



The Gilded Age featuring the Phonograph

OVERVIEW

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

How does the invention of the phonograph represent how the daily lives of Americans changed during the Gilded Age?

OVERVIEW

*In this lesson, students will explore the social, economic, and political effects of the Industrial Revolution during the Gilded Age. Students will examine inventions like the phonograph and industrial growth data during this period to determine why the Gilded Age appeared golden on the surface. Students will then analyze contemporaneous newspaper articles about Upton Sinclair's 1906 book, *The Jungle* to identify the societal problems hidden under the Gilded Age's golden exterior.*



Thomas Edison, full-length portrait, seated, facing front, with phonograph. , ca. 1878. Photograph. <https://www.loc.gov/item/89714876/>.

Before the phonograph was invented in 1877 by Thomas Edison, music could only be heard if it was played live at home, performed in a concert hall, or presented in other places where music was played by musicians. The phonograph, like other inventions of the Gilded Age, would change the lives of Americans and would be the beginning of what most historians consider “Modern America”. The time period of the Gilded Age (1876-1900) saw great advancements in transportation with the expansion of railroads, and telecommunications with the invention of the telephone. Inventions and innovations spurred rapid growth in the economy through the railroads, steel, coal, and other industries.

The Gilded Age was propelled by the Second Industrial Revolution that began around 1870. Historians adopted the term, “Gilded Age” for this era from Mark Twain and Charles Dudley Warner’s satirical novel of the same name published in 1873. In the book, Twain and Warner offer commentary on greed and corruption during this time period by using the word “gilded.” “Gilded” refers to the practice of covering the surface of cheap metals with thin gold leaf. In doing so, the outside of an object glitters with gold, thus projecting an appearance of great quality, while concealing the poorer quality of the object’s interior elements. This metaphor has been applied to the Gilded Age where industrial growth and prosperity by a few concealed the many societal problems in America underneath the surface.

The Second Industrial Revolution transformed the United States. The transition from an agricultural to an industrial society led to the growth of the modern city. Between 1870 and 1920, eleven million people migrated from rural to urban areas where the majority of manufacturing jobs were located. In addition to this migration, twenty-five million immigrants came to the



United States and made urban areas their home during this time period. This rapid population growth shaped the cities we know today but also led to new problems in society. Overcrowded tenements, poor sanitation, corrupt political machines, and poor working conditions lay underneath the advancements in urban areas during the Second Industrial Revolution.

As industrialization shaped America, the gap between the rich and the poor widened. During the Gilded Age, the richest 4,000 families had as much wealth as the rest of the 11.6 million families in the United States. Some of the wealthiest men during this time, Andrew Carnegie, J.P. Morgan, John D. Rockefeller, and Cornelius Vanderbilt have been called both “Robber Barons” and “Captains of Industry”. These men were labeled “Robber Barons” for their ethically questionable business practices; like forming monopolies, using their power to influence politics, and their exploitation of workers. They were given the more favorable label, “Captains of Industry,” for their role in driving the boom in industrialization and innovation that led to increased job opportunities and the nation’s economic growth.

One aspect that made the Gilded Age not golden underneath its shiny surface was the lack of infrastructure and government regulation to keep up with industrial expansion. Examples of this can be seen in the photographs of Jacob Riis, which brought viewers into the crowded tenements of New York City where much of the city’s immigrant working-class lived, and disease spread quickly and living conditions were poor. Or in the Chicago meat packing plants, where the deplorable working conditions for meat processing are unimaginable in the 21st Century. Lastly, in political machines like Tammany Hall in New York City, where government corruption was rampant but local politicians sought to remain in power by trading job opportunities with immigrant voters in exchange for their support during elections.

OBJECTIVES

Upon completion of this lesson, students will:

1. KNOW (KNOWLEDGE):

- The social, economic, and political effects of the Second Industrial Revolution
- The impact of the Industrial Revolution in urban and rural places
- Why this period of time is referred to as the “Gilded Age”
- The role of business leaders, entrepreneurs, and inventors during this time period
- The societal conditions of the Gilded Age as reflected in Upton Sinclair’s book, *The Jungle*

2. MASTERY OBJECTIVE:

- Students will be able to describe how the daily lives of Americans changed during the Gilded Age through the analysis of images, data, and primary sources.

ACTIVITIES

MATERIALS NEEDED

- A device with internet access (1 per student)

PREPARATION

1. Provide students access on their device to the following newspaper documents from the Library of Congress website.
 - **Article 1 – “Upton Sinclair’s Own Story of the Horrors of Packingtown”**
 - **Article 2 – “Upton Sinclair’s Own Story of How He Was Led to Expose Beef Trust Horrors”**
 - **Article 3 – “Upton Sinclair Tells About the Sufferings of Women in Packingtown”**
 - **Article 4 – “Discovery of Condemned-Meat Industry Accidental, Says Upton Sinclair”**
2. Display **Gallery Walk – Robber Baron or Captain of Industry?** around the classroom.

MOTIVATIONAL ACTIVITY

1. Ask students:
 - What was the last song you streamed?
 - If you could not stream the song to your phone, how would you have listened to it?
 - Before music could be streamed and downloaded to a smartphone, how do you think music was listened to? (*MP3 Players, CDs, Radio, Cassette Tapes, Record Players*)
 - How might streaming have changed the way people listen to music?
2. Display **Image 1, The Phonograph and Thomas Edison** and ask students:
 - Do you know who and what is pictured here?
3. Inform students that this is a photograph of the inventor Thomas Edison and the phonograph, which he invented in 1877. Explain to students that the phonograph introduced the first time that recorded audio could be listened to. Ask students:
 - How do you think this machine recorded and played audio?

4. Play the Youtube video “1903 Edison Phonograph Recording Demo” from The Henry Ford.. Then ask students:
 - How do you think music was listened to before the phonograph? (*Music was played at home on an instrument, singing of music at home, attending a concert hall or other places where music was performed*)
 - How do you think the phonograph changed the lives of Americans during this time period?
5. Inform students that they will examine the phonograph and other inventions of the Second Industrial Revolution in order to be able to describe what life was like during this time period.

PROCEDURE

Part 1: Industrialization during the Gilded Age

1. Display **Image 2, Gilding Example** and inform students that the time period from roughly 1876 to 1900 is referred to as the Gilded Age. Ask students:
 - What does the word gilded or gilding mean? (*Normally a cheaper material covered thinly with gold leaf or gold*). If you do not know, what might you guess based on the image?
 - Based on what gilded means, can you predict why this time period is called the Gilded Age? (*Guide students to the conclusion that this time period appeared to be prosperous and golden on the surface but was concealing societal problems in America on the inside. This time period looked good from the outside but was hiding problems underneath.*)
2. Distribute **Handout – Writing Prompt Evidence Log** to students and explain that over the course of this lesson they will collect evidence to help them answer the writing prompt at the end of the lesson.
3. Inform students that they will analyze some of the inventions of the Second Industrial Revolution during the Gilded Age to determine part of the reason the era appeared “golden” on the outside but problematic underneath the surface.
4. Present **Slideshow 1, Gilded Age Inventions** and distribute **Handout – Inventions Bracket** to students. Explain to students that they will use a bracket system to analyze a selection of Gilded Age inventions through images and video to determine which invention had the greatest impact on the daily lives of Americans.
5. Guide students through each invention in the slideshow using the teacher notes. Encourage students to use the guiding questions on the handout when deciding which invention will move on to the next bracket. (*Encourage students there is no right answer and ask volunteers to share their picks and reasoning as you move through the presentation to create a dialogue.*)
6. After the presentation is complete and students have finished their bracket, ask students:

- What invention did you pick as having the greatest impact and why did you choose it?
7. Distribute **Handout – Industrial Growth Reading**. Ask students to follow the directions and complete Step 1. Then ask students to work with a partner to complete Step 2 and Step 3.
 8. After students have completed all three steps of the handout, ask students to share with the class the unforeseen consequences they thought of in their partner groups.
 9. Instruct students to look back at their evidence log and ask students:
 - What is one piece of evidence you have discovered so far that can go under the category of why the Gilded Age appeared golden on the surface?
 10. Instruct students to work independently to provide on their evidence log at least two more pieces of evidence from the lesson materials as to why the Gilded Age appeared golden on the surface.

Part 2: Industrialization and Societal Impact

1. Ask students to share what they wrote on their evidence log.
2. Explain to students that during the Gilded Age, there was a lack of government regulation and infrastructure to keep up with the rapid industrial growth. Ask students:
 - What does government regulation mean? (*Rules made by a government in order to control the way something is done.*)
3. Display **Image 3, Gilded Age Industrialists** and explain that during the Second Industrial Revolution, a group of men and corporations accumulated a great amount of wealth from industrial progress. These men are often referred to as Robber Barons or Captains of Industry.
4. Display **Image 4, Gilded Age Definitions** and examine the definitions of Robber Baron and Captains of Industry. Ask students:
 - Why do you think monopolies and trusts could be a problem for the consumer in America?
 - What might be the positives and negatives of having access to only one music streaming service provider instead of having multiple options to choose from?
5. Distribute **Handout – Robber Baron or Captain of Industry?** and instruct students to follow the directions as they circle the room and examine the images from the **Robber Baron or Captain of Industry Gallery Walk** (*keep Image 4 displayed as students circle the room*). Then, ask students:
 - What does infrastructure mean? (*Fixed installations a country needs in order to function, like roads, bridges, dams, water and sewer systems, railways, harbors, etc.*)
 - Why might a lack of government regulation and infrastructure be a problem during rapid industrial growth? (*There were not enough laws and policies to deal with situations that had never come up pre-industrialization.*)



- Do you think these businessmen of the Gilded Age were Robber Barons or Captains of Industry? Why?
- Were there any business people or corporations from today that came to mind as you were viewing the sources? Who or what came to mind? Are they Robber Barons or Captains of Industry? Explain your reasoning.

6. Distribute **Handout – The Jungle Newspaper Analysis** and divide students into groups of four.

7. Present **Slideshow 2, Newspaper Analysis Directions**. Display Slide 1 and explain to students that this book was published in 1906 to expose some of the societal issues that arose from industrialization. Assign one of the following newspaper articles to each group so that all articles are covered, repeating if necessary depending on class size. (*This activity is best undertaken on a device so*

students can use the zoom features to analyze the article.)

- Article 1 – “Upton Sinclair’s Own Story of the Horrors of Packingtown”
- Article 2 – “Upton Sinclair’s Own Story of How He Was Led to Expose Beef Trust Horrors”
- Article 3 – “Upton Sinclair Tells About the Sufferings of Women in Packingtown”
- Article 4 – “Discovery of Condemned-Meat Industry Accidental, Says Upton Sinclair”

8. Continue to display **Slideshow 2, Newspaper Analysis Directions**. Guide students from Steps 1 through 4, providing an appropriate amount of time to complete each step. After Step 4, ask students:

- What is one thing that surprised you most about what you read?

SUMMARY ACTIVITY

1. Instruct students to complete **Handout – Writing Prompt Evidence Log** that was started in Part 1 of the lesson with the new information they analyzed in Part 2. Then ask students to answer the writing prompt using the pieces of evidence they found to support each statement.
2. (Optional) Students conduct research about the benefits and drawbacks of music streaming services and develop an argument on whether a specific streaming service is a Captain of Industry or Robber Baron. This can be done through the creation of:
 - Argumentative Essay
 - Poster
 - Arts project
 - Video



EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

1. Explore more about the history of the cylinder phonograph at the Library of Congress: <https://www.loc.gov/collections/edison-company-motion-pictures-and-sound-recordings/articles-and-essays/history-of-edison-sound-recordings/history-of-the-cylinder-phonograph/>
2. Read the article “Close Elections Signal a New Gilded Age” <https://www.bunkhistory.org/resources/close-elections-signal-a-new-gilded-age>
 - What does the author say about elections during the first quarter of the 21st Century compared to elections during the Gilded Age?
 - Do you agree or disagree with the author’s observations? Why?
 - What are the author’s credentials and do they provide credibility to the author’s observations? Why or why not?
3. Read the article “Lessons from the Gilded Age” <https://www.bunkhistory.org/resources/lessons-from-the-gilded-age>
 - What does the author state are the similarities between the Gilded Age and the first quarter of the 21st Century?



STANDARDS

COLLEGE, CAREER, AND CIVIC LIFE (C3) SOCIAL STUDIES STANDARDS

History

D2.His.2.9-12. Analyze change and continuity in historical eras.

D2.His.3.9-12. Use questions generated about individuals and groups to assess how the significance of their actions changes over time and is shaped by the historical context.

D2.His.5.9-12. Analyze how historical contexts shaped and continue to shape people's perspectives.

D2.His.14.9-12. Analyze multiple and complex causes and effects of events in the past.

D2.His.16.9-12. Integrate evidence from multiple relevant historical sources and interpretations into a reasoned argument about the past.

CALIFORNIA HISTORY—SOCIAL SCIENCE CONTENT STANDARDS

11.2 Students analyze the relationship among the rise of industrialization, large scale rural-to-urban migration, and massive immigration from Southern and Eastern Europe.

1. Know the effects of industrialization on living and working conditions, including the portrayal of working conditions and food safety in Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*.
2. Describe the changing landscape, including the growth of cities linked by industry and trade, and the development of cities divided according to race, ethnicity, and class.
5. Discuss corporate mergers that produced trusts and cartels and the economic and political policies of industrial leaders.

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA SOCIAL STUDIES STANDARDS

US2.14 Analyze the transformation of the American economy during the Industrial Revolution to explain the changing social and political conditions in the United States and its impact on the environment.

US2.15 Evaluate arguments about the causes of rising inequality in industrial America related to wealth, health, economic opportunity and social class.



MASSACHUSETTS HISTORY AND SOCIAL SCIENCE FRAMEWORK STANDARDS

Topic 6. Rebuilding the United States: industry and immigration [USI.T6]

1. Explain the various causes of the Industrial Revolution (e.g., the economic impetus provided by the Civil War; important technological and scientific advances, such as the expansion of the railroad system; 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).
2. Make connections among the important consequences of the Industrial Revolution (e.g., economic growth and the rise of big business; environmental impact of industries; the expansion of cities).

CONNECTICUT SECONDARY SOCIAL STUDIES FRAMEWORK

US-2. Immigration, Industrialization, and Progressivism

US.Eco.12.a. Evaluate the impact of laissez-faire economic policies regarding corporate decision making, labor conditions, and public advocacy in the Gilded Age (e.g., monopoly, captains of industry, muckrakers, social Darwinism, labor unions).

NEW JERSEY STUDENT LEARNING STANDARDS - SOCIAL STUDIES

Era 5. The Development of the Industrial United States (1870–1900)

- 6.1.12.GeoHE.5.a: Generate/make an evidence-based argument regarding the impact of rapid urbanization on the environment and on the quality of life in cities.
- 6.1.12.EconEM.5.a: Analyze the economic practices of corporations and monopolies regarding the production and marketing of goods and determine the positive or negative impact of these practices on individuals and the nation and the need for government regulations.

SOCIAL STUDIES – NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR THE SOCIAL STUDIES (NCSS)

Theme 1: Culture

Theme 2: Time, Continuity, and Change

Theme 5: Individuals, Groups, and Institutions

Theme 7: Production, Distribution, and Consumption

Theme 8: Science, Technology, and Society



COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

College and Career Readiness Reading Information Text Standards for Grades 9-12

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.9-10.1 Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.9-10.6 Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text and analyze how an author uses rhetoric to advance that point of view or purpose.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.9-10.7 Analyze various accounts of a subject told in different mediums (e.g., a person's life story in both print and multimedia), determining which details are emphasized in each account.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.1 Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.7 Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in different media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively) as well as in words in order to address a question or solve a problem.

College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Writing for Grades 9-12

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.1 Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.2 Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.4 Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.7 Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.9 Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.1 Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.



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CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.9 Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Speaking and Listening for Grades 9-12

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-10.1 Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 9-10 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-10.2 Integrate multiple sources of information presented in diverse media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) evaluating the credibility and accuracy of each source.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-10.4 Present information, findings, and supporting evidence clearly, concisely, and logically such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, substance, and style are appropriate to purpose, audience, and task.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.11-12.1 Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 11-12 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.11-12.2 Integrate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) in order to make informed decisions and solve problems, evaluating the credibility and accuracy of each source and noting any discrepancies among the data.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.11-12.4 Present information, findings, and supporting evidence, conveying a clear and distinct perspective, such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning, alternative or opposing perspectives are addressed, and the organization, development, substance, and style are appropriate to purpose, audience, and a range of formal and informal tasks.



RESOURCES

HANDOUTS

- Handout - Writing Prompt Evidence Log
- Teacher Notes for Gilded Age Presentation
- Handout - Inventions Bracket
- Handout - Industrial Growth Reading
- Gallery Walk - Robber Baron or Captain of Industry?
- Handout - Robber Baron or Captain of Industry?
- Handout - *The Jungle* Newspaper Analysis