

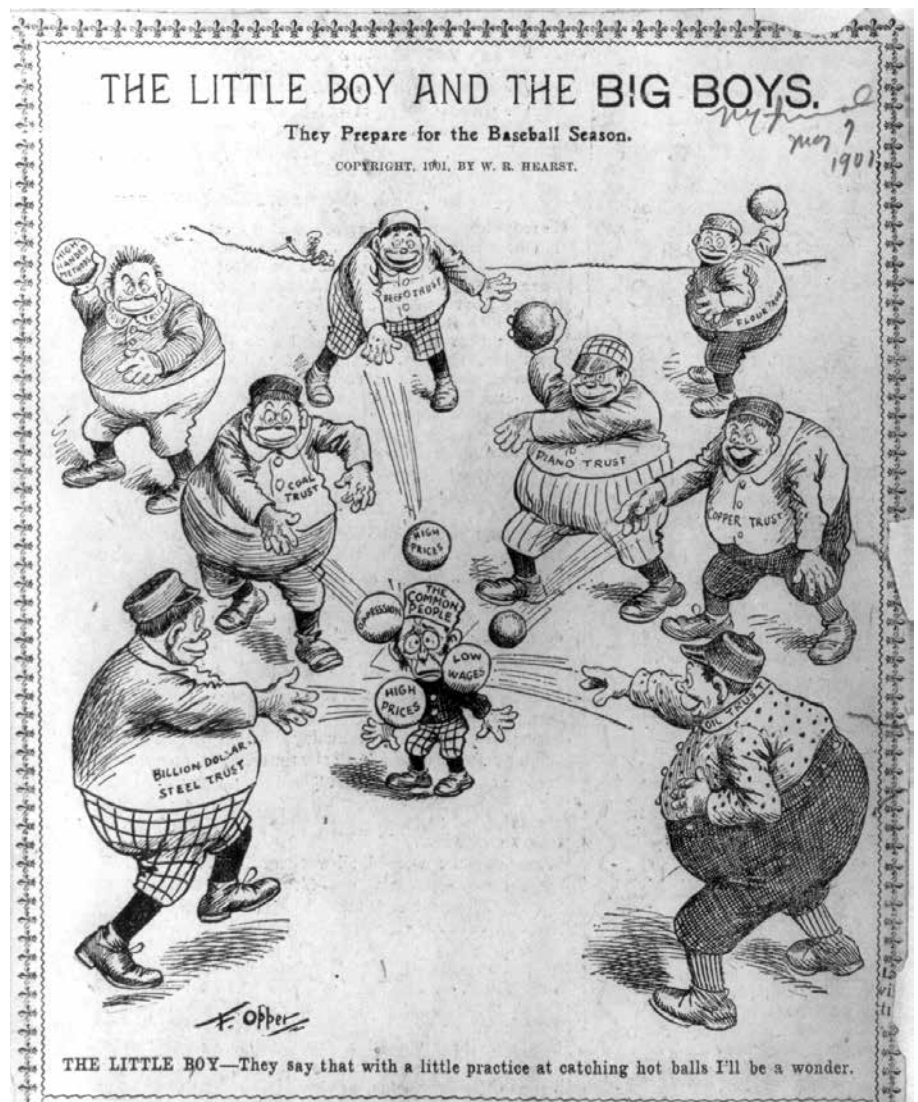
Discovering Economic Concepts and Criticism in Progressive Era Cartoons

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At the turn of the nineteenth century, editorial and comic cartoons were important features within magazines and newspapers. Publications fiercely competed for subscribers and sought to increase circulation by offering a variety of content to readers. Political cartoons in publications such as *Puck* and *Judge*, and in newspapers such as Hearst's *The New York Journal*, sought to highlight and satirize the political and economic issues of the day. One cartoonist whose work significantly influenced Americans' perspective of contemporary issues during the Progressive Era was Frederick Burr Oppen.

Born in rural Lake County, Ohio, in 1857, influenced by his rural and public education roots, Oppen's artistic style was considered part of the Midwestern School of Editorial Cartooning, emphasizing homespun values through the plight of ordinary people. Like his fellow contemporaries, he drew for multiple audiences in various formats including comic strips and editorial cartoons. His work focused on the tension between the political corruption and greed of robber barons and the existence of the common man in the early twentieth century.

As a cartoonist for the magazine *Puck* from 1881–1899, Oppen's illustrations repeatedly took aim at the political and economic corruption of politicians and titans of industry. After being hired



The little boy [Common People] and the big boys [Trusts] prepare for the baseball season. (Anti-trust cartoon, 1901)



Nursery Rhymes for Infant Industries. An Alphabet of Joyous Trusts—no. 5 / F. Opper (c1902).



Nursery Rhymes for Infant Industries. No. 15: 'O' is for Oil Trust, a modern Bill Sikes; he defies the police, and does just as he likes (c1901).

by Hearst to draw for the *New York Journal* in 1899, and with Hearst's support, Opper published a 1900 series titled "Willie and Papa," mocking then President William McKinley in his reelection campaign. He drew President McKinley as an infantile four year old (representing his first term in office) under the tight control of trusts and powerful political operatives.

In 1902, Opper created a booklet of drawings called *Nursery Rhymes for Infant Industries: An Alphabet of Joyous Trusts* printed in the *New York Journal*. The drawings were assembled in the format of a children's ABC book employing a rhyming pattern with 26 illustrations, each targeting the power and reach of trusts. In the final image for "Z," Opper

echoed Progressive economic concerns and cautioned readers that "Z is the Zephyr Trust, prophets declare, we soon pay for breath when the trusts own the air." Frederick Opper's daily editorial cartoons and ABC booklet with its easily accessible format, repetition of theme, and appealing images swayed readers to confront the power and influence of trusts in American society.

Analyzing such political cartoons from the Progressive Era offers students the ability to evaluate firsthand the economic concerns of Progressives and the opportunity to learn and apply economic principles such as trusts, wages, and prices to a historic context.

To introduce the concept of trusts to students, show them the cartoon "[Anti-

trust cartoons]: The little boy [Common People] and the big boys [Trusts] prepare for the baseball season" ("Little Boy..."), on p. 89, created by Opper for *The New York Journal* (www.loc.gov/item/2005685051/). Ask them what is happening and who is represented in the drawing. Additional questions from the Library of Congress Analysis Tool for Political Cartoons (www.loc.gov/teachers/usingprimarysources/resources/Analyzing_Political_Cartoons.pdf) may help focus and deepen student observations and thinking.

Students may notice in "Little Boy..." that each of the baseball players is larger in comparison to the boy in the middle. They may note that each player has the name of a specific industry trust dis-

played on the jersey. In addition, they might share that the baseballs each represent some type of consequence to “the common people” due to trusts controlling industries. Ask student volunteers to summarize what the cartoonist believed were the negative consequences of trusts.

Give each student a notecard and ask them to complete the following sentence stems:

This political cartoon shows me that trusts affected Americans by [blank rule].

I still don't understand [blank rule] about trusts.

Direct students to share their thoughts from the notecard with one other classmate. After doing so, ask the pair to share with another pair of students. After all four students have shared, ask students to choose one notecard to be shared with the whole class. Facilitate a class discussion, prompted by student ideas from the groups of four, and record their statements. Use student observations and questions to generate a working defini-



If you try these suggestions, or a variation of them, with your students, tell us about your experience! During the last week of April 2020, the Teaching with the Library of Congress Blog at blogs.loc.gov/teachers will feature a post tied to this article and we invite you to comment and share your teaching strategies.

Using Bibliographic Information to Explore Interesting Research Rabbit Holes

The Library of Congress has more than 168 million items in its collections—and millions have been digitized and are available on the Library’s website at loc.gov. Every digitized item is accompanied by a bibliographic information page that can be a valuable research tool. Using specific links on the page may lead you and your students down some very interesting research rabbit holes.

Every bibliographic information page includes an image of the item. Directly below the image is its title, a summary, and more, along with contributor(s) names, date of publication, digital identification, rights and access information, and citation information. In addition, the right side of the bibliographic information page provides links to additional information related to the item including possibly its lot grouping, related contributor(s), and affiliated subjects. The lot group for the Prints and Photographs Division displays similarly grouped items and the contributor link will display other items produced by the same person(s). The subject heading offers the ability to find additional items connected to the highlighted item on the displayed page. Accessing these three links can yield broader search results for students and teachers.

For example, to find additional information relating to “Nursery Rhymes for Infant Industries. An Alphabet of Joyous Trusts—no. 5/F. Opper” (“Joyous Trusts No. 5...”) (www.loc.gov/item/90707598/), look on the item page at its bibliographic data. Locate on the right side of the page under “Part of,” the item’s lot. For “Joyous Trusts No. 5...,” the lot record indicates it is part of a group of nine additional items which includes an image from Frederick Opper’s series “Willie and Papa” as well as two political cartoons from his anti-trust images. As a variation on the lot search strategy, you may want to compare other illustrations by Frederick Opper to his work within the *Nursery Rhymes for Infant Industries: an Alphabet of Joyous Trusts* series. To do so, find the contributor link and click on Opper, Frederick Burr. Doing so yields 192 additional images by Frederick Opper available online at the Library of Congress. Lastly, consider researching related terms under subjects. A quick review of subject listings reveals the subject heading “Industrial Trusts”. Selecting that subject phrase offers 193 items for research.

While these strategies take some time, curiosity, and creativity, they offer students and teachers the ability to broaden the scope and depth of research resulting in some very interesting discoveries within Library of Congress collections.

The screenshot shows the Library of Congress website interface. On the left, there's a search bar and navigation options. The main content area displays the title "Nursery rhymes for infant industries. An alphabet of joyous trusts--no. 5 / F. Opper." and a thumbnail image of a political cartoon. On the right side, there's a detailed bibliographic information section. Three red arrows point to specific links in this section: "Part of" (with a link to "Lot 11530"), "Contributor" (with a link to "Opper, Frederick Burr"), and "Subjects" (with a link to "Industrial Trusts").

	Nursery Rhymes for Infant Industries, No. 5	Nursery Rhymes for Infant Industries, No. 15
What people are in the cartoon?		
What does the text of the cartoon say about trusts?		
How does this cartoon compare with “The Little Boy” cartoon? (consider images and message)		
Comment or question regarding this cartoon		
Collectively, what do the cartoons reveal about Progressive concerns regarding the creation of trusts by big business?		

tion of a trust. Direct students to write the definition of a trust on the back of their notecard. A possible definition to use is: *trusts are comprised of rival businesses from the same industry who merge together with the goal of fixing prices and eliminating competition to achieve market control.*

Deepening the Investigation

Next, tell students that they will analyze two additional cartoons highlighting trusts that were created by the same illustrator at the turn of the century. Prior to handing out the political cartoons, ask students if they have ever read a children’s ABC book. Ask what format it typically takes and provide an overview of the typical ABC book, if needed. Tell students that they will be evaluating a political cartoon drawn as though it was part of a children’s ABC book. Invite them to consider why a cartoonist might use this format. Depending on the background knowledge of your students, you might explain or have students look up who the character of Bill Sikes was in the book *Oliver Twist* and encourage them to use that information in their analysis of *Nursery Rhymes for Infant Industries, No. 15*.

Give students’ copies of *Nursery Rhymes for Infant Industries. An Alphabet of Joyous Trusts—no.5* (“Joyous Trusts no.5”) (www.loc.gov/item/90707598/) (1902) and *Nursery Rhymes for Infant Industries, No. 15: ‘O’ is the Oil Trust, a modern Bill Sikes; he defies the police does just as he likes* (www.loc.gov/item/2005685052/) (“Joyous Trusts No. 15...”) (1902), both on p. 90.

Provide a graphic organizer (such as the one above) to guide students in their observations and analyses.

As a whole class, ask for volunteers to share their answers on specific portions of the graphic organizer. Confirm that they realize “Joyous Trusts No. 5...” highlighted the economic power over the common person while “Joyous Trusts No. 15...,” represented the Standard Oil Trust and the sheer power of the industry as well as its corrupt practices involving bribery with the police and Attorney General Philander Knox.

They will also likely notice that both cartoons depicted the character representing “the common people” as small and powerless against the trusts. Ask students: what are the economic consequences of trusts suggested in *Nursery Rhymes for Infant Industries, No. 5 and No. 15*?

Direct students to review what they initially wrote on their notecard in their first sentence stem and write and respond to the following sentence stem:

I used to think _____ about trusts.

The Progressive era political cartoons suggest trusts are harmful to an economy because they _____.

Extend Student Thinking

Challenge students to conduct original research relating to topics identified within the featured political cartoons and during the Progressive Era. Show students the database of historic newspaper pages at *Chronicling America* at chroniclingamerica.loc.gov. Encourage students to analyze articles for evidence of economic concerns in the early part of the twentieth century. For example, students might search the term “trusts” and explore what text and images within the newspapers revealed about trusts. In addition, students could utilize the search strategies described in the sidebar article to find other primary sources related to economic terms during this time period. After students have researched, facilitate a class discussion using the question, “What were the main economic issues during the Progressive Era and how are they similar or different to the economic concerns of today?”

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