



Scholastic Journalism Week

Feb. 19-23, 2024

HERE TO STAY

Journalism Then

Rationale: Our current age of 24/7 news cycles, social media and fake news sensationalizes news to its followers — but this trend is not new to the history of news. In fact, during the period of “yellow journalism” at the end of the 19th century and early 20th century, newspaper magnates such as Pulitzer and Hearst led a highly competitive news environment, heightening the lurid news of the day, and they also sometimes made up information to sell newspapers.

Essential Questions:

- How did the newspapers’ coverage of the USS Maine lead to calls for war against Spain?
- What similarities and differences are there between sensationalist “yellow journalism” and today’s sensationalist news?

Learning Objectives:

 Students will be able to:

- Explain the historical context of yellow journalism, including the Spanish-American War and the media environment at the time
- Analyze the Hearst and Pulitzer coverage of the explosion of the USS Maine in Cuba
- Compare yellow journalism with today’s sensationalist news media

Vocabulary:

Yellow journalism: Yellow journalism refers to reporting that is sensationalistic and may not be entirely factual. The derogatory term was first used to describe the reporting in Joseph Pulitzer’s New York World and William Randolph Hearst’s New York Journal, two rival newspapers that were competing for readers in the 1890s. The World featured a comic strip with a character that wore yellow and was named “the yellow kid.” Hearst lured the artist of the strip to work for the Journal, prompting Pulitzer to hire another cartoonist to launch a similar “yellow kid” comic. Hence, the ultra-competitive papers were the “yellow-kid papers.” Both papers were accused of dramatizing the news in order to increase circulation. They also were charged with prompting the start of the Spanish American War, when Hearst’s papers printed stories that blamed Spain for the sinking of the battleship Maine.

Spanish-American War: (1898) The Spanish-American War was a conflict between the United States and Spain that effectively ended Spain's role as a colonial power in the New World. The United States emerged from the war as a world power with significant territorial claims stretching from the Caribbean to Southeast Asia.

Imperialism: Imperialism is when one country exercises power over another through various methods of control. It describes an economic, political, and social system in which one country subjugates others, and brings them under its control.

Duration: Lesson will take place over 1 day.

Procedure:

Activity:

1. Anticipator: What is fake news and when do you think it started? How do you know it's fake?
2. Students will share their responses from the anticipator.
3. Historical context: Show students either the NBC Learns or PBS American Experience video, depending on how much time you have.
 - a. Students should be able to explain the historical context for the Spanish-American War and the rise of yellow journalism.
4. Debrief the video with students.
5. Share key vocabulary with students.
6. Primary source exploration (either as a whole class or in small groups)
 - a. How do you know it's yellow journalism? What is the slant all of these front pages present?
 - b. What is "sensationalist" about the words used in these front pages?
 - c. How would people feel as they read this news?
7. What similarities and differences do you see between today's "fake news" and yellow journalism?

What is comparable to yellow journalism today?

Materials:

historical context of the Spanish-American War

[NBC Learns "Spanish-American War" summary](#) (4 minutes)

[PBS American Experience "Yellow Journalism"](#) (8 minutes)

Primary Source Documents:

<https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85066387/1898-02-16/ed-1/seq-1/>

<https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn86069396/1898-05-03/ed-1/seq-1/>

<https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85058130/1898-07-04/ed-1/seq-1/>

Additional Reading:

[PBS American Experience "How the Media Started the Spanish-American War"](#) (3 minutes)