

VOCABULARY KNOWLEDGE RATING
ACTIVITY 10: WILLIAM JENNINGS BRYAN

Directions: Decide how well you and your group know each of the words/phrases below by checking your knowledge for each. Put each group member's name in the proper category. Once you have rated a word/phrase, whoever knows the definition must share that knowledge with the rest of the group. Finally, use a dictionary to confirm and/or enrich the group's understanding of the word/phrase.

Word	Can Define/Use It	Heard It/Seen It	Don't Know It	Definition
principle				
negotiate				
imperialism				
resign				
advocate				
liberal				
fundamentalist				
evolution				
flout				
hoopla				
agnostic				
mandate (verb)				
laissez-faire				
exterminate				
convict (verb)				

ACTIVITY TEN: WILLIAM JENNINGS BRYAN

TEACHER DEBRIEFING SHEET

Discussion Questions:

1. What groups of people might have supported William Jennings Bryan's ideas? Why? Who might have criticized his ideas? Why?
2. Describe how religious, political, economic, and social factors influenced Bryan's opinions about Darwinism and his position with regard to the Scopes trial.
3. How did interpretations of Darwinism and the textbook that Scopes used, *Civic Biology*, reflect the attitudes of the 1920s surrounding diversity?
4. How do you think William Jennings Bryan would have responded to the cartoons on Resource Card 2? Justify your answer.
5. From William Jennings Bryan's point of view, what are the advantages and disadvantages of a diversity of people and ideas in the United States?

Task:

Imagine that William Jennings Bryan had lived through the 1920s. Your political consulting firm has been hired to run Bryan's 1928 presidential campaign. Create a multimedia campaign to convince voters to elect Bryan.

Task Evaluation Criteria:

- Campaign makes use of at least three different media (direct mail flyers, radio advertisements, campaign speeches, campaign buttons, bumper stickers, newspaper advertisements, etc.)
- Campaign accurately reflects the beliefs and ideals of William Jennings Bryan.
- Campaign makes use of memorable persuasive techniques such as slogans, jingles, symbols, etc.
- Campaign is designed to appeal to a wide variety of voters.
- Presentation addresses the advantages and disadvantages of diversity in the 1920s from the point of view of William Jennings Bryan.

Extension Questions:

1. From among the other personalities in this unit, who would agree with Bryan's position in the Scopes trial the most? Why? The least? Why?
2. Do you think what the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) did to provoke the Scopes trial was justified? Why or why not?
3. Compare and contrast Darwinism and Social Darwinism.
4. Describe the tension that exists between state laws and the U.S. Constitution.
5. Would you have voted for William Jennings Bryan for president? Why or why not?
6. Describe William Jennings Bryan's position on the Scopes case.
7. Besides the Scopes trial, what causes did Bryan support? Why?
8. Describe one of the cartoons on your Resource Cards and tell us whether or not you agree with the cartoon's author.
9. What do you think Charles Evans Hughes thought about the Scopes trial?
10. What do you think William Du Bois thought about the Scopes trial?

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ACTIVITY CARD

During the first two decades of the twentieth century, the United States underwent significant changes. Cities grew at a rapid rate as the country shifted from a rural- to an urban-based society. Immigrants flooded the new urban centers, changing the composition of the United States from primarily Anglo-Saxon and Protestant to a diverse mix of Italians, Greeks, Poles, Czechs, Russian, and a plenitude of others. Many of the newcomers had non-Protestant beliefs; some had radical political notions. A massive migration of African Americans to northern cities created an even greater surge of diversity in urban centers. Like immigrants from foreign lands, these African Americans hoped for greater freedom and opportunity for themselves and their children.

As the 1920s dawned, many Americans reacted strongly to these changes. In the aftermath of World War I, prominent and powerful forces pushed for a return to “normalcy” – a return to traditional values and beliefs. In response to this atmosphere, Congress passed laws restricting the inflow of immigrants and the foreign ideas that came with them. Organized labor fell under attack as it became associated with radical political elements. People were concerned that the communist revolution birthed in Russia in 1917 would spread to the United States and steal the heart from the “American” way of life. Legislation and court rulings severely limited the influence of the labor movement.

The yearning for a return to traditional values and norms led to friction between old-stock Americans and newcomers. Out of this tension came intolerance. The Ku Klux Klan grew to unprecedented numbers. Lynchings were on the rise. Communists and anarchists were arrested, and in one instance forced on board a ship and sent to communist Russia. Racial tensions erupted as riots broke out in northern U.S. cities. Many people openly wondered how much diversity the United States could tolerate. Would the country become a place where diversity was accepted, even celebrated, or a nation that put up barriers to diverse people and ideas?

Directions: Read the Resource Cards and analyze the visuals. Discuss the following questions with your group:

1. What groups of people might have supported William Jennings Bryan’s ideas? Why? Who might have criticized his ideas? Why?
2. Describe how religious, political, economic, and social factors influenced Bryan’s opinions about Darwinism and his position with regard to the Scopes trial.
3. How did interpretations of Darwinism and the textbook that Scopes used, *Civic Biology*, reflect the attitudes of the 1920s surrounding diversity?
4. What are the messages of the political cartoons on Resource Card 2? How do you think William Jennings Bryan would have responded to the cartoons?
5. From William Jennings Bryan’s point of view, what are the advantages and disadvantages of a diversity of people and ideas in the United States?

Task: **Imagine that William Jennings Bryan had lived through the 1920s. Your political consulting firm has been hired to run Bryan’s 1928 presidential campaign. Create a multimedia campaign to convince voters to elect Bryan.**

TASK EVALUATION CRITERIA

- Campaign makes use of at least three different media (direct mail flyers, radio advertisements, campaign speeches, campaign buttons, bumper stickers, newspaper advertisements, etc.)
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ACTIVITY TEN: WILLIAM JENNINGS BRYAN

RESOURCE CARD 1 OF 2



William Jennings Bryan was a gifted speaker, lawyer, three-time presidential candidate, and devout Protestant. Although he was born in Salem, Illinois, Bryan made his career in Nebraska politics. He won a seat in the U.S. House of Representatives in 1890. A tireless defender of the small farmer and laborer, Bryan worked closely with the Populist Party, a group of poor Midwestern and Southern farmers who suffered economically due to low prices for their crops, which they blamed on Northeastern business interests. Bryan's efforts on behalf of farmers and laborers (the so-called "common" people) earned him the title the "Great Commoner."

William Jennings Bryan was a man who lived by his principles. He was not afraid to take an unpopular stand on an issue. Although Bryan lost three presidential elections, he did become secretary of state in President Woodrow Wilson's administration in 1913. As a peacemaker, he negotiated treaties with 30 nations in which they agreed to investigate all disputes with other nations rather than go to war. Although Bryan did not always get his way, he remained firm in what he believed in.

Bryan strongly opposed imperialism, the extension of one nation's power over other countries. But President Wilson believed that the United States had interests in Latin America and that American influence over these nations was important to the security of the United States. The president ordered more U.S. involvement in Latin America than Bryan believed was necessary. Bryan's beliefs were put to the test when a German submarine sank the British ship *Lusitania* in 1915. More than 100 Americans on board were killed. President Wilson wrote a letter that strongly condemned the German attack. Bryan feared that if he signed the letter, it would provoke war with Germany. Rather than sign it, he resigned.

After William Jennings Bryan resigned as President Wilson's secretary of state, he resumed his place as one of the most important members of the Democratic Party. He strongly advocated women's suffrage (women's right to vote). His efforts, as well as others, led to the passage of the 19th Amendment in 1920, which guaranteed women a vote in elections.

Often ahead of his time as a spokesman for liberal causes, William Jennings Bryan was also closely identified with traditionalism, particularly with fundamentalist Christianity. In 1924 he drafted legislation to prevent the teaching of Darwinist evolutionary theory in Florida's public schools, and in 1925 he served as a prosecution lawyer in the Scopes Trial, a famous Tennessee case involving a similar law.

The five-year-old American Civil Liberties Union had taken out newspaper advertisements offering to defend anyone who flouted the Tennessee law. George Rappelyea, a Dayton, Tennessee, booster, realized that the town would get enormous attention if a local teacher was arrested for teaching evolution. He enlisted John Scopes, a science teacher and football coach, who arranged to teach from George Hunter's *Civic Biology*, a high school textbook promoting Charles Darwin's arguments in *The Descent of Man*.

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RESOURCE CARD 2 OF 2

The Tennessee Scopes trial was marked by hoopla and a carnival-like atmosphere. Thousands of people swelled the town of Dayton, which had a population of approximately one thousand. For 12 days in July 1925, 100 reporters sent dispatches. Two of the country's most famous attorneys faced off in the trial. William Jennings Bryan, 65 years old, prosecuted; 67-year-old Clarence Darrow, who was a staunch agnostic, represented the defense. Bryan declared that "the contest between evolution and Christianity is a duel to the death."

Bryan's position was complex. He opposed the mandated teaching of evolution in public schools because he thought the people should exercise local control over school curricula. He also opposed Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection because these ideas had been used to defend laissez-faire capitalism on the grounds that a perfectly free market promotes the "survival of the fittest." As early as 1904, Bryan had denounced social Darwinism as "the merciless law by which the strong crowd out and kill off the weak."

In addition, he opposed Darwinism as a justification for war and imperialism. In *The Descent of Man*, Darwin had argued that "at some future period, not very distant as measured by centuries, the civilized races of man will almost certainly exterminate and replace the savage races." The textbook that Scopes taught from, *Civic Biology*, identified five "races of man" ("Ethiopian, Malay, American Indian, and Mongolian") and "finally, the highest type of all, the Caucasians, represented by the civilized white inhabitants of Europe and America." Bryan was also unhappy with Darwin's assumption that the entire evolutionary process was purposeless and not the product of a larger design.

Scopes was convicted and fined \$100. But the conviction was thrown out on a technicality by the Tennessee Supreme Court (that the judge, and not the jury, had determined the \$100 fine). Five days after the trial's conclusion, Bryan died of a stroke. In 1967, the Supreme Court struck down Tennessee's anti-evolution law for violating the Constitution's prohibition against establishment of religion.



"WHAT WOULD THEIR VERDICT BE?"
—*The Daily Star* (Montreal).



July 22, 1925

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ACTIVITY TEN: WILLIAM JENNINGS BRYAN

INDIVIDUAL REPORT

Anglo-Saxon civilization has taught the individual to protect his own rights; American civilization will teach him to respect the rights of others.

William Jennings Bryan, 1899

The quote at left is one of William Jennings Bryan's most famous statements. To what extent did Jennings exemplify his ideal of American civilization? Justify your answer with specific evidence.

Evaluation Criteria:

- Response clearly states the extent to which Jennings exemplified his ideal of American civilization.
- Response includes at least three justifications for your answer; justifications make use of specific examples and terminology from your Resource Cards.
- Response demonstrates a clear understanding of William Jennings Bryan's philosophy.
- Response addresses the advantages and disadvantages of diversity in the 1920s.