

## **iiiAmerican Experience “Monkey Trial” Video Notes**

*Inherit the Wind* is a work of fiction, but it is clearly based on the 1925 trial of John Scopes. In order to understand the historical events and real life individuals that provide the raw material for the play, you will watch this 80-minute video and answer the following questions. These questions should not define the limits of your curiosity, so be sure to take notes as you watch; there will be time to ask questions each day.

### **The Basic Information**

- Who is the defendant (the man on trial who is accused of committing a crime)?
- What crime did the defendant commit? What did the law in question prohibit?
- Where (town, state) is the trial taking place?
- When did the actual trial (jury selection) start?
- So what was the verdict?
- On appeal, what was decided about the law in question?
- Did other states have similar laws?
- Is the Tennessee law that was at the center of this trial still “on the books” today?

**Key players.** Can you identify the role of each in the Scopes Trial? The names with ✂ are key, so fill in chart on back for them.)

✂ **John T. Scopes**

✂ **Clarence Darrow**

✂ **William Jennings Bryan** (“the Great Commoner”)

✂ **H.L. Mencken**

✂ **John Raulston**

- George Rappalyea
- the ACLU
- F. E. Robinson
- John Butler – Tennessee legislator who drafted the statue making it unlawful to teach “any theory that denies the Story of the Divine Creation of man as taught in the Bible, and to teach instead that man has descended from a lower order of animals.” The Butler Act was the law that Scopes was accused of breaking.

### Questions for Part 1:

1. The spokesperson for the ACLU makes the point of noting that the ACLU's goal was NOT specifically to support Darwin's Theory of Evolution because they believed in that theory. Instead, the ACLU had a much broader reason for its support of Scopes. Explain what the ACLU's goal/ motivation was.

**2. The more things change, the more they stay the same?** In the political races of 2008, "change" was a reoccurring rallying cry, and at least one candidate (Obama) characterized the campaign as a battle between the *past and the future*. Several candidates (Huckabee/ Sarah Palin) built campaigns upon *religious values* and advocated changes to our Constitution to make it more in line with Biblical values. The 1920's were also a time of change. What economic and social forces were in conflict at that time? How did the trial really come to represent the larger conflict within society at that time?

3. How did Darrow's and Bryan's fathers influence their values?

4. According to the video, what was really on trial? What were Darrow's two alternative goals? (Hint – Neither was to get Scopes found "not guilty"!)

### **Part 2 – Cultural Concepts that started to emerge in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century**

*Social Darwinism* – the belief that society should embrace the "survival of the fittest" attitudes in social programs, and in so doing, *limit charity* to discourage survival of those who might not be genetically and biologically fit. A decade later Hitler would adopt similar ideas.

*Friedrich Nietzsche* – German philosopher who is famous, in part, for his statement "God is dead." Obviously, his views were strongly opposed by Fundamentalists, who saw some modern scholars' willingness to even discuss Nietzsche's views as a step in the wrong direction.

*Nihilism* – a philosophy that maintains that man's existence is without meaning, purpose, truth, or value, that "nothing matters and everything is permitted." Fundamentalists and conservatives strongly opposed this philosophy and viewed it as dangerous.

1. **Who were Leopold and Loeb?** Why did mention of them scare conservatives? How did they come to represent (to conservatives) the evil outcome of modern ideas?

2. **What is ironic** in John Butler's comment that he was disappointed in the judge's exclusion of debate on Evolution because he (Butler) would like to know what evolution is?

### **Part 3: The Trial Moves Outdoors**

1. Darrow faces the obstacle of having ALL of his scientist-witnesses barred from testifying. Everyone assumes that the trial is over. But whom does Darrow call as his surprise witness?

2. What last trick did Darrow have up his sleeve? How does he insure that Bryan would not have the last word and make the long-awaited speech against Darwin's Theory of Evolution?

3. Pay special attention to the film clips of Inherit the Wind and to Eloise Reed's comments. Why did the people of Dayton feel that Inherit the Wind is inaccurate? (The teaching of this text is often criticized, especially by Fundamentalists, who feel that it distorts historical facts to show Fundamentalism in an especially poor light. We will revisit this issue when we are finished with the text.)

### **Wrap up**

1. In addition to being one of the most famous in legal history, the Scopes Trial was also notable in broadcasting history. Why?

2. Who said that Bryan began life "as a hero" and "finished it as a buffoon"?

3. Who believed that "ideas can be dangerous"? (Do you?)

4. **✎Do the culture wars continue today?** Are there big divisions in our society between conservative/religious beliefs and liberal/secular beliefs? What examples can you give of **recent issues** that have been fought between these sides?

**Need to know more?** Want to see it all in writing? Explore some primary and secondary source information at the *Scopes Trial Home Page* at [www.law.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/scopes/scopes.htm](http://www.law.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/scopes/scopes.htm).

**Extra credit opportunities** – Web searches (Each worth 3 extra credit points.)

⌘ The video makes the point that the science textbooks of the 1920's all supported Evolutionary theory, but that the average Tennessean was less convinced. Go online and research today's attitude toward Evolution. Find statistics that quantify the views of the average scientist and the average American. Print out data and be prepared to summarize it briefly to the class.

⌘ When did the US Supreme Court first rule that state laws forbidding the teaching of evolution are unconstitutional? Print out research and summarize for class.

Research the 50s. How was freedom of speech is issue? Hint—who was

Creative assignment: You've been hired by People Magazine to write a paragraph profile of one of the 3 key players

Writing activities:

Type a paragraph in which you give a descriptive profile of Darrow, Bryan, or Mencken. Be sure to have topic sentence that lets the character come alive.

Making inferences – look at the cartoons, explain the key message of each