UNIT: How the Other Half of the Half of the Half…..Lived

Standards:

US History II: Reconstruction to the Present, 1877 – 2001
Industrial America and Its Emerging Role in International Affairs, 1870-1920
US II. 1. Explain the various causes of the Industrial Revolution. (H, E)
   C. the role of business leaders, entrepreneurs, and inventors such as
      Alexander Graham Bell, Andrew Carnegie, Thomas Edison, J.P.
      Morgan, John D. Rockefeller, and Cornelius Vanderbilt

US II. 2 Explain the important consequences of the Industrial Revolution. (H,E)
   A. the growth of big business

Connecting my unit on Newport may be a bit of a stretch for the standards. My
initial connection is that the summer cottages were one way that the wealthy of
the Gilded Age spent and invested their money. My plan for the future would be
to connect Newport to a unit on “the role of business leaders, entrepreneurs, and
investors..” in the Gilded Age. I started reading Jean Strouse’s Morgan: American
Financier and became interested in the Vanderbilts and Edward Julius Berwind
on my site visit to Newport and feel that I could easily expand on these lessons to
include a study of these individuals.

Introduction:

When I first read the assignment options for this course I was drawn to the idea
of doing a visit to an historic site. I immediately thought of Newport. My trip there
many years ago left an imprint concerning the lavish excesses of the Gilded Age. I also teach world history and years ago taught western civilization, including AP western civilization, courses that were very Eurocentric. Thus I have taught a great deal of history that has dealt with the complexities of a privileged nobility and all that it brings to the social, economic and cultural life of a society, as well its impact on governance. Because the business leaders and entrepreneurs of the Gilded Age have been described as an American aristocracy, Newport’s mansions seem to be a good fit for my lessons.

About two hours after I arrived in Newport, I decided that I wanted to return there with my classes as I had in 1989. Thus I have decided to incorporate a field study visit into my unit as its primary focus. I enjoy using primary sources, especially documents, with my classes. Some day with further research, they will be a welcomed addition to my unit. For this unit however, my primary source material is the place itself, Newport. The Breakers, Marble House, Rosecliff, and The Elms provide a wealth of resource material in and of themselves. The DVD produced by the Preservation Society of Newport County, which I use in my unit begins, “Beauty, artistry, wealth, power, monumental scale, open spaces, whimsical place, windows on a world now gone, the Newport mansions.” All of these words or phrases are reflected in each of these amazing estates.

The mansions provide a window through which we view a small, miniscule percentage of the people who lived in that age. As our course has progressed, we have researched and discussed topics that have related more to the other 99.9% of the population that lived in that age and thus I will try to lead my students to look beyond the opulence that they will see in Newport. A failure of my venture however, lies in the fact that I have only used one resource that we discussed in class, the Magazine of History’s edition devoted to the Gilded Age.

**Lesson Objectives:**

- Students will discuss an overview of the Gilded Age and its impact upon Newport, Rhode Island.

- Students will participate in a field study trip to Newport, Rhode Island and will tour The Elms and Marble House.

- Students will view these houses and interpret what the artwork, furnishings, and architecture say about the lifestyles of those who summered in them.

- Students will view and analyze photographs and objects on their site visit as well as in the classroom.
• Students will view these houses and their grounds and provide analysis on what support staff would have been needed to maintain these properties and the lifestyles of those who lived in them.

• Students will compare and contrast the lifestyles of those who lived in Marble House and/or The Elms with those who worked there.

Schedule: Time and Materials:

Day #1: Introduction to the Gilded Age:

Preread: Short article America’s Gilded Age – this articles from the website of the Flagler Museum gives a very short introduction to the age.

Unit Focus Questions: In describing the monied class of the Gilded Age, the article says, “… this group of newly wealthy citizens of a relatively young country found context and meaning for their lives and good fortune by thinking of themselves as heirs of a great Western Tradition. They traced their cultural lineage from the Greeks, through the Roman Empire, to the European Renaissance, particularly the Venetian Renaissance.” How is this connection manifested in their summer cottages?

What do these spaces say about class in Gilded Age Newport?

Class:

Begin class with a brief discussion of the homework assignment and provide the class with the Unit Focus Question. Next show the second section of the Preservation Society’s DVD, The Romantic Era (9:22). This gives an overview of the early history of Newport with connections to wealth and the Chine trade. It also highlights some of Newport’s earlier houses such as Kingscote and Chateau-Sur-Mer. Underscore Newport’s ideal location and climate and its early attraction as a summer resort for the wealthy.

Day #2: Introduction (Cont.) & Preparation For Filed Study to Newport:

Show the Preservation Society’s DVD, part I, The Gilded Age (17:00). The video begins with the lines, “Beauty, artistry, wealth, power, monumental scale, open spaces, whimsical places, windows on a world now gone, the Newport mansions. As the 20th century was dawning, the leaders of America’s economic and social life were creating a wide range of innovative and dramatic public and private architecture. Few cities in America saw this played out in such a vast range of styles and designs as Newport, Rhode Island.” The video gives an excellent introduction to Newport’s four major Gilded Age cottages, the Breakers, Marble House, Rosecliff, and The Elms. These houses are explored inside and out, an excellent glimpse into what we will see on our field study.
We would also need to spend a piece of this class giving some of the logistic instructions for the field study though if discussion of the video takes too much time we can also use time on the bus tomorrow to explain the tasks involved with the field study.

**Day #3: Field Study Trip to Newport, Rhode Island: Marble House & The Elms:**

We will travel by bus from Fitchburg to Newport (two hours) and will visit Marble House and then The Elms.

**Tools of the Trade:**

The class of 40 is divided into ten groups of four students. Each group will be assigned a room or area in both houses on which to “specialize.” Note: In our regular history classes, the 40 are divided into 3 history classes.

Each student will have a small spiral notebook in which to jot down notes and observations. Their instructions are as follows:

**[THE INFORMATION GIVEN BELOW IS A COPY OF THE HANDOUT THAT WILL BE GIVEN TO THE STUDENTS TO GUIDE THEM ON THEIR TOURS]**

As you tour the houses and grounds of Marble House and The Elms, consider the following (be very specific):

(1) What would it have been like to spend summers living in one of these cottages? i.e. What would your daily routine have looked like?

(2) How much support staff would have been necessary to run these estates? Be very specific with a number and specific role/job for each.

(3) What did you learn about the history of each house?

(4) Choose one interesting fact from each house to share with the class.

In your group you will be assigned one room/area in each house, at random, during the tour. Divide tasks and make notes of your observations:

(A) What use(s) was made of the room/area?
(B) Describe the décor/design of the room/area.
(C) Describe the furnishings in the room/area.
(D) Describe the special artwork located in the room/area.

Homework: Transcribe your notes from your notebook onto good paper.

**Day #4: Deprogramming the Field Study**

This class will include the entire 40 students who participated in the field study. Homework will be collected during homeroom period to allow time for it to be photocopied so that each member of each group has a copy of everyone in the group’s notes.

I would begin the class by asking the class for positive or negative feedback on the field study trip, including suggestions for future trips to Newport. I have found doing that to be very productive when I have taken my classes on field studies in the past. A good source of discussion would be answers to the question from the filed study, “choose one interesting fact from each house to share with the class.”

Time will be spent in groups and each student will complete an Artifact Analysis Worksheet (NARA) choosing at least one of the items that he/she saw yesterday during our field study, input from members of the group is encouraged.

Homework: Each student must complete one Artifact Analysis Worksheet.

**Day #5: Sharing Artifacts**

Students will share Artifact Analysis Worksheets with the class. After each one is shared, the class will discuss the question – what does this artifact tell us about the lives of those who lived in the house?

This activity should take the entire class period.

Homework: Each student receives a Photo Analysis Worksheet and one of six photos: Alva Vanderbilt Belmont’s bedroom from Marble House, Consuelo Vanderbilt’s bedroom from Marble House, Mrs. Berwind’s bedroom from The Elms, Figure 7 (Maid’s room & Servant’s room) from the Breakers, Figure 6 (Servant’s room fireplace) from the Breakers, and Figure 12 (Berkey & Gay furnishings) from the Breakers. Each student is responsible to complete a worksheet on his/her photo for homework.

**Day #6: A Contrast: Working in the Mansions of Gilded Age Newport**

Though we did not visit the Breakers, it provides the model for our study of servant life in Gilded Age Newport. This is primarily true because of the existence of good source material on the subject as well as the fact that architect Richard Morris Hunt’s treatment of the servant quarters there was recognized as the best
to that time in the Newport mansions. I have attached segments of Holly Collins’ study, *Servant Life At the Breakers: A Room With a View* for teacher background material. It is fascinating indeed and could easily be read by high school level students. Especially interesting are sections entitled “Serving the Wealthy,” “Serving Mrs. Vanderbilt,” “Living-in at the Breakers,” and sections describing the roles of the butler, ladies maid, valet, and kitchen maid. I would have my students read it, but I am attempting to let the houses be the focal points of these lessons. Perhaps if the photo analysis activities do not generate solid enough discussion, I will have them read these sections in their small groups.

Begin class with a discussion of the question that they completed on their field study: **How much support staff would have been necessary to run these estates? Be very specific with a number and specific role/job for each.**

After a discussion of student impressions from their visit, distribute the handout *The High Cost of Being Rich* (*This Fabulous Century: 1900 – 1910*, p.220). It provides a list of an estates payroll, though it points out that it is not “…of the richest families, whose payrolls would of course be much larger.” This provides an example for the students to compare with their own estimates and tallies.

**Small group work:** Now place the student into groups of three determined by the photos that they worked with for homework: those who worked with servant rooms grouped together and those who worked with the bedrooms grouped together. After a short introduction to the servant/worker class in Newport have the students compare their worksheets paying close attention to two areas: (1) the things that they might infer from the photos & (2) questions raised by the photos. Add to these questions: what does your photo say about class in Newport.

**Day #7: Final Analysis**

Have the groups share their findings from yesterday. Hopefully they will mention the vast differences between the spaces.

It is appropriate to finish the unit by returning to our original focus questions.

**Unit Focus Questions:** In describing the monied class of the Gilded Age, the article says, “… this group of newly wealthy citizens of a relatively young country found context and meaning for their lives and good fortune by thinking of themselves as heirs of a great Western Tradition. They traced their cultural lineage from the Greeks, through the Roman Empire, to the European Renaissance, particularly the Venetian Renaissance.” How is this connection manifested in their summer cottages?

What do these spaces say about class in Gilded Age Newport?

Discuss these questions with the class.
Assessment:

- Students will be able to provide analysis of the spaces that they view on their field study trip to Newport.

- Students will be able to assimilate information on the spaces that they view on their field study by paying close attention to the tour provided.

- Students will be able to speculate on the staffing that would be necessary to run and maintain Marble House and The Elms.

- Students will be able to utilize Photo Analysis Worksheets and Artifact Analysis Worksheets to provide analysis of artifacts viewed on the field study and photos studied in class.

- Students will be able to complete regular homework assignments that accompany this unit.

- Students will submit a final portfolio containing their field study notes, analysis worksheets, and a final paper (details contained below).

Student Written Assessment:

In an essay of at least 500 words answer one of our two unit questions.

Materials:

- “America’s Gilded Age” – 5 page article from the Flagler Museum
- Television
- DVD player
- DVD, Newport Mansions, Preservation Society of Newport County
- Small spiral flip notebooks for each student
- Pencils for each student
- Handout – “Newport Field Study: Guidelines & Tasks”
- National Archives Artifact Analysis Worksheet (www.archives.gov)
- National Archives Photo Analysis Worksheet (www.archives.gov)
- Photo – Alva Vanderbilt Belmont’s bedroom from Marble House
- Photo – Consuelo Vanderbilt’s bedroom from Marble House
- Photo – Mrs. Berwind’s bedroom from The Elms
- Photos – Maid’s Room & Servants Room from the Breakers
- Photo – Servant’s Room Fireplace from the Breakers
- Photos – Berkey & Gay Furnishings from the Breakers
- “Servant Life At the Breakers: A Room With a View” – selections from this paper for teacher background and possible use with students
- Handout – “The High Cost of Being Rich”
- Handout – The Progressive Era – section chapter on this era from my text
Alva Vanderbilt Belmont’s Bedroom

Consuelo Vanderbilt’s Bedroom
Mrs. Berwind’s Bedroom