

## Explosion of the *Maine* Lesson Plan

### Central Historical Question: *What sank the Maine?*

#### Materials:

- *Maine* Powerpoint
- Copies of *Journal* Document
- Copies of *Times* Document
- *Maine* Guiding Questions
- *Maine* Graphic Organizer

#### Plan of Instruction:

1. Put the following headlines on the board:

- Search for Missing Bride Continues
- Bride Missing! Groom's Family Blame History of Mental Illness

Have each student respond in writing:

- How do these headlines differ?
- Consider the wording and how a reader might respond to each article.

2. Discussion:

- What does each headline imply?
- If these were articles, which would you have wanted to read first?
- Which do you think would have been the most reliable story? Why?
- Why might different newspapers choose to present the same event so differently?

3. Transition and Powerpoint: Today we are going to be comparing two newspaper accounts of an event that happened in 1898.

Show slide of *Maine* exploding and explain the following:

- *Cuba was colonized by Spain.*
- *Cuban rebels had been fighting for independence.*
- *Spain was thought to be brutal in repressing the rebellion.*
- *U.S. had business interests in Cuba.*
- *President McKinley had sent the *Maine* to Cuba (Why? To protect American interests? To prepare for war? To intimidate Spain? This is debated by historians. . .).*
- *Maine explodes on Feb 15, 1898.*

Introduce inquiry question: Who sunk the *Maine*?

Show slide of "Awake! United States." Read out loud.

Discussion questions:

- According to this song, who sunk the *Maine*?
- Does this prove the Spanish blew it up?

4. Hand out *Journal* document and *Times* document and have students read and fill out the graphic organizer.

5. Whole class discussion:

- Do you know what happened to the *Maine*?
- What evidence do you have for your answer? Give an example where the reporter uses solid evidence to support a claim made in the article.
- Do you think these articles would have been received differently by their readers in 1898? How so?
- What effect might the *Journal* article have had on its readers?
- What effect might the *Times* article have had on its readers?
- How significant do you think the *Maine* explosion was to the American people at this time? Why?

6. Assessment

Writing prompt: Which account is more believable? Why?

First section: Compare the evidence used by both papers to support their claims that the *Maine* was blown up by attack or by unknown causes. Which uses stronger evidence? Use at least three specific examples/phrases/words from the articles to support your position.

Second section: Does this difference in accounts matter? Why or why not?

---

Citations:

"Destruction of the War Ship *Maine* was the Work of an Enemy," *New York Journal and Advertiser*, (Feb. 17, 1898).

<http://historicalthinkingmatters.org/spanishamericanwar/0/inquiry/intro/>

"*Maine*'s Hull will Decide," *New York Times*, (Feb. 17, 1898).

<http://historicalthinkingmatters.org/spanishamericanwar/0/inquiry/intro/resources/10/>

## Document A: *New York Journal* (Modified)

DESTRUCTION OF THE WAR SHIP MAINE WAS THE WORK OF  
AN ENEMY

Assistant Secretary Roosevelt Convinced the Explosion of the War  
Ship Was Not an Accident.

The Journal Offers \$50,000 Reward for the Conviction of the  
Criminals Who Sent 258 American  
Sailors to Their Death.

Naval Officers All Agree That the Ship Was Destroyed on Purpose.  
NAVAL OFFICERS THINK THE MAINE WAS DESTROYED BY A  
SPANISH MINE.

George Bryson, the Journal's special reporter at Havana, writes that it is the secret opinion of many people in Havana that the war ship Maine was destroyed by a mine and 258 men were killed on purpose by the Spanish. This is the opinion of several American naval authorities. The Spaniards, it is believed, arranged to have the Maine drop anchor over a harbor mine. Wires connected the mine to the magazine of the ship. If this is true, the brutal nature of the Spaniards will be shown by the fact that they waited to explode the mine until all the men had gone to sleep. Spanish officials are protesting too much that they did not do it. Our government has ordered an investigation. This newspaper has sent divers to Havana to report on the condition of the wreck. This newspaper is also offering a \$50,000 reward for exclusive evidence that will convict whoever is responsible. Assistant Secretary of the Navy Theodore Roosevelt says he is convinced that the destruction of the Maine in Havana Harbor was not an accident. The suspicion that the Maine was purposely blown up grows stronger every hour. Not a single fact to the contrary has been produced.

**Source:** *Excerpt from New York Journal and Advertiser, February 17, 1898. Purchased by William Randolph Hearst in 1895, the Journal published investigative and human interest stories that used a highly emotional writing style and included banner headlines and graphic images.*

## Document B: *New York Times* (Modified)

MAINE'S HULL WILL DECIDE  
Divers Will Inspect the Ship's Hull to Find Out Whether the Explosion  
Was from the Outside or Inside.  
Magazines of War Ships Sometimes Blow Up Because of Too Much  
Heat Inside –  
Hard to Blow Up the Magazine from the Outside.

It has been a busy day for the Navy Department. The war ship Maine was destroyed in Havana Harbor last night. Officials in Washington and Havana have been sending cables all night long. Secretary Long was asked whether he thought this was the work of the enemy. He replied: "I do not. I am influenced by the fact that Captain Sigsbee has not yet reported to the Navy Department. It seems he is waiting to write a full report. So long as he has not made a decision, I certainly cannot. I should think from the signs however, that there was an accident – that the magazine exploded. How that came about I do not know. For the present, at least, no other war ship will be sent to Havana." Captain Schuley, who knows a great deal about war ships, did not entertain the idea that the Maine had been destroyed on purpose. He said that fires would sometimes start in the coal bunkers, and he told of such a fire on board another war ship that started very close to the magazine. The fire became so hot that the heat blistered the steel wall between the fire and the ammunition before the bunkers and magazine were flooded with water to stop the fire. He did not believe that the Spanish or Cubans in Havana had either the information or the equipment necessary to blow up the magazine, while the Maine was under guard.

**Source:** *New York Times*, February 17, 1898. Established in 1851, the *New York Times* provided investigative coverage of local New York issues and events, as well as national and international news.

## Guiding Questions

Name \_\_\_\_\_

### *New York Journal*

#### *Sourcing*

1. How long after the explosion of the *Maine* was this article written?
2. What does the headline of the article suggest about the newspaper's point of view?

#### *Close Reading*

3. Upon what type of evidence does the *New York Journal* base its claims?

### *New York Times*

#### *Sourcing*

1. How does the date of this article compare with the date on the *New York Journal and Advertiser* article?

#### *Close Reading*

2. According to these headlines, what happened to the *Maine*?
3. What kinds of evidence does the *New York Times* include to support its account of the incident?