

## Scopes Trial Lesson Plan

**Central Historical Question:**  
*Why did people care about the Butler Act?*

### Materials:

- Scopes Movie: <http://historicalthinkingmatters.org/scopestrial/>
- "Textbook" Document
- Copies of Scopes Documents A-D
- Copies of Scopes Guiding Questions
- Copies of Scopes Graphic Organizer

### Plan of Instruction:

1. Hand out the "Textbook-A Civic Biology" Document and have students answer the questions on the bottom.

Elicit student answers.

2. Mini-lecture on the history of religious movements in the United States and the rise of Fundamentalism:
  - *As we've seen, every so often in the United States, a wave of people become very religious.*
  - *In the United States, religious waves have often been associated with questioning authority and power or questioning the elite.*
  - *Often, these religious revivals involve passionate speakers and people feel that they are directly connected to God.*
  - *The First Great Awakening (1740s-1750s)—helped fuel rebellion against England and the Anglican Church (popular religions: Presbyterianism, Baptists, Methodists).*
  - *The Second Great Awakening (1820s-1840s)—helped launch a number of 19<sup>th</sup> century political movements—temperance, abolition (during this time, spread of Methodists and Baptists; birth of Mormonism).*
  - *In the 1920s, a new religious wave hit the country: Fundamentalism. Fundamentalists believed in the literal truth of the bible. They also were very opposed to what they believed to be the sins of modern life.*
3. Play Scopes Movie: <http://historicalthinkingmatters.org/scopestrial/>

After watching movie, ask students to begin filling out the top of the graphic organizer: What was happening in the 1920's?

Review: Who supported the Butler Act? (Tennessee) Who opposed it? (John Scopes)

4. Hand out Scopes Documents A-D, and have students answer Guiding Questions. After students answer Guiding Questions, they should fill out Graphic Organizer.
5. Discussion:
  - Who supported the Butler Act? What were their reasons?
  - Who opposed the Butler Act? What were their reasons?
  - How did Reverend Straton view the big cities? How did the *New York Times* view Dayton, Tennessee? Why did those views play a role in the Scopes trial?
  - In what way did the historical context of the 1920s affect the battle over the Butler Act?
  - How was the Scopes Trial more than just a simple debate between evolution and creationism?

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Citations:

Defense Pleads Not Guilty; Cases Outlined, Transcript from Scopes trial, July 15, 1925. Reproduced in Jeffrey P. Moran (Ed.), *The Scopes Trial: A Brief History with Documents*, (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2002), 129.

George W. Hunter, *A Civic Biology* (New York: American Book Co., 1914), 195-96, 261-263. Available online at *Famous Trials in American History*, <http://www.law.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/scopes/scopes.htm>

Sparks, Jesse. Letter to the editor, *Nashville Tennessean*, July 3, 1925, p. 4. In Jeffrey P. Moran (Ed.), *The Scopes Trial: A Brief History with Documents*. (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2002), 186-188.

Straton, John Roach. "The Most Sinister Movement in the United States," *American Fundamentalist*, Dec. 26, 1925, pp. 8-9. Reproduced in Jeffrey P. Moran (Ed.), *The Scopes Trial: A Brief History with Documents*. (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2002), 210-212.

"Crank and Freaks Flock to Dayton." *New York Times*. July 11, 1925, p. 1.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

*In 1925, Tennessee passed the following law, called the Butler Act:*

It shall be unlawful for any teacher . . . 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 made it illegal to teach from textbooks like the one below.*

### **Textbook – A Civic Biology, 1925**

#### **The Doctrine of Evolution.**

We have now learned that animals may begin with very simple one-celled forms and end with a group which contains man himself. The great English scientist Charles Darwin explained the theory of evolution. This is the belief that simple forms of life on the earth slowly gave rise to more complex forms.

#### **Man's Place in Nature.**

We see that man must be placed with the vertebrate animals because of his vertebral column. We place man with the apelike mammals because of structural likeness. The group of mammals which includes the monkeys, apes, and man we call the primates.

#### **Evolution of Man.**

There once lived races of men who were much lower in their mental organization than present people. If we follow the early history of man, we find that at first he must have been little better than one of the lower animals. Gradually he must have learned to use weapons and kill his prey, first using rough stones for this purpose. Man then began to farm the fields, and to have permanent houses. Civilization began long ago, but even today the earth is not entirely civilized.

**Source:** *Excerpt from widely-used biology textbook, A Civic Biology, written in 1914 by George W. Hunter, a biology teacher from New York City.*

#### **Questions:**

1. (Close reading) How does this textbook explain where man came from?
2. (Contextualization) Why might people in Tennessee in 1925 have wanted to outlaw this textbook?

## Document A: Sparks Letter to the Editor (Modified)

Dear Editor:

When the bill against the teaching of evolution in public schools was passed, I could not see why more mothers were not thanking the lawmakers. They were protecting our children from one of the destructive forces which will destroy our civilization. I for one was grateful that they stood up for what was right. And grateful, too, that we have a Christian man for governor who will defend the Word of God against this so-called science.

The Bible tells us that the gates of Hell shall not win against the church. We know there will always be those who set an example for the cross of Christ. But in these times of materialism I thank God deep down in my heart for everyone whose voice is raised for humanity and the coming of God's kingdom.

Mrs. Jesse Sparks  
Pope, Tennessee

**Source:** *Mrs. Jesse Sparks, letter to the editor, Nashville Tennessean, July 3, 1925. Mrs. Sparks was one of many citizens who wrote letters to Tennessee's newspapers in response to the Butler Act.*

## Document B: Malone's Trial Speech (Modified)

The least that this generation can do, your Honor, is to give the next generation all the facts and theories that observation and learning have produced—give it to the children in the hope of heaven that they will make a better world than we have. We have just had a war with 20 million dead. Civilization is not so proud of the work of the adults.

For God's sake let the children have their minds kept open—close no doors to their knowledge. Make the distinction between religion and science. Let them have both. Let them both be taught. Let them both live.

We feel we stand with progress. We feel we stand with science. We feel we stand with intelligence. We feel we stand with freedom in America. We are not afraid. Where is the fear? We meet it! Where is the fear? We defy it!  
(Loud applause. Bailiff raps for order)

**Source:** *Excerpt from Dudley Field Malone's speech on the fourth day of the Scopes trial, July 15, 1925. Dayton, Tennessee. Dudley Field Malone was a New York attorney who was on the defense team, defending John Scopes. He argued for the importance of teaching science.*

## Document C: Reverend Straton Article (Modified)

The real issue at Dayton and everywhere today is this: “Whether the religion of the Bible shall be ruled out of the schools, while the religion of evolution, with its harmful results, shall be ruled into the schools by law.”

John Scopes’s lawyers left New York and Chicago, where real religion is ignored, where crime is most widespread, and they came to Tennessee to save a community where women are still honored, where men are still polite, where laws are still respected, where home life is still sweet, where the marriage vow is still sacred. Think of the nerve of it! and the enormous vanity of it!

**Source:** *Excerpt from Reverend John Roach Straton’s article in American Fundamentalist, “The Most Sinister Movement in the United States.” December 26, 1925. John Roach Straton was a minister who preached across the country against the sins of modern life. He was firmly opposed to the teaching of evolution.*

## Document D: New York Times Article (Modified)

Cranks and Freaks Flock to Dayton:  
Strange Theories are Preached and Sung  
Visitors to Scopes Trial are Mostly Tennessean Mountaineers.

Tennessee came to Dayton today in overalls to attend the trial of John Scopes for the teaching of evolution. The Tennesseans came from mountain farms near Dayton, where work, usually begun at day light, had been deserted so that gaunt, tanned, toil-worn men and women and shy children might see William Jennings Bryan’s “duel to the death” with “enemies of the Bible.”

They stood in groups under the trees, listening to evangelists, moved by the occasion to speak for the “Word.” They listened to blind minstrels, who sang mountain hymns and promises of reward for the faithful, and to a string quartet of negroes. They walked up and down hot, dusty Market Street, with its buildings hung with banners, and lined with soda-water, sandwich, and book stalls, as for a carnival. Religion and business had become strangely mixed.

### Vocabulary

Cranks: oddballs

minstrels: white entertainers who wore black makeup and performed in variety shows

**Source:** *Excerpt from a front page New York Times article, “Cranks and Freaks Flock to Dayton.” July 11, 1925. The New York Times editorials sided with the defense and criticized Dayton’s small-town mentality. Dayton’s population in 1925 was 1,800.*

## Guiding Questions

Name \_\_\_\_\_

### Document A: Sparks Letter to the Editor

1. (Sourcing) Who is Mrs. Sparks and why does she care about what is taught in schools?
2. (Contextualizing) What is Mrs. Sparks referring to when she says “these times of materialism”?
3. (Close Reading) Find all of the words that suggest the presence of a great danger. Why might Mrs. Sparks believe that evolution is such a threat?

### Document B: Malone’s Trial Speech

1. (Sourcing) The audience in the courthouse mostly supported Bryan and the Butler Act. Why do you think they applauded Malone’s speech?
2. (Close Reading) Why does Malone think science is so important?
3. (Contextualizing) What is Malone referring to when he says “civilization is not so proud of the work of the adults”?

### **Document C: Reverend Straton Article**

1. (Close reading) What words does Straton use to show that he likes small towns?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. (Contextualizing) According to Straton, what are signs of corruption in New York and Chicago?

### **Document D: New York Times Article**

1. (Sourcing) What was New York City like in the 1920s? Why might the New York Times look down on Dayton, Tennessee?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. (Close Reading) How does the New York Times describe the local Tennesseans? What words can you find that show that the New York Times thinks of these people and events as bizarre and interesting?

Name \_\_\_\_\_

**Context:** *What was happening in the 1920s?*

<b>SUPPORTED the Butler Act</b>	<b>OPPOSED the Butler Act</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• State of Tennessee</li><li>• Fundamentalists</li><li>• William Jennings Bryan (defended Tennessee)</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• John Scopes</li><li>• American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU)</li><li>• Clarence Darrow (defended John Scopes)</li></ul>
<p><b>Person or Source:</b></p> <p><b>Reason for supporting Butler Act:</b></p> <p><b>Quote:</b></p>	<p><b>Person or Source:</b></p> <p><b>Reason for opposing Butler Act:</b></p> <p><b>Quote:</b></p>
<p><b>Person or Source:</b></p> <p><b>Reason for supporting Butler Act:</b></p> <p><b>Quote:</b></p>	<p><b>Person or Source:</b></p> <p><b>Reason for opposing Butler Act:</b></p> <p><b>Quote:</b></p>