

Teacher Key: Gilded Age: Bosses, Trusts & Tariffs

What each labeled part shows. These describe the image only. Each cartoon was made by someone with a point of view, noted under "Viewpoint." Let students build and defend their own readings.

Station 1: "Stop Thief!" (1871)

Context: Drawn during the 1871 investigations into the Tweed Ring, which controlled New York City government. The caption quotes Oliver Twist, where thieves join the shout of "Stop thief!" to escape notice.

A: A building sign reading "N.Y. TREASURY," where the crowd is running from.

B: A large man in a suit running with the crowd. Nast often drew William M. "Boss" Tweed this way.

C: A man who has fallen to the ground as the crowd runs past him.

Viewpoint: Harper's Weekly was a Republican paper; Tweed led the Democratic Tammany Hall machine.

Source: Thomas Nast, Harper's Weekly, 1871. Library of Congress: www.loc.gov/item/2006675535/. Public domain.

Station 2: The Bosses of the Senate (1889)

Context: Drawn at a time when U.S. senators were chosen by state legislatures, not voters, and large business trusts were growing rapidly. The Sherman Antitrust Act passed the next year.

A: A sign: "This is the Senate of the Monopolists, by the Monopolists and for the Monopolists!"

B: Huge men shaped like money bags, labeled with trusts such as "Steel Beam Trust" and "Copper Trust."

C: A small door in the gallery labeled "People's Entrance," marked "Closed."

Viewpoint: Puck generally leaned toward the Democratic Party and criticized high tariffs and trusts.

Source: Joseph Keppler, Puck, 1889. Library of Congress: www.loc.gov/item/2002718861/. Public domain.

Station 3: The Protectors of Our Industries (1883)

Context: Drawn during the debate over protective tariffs. Supporters said tariffs protected American jobs; critics said they mostly helped owners.

A: Four wealthy men in top hats sitting on bags labeled with millions, including names such as Field, Gould and Vanderbilt.

B: Labels on the goods such as "Linen workers average \$1 a week."

C: Workers holding up the whole platform on their backs while standing in the water.

Viewpoint: Puck opposed high tariffs. Republican magazines such as Judge argued tariffs helped workers.

Source: Bernhard Gillam, Puck, 1883. Library of Congress: www.loc.gov/item/94507245/. Public domain.

Station 4: The Modern Colossus of (Rail) Roads (1879)

Context: Railroads were the biggest businesses of the era. The title refers to the Colossus of Rhodes, a giant ancient statue said to stand over a harbor.

A: A giant man (railroad owner William H. Vanderbilt) standing over the tracks.

B: Two smaller men below him on the tracks (often identified as Cyrus Field and Jay Gould), connected to him by reins.

C: A sign: "All freight ... must pass here and pay any tolls we demand."

Viewpoint: Puck often criticized railroad owners; defenders pointed to the growth and lower travel costs railroads brought.

Source: Joseph Keppler, Puck, 1879. Library of Congress: www.loc.gov/item/2014645351/. Public domain.

Station 5: Next! (1904)

Context: Published in 1904, the same year Ida Tarbell's History of the Standard Oil Company appeared. The Supreme Court broke up Standard Oil in 1911.

A: An oil tank labeled "Standard Oil," forming the body of an octopus.

B: A tentacle wrapped around the U.S. Capitol building.

C: The White House, with a tentacle reaching toward it.

Viewpoint: Critical of Standard Oil; the company argued its size made oil cheaper and more reliable.

Source: Udo J. Keppler, Puck, 1904. Library of Congress: www.loc.gov/item/2001695241/. Public domain.