

Imperialism (and Humans) on Display: The 1904 World's Fair

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Lesson #2: Meet Me in St. Louis, Meet Me at the Place of Nations

Abstract: In this lesson, students will explore various international exhibits by Asian, Latin American, and Middle Eastern countries at the 1904 World's Fair. Students will analyze primary source descriptions and photographs of the exhibits, and they will determine the purpose and message of the exhibits. Students will also be encouraged to experience the exhibits as though they were attending the 1904 World's Fair to understand how people would have viewed the exhibits at that time.

Essential Questions:

- How were the foreign exhibits at the 1904 World's Fair designed to shape Americans' opinions of countries in Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East?
- How did the growing imperialist sentiment in the early-20th century United States shape the views of Americans toward other countries?

Assessment: Students will be assessed based on their ability to analyze the readings and photographs related to the foreign exhibits at the 1904 World's Fair. Students will also be assessed on the diary entries that they created after viewing the Place of Nations exhibit, as well as their understanding of these exhibits as an example of imperialism.

Procedures:

- 1) *Setting the Purpose:* In order to understand the purpose and setting of the international exhibits at the 1904 World's Fair, the students will begin this lesson by analyzing sources related to the Place of Nations. The teacher should begin by handing out the "Social Economy" reading to the students. When students finish reading the document, the teacher should then discuss with the class the purpose of including exhibits from other countries at the World's Fair. It would also be helpful for the students to think about the amount of information on foreign countries that would have been available to the average American who attended the Fair. After this discussion, the teacher should project the photograph of the Place of Nations. Students should analyze the photograph, and in particular they should pay attention to the ways that the countries presented themselves in their exhibits. Students should also compare this photograph to the photographs they viewed yesterday of the fairgrounds as a whole.
- 2) The teacher should then divide the students into 6 groups and explain to the students that they will be going on a tour of the foreign exhibits at the 1904

World's Fair. Each of the 6 stations around the classroom should include artifacts and readings from the Place of Nations. As students tour the exhibit, they should view the artifacts as though they were visitors at the World's Fair in 1904, and they should think about the impression of each country that a 1904 visitor would have taken from the exhibit. As students walk around the Place of Nations exhibit, they should document the sources that they view on the Place of Nations Analysis Sheet.

The 6 stations should be set up as follows:

Station #1: China Exhibit Reading (background information about the China exhibit)

Station #2: Photographs from the China exhibit

Station #3: Photographs from the Japanese and "Mysterious Asia" (India, Sri Lanka, and Burma) exhibits

Station #4: Photographs from the Middle East exhibits (Jerusalem, Damascus, The Moors)

Station #5: Reading and photographs from the Brazil exhibit

Station #6: Photographs from the Mexico exhibit

3) When students finish their tour of the Place of Nations exhibit, the teacher may want to discuss as a class the various impressions to the exhibits. Possible discussion questions include:

- Why might these countries have presented themselves in this way?
- Why would Fair organizers have wanted to put these countries on display?
- How might American visitors have viewed the artifacts and displays at the exhibits?
- How might visitors have compared these exhibits to American displays at the Fair?
- How do these exhibits illustrate the growing importance of American imperialism in the early-20th century?

4) After viewing the Place of Nations exhibit, students should complete a diary entry in which they reflect on their impressions of the exhibit. The teacher should explain to the students that they should write this entry as though they were viewing the Fair in 1904, and they should include their impressions on the artifacts and people that they saw. They should also use their knowledge of early-20th century American society to compare the "progress" of the countries they have seen to American "progress" at the time. This diary entry should be at least 1 page (single-spaced) in length and must include a discussion of the artifacts viewed in the exhibit.

Analysis of Local Primary Sources: During this lesson, students will analyze numerous photographs of exhibits and artifacts from the 1904 World's Fair. These artifacts will help to recreate some of the exhibits that were on display at the Fair.

Ties to National Primary Sources: During this lesson, students will read excerpts from national publications about the 1904 World's Fair in St. Louis. These publications were written during and shortly after the Fair and will give context to the images that students view in the Place of Nations exhibit.

List of Materials and Resources:

“Social Economy” reading from *The Universal Exposition of 1904*

“The Place of Nations from Above” Photograph

China Exhibit Reading from *History of the Louisiana Purchase Exposition*

China Exhibit photographs

“Mysterious Asia” Exhibit photographs

Middle East Exhibit photographs

Brazil Exhibit Reading from *History of the Louisiana Purchase Exposition*

Brazil Exhibit Photographs

Mexico Exhibit Photographs

Place of Nations Analysis Sheet