Analysing Political Cartoons with See, Mean, Matter

Resources needed:
- Political Cartoon: these can be found in a history textbook or at one of the following websites:
  - Library of Congress (World War II, Red Scare, Cold War, Vietnam, Nixon, Middle East)
  - National Archive Docs Teach (Imperialism)
- Access to background knowledge in a history textbook or online resource
- See, Mean, Matter Graphic Organizer

SET UP:
- Give students a copy of the political cartoon (or project the image if necessary) and blank graphic organiser.

STEP 1:
- Allow students to make observations about the time period. Here are some guiding questions:
  - When was the cartoon created?
  - What event or people (individuals or groups) are being depicted?

STEP 2:
   SEE
- Allow students to make observations about what they see in the political cartoon.
  - Sentence frames: "I see…" and "I observe…"
- Encourage students to make literal observations without interpretation.
   DO
- Allow students to identify the artistic techniques used by the cartoonist. Some examples include:
  - Color
  - Language
  - Size of objects
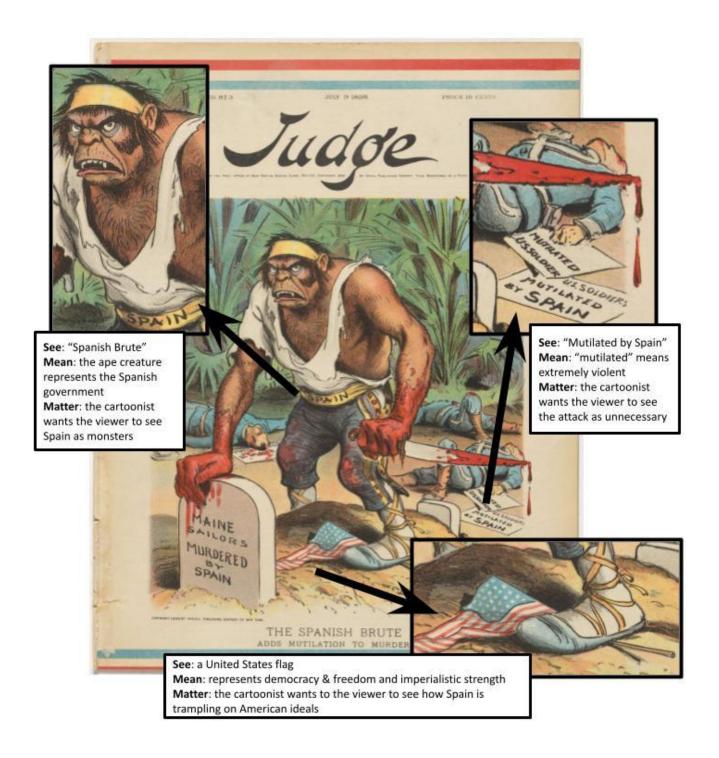 - Symbolism
  - Exaggeration
  - Labelling
   MEAN
- Allow students to interpret their observations.
  - Sentence frames: "This _____ means…" or "I think _____ represents _____."
   MATTER
- Allow students to explain what they think the cartoonist is arguing.
  - Sentence frames: "I think the cartoonist is arguing _____ about _____." Or, "The cartoonist wants the audience to think _____ because _____."

STEP 3:
- Allow students to summarise in writing or in discussion.

See: "Spanish Brute"
Mean: the ape creature represents the Spanish government
Matter: the cartoonist wants the viewer to see Spain as monsters

See: "Mutilated by Spain"
Mean: "mutilated" means extremely violent
Matter: the cartoonist wants the viewer to see the attack as unnecessary

See: a United States flag
Mean: represents democracy & freedom and imperialistic strength
Matter: the cartoonist wants to the viewer to see how Spain is trampling on American ideals

Artist: Grant E. Williams
Image: "The Spanish Brute" in *Judge* Magazine (July 9, 1898).
Location: https://npg.si.edu/object/npg_AD_NPG.77.12

Political Cartoon Analysis SAMPLE

List some key information about the time period of the political cartoon. What major events or people are associated with the topic?

Spanish-American War, imperialism, President McKinley

Complete the chart identifying and interpreting the cartoon.

SEE What do I see?	DO What techniques does the cartoonist use?	MEAN What does it symbolise? Why is it depicted that way?
• Ape/monkey • American flag • Dead soldiers • Sword with blood • Headstone "Maine soldiers" • Jungle • Belt that says "Spain" • Title 'The Spanish Brute"	• Symbolism • Captions/labels • Exaggeration • Colour	• Ape/monkey – Spanish • Dead soldiers – soldier of the Maine • Jungle – site of war • Colours – show emotional reaction • American flag being stepped on represents the attack on democracy

MATTER What is the cartoonist trying to say to the viewer?
The cartoonist created an example of yellow journalism to incite an emotional reaction to the attack of the USS Maine. It exhibits the power of the newspapers during this time period to share information with readers in the United States. The demonising view of the Spanish was used in order to gain support for entering a war to defend American honour and retaliate for the death of soldiers.

Write a summary explaining what the cartoonist is arguing using evidence OR discuss with a partner your conclusions.

This cartoon, originally published in *Judge* magazine, exhibits one emotional response to the sinking of the U.S.S. Maine during the Spanish American War. In 1898, the United States entered into a war with Spain, but it was fought in the Philippines and in Cuba where the United States proved the power of its navy. The image of the ape holding a bloody sword in the center of the picture represents a demonizing view of the Spanish to show how monstrous it was to sink a United States ship. The vibrant blood dripping to the ground is brighter than the pale red of the United States flag being trampled on by "the Spanish Brute," which tries to represent the Spanish as unnecessarily violent. As an example of yellow journalism, this cartoon is used to encourage Americans to support entering a war with the Spanish. The cartoonist's message is very clear based on the title and central image of the monstrous character standing over the cemetery of dead American soldiers.

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MATTER What is the cartoonist trying to say to the viewer?		

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