IndyKids Teaching Guide
A free guide for teaching *IndyKids*
Spring 2026•Issue 95

The lesson plans below are divided into two Phases, each focusing on a different part of IndyKids Issue 95: the centerspread and cover story. Each phase includes a warm up, a reading activity and group work, and can be scheduled over one or two days, depending on student needs and the classroom time available to each teacher.

Phase 1

"Are We In a New Gilded Age?" *by Brooklynn Then*

Grade Level: Elementary/Middle School **Subject:** Social Studies, English Language Arts, Journalism
NYC Teachers: Possible Pairing Opportunity with Passport to Social Studies Grade 4, Unit 5, Mini Unit C (Robber Barons or Captains of Industry)

Overview: Is the U.S. in a new Gilded Age? The term "Gilded Age" refers to an historical period between 1890 and 1910 marked by a stark contrast between ultrawealthy monopolists and an exploited working class. On paper, the turn-of-the-century economy was booming, and the rich celebrated by indulging in ostentatious displays of wealth. Yet the majority of people faced shockingly poor labor conditions, urban poverty and homelessness. Commentators have recently pointed out the similarities between today's economy and the shocking wealth inequality and monopolistic business practices of the Gilded Age. In this phase, students will learn about the economic challenges facing today's working class and compare our present situation to Gilded Age politics. What similarities, if any, do they see between the two eras? What can we learn from the Gilded Age that might help us today?

Objective/Goal: In this phase, students will be asked to learn from history by comparing the Gilded Age to today's social and economic conditions. Through a quote reflection, popcorn reading and class discussion, students will learn how history can be relevant and useful to us as thinkers and citizens. They will then practice making historical comparisons in groups through a jigsaw activity.

Pacing: This phase is estimated to take roughly 40 minutes of class time, not including set-up and transition time between activities. The phase can be taught all together in one lesson, or split across two lessons, with lesson 1 covering the Warm Up and Activity 1 (15 minutes), and lesson two covering Activities 2 and 3 (25 minutes).

- Warm Up - Quote Reflection/Quick Write: 5 minutes
- Activity 1 - Popcorn Reading: 10 minutes
- Activity 2 - Jigsaw: 20 minutes
- Optional Activity 3 - Bubble Chart: 5 minutes

Materials:

- Copies of IndyKids Spring 2026 issue (available for download here) for each student
- Copies of worksheet for each student

Sources for educator:

- YouTube video: "What was the Gilded Age? | US History | Khan Academy" by Khan Academy
- Octavia Butler's "A Few Rules for Predicting the Future"

Warm Up - Quote Reflection/Quick Write (5 minutes): Students will do a quick write reflecting on the quote below. Ask: Why would someone want to "foretell the future"? How does studying history help with that?

> "The past … is filled with repeating cycles of strength and weakness, wisdom and stupidity, empire and ashes. To study history is to study humanity. And to try to foretell the future without studying history is like trying to learn to read without bothering to learn the alphabet." ~Octavia Butler, "A Few Rules for Predicting the Future"

Activity 1 - Popcorn Reading (10 minutes): Read the centerspread story, "Are We in a New Gilded Age?" by Brooklynn Thenn, together as a class. Have one student start reading and then call on another student to read the next paragraph, and so forth. Continue by calling on students to read aloud the vocabulary words and definitions at the top of their worksheet.

Lead a short discussion to ensure students understand what the Gilded Age represented. This discussion will model the type of analysis students will do in the next activity. Write key words from the discussion on the white board so students can reference them during Activity 2.

- When did the Gilded Age take place?
- What are some of the defining characteristics of the Gilded Age? (wealth inequality, homelessness, poor labor conditions, large monopolies)
- Who are some of the famous people associated with the Gilded Age? What were they famous for?
- What are some things from politics today that are similar to the Gilded Age?

Activity 2 - Jigsaw (20 minutes): Break students into four groups and assign each one an article from the centerspread: "Poorer Countries Are More Vulnerable to Climate Change" by Esmerlin Tavarez; "Raising Awareness About Student Homelessness" by Sianna Santos; "The Impact of Increasing Healthcare Prices in America" by Tucker Lupi; or "What Is SNAP, and Why Is Trump Cutting It?" by Jade Rodriguez & IndyKids Staff.

Students will work together to read and annotate their assigned article, using the questions on the worksheet to guide their discussions. Each group will then share their answers with the rest of the class, summarizing the article and explaining any similarities between their article's topic and the Gilded Age.

Optional Activity 3 - Bubble Chart (5 minutes): Create a compare/contrast bubble chart on chart paper to show comparisons between the Gilded Age (past) and current conditions (present), using what groups have learned from their articles.

Worksheet: “Are We In a New Gilded Age?”

gilded (adj):	1. covered or tinged with gold or a golden color 2. having a background of wealth and luxury
monopoly (n):	exclusive control of a particular market that is marked by the power to control prices and exclude competition *ex: Because Ticketmaster controls everything from venue bookings to event ticketing, many artists have accused it of being a monopoly.*
inequality (n):	the quality of being unequal or uneven
exploitation (n):	the act of meanly or unfairly making use of someone or something for one's own advantage

Questions for Close Reading

1. What is the main idea of this article?

_____

_____

_____

2. What are some facts and data points from your article that support the main idea?

_____

_____

_____

_____

3. What connections can you make between your article’s topic and the Gilded Age?

_____

_____

_____

_____

Phase 2

"At 250, the U.S. Is At a Crossroads" *by Aida Cepeda*

Grade Level: Elementary/Middle School **Subject:** Journalism, English Language Arts, Social Studies
NYC Teachers: Possible pairing opportunity with Passport to Social Studies Unit 3, Mini Unit D: The Declaration of Independence

Overview: Over the past decade, the United States' media landscape has become increasingly polarized and difficult to navigate. The morass of social media and the development of generative AI have only muddied the waters, making it more challenging to identify credible information. In this phase, students will build media literacy skills by dissecting and interpreting an IndyKids article on a highly politicized subject: the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence, which takes place on July 4th this year. As reporter Aida Cepeda explains, the anniversary has been marked by controversy over President Donald Trump's plans for the occasion, as well as sober reflections on the polarized state of the country on its 250th birthday. By identifying the main facts of the article and inspecting its sourcing, students will practice making sense of complex topics and using it to form their own opinions.

Objective/Goals: In this phase, students will learn how to identify key components of a news article, including its main topic, point of view and sources. In particular, the activity will ask them to consider surveys and polling as a source of information. What kinds of topics can be covered in a survey? How can we ask good questions? What kind of lessons can a survey teach us, and are there limits? By analyzing an article and its sourcing in the context of a controversial political news story, students will be introduced to important media literacy skills, learning how to read between the lines and use a news article to form their own opinions.

Pacing: This phase is estimated to take roughly 90 minutes of class time, not including set-up and transition time between activities. The phase can be taught all together in one lesson, or split across two lessons, with lesson 1 covering the Warm Up and Activity 1 (25 minutes) and lesson two covering Activity 2 and the Exit Ticket (35 minutes).

- Warm Up - Identity Chart: 5 minutes
- Activity 1 - Popcorn Reading and Think-Aloud: 20 minutes
- Activity 2 - Survey - Jigsaw: 30 minutes
- Alternative Activity 2 - Survey Mingle: 30 minutes
- Exit Ticket - Quick Write: 5 minutes

Materials:

- Copies of IndyKids Spring 2026 issue (available for download here) for each student
- Copies of worksheet for each student
- One copy of the Think Aloud Guide and Sample Answers for the teacher's reference
- Slides or print-outs of the reference materials below ("More than 80% of Americans…," "Poll: Major allies see US…," and "Two Types of Survey Questions") to review with the class
- Tablets or laptops, internet access, and access to Google Forms

Sources for educator:

- "Report: News Literacy in America" (News Literacy Project)
- "Inside the Partisan Battle Over America's 250th Anniversary Celebrations" (New York Times)

- "News Writing Fundamentals" (George Mason University) or "The Inverted Pyramid Structure" (Purdue) for information on journalistic basics, such as the 5Ws, inverted pyramid structure and "newsworthiness"
- "5 basic things journalists need to know about polls and surveys" (Journalist's Resource)
- "Writing Survey Questions" (Pew Research Center)

Warm Up - Identity Chart (5 minutes): Write "USA 250" on the whiteboard and ask students to shout out words they associate with the United States and the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. If needed, prompt students with questions such as:

- What are some words you can use to describe the United States?
- What does the Declaration of Independence make you think of?
- What people come to mind when you think of the United States and its history?
- What does the United States stand for?

Activity 1 - Popcorn Reading and Think-Aloud (20 minutes): Students will take turns reading aloud the front-page article, "At 250, the U.S. Is At a Crossroads" by Ava Cepeda. After reading, model media literacy by annotating the article for the class and answering the questions on the worksheet. This involves media literacy basics, such as identifying:

- the main topic of an article
- the "5Ws" (Who? What? When? Where? Why/How?)
- the sources used to back up a claim

See the "Think-Aloud Guide and Example Answers" resource below for more on how to lead this discussion. Students will take notes on a clean worksheet as they listen. Conclude by asking students to share their own opinions on the article and whether they agree with the writer.

Activity 1 - Survey (30 minutes): Use the resources below to lead a discussion about how researchers write survey questions. The first pages show the original public opinion polling data that was used in the IndyKids article, along with possible questions the pollsters could have asked to get that data. These pages can be shown to students to get them thinking about how surveys work and what kinds of questions they ask. The third page defines the two types of survey questions. Use this page to discuss the differences between closed-ended questions and open-ended questions.

Students will then break into small groups and work on tablets or laptops to create a survey on Google Forms. The groups will choose any topic and design a survey with 2 open-ended questions and 1 closed-ended question.

Share the links for all the surveys in a common location, like Canvas. Give students 10 minutes to submit answers to the other groups' surveys. Then, review and discuss the results of the surveys together as a class.

Alternative Activity 1 - Survey Mingle (30 minutes): If computers are not available, students will work in groups to write 3 closed-ended survey questions on any topic. Each student will write their group's questions on their own sheet of paper. Then, break up the groups and ask students to interview their peers during a 10-minute classroom mingle. Students will partner up and ask one another the survey questions, making tally marks on their papers to record the responses. Then, each student will find a new partner and survey them. Repeat until the time elapses. To conclude, call on a few students to share their findings with the class.

Exit Ticket - Quick Write (5 minutes): Ask students to reflect on the experience of creating and filling out a survey. What was it like to write or answer survey questions? What did they learn from the results, and what questions do they still have?

Worksheet: "At 250, the U.S. Is At a Crossroads"

1. What is the main topic of this article?

2. Can you identify this topic's **5Ws**?

WHO?	
WHAT?	
WHEN?	
WHERE?	
WHY/HOW?	

3. What kind of facts does the journalist use to teach us about this topic, and what sources do they use as evidence?

FACT **SOURCE**

◇ ➜

◇ ➜

◇ ➜

Think-Aloud Guide and Example Answers: "At 250, the U.S. Is At a Crossroads"

1. What is the main topic of this article?

The main topic of this article is the United States' celebration of the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence.

2. Can you identify this topic's **5Ws**?

The "5Ws" are five questions used to identify the basic facts of the topic an article is about: Who? What? When? Where? Why/How? Journalists use the 5Ws while writing to make sure they've included all the basic information a reader needs to know. Readers can use the 5Ws to make sure they understand those basics and the general scope of the article.

Typically, the answers to the 5Ws are found at the beginning of an article (as in example 1 below). However, because this article covers a range of topics, students might come up with various answers to the 5Ws, depending on how they answer "Who?" (see example 2).

	Example 1	Example 2
WHO?	The United States	President Trump and Freedom 250
WHAT?	The celebration of the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence	250th anniversary events including a UFC fight, IndyCar race, mobile museums, etc.
WHEN?	July 4, 2026	Around July 4, 2026
WHERE?	The whole country will celebrate the anniversary. Many events are planned, including events in Washington, D.C. and across the country in mobile vans.	Many events are planned in Washington, D.C.
WHY/HOW? ("Why/how is this happening?" or "Why does it matter?")	It is a big moment in history/a milestone. It's a time to reflect on our history and how people feel about the U.S.	President Trump wanted to host events that align with his political views and base.

3. What kind of background information and facts does the journalist use to teach us about this topic, and what sources do they use as evidence?

After the introduction, this article's structure has three sections: (1) background on the Declaration of Independence, (2) President Trump's plans for the anniversary, (3) reflections on the U.S. at 250. In each, the journalist uses different sources to provide information. Ask students to identify different facts in the article by looking for quotation marks and numbers. Lead a discussion about sourcing in articles: Why do writers include sources? What kinds of sources did this article use and why? What other sources could we look at to explore this topic?

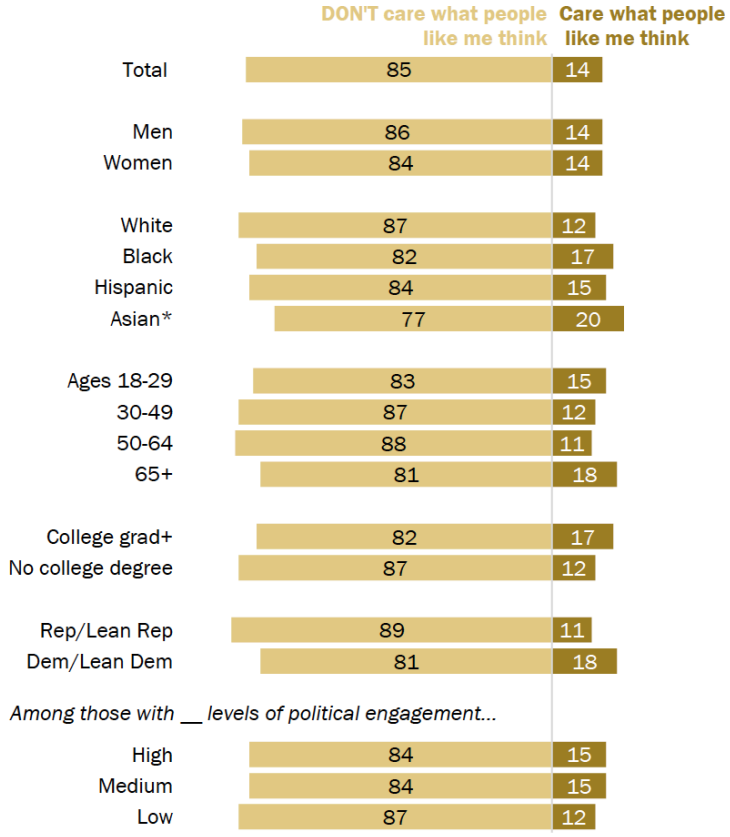
FACT		**SOURCE**
◇ "The Declaration of Independence … argued that "(1) God made all men equal…."	➜	Britannica Kids
◇ "People who donate more than $2.5 million will be giving speaking roles in Washington, D.C., at an event on July 4."	➜	The New York Times
◇ "over 83% of Americans said that elected officials do not care about what people like them think."	➜	A Pew 2023 survey of 24 nations

More than 80% of Americans believe elected officials don't care what people like them think

By Jenn Hatfield | April 30, 2024 | Pew Research Center

Overwhelming majority of Americans say most elected officials don't care what 'people like them' think

% who say most elected officials ...



* Asian adults were interviewed in English only.
Note: No answer responses not shown. Refer to methodology for full details on the measure of political engagement. White, Black and Asian adults include those who report being only one race and are not Hispanic. Hispanics are of any race.
Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted July 10-16, 2023.
"Americans' Dismal Views of the Nation's Politics"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Please complete the following sentence:

Most elected officials...

A. Care what people like me think
B. Don't care what people like me think

Do public officials care what people like you think?

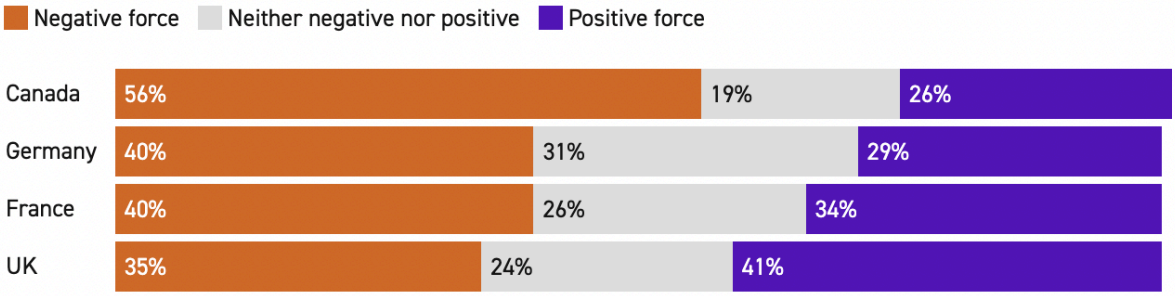
A. Yes
B. No

Poll: Major allies see US as unreliable and destabilizing

By Erin Doherty | 12/23/2025 | Politico

Canada, Germany and France lean negative on U.S. role in the world

Percentage of adults from each country who say the United States is either a **negative** or a **positive force** in the world overall



Numbers may not add up to 100 percent due to rounding. Public First conducted an online anonymous survey of 10,510 adults aged 18+ between the 5th - 9th of December in the U.K., U.S., France, Germany and Canada.

Source: The POLITICO Poll with Public First

Anna Wiederkehr/POLITICO

Please complete the following sentence:

The United States is…

A. a negative force in the world.
B. a positive force in the world.
C. neither a negative nor positive force in the world.

How would you describe the United States as a force on the world?

A. A negative force
B. A positive force
C. Neither a negative nor positive force

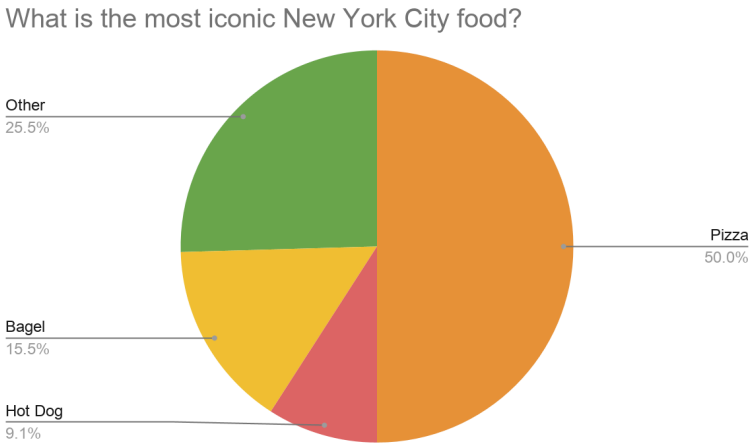
Two Types of Survey Questions

- Closed-Ended Questions: Questions that ask you to choose the answer you agree with the most from a list of options, like multiple-choice questions on a test.

  What is the most iconic New York City food?

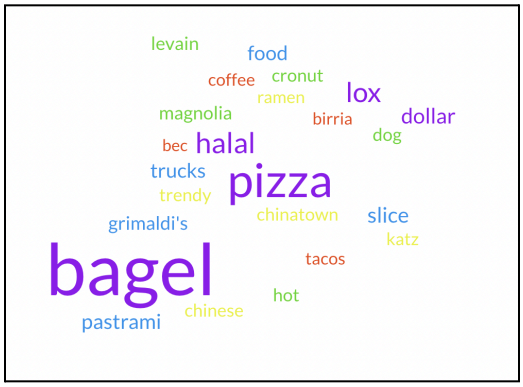
  A. Pizza
  B. Hot Dog
  C. Bagel
  D. Other

  Answers to closed-ended questions can easily be analyzed with graphs and charts.



- Open-Ended Questions: Questions that let you put in your own answers without choosing from a list.

  What is the most iconic New York City food?

  _____

  Answers to open-ended questions are a little harder to visualize in charts, but can bring up unexpected or surprising results.