

“To the Victor Belong the Spoils” (~15–30 min.)

Introduction

This is a [Noteboard](#) structure, focused on [brainstorming ideas](#).

Learning Goal: Analyze the historical context of Thomas Nast's "To the Victor" to explain why the spoils system became a target of public criticism — and whether that criticism was justified.

Students add notes about what they know of the cartoon's context — the cartoonist, the publication, the audience, and the political moment — and discuss the broader meaning.

Before the Activity

Prep Your Structure

After [signing in](#), click the button below to make a copy of the structure for each class.

Clone Structure for Your Class

(We recommend starting each title with a code that helps you identify the class.)

Prep Your Students

Teach about Andrew Jackson, the spoils system, and the civil service reform movement. Students need enough background to populate the Noteboard with meaningful context. Show students [the cartoon](#) and keep it visible while they work.

Set ground rules & norms with your students for using online activities and show them how to access your Superstructure:

- Go to [soops.io](#) and enter your structure's unique code
- OR
- Go directly to your structure's URL

Use this format with *any* political cartoon by [cloning a copy of this structure](#).

Use the Edit feature in the ... menu to change the title.

During the Activity

Here are the instructions for students:

- Move your mouse over an empty spot on the board. Click the plus icon where you'd like to write your idea.
- Type your idea.
- Pick a color for your note (consider assigning colors based on the prompt)
- Move your notes around to group related ideas together.

While your class contributes to the Superstructure, you can encourage them as they work, guide them with questions, and use Teacher View to gain insights about individual and class input.

After the Activity

We encourage teachers to lead a class discussion based on the Superstructure. You can ask a question in the Teacher View Class Insights panel to generate a customized discussion prompt, or consider asking one of these (designed for increasing ability levels):

- Which piece of context on our board do you think the cartoonist most wanted readers to already know? Why?
- What does the combination of creator, publication, and political moment tell us about who this cartoon was for — and who it wasn't for?
- To what extent does historical context shape what a political cartoon can accomplish? Use evidence from our board to support your argument.

We hope your class enjoys and learns from this Superstructure. We welcome [feedback](#)!