.
- Provide student groups with the documents they will use to complete the TDA:
  - Paula A. Treckel, “Lady Muckraker”  
<https://www.npsd.k12.nj.us/cms/lib04/NJ01001216/Centricity/Domain/164/apladymuckraker.PDF>
  - The National Humanities Center, “On the Standard Oil Company”  
<http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/pds/gilded/power/text2/standardoil.pdf>
  - Burton Fulsom, Jr., “John D. Rockefeller and His Enemies”  
<https://fee.org/media/5279/0805freemanfolsom.pdf>
  - Constitutional Rights Foundation, “Ida Tarbell and the Muckrakers”  
[https://www.crf-usa.org/images/pdf/Ida\\_Tarbell.pdf](https://www.crf-usa.org/images/pdf/Ida_Tarbell.pdf)
  - Ida Tarbell, “Excerpts from The History of the Standard Oil Company”  
[https://www.coreknowledge.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/CKHG\\_G6\\_U9\\_Reform-in-Industrial-America\\_NFE1\\_HistoryoftheStandardOilCompany.pdf](https://www.coreknowledge.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/CKHG_G6_U9_Reform-in-Industrial-America_NFE1_HistoryoftheStandardOilCompany.pdf)
  - Mark Thomas, “Ida M. Tarbell’s Crusade against Standard Oil”  
<https://cnx.org/contents/NgBFhmUc@14.5:IRu4WSfR@7/10-3-%F0%9F%94%8E-Ida-M-Tarbell-s-Crusade-against-Standard-Oil>
  - Standard Oil Company of New Jersey v. the United States  
<https://sites.gsu.edu/us-constipedia/standard-oil-co-of-new-jersey-v-united-states-1911/>
  - 1904 Puck Magazine Political Cartoon on the Standard Oil Company  
<https://explorepahistory.com/displayimage.php?imgId=1-2-1934>
- Notes:
  - ★ Depending on the size of the class, the number of documents above can be reduced. Standard Oil v. U.S. and the 1904 Puck Magazine cartoon should not be eliminated for this activity.
  - ★ Depending on the grade and ability levels of the class, the documents above can be excerpted.
  - ★ Any political cartoon depicting Standard Oil can be used in this TDA. Additional cartoons can also be added.
- Conduct a “Talking TDA”:
  - Step 1 - Once student groups have the TDA prompt and supporting documents, explain that they will begin analyzing the documents one at a time.
    - Each group will be assigned to investigate one of the texts above (If you have more groups than texts, more than one group can be assigned to a text. If you have fewer groups than texts, see note above).
    - Groups will have 15 minutes to review their assigned text and write a minimum of five yes/no questions that will provide them with additional information. Remind students that ultimately they are addressing the TDA prompt and will keep that in mind as they are reading.
    - At the end of the 15 minutes, as a whole class discussion, groups will ask their questions. This can be done by having each group ask all of their questions before moving on to the next groups, or having each group ask a question and rotating through the groups in five rounds.
    - For each group’s questions, other groups will have the first opportunity to answer yes or no based on the information in their documents. If no other group has an answer, the teacher will answer yes or no.



## Resources:

### Lesson Resources:

- “1904 Puck Magazine Political Cartoon - Standard Oil Company.” *ExplorePAHistory.Com*, Library of Congress, 1904, [explorepahistory.com/displayimage.php?imgId=1-2-1934&storyId=1-9-20](https://explorepahistory.com/displayimage.php?imgId=1-2-1934&storyId=1-9-20).
- Erie Hall Of Fame. “No Man More Dangerous.” *YouTube*, uploaded by ErieHall, 21 Sept. 2009, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Yog7FyAFyA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Yog7FyAFyA).
- Fulsom, Jr., Burton. “John D. Rockefeller and His Enemies.” *The Freeman: Ideas on Liberty*, May 2008, pp. 33–34.
- Granger. “STANDARD OIL CARTOON - ‘Monster Monopoly.’” 1884. *Fine Arts America*, 17 Feb. 2013, [fineartamerica.com/featured/standard-oil-cartoon-monster-monopoly-granger.html](https://fineartamerica.com/featured/standard-oil-cartoon-monster-monopoly-granger.html).
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- “Ida Tarbell | Allegheny College.” *Allegheny.Edu*, Allegheny College, 1997, [sites.allegheny.edu/tarbell](https://sites.allegheny.edu/tarbell).
- “Ida Tarbell and the Muckrakers.” *Bill of Rights in Action*, Constitutional Rights Foundation, 2019, [www.crf-usa.org/images/pdf/Ida\\_Tarbell.pdf](https://www.crf-usa.org/images/pdf/Ida_Tarbell.pdf).
- Jimison, Robert. “Standard Oil Co. of New Jersey v. United States (1911) – U.S. Conlawpedia.” *U.S. Conlawpedia*, 2016, [sites.gsu.edu/us-constipedia/standard-oil-co-of-new-jersey-v-united-states-1911](https://sites.gsu.edu/us-constipedia/standard-oil-co-of-new-jersey-v-united-states-1911).
- King, Gilbert. “The Woman Who Took on the Tycoon.” *Smithsonian Magazine*, Smithsonian Magazine, 5 July 2012, [www.smithsonianmag.com/history/the-woman-who-took-on-the-tycoon-651396](https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/the-woman-who-took-on-the-tycoon-651396).
- “On the Standard Oil Company.” *The National Humanities Center*, Random House, 2005, [nationalhumanitiescenter.org/pds/gilded/power/text2/standardoil.pdf](https://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/pds/gilded/power/text2/standardoil.pdf).
- “Political Cartoons and Standard Oil (Gallery).” *Energy History*, Yale University, 2021, [energyhistory.yale.edu/library-item/political-cartoons-and-standard-oil-gallery](https://energyhistory.yale.edu/library-item/political-cartoons-and-standard-oil-gallery).
- Smith, Kyle. “Essential History: Ida Tarbell, the Investigative Journalist That Beat Big Oil.” *Essential Millennial*, 6 Mar. 2021, [www.essentialmillennial.com/2021/03/01/ida-tarbell-the-investigative-journalist-that-beat-big-oil](https://www.essentialmillennial.com/2021/03/01/ida-tarbell-the-investigative-journalist-that-beat-big-oil).
- Tarbell, Ida. “Excerpts from The History of the Standard Oil Company.” *Core Knowledge*, 1904, [www.coreknowledge.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/CKHG\\_G6\\_U9\\_Reform-in-Industrial-America\\_NFE1\\_HistoryoftheStandardOilCompany.pdf](https://www.coreknowledge.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/CKHG_G6_U9_Reform-in-Industrial-America_NFE1_HistoryoftheStandardOilCompany.pdf).
- Thomas, Mark. “Ida M. Tarbell’s Crusade Against Standard Oil.” *Bill of Rights Institute*, 2021, <https://cnx.org/contents/NgBFhmUc@14.5:IRu4WSfR@7/10-3-%F0%9F%94%8E-Ida-M-Tarbell-s-Crusade-against-Standard-Oil>.

Treckel, Paula. "Lady Muckraker." *New Providence, NJ School District*, Primedia Enthusiast Publications, Inc., June 2001, <https://www.npsd.k12.nj.us/cms/lib04/NJ01001216/Centricity/Domain/164/apladymuckraker.PDF>.

**Analyzing Political Cartoons Resources:**

"Cartoon Analysis Worksheet." *The National Archives and Records Administration*, Dec. 2019, [www.archives.gov/files/education/lessons/worksheets/cartoon\\_analysis\\_worksheet\\_former.pdf](http://www.archives.gov/files/education/lessons/worksheets/cartoon_analysis_worksheet_former.pdf).

Knowles, Melissa. "The Teacher's Guide to Helping Students Analyze Political Cartoons." *Socialstudies.Com*, 18 May 2020, [.blog.socialstudies.com/the-teachers-guide-to-helping-elementary-students-analyze-political-cartoons](http://blog.socialstudies.com/the-teachers-guide-to-helping-elementary-students-analyze-political-cartoons).

**Graphic Organizer Resources:**

"HAPPY Document Analysis, <https://www.fortschools.org/site/handlers/filedownload.ashx?moduleinstanceid=9902&dataid=18664&FileName=Doc%20Analysis%20handout.pdf>.

"Reading Comprehension Graphic Organizer Tool – Someone-Then Character Summary." *Action Potential Learning*, 2018, [www.aplearning.com/education-resources/item/reading-comprehension-graphic-organizer-tool-someone-then-character-summary.html](http://www.aplearning.com/education-resources/item/reading-comprehension-graphic-organizer-tool-someone-then-character-summary.html).

Source:			
People:		Setting:	
		Conflict/Problem:	
Major Events:			Resolutions:

## Evidence/Interpretation Chart

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Evidence</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">I read in the article...</p> <p style="text-align: center;">(You must include at least 10 items on you about in the article)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">NOTE: This evidence will be part of your notes for this section.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Interpretation</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">I wondered, I made a connection, I thought...</p> <p style="text-align: center;">** Ask at least three questions, make at least three connections, and include at least five insights.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">NOTE: An insight statement is a discovery of understanding that helps to explain why something is happening the way it is. It is being able to see and understand a situation clearly or gaining a new perspective. Think of it as an "aha" moment.</p>

- Additional examples of graphic organizers can be found on the Action Potential Learning website: <https://www.aplearning.com/education-resources/item/reading-comprehension-graphic-organizer-tool-so-meone-then-character-summary.html>

## Analyzing Political Cartoons

### Observe by identifying and noting details

- Describe what you see in the cartoon:
  - What did you notice first?
  - What people and objects are shown?
  - What, if any, words are included in the cartoon?
  - What do you see that looks different than it might look in a photograph?
  - What do you see that might refer to another work of art or literature?
  - What do you see that might be a symbol?

### Reflect by generating and testing hypotheses about the source

- Describe what is happening in the cartoon:
  - What was happening in the U.S. (or around the world) when the cartoon was drawn?
  - Who do you think is the intended audience? Why?
  - What issue do you believe the cartoon is about?
  - What do you think the cartoonist's opinion of the issue is? How can you tell?
  - What techniques does the cartoonist use to persuade the audience?

### Ask questions that lead to more observation and reflection

- Do you have additional questions about:
  - The cartoon's message?
  - The time period it was drawn during?
  - The cartoonist's opinion?
  - The subject of the cartoon?
- The National Archives Cartoon Analysis Forms can be found at:  
[https://www.archives.gov/files/education/lessons/worksheets/cartoon\\_analysis\\_worksheet\\_former.pdf](https://www.archives.gov/files/education/lessons/worksheets/cartoon_analysis_worksheet_former.pdf)  
[https://www.archives.gov/files/education/lessons/worksheets/cartoon\\_analysis\\_worksheet.pdf](https://www.archives.gov/files/education/lessons/worksheets/cartoon_analysis_worksheet.pdf)

APPENDIX C

	Description/Questions to Ask
	<p><b><u>Historical Context</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the immediate historical events that shaped/triggered this document?</li> <li>• What is the environment of ideas, attitudes, + emotions behind the creation of the document?</li> </ul>
	<p><b><u>Audience</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• For whom (specifically, generally, logically) was the document intended?</li> <li>• What details in the document help you attribute the audience?</li> </ul>
	<p><b><u>Point of View</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who (specifically, generally, logically) wrote/produced the doc?</li> <li>• Is there a reference to the author's POV (i.e. his/her professional, gender, social background) in the document representation? If not, can you infer it?</li> <li>• What details in the document reflect the author's Perspective and/or <i>Bias</i>?</li> </ul>
	<p><b><u>Purpose</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Why was the document created?</li> <li>• What elements in the document help you to determine its purpose?</li> <li>• How does the author's point of view shape the document's purpose AND/OR</li> <li>• How does the format of the document shape its purpose? (e.g. Is a visual/photo more emotional than an essay?)</li> </ul>
	<p><b><u>'Y' is The Document Significant?</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How Reliable is this document?</li> <li>• Can we trust what is said or what we see according to what we know about the time period?</li> <li>• What are the limitations of the document?</li> </ul>

Credit: My Social Studies Teacher

- Download a H.A.P.P.Y. Document Analysis Handout at:  
<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1IVfZpGWYXYdiJFVybXguEfp2vZLQSkEC/view?usp=sharing>

Lesson plan developed for the Oil Region Alliance for Business, Industry, and Tourism by Sara Jones, Social Studies teacher at Titusville High School in Titusville, PA. 2021. [sjones@gorockets.org](mailto:sjones@gorockets.org)

Oil Region Alliance for Business, Industry, and Tourism, 217 Elm Street, Oil City, PA 16301. <https://oilregion.org>



The mission of the Oil Region Alliance of Business, Industry & Tourism is to manage the Oil Region National Heritage Area and to increase the prosperity of the Oil Region by enticing all people to live, work, learn and play in “the Valley that Changed the World” through the preservation, promotion, development, and support of historical, educational, natural, recreational, residential, commercial and industrial destinations.

The Oil Region Alliance manages the Oil Region National Heritage Area, which is also a Pennsylvania Heritage Area. The Area encompasses Venango County and the City of Titusville, Borough of Hydetown, and Oil Creek Township of Crawford County. More information is available at [OilRegion.org](http://OilRegion.org).

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