



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute  
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## **Cultural Artifacts in a Time of Change: Material Culture of Daily Life**

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This unit will provide the elementary school teacher with a framework for the study of everyday American artifacts representative of the time period between 1800 and 2000. Because the specific functions of rooms have changed over these two centuries, the organizational rubric for this unit is the 'period room.' The consideration of the context of function is further elaborated through the analysis and interpretation of specific objects that structure and enable the activities within these room settings. By studying period rooms across time, students will be able to observe the different technological, industrial, social, demographic, economic, and cultural changes that took place. These changes from a pre-industrial, to industrial, to modern interior can be seen and understood in every room, in every region of the country to one extent or another.

This unit is based on the premise that artifacts are essential to the interpretation of past history. Through the study of objects as social and historical documents, one can have a better, or at least tangible understanding of history. While traditional history has often used written documents to study politics or military action, material history based on artifacts permits a more concrete, and less abstract, understanding of everyday life. In this unit artifacts become primary sources from which we can extract historical information. That is, objects are a more tangible link to the past. This unit creates a methodology of study that will be able to be applied to other material culture regardless of the time period of those artifacts.

Fundamental to the thesis of this unit is the belief that objects grow out of, respond to, and shape specific cultural contexts. Furthermore these individual objects need to be interpreted as parts of an assemblage of interconnected objects. The mode of analysis is the room, because here both form and function are interlinked. I introduce the term 'period room' as the unit of analysis in the study of everyday life of ordinary things.

In looking at material objects, regardless of the time of their creation or use, these are some of the overarching questions that frame the unit:

- What are the functions that take place in these period rooms (i.e. social calling, entertaining, bereavement)?
- How do the functions of these period rooms change over time?
- What material objects played the most significant role and what were their functions
- How are the artifacts related to larger cultural issues?

- What is the meaning of the artifact and which is the relation to other cultural activities of the time?
- How do the objects change over time?

These are the following concepts I want my students to be able to understand and know by the completion of this unit:

- Objects can play multiple purposes (function versus form)
- Our cultural values shape how we feel about the objects that surround us
- The cultural value of an object changes according to the times
- Artifacts are expressions of a culture and at the same time a medium in the creation and reinforcement of current cultural values.

In order to begin this process, I start by looking at what it is that students need to be able to know and do by the completion of this unit. In other words, the 'why' behind the studying of material culture as a means to meeting age and grade level appropriate content, and the skills needed to be able to successfully progress to the next grade. For such a purpose, I look into the Connecticut State Department of Education Framework <sup>1</sup> and focus on the following three specific goals related to the Social Studies curriculum.

- Demonstrate an understanding of the concept of culture and how different perspectives emerge from different cultures;
- Apply geographic knowledge, skills and concepts to understand human behavior in relation to the physical and cultural environment;
- Describe how people organize systems for the production, distribution and consumption of goods and services;

Although I only list the social studies frameworks, the different activities and extension tasks also target content standards in language arts, science, visual arts, and mathematics. As a matter of fact, it would be very difficult not to take into account both the language arts and English as a Second Language standards at the same time <sup>2</sup>.

## Introduction

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In the writing of history much emphasis has been placed in the study of primary verbal documents, essentially manuscripts and printed materials. Archives and written sources have been the main means of documenting history. However, these sources are not inclusive and rarely offer much of a glimpse into social groups that were not wealthy or powerful. Farmers, artisans, lower classes, and ethnic minorities are often underrepresented in traditional or written records. Thus, in order to learn about these groups we must make use of alternate forms of evidence.

One such form of evidence is objects or artifacts. By an artifact we refer to some concrete item that has been created by humans. In other words, a table or chair will meet the criteria of material culture but a tooth would not. The object in mind has to also play some significant role in the history of human development. Examples of this type will vary, from a nail to a piece of rope, from a door to a hammer.

What is material culture?

It is important to first differentiate between objects, items, things, and artifacts as synonyms of what scholarly is referred to as material culture <sup>3</sup>. Additionally, it is worth noting that this paper discusses material culture with an emphasis on domestic artifacts versus commercial, public, or industrial life artifacts. Also the emphasis is on objects, who made these objects, the process of making these objects, and the people who used them. The basic premise of this unit is that these representations of material culture tell a story about the values of those who designed, created, produced, and used them.

Jules David Prown defines material culture as:

‘The study through artifacts of the beliefs - values, ideas, attitudes and assumptions  
- of a particular community or society at a given time’ <sup>4</sup>

In other words, it refers to the material of the object and the purpose for which it was created. This definition however lacks some depth. Therefore, throughout this paper material culture will be defined as:

“The study through artifacts (and other pertinent historical evidence) of the belief systems - the values, ideas, attitudes, and assumptions- of a particular community or society, usually across time” <sup>5</sup>

The study of a man-made object entails the study of materials, the source of those materials, the creator of the object, the process followed, the workshop, and the time frame from conception to completion. Furthermore, an object reflects cultural characteristics as portrayed by the values of the person creating the

object, the designer, the individual who commissioned the object, the person who bought it, and as an extension the society in which the object was used. The importance of this can be clearly seen at the point of analysis in trying to understand the value and importance of an object.

Mac Fleming, in viewing and looking at the cultural values reflected by a given artifact, proposed to include the following elements: 1) craftsmanship, 2) raw materials, origin, and destination, 3) technology of that era, 4) wealth of the users, 5) customs and social patterns, 6) images reflecting popularity of the object, and 7) form and function. <sup>6</sup>

In the best of scenarios the interpretation of cultural artifacts is a complex endeavor in so much as the fact that there is a reinterpretation, revision, a new way of thinking, and of evaluating such artifacts. This is also the case given that history in itself is a subjective and artificially created story composed of fragmented and biased interpretations.

In the case of material culture, an artifact has a long history in time; multiple past moments. When we select that object at a moment in time, we ignore and devalue other past and future moments and by doing so, take away from the value of such an object. It begs to ask oneself, what is the original meaning that was applied to a given artifact by the original owners? Here we begin the speculation process based on our deduction and description stages.

Another aspect of material culture that reflects present values is how an object of the past acquires value as an object of the present. With the passage of time, there is a change in values, ideas, attitudes, needs, and uses. An object can begin having the value as something of use within the context of a given culture and time period and later become an 'outsider', because of the changes in values, etc.

As we will be able to see as we look at functions and period rooms, there are many different changes taking place in time and space that are reflected in the way that people live; the way that they interact with one another and with the artifacts that surround them; and the values that they cherish as individuals, families or communities.

### **Observation of material culture: a protocol**

If we are to teach our students to think broadly, to think outside the box; we must provide our students with a framework that will allow them to expand instead of contract, to enquire instead of fill in the blank, to imagine instead of copy, or to encourage instead of inhibit the growth.

The following steps can be considered as a framework or scaffold that will allow the students to begin the enquiry process on material culture: production, skill and labor; lives of the object; and memories associated with the objects.

#### *Production, skill, and labor*

Any artifact has a maker. Prior to the maker, there is an idea, someone who thinks about the object from its inception. This person might or might not be the same person who designs and finally makes the item. The term of production here encompasses the previous three steps (ideation, design, creation). Each of these individuals (or possibly the same person) must have a skill and there is a labor that is associated from the beginning to the end of the process. At each of these steps, the artifact offers us a window into the characters of that time period, a narrative, which is often not looked upon as adding any knowledge or value to the

already written story.

This narrative is of necessary importance for us if we are to grasp and better understand the incomplete story of how the artifact came into existence, and what it tells us about who we are as a community.

### *Lives of the object*

There are multiple contexts to an object. The different lives of an object can be best visualized in terms of a beginning and an end or even in a spiral from where the object itself progresses from beginning to end and is elevated to a new beginning. The same can be said of architectural elements. The main door, with time, moved from the front of the house, then to the side, and finally to the back of the home.

An example of the different lives of an object can be best depicted with an example. This could be the case of the parlor chair. In its inception the chair played a dominant place in the parlor, the public part of the home. That is, the area where the family received the daily visitors who called in.

As the time period progressed, the parlor became the living room and that chair of which I spoke, might have been moved to the back of the house. That is, the private sphere of the home. Here the chair had a different life, a different meaning from the original one. Eventually the chair could have been moved to the garage, attic or storage area. This same chair, that originally sat the guests, now the family might hold on to it because of sentimental value; maybe it was the chair where grandma sat, or grandpa's smoking chair and thus worth saving as a family heirloom.

Once that chair left the workshop or factory and made it to the house, this cultural artifact, took a life of its own. The object has multiple contexts based on the person who made it or bought it, what the intended purpose of the one who made it was and what the person bought it for. Where was the object bought and where did it end up, and when was it built and when was it bought. This object could have been passed to the different generation, sold at a tag sale, or burnt on a cold winter night.

### *Memories associated with the objects*

Earlier when discussing the lives of a given artifact, I briefly touched upon the idea that all artifacts have memories associated to them. When we look at the old chair in the attic, soon we attach the memory of a different time or a person that we associate with it. These memories are not static but evolving according to the values and multiple contexts. The same way that an object may have multiple lives it also has multiple memories associated with it, either in time or in its location.

### *The CD tower case*

Not long ago, I found a used 4 feet tall iron CD storage tower case in the shape of a steeple. At either side there were two smaller steeples about a foot and a half tall. The original purpose of this object was to store music at a time when CDs had replaced LP records. In turn, as the influence one of the most significant cultural artifacts of the XXI century, the Ipod, was growing, the life of the storage case was declining.

When that original owner bought the CD tower case, the main location of the object would have been in a prominent place in the living room, next to the sound system. Not only did it replace the cabinet where the LP records were stored, but it also had an aesthetic purpose. With the arrival of new technology all this music in the storage tower, could be now transferred into a hard-drive and inside an Ipod. Thus the tower case lost its

original functionality, lost its main purpose and it ended up moved to a different room. The object acquired a new life. Eventually, this tower became part of a garage sale and acquired yet another life. It could have regained its original function as a storage device had somebody who was looking for such a storage device bought it. However, in this case it became a trellis in my garden for my clematis Florida 'Sieboldii'. Now, this metal tower plays a prominent role by my mailbox, not as a storage device, but as a support to the growth of one of my favorite plants.

### **Further discussion**

As we can see from the previous discussion in defining what material culture is, the interrelation between the physical object and human behavior helps us to begin understanding the who, what, where, when, and why in objects, ourselves, and our culture. There is a memory association that conjures up a set of shared ideals, beliefs and philosophies of people at a certain time period and location.

It is these values and ideals that we attempt to study when talking about material culture, as we observe an artifact of a given time period, social class, or physical region. In the end, it is not the object that is of importance, but the interpretations that we make from such an object that truly matters. Therefore, the goal of this unit on material culture is that of providing students with a framework that will allow for interpretation based on cultural artifacts within the context of the period room.

In studying objects from any given period, we will often discover how people's beliefs are not static or necessarily shared by the whole community, region, state, or country. Yet this process of study can depict what values were held in the majority, minority, or the status quo as we explore a given artifact.

It is not that we are attempting to create a hermetically closed description of an era or a period based on the study of some representative artifact or period room. We are trying to amplify what life was or must have been as we look beyond the object itself by recognizing the various personal, familial, and social contexts of what is in front of us.

## **Period Rooms**

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The idea of a period room was first developed as a museum technique as a means of preserving the historical accuracy of the material culture of the time. Parallel to period rooms we encounter historic house museums, outdoor history museums, as well as village and period recreations.

The period room originates from the need for storing and displaying objects gathered by collectors and antiquarians. These period rooms were also a means of bringing present and future generations in touch with their ancestral origins and connecting with their historical past. One of the pioneers of the use of period rooms to display and interpret collections was Charles P. Wilcomb<sup>7</sup>. Unlike the study of an artifact in isolation, the period room allows the viewer to see the artifacts within the physical context in which they were placed demonstrating the aesthetic values of that culture.

The concept of period rooms appears to originate in the French *monument historique* movement around 1830, which was based in the promotion of historical and architectural buildings. In the United States it is followed with the beginning of the preservation in 1850 of such well-known properties such as George Washington's

headquarters in Newburgh, New York or Mount Vernon, Virginia about ten years later. That is, it begun with the historic preservation of places where well-known events had taken place or famous people lived.

It is not until the so-called *Sanitary Fairs* (exhibitions created as a means of raising funds during the American Civil War for widows and orphans) that 'colonial mood' rooms came about. The purpose was not preservation, education or even replication with any authenticity the interior rooms of that time period. These 'colonial mood' rooms can therefore be best compared with today's 'theme parks.'

As a prelude to museum rooms, we have the work of Parley Poore who begun to pursue aspects of historic periods within home settings. Also of especial importance are the period rooms of 1880 identified by George Sheldon and others of the Pocumtuck Valley Memorial Association in Deerfield, Massachusetts. These period rooms exhibited artifacts pertaining to the kitchen and bedroom but without attempting to authentically recreate a given period.

### **Criteria of the period room**

The period room can be historical, aesthetic, or both. According to Young <sup>8</sup> there are three different criteria by which the period room must be judged: 1) the purpose of the room as dictated by its location, 2) the capacity to make you believe in the historical period or concept represented. That is, how well it captures the 'spirit' of the historical period or concept; and 3) the authenticity of originality of the enclosed furnishings and the frame.

There are artistic, ethnographic and educational goals associated with the true period room. Therefore, it is much more than just providing a background for the different cultural artifacts. Period rooms are used also as means of expressing and maintaining core beliefs, values and of representing rituals. It is a way of keeping ideals and ideas alive.

There are different ways of experiencing period rooms. The first is by being able to walk into the room and getting as close in proximity to the artifacts as is possible. The second way is the viewing of the period room from either a doorway or through a window. Each mode offers the viewer with a unique way of interrelating with the cultural artifacts within the context of the time period being represented.

### **Period rooms and artifacts: a social document of an era**

The study of material culture as reflected in period rooms, as we go from the public or outside of the home, to the private, or inside the home replicates the Victorian values of the late 1800s and early 1900s. Students can better understand the role that cultural values and technology play on material culture and the importance of period rooms as a unit of analysis.

As the unit is implemented, it is recommended that we begin with a room that everyone can relate to. I propose to start with the kitchen and the bathroom (highlighting the role that technology plays in these two rooms) followed by studying the way that cultural values change the composition, location, and meaning of today's living room.

Nonetheless, this narrative begins with the parlor as a means of illustrating the clear division during the Victorian period between private and public spaces within the home. The parlor, being the quintessential Victorian room represented the public face of the home and I so choose because the study of this public space within the home will afford us a window to the many social rituals that took place within those four walls and



that characterized this time period.

### *The parlor*

During the Victorian period the separation between private and public spaces was well delineated in the house layout. In general, public rooms were in the front while the more functional rooms were either in the back or on other floors of the house. Depending on the size of the homes, there may have been other 'public' single-purpose rooms loaded with symbolism through the décor and furnishings. Among these rooms we have the parlor, library, music room, and the dining room.

The parlor was a place of rituals encompassing life and death. Rituals regarding the way you acted in society where you demonstrated that you had a space in society as demonstrated by the orderliness and symbolism represented by all accessories and manners.

In order to better understand this time period it is important to study the existing dichotomy between the value of *culture*, as reflected from the ideals of gentility and cosmopolitanism, and *comfort* as reflected by domesticity (family-centered) <sup>9</sup>.

During this period there was a fascination with eighteenth-century European cultural ideals reflecting gentility values. Consequently we have parlors that mirror eighteenth-century salons or drawing rooms in their furnishings and in the activities that take place in them. These rooms with all their accessories were not set up for comfort but for the social display of refined manners, behavior, and appearances.

During the Victorian period 'refinement' means more and more elaborate possessions as their owners could buy or bring together. For example, the *fauteuil* style of the open-armed chair was meant to convey the eighteenth-century European cultural ideals of drawing rooms. If you owned one, the *fauteuil* brought you symbolically closer to the salon or drawing room; and if you could sit on it, you could then begin to act like a noble, and thus claim without stating it in words that you were what your possessions claimed you are. As a result you became noble by association.

Objects were saturated with covert and overt symbolism and were considered a reflection of family values and accomplishments. There are complex ideas that are reflected in the decoration and the placement of artifacts in the parlor. Among these ideas we have the term *domesticity*, which encompasses those family life norms that directed the conduct of the members of the household. This domesticity was reflected in the cleanliness, in the type of furniture, and wall decorations, which all expressed values of formality and appropriateness <sup>10</sup>.

Another ideal of the Victorian period is the fascination with travel, foreign lands, and the breadth of knowledge gained from traveling. This cosmopolitan ideal was directly reflected in the type of objects that would furnish the parlor. This ideal of world culture, of widespread knowledge and high-culture were represented among other artifacts on pianos and in wall decorations depicting foreign lands.

### *The decline of the parlor*

With the exception of the 'well-to-do' who were able to afford to maintain multiple single purpose rooms, by the first decade of the twentieth century, we begin to see the living - room substituting the parlor.

Additionally, with the beginning of the arts and crafts period in the 1900s, there is a shift from pretentious complexity to the artistic simplicity of the handmade one-of-a-kind décor; a shift from the specialized room



floor plan to the open space floor plan of the bungalow. Public and private home spaces are one and the same and by the 1920s the word living room had replaced the parlor in catalogs and magazines, even making the word parlor disappear from model homes.

At this point in time, the living room becomes a multipurpose room, which was now designed for both family and visits. In a sense it represents a return to the multipurpose room of the Colonial past.

One of the main reasons for the decay and eventual disappearance of the parlor is the fact that living spaces become smaller. There is a rise in the number of apartments, homes were subdivided into two or three family units, and consequently less space was available to have specialized rooms, which were not a part of the family day-to-day life. Additionally, functionality (technology) replaced form (decorative fashion). New homes, unlike those in the Victorian period, included some of the most up-to-date home technologies, which were dependent on electricity, pipes, plumbing, a furnace, water system, etc. that required more space and money.

Furthermore some of the social functions that took place in the parlor: calling, teas, and theatrics fell out of favor due to technological advances such as the invention of the car and the telephone, or due to new forms of social entertainment such as movies and entertainment parks. These advances and cultural changes made the need for a 'public' social space within the home obsolete.

### **The bathroom and the kitchen**

In the nineteenth century we begin to see a significant shift from traditional forms of manufacturing goods (such as weaving, furniture making, canning goods, and agriculture) to the industrialization process of all those goods. This shift, paired with the rise of advertisement, created the idea of mass consumption.

This era of consumption takes place from the 1890s to 1940s as represented by the mass production of goods. This was the same period when the bathroom and the kitchen experience their most significant changes. As the bathroom became the center of the fight against all type of secretions, the kitchen became the control center for household consumption. While for the men the home was a shelter from production for the woman the house became the control center for managing consumption. <sup>11</sup>

#### *Timeline*

The following list is a brief chronology of the most important events related to water, waste, and electrical systems, which are of significance to the understanding of the way that technological advances affected both the kitchen and the bathroom <sup>12</sup>.

- 1790, First system of public waterworks in Philadelphia
- 1820, Begins production of cast iron tubes in England (production begins in the US in 1850)
- 1840, Hot water available as part of a container in the hearth. The cooking range is also located there.
- 1849, Philadelphia's population = 340,000. Number of bath tabs = 3,251
- 1854, New York's population = 629,904. Number of bath tabs = 3,251
- c.1850, Mass production of cast-iron, wrought-iron, and glazed stoneware pipe. Full mass production of affordable pipes makes plumbing available to all social classes by the first decades of the twentieth century.
- Number of plumbing and gas fitting supply manufacturers in the US

Year	1860	1870	1880
Number	221	705	2,161

- c.1860 Water closet is more common in wealthier than in middle or lower class households
- 1878, Thomas Edison and Joseph Swan invent the incandescent carbon-filament lamps and with time becoming a major competitor with gas lighting.
- 1890, Edison-Swan Company builds power stations in New York and London
- 1901, New York's Model Tenement House Reform Law requires that all new buildings must provide each floor with running water. Later it required that this be the case for each apartment.
- Percentage number of US homes that have electricity provided by power stations

Year	1902	1918	1925	1948
Percent	8%	24.30%	53.20%	78%

It is important to note the differences between the percentage number of urban and suburban families who in 1940 had access to indoor plumbing as represented by the percentage of those who had running water, indoor toilets, and bathing arrangements.

While in the urban areas 93.5 percent of the households have access to running water, only 17.8 percent of those living in the rural areas do so. 83 percent of the families living in urban areas have indoor toilets and 77.5 percent have some type of bathing arrangement. Meanwhile, of the over 40 percent of Americans living in rural areas only 11.2 percent had indoor toilets and bathing arrangements.

### *The bathroom*

There is no other room in the house that ever saw as much change in as little time as the bathroom. This was in part due to the fact that up until the end of the nineteenth century the bathroom did not exist architecturally as a separate room (other than in the rural areas in the form of an outhouse or delegated in urban areas to the cellar or merged into the bedroom in the form of portable containers.)

Before there was plumbing, families would make use of water basins and pails, commodes and chamber pots (portable containers). Before plumbing the functions of cooking and basin bathing were partners because of the combination of both heat and water in the kitchen. With the onset of new ideas on hygiene combined with technological changes, each function was separated and consequently delegated to separate rooms.

Unlike the portable appliances of yesteryear, such as the washstand or the chamber pot, the new bathroom equivalents the sink or the toilet bowl needed a room of their own. As running water and plumbing and fixtures became available in the home, small closets, stairway landings, and rooms were converted into

bathrooms.

As with the rest of the house we see that the aesthetic trends of the period are reflected in the fixtures and the appliances across all the rooms in the house. During the Victorian period we see some of the decorative forms such as elephant trunks and dolphins reflected in the fixtures as well as the 'claw-foot' design on bathtubs and sinks. Later on, we will see the new ideals and emphasis on hygiene reflected in streamlined bathroom designs that exemplify the ideals of cleanliness.

### *The kitchen*

Of all the rooms in a house, the kitchen is the room throughout the ages that evokes multiple universal meanings and values. Although the configurations may be very different whether you are in the north or the south, the east or the west, the pre-colonial or the Victorian period, the kitchen is a conveyor of multiple meanings and values related to primordial needs of nurturance, nourishment and family ties.

During the pre-industrial era the kitchen held significant artifacts associated with the role of the mother and homemaker. Objects such as spinning wheels or tall clocks were the norm. While during the Victorian period the 'heart' of the home was in the parlor, during the pre-industrial era the kitchen was vital to the functioning of the household and family members. This space was associated with women and children. Even in those households where there were servants, the kitchen became the refuge from the other 'formal' rooms of the house such as the dining room or the parlor.

The Victorian period fascination with intricate decorations and plush fabrics was soon replaced by a streamline modern design of the 1930s that was characterized by horizontal clean lines and curving forms. These changes were evident throughout the house, but nowhere did it have as much significance as in the kitchen and the bathroom.

Most typical of this streamline modern design is the conical 'teardrop' borrowed from aerodynamics and which would be integrated into the design of most objects from toasters to refrigerators to light fixtures.

There is a move from the mechanical pieces with all the nuts and bolts of the industrial era towards the streamline design characterized by one-piece seamless shell frame, which gave the impression of having been molded from a single piece. This is the beginning of porcelain and enamel surfaces that eventually would move from a heterogeneous collection of appliances to a coordinated and continuous group of domestic appliances.

Among of the most important technological improvements in the kitchen of this time are worth mentioning the washing machine, drier, dishwasher, refrigerator, and vacuum cleaner.

## **Context and rationale**

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As an Instructional coach for the English Language Learners (ELL) department, my position consists of assisting both teachers and students. One of my roles as an instructional coach is modeling effective strategies for teachers that work with ELL students. These strategies ensure that the curriculum is accessible to each student's needs as they develop appropriate grade level content while acquiring academic English.

One of the most effective ways of assisting ELLs is that of facilitating the acquisition of English not in isolation but in combination with one of the curricular content areas. In order for these students to master age and grade level appropriate content standards they need to be able to access the same core curriculum and they must be able to acquire more than simple language skills: ELLs must acquire the needed academic language that will allow them to compete with the rest of the school population.

According to the Connecticut State Department of Education *The Condition of Education in Connecticut* report, the percentage of students who are racial/ethnic minorities continues to increase <sup>13</sup>. There has been a 44% increase in the number of ELLs enrolled in CT schools from 2000 to 2005 <sup>14</sup>. English Language learners represent 5.3 percent of the whole student population. However, based on the *Connecticut's Strategic School Profiles, Connecticut Education Facts* we observe that these percentages can be deceiving. This is due to the fact that the highest concentration of ELLs is located in urban areas, and often times attending a few neighborhood schools within those districts. According to the New Haven Public Schools 2005-2006 Strategic District School Profile <sup>15</sup>, the number of minority students being serviced is 89 percent, and 28.7 percent is identified with non-English as the home language (as compared with 12.6 percent statewide).

### **ELL challenges**

The challenge that ELLs or second language learners face is a daunting one in that in order for them to catch up to grade level norms, they must acquire the needed oral language and literacy skills at the same time they acquire the required grade level content knowledge. The acquisition of academic language proficiency is a long process that is literacy dependent. Hence, ELLs need to be able to read, write, and speak making use of academic language.

In the last few years there has been a shift in the way that we work with ELLs, which allows us to begin differentiating between English language proficiency, academic language proficiency, and academic achievement or content mastery <sup>16</sup>.

English language proficiency places ELLs along the language acquisition continuum from beginner to advanced and refers, in general terms, to the ability to speak, read, write and comprehend the English language. As ELLs progress through this continuum and meet the English language proficiency standards, they gain access to academic content standards. These language proficiency standards are to English as content areas standards are to academic achievement (the knowledge and skills of a specific content area). While the first meets the academic English language proficiency continuum, the later are the anchors for measuring academic achievement which is an indicator of conceptual development in that given content area <sup>17</sup>. It is at the intersection of language proficiency and academic achievement that academic language becomes the medium.

Much of the academic language is vocabulary bound. Students must not only be able to understand English syntactically and grammatically, but most importantly, ELLs need to be able to have access to highly specific content area vocabulary that will facilitate concept comprehension. Ten Important Words Plus <sup>18</sup> is an effective strategy for building word knowledge that is very appropriate for use within content areas.

## Curriculum Strategies and lesson plans

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In working with students, and especially second language learners, it is imperative that we make connections to the knowledge that students bring with them. The following activities will allow these students to incorporate their values and culture as they learn about their new culture. In addition, this process of building background knowledge on what students know in the subject matter allows the classroom teacher to differentiate instruction and build upon what students already know.

Many of the students that I serve in the bilingual program, or who are English Language Learners (ELLs), arrive from cultures very different from the mainstream North American one. Often times, these students in their first years have great difficulties adjusting to a foreign culture that exhibits very different values than their own. In allowing these students to voluntarily contribute their experiences, we are able to create a scaffold that will ensure that what they learn is attached to something meaningful.

The following lessons represent a sample of the different elements that are part of this unit and the implementation will be based on short activities integrating all curricular areas. The main goal of these lessons is to develop second language academic proficiency while studying the concepts related to material culture. For such a purpose, close attention is placed upon key concepts, outcomes, accountable-talk, and language structures. These lessons are developed with ELL students in mind; thus, especial importance is placed on comprehensible input by means of modified speech, vocabulary front loading, clear and specific language structures, and accountable-talk.

### Unit introduction

The starting point of this unit is with the legend of the *The Blind and the Elephant* <sup>19</sup>. In this popular and multicultural legend each individual arrives to a different conclusion based on limited observations. Although the main intent of this legend is teaching that the inability to see one's limitations because of shortsightedness makes one as blind as one who does not have sight, the legend will be here used as a springboard to the study of material culture.

The purpose of the legend in this lesson is to make students aware that when studying an artifact we must look beyond what we think we can see. We need to look past our own conception as we study material culture. Therefore the saying of 'do not judge a book by its cover' becomes a congruent motto with the lesson to be taught. In addition, the following print titled *Blind Monks Examining an Elephant* <sup>20</sup> can be used as a mnemonic device in the classroom so as to remind us to look beyond what we can see.

It is also important to remember that as we observe an artifact of a given time period it is the values and ideals that we are studying. In the end, it is not the object that is of importance, but the interpretations that we make from such an object that truly matters. Therefore, it is important to remember that the goal is to provide the students with a framework that will allow for open-ended interpretations based on cultural artifacts within the context of the period room. This lesson is consequently the foundation of such a process.



### **From the whole to the parts and back**

It is left to the teacher's discretion as to how to continue this unit. It is possible to begin with the whole (period room) and move on to the individual parts (cultural artifacts) or begin with the individual parts and look at the whole. Nevertheless, it is imperative (this being one of the first lessons) that the structure be systematically followed so the students, eventually, will be able to complete the process independently.

Given the fact that this lesson will be ongoing, it is important to create a purpose and provide the students with a general introduction of the following concepts that frame the unit. At a later point in the unit these will be the used as content objectives for each of the lessons.

- Our cultural values shape how we feel about the objects that surround us
- The cultural value of an object changes according to the times
- Artifacts are expressions of a culture and at the same time a medium in the creation and reinforcement of current cultural values.
- Objects can play multiple purposes (function versus form)

Due to the fact that this lesson will be replicated multiple times using a different artifact or period room, I would write, for everyone to see, at least one of the concepts in order to direct the class discussion.

Since one of the main didactic purposes of this unit is to assist my students to understand that objects and



artifacts transmit cultural values and are representative of time and space, I will begin with such a concept.

In beginning with an object, the following questions will direct the discussion.

- Where is the object located in relation to the rest of the objects?
- Who made/designed the object?
- What is its function?
- For what purpose does the object exist?
- What are the materials used in its construction?
- Where does it come from?
- Are there any variations in the make up?
- Has the object transformed though time?
- How has the object transformed through time?

It is essential that the teacher writes down the students' comments so as to model the correct language structures and needed framework in order for the students to be able to apply this process to the independent study/research paper of a different room or artifact. Additionally, I recommend the use of visuals and the use of multicolor markers to bring attention to the different language structures that are being modeled.

If instead we begin by looking at a given room in a house, let's say the bathroom, the following questions will serve as a guideline in directing the discussion.

- What does the setting of the bathroom tell us?
- What does the interior communicate: simplicity, cleanliness, privacy, etc.?
- How does the bathroom compare to the setting and the surrounding rooms?
- What are the functions that take place?
- How have the different functions that we perform in the bathroom changed over time?
- What are the objects and material culture related to these functions?
- Are there any cultural differences in the functions or the makeup of the bathroom?
- What do material objects in the bathroom tell us about our culture?



I chose the bathroom to begin this unit because it is likely to be a universal room and because it will captivate the students' attention. We will come back to this activity over and over again. Eventually, once the students understand the structure, they will be asked to independently follow the same enquiry process as the one modeled with a room or an object of their own choosing.

In this follow up activity students observe changes over time by comparing and contrasting urban versus rural and present to past percentage of households with running water, indoor toilets, and bathing arrangements. Using the following two tables, students create three bar graphs representing the differences in 1940 of access to indoor plumbing between rural and urban areas.

#### Urban areas

Year	Running water	Indoor toilets	Bathing arrangements
1940	93.50%	83%	77.50%

#### Of the over 40% of Americans living in rural areas

Year	Running water	Indoor toilets	Bathing arrangements
1940	17.80%	11.20%	11.20%

Can you picture this? Create a timeline through pictures representing the changes taking place in the kitchen and the bathroom.

1820, Open fire, water pump. 1860, Open fire, stove, running water, tub. 1900, Furnace, enhanced stove, icebox, tub, lavatory, gas lamps. 1938, Refrigerator, air conditioning, electric power, light, electric accessories, prefabricated kitchen and bathroom utensils.

### **What is material culture and why should we study it?**

As a follow up, and always departing from the concepts that frame the unit, I want the students to identify and make their own one or a combination of definitions on material culture and why it is important that we study it. Once we have reviewed what we did the previous days and re-read the concepts the teacher can begin with a 'think aloud' about material culture:

Almost everything that surrounds us that is inanimate (with the exception of natural objects such as a rock or a tree) is part of the material culture in our lives. These artifacts speak of what we hold dear or that value for one or another purpose. These objects, not only have a function but a value to us as human beings. In the case of

the rock, the material culture is acquired when that rock becomes part of a wall, or a marker delineating where a property ends and the other begins. Same thing can be said of the tree, when the value that acquires is related to a function that is not that of the intended one.

Today we are going to look at the way that other people describe what material culture is and then I want you to come up with your own description. You may do so through a picture, as a story, through mime, etc. Here there are some of those definitions <sup>21</sup> :

Material culture entails the actions of manufacture and use, and the express theories about the production, use, and nature of material objects.

Material culture is that segment of man's physical environment, which is purposely shaped by him according to culturally dictated plans.

Material culture is the ideas about objects external to the mind resulting from human behavior as well as ideas about human behavior required to manufacture these objects.

The underlying premise is that objects made or modified by humans, consciously or unconsciously, directly or indirectly, reflect the belief patterns of individuals who made, commissioned, purchased, or used them, and, by extension, the belief patterns of the larger society to which they belonged.

The study through artifacts of the beliefs- values, ideas, attitudes and assumptions- of a particular community or society at a given time. <sup>22</sup>

The study through artifacts (and other pertinent historical evidence) of the belief systems-the values, ideas, attitudes, and assumptions- of a particular community or society, usually across time. <sup>23</sup>

## **Activities and Assessments**

The following activities can be used as whole class lessons, small group activities, or independent studies.

Looking through catalogs <sup>24</sup> (Sears, Time, websites). Here are some descriptors of some homes: 'truly magnificent', 'noble work', 'large in size', 'grand in style' Can you find other descriptor words in the ads? How would you classify these descriptions?

Looking for objects and how they changed over time according to the models, materials, and cost. Create a 10x5 matrix with the following headings for at least two period rooms: object, year, model, materials, and cost.

Creating a chronological/pictorial timeline of significant cultural objects (i.e. telephone). How has the phone changed over time? Who had telephones, and who has them now?

Do objects have gender? What about rooms in a house? In Spanish and some other languages they do have a gender. However, although English is a gender free language (i.e. lamp) what are some objects that have a gender identified to them? Why?

Sorting floor plans <sup>25</sup> . After students study period rooms; including functions and cultural objects involved in those rooms, students locate the rooms within a house floor plan. Students then sort chronologically those floor plans. First sorting the period rooms and then the floor plans (i.e. bathroom, bedroom). What would a floor plan of the XXII century look like?

Period room design. What will be the functions and objects of a period room of the XXII century? What functions and object would be included?

## **Last word and extension activities**

As an instructional coach and teacher of English Language Learners, it is important that these students are given ample opportunities to make use of the four language domains in any task or activity in which they partake. The following extensions are representative of activities where students are forced into using the domains of speaking, listening, reading, and writing within different content areas.

Language arts: Introduce the opening legend as a listening center, taping the story. As a written prompt, consider re-writing a story where the students integrate as part of the story descriptions of new objects of the

new millennium.

Art: Students design their own objects and describe what these objects would tell about the culture of those who used them. Students make their own technical drawings and then create three-dimensional models. Finally, students build a diorama that includes those objects in the context of a room or space.

Science: Energy use across the time periods studied. Students brainstorm about the relationship between energy and number of rooms. How has the energy efficiency of some common kitchen utilities changed over time? Students will select one such utility (refrigerator, washing machine, drier, pots and pans, etc), create a matrix and then will graph the results across time and energy usage.

Games: Students create their own games related to some of the material culture that they studied as part of this unit. One such game consists of naming three objects and having the other person name some characteristic that they share in common. For example, what commonality do the following three items have? Or what characteristic do the following three items have in common? A chest, a staircase, and a hall-stand?

Categorize the following objects that could be found in a parlor during the Victorian period according to whether they are a symbol of culture (cosmopolitanism or gentility) or comfort (domesticity).

Seashell, books, needlework, photographs of friend and family members, piano, parlor organs, silver tray, étagère (display shelf), bust of a well known artist.

Read the following quote and discuss how did the changes during industrialization affect manufacturing and the household.

'It is unmistakable tendency of modern and economic and industrial progress to take out of the home all the processes of manufacture...One thing after another has been taken, until only cooking and cleaning are left and neither of these...leaves results behind to reward the worker as did...spinning, weaving, and soap making <sup>26</sup>.'

Compare and contrast. With the use of today's technology it is very easy to integrate media in the form of pictures and sound. The following sample lesson looks to integrate the artwork of Thomas Hovenden <sup>27</sup> and Norman Rockwell <sup>28</sup>. Both artists choose the same theme *Breaking Home Ties*, depicting the same scene in two different time periods. The students will compare and contrast both scenes looking for material culture.

Discuss elements in Edward Lamson Henry's "The old clock on the stairs <sup>29</sup>" and then read the poem by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow - *The old clock on the stairs* <sup>30</sup>. Students will follow the same process as discussed in the second lesson and apply it first to the picture and then to the poem.

## Teacher Resources

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Ames, Kenneth L. *Death in the Dining Room, and Other Tales of Victorian Culture, American Civilization*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992.

An excellent resource on 19th century Victorian costumes and social life. Well-documented and simple to read. Portraits Victorian lifestyle inside and outside the home.

Braden, Donna R. "'The Family That Plays Together Stays Together': Family Pastimes and Indoor Amusements, 1890-1930." In *American Home Life, 1880-1930 : A Social History of Spaces and Services*, edited by Jessica H. Foy and Thomas J. Schlereth, ix, 284 p. Knoxville, Tenn.: University of Tennessee, 1992.

A brief history of the role of pastime and play in the family social life from the Victorian Period to the depression era.

Cranz, Galen. *The Chair : Rethinking Culture, Body, and Design*. 1st ed. New York: W.W. Norton, 1998.

Everything that you wanted to know about the chair and you were afraid to ask. An exhaustive account of the design and history of chairs.

Education, Connecticut State Department of. "Social Studies Curriculum Framework." 1998  
[http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/pdf/curriculum/Curriculum\\_Root\\_Web\\_Folder/frsocst.pdf](http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/pdf/curriculum/Curriculum_Root_Web_Folder/frsocst.pdf). May 25 2008

Foy, Jessica H., and Thomas J. Schlereth. *American Home Life, 1880-1930 : A Social History of Spaces and Services*. Knoxville, Tenn.: University of Tennessee, 1992.

An easy to read reference book on social life and customs. It is broken down in three parts: room life, home life, and keeping house. I recommend portions as read aloud to contextualize the functions with the rooms.

Lupton, Ellen, J. Abbott Miller, and MIT List Visual Arts Center. *The Bathroom, the Kitchen, and the Aesthetics of Waste : A Process of Elimination : Mitt List Visual Arts Center*. Cambridge, Mass.

A highly recommended reference on the history of the bathroom and the kitchen, and the effects of these in the design, location, and construction of the home as we know it. Great graphics and period ads.

Nylander, Jane C. *Our Own Snug Fireside : Images of the New England Home, 1760-1860*. New York: Knopf : Distributed by Random House, 1993.

Nylander, Jane C., Diane L. Viera, and Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities. *Windows on the Past : Four Centuries of New England Homes*. 1st ed. Boston: Bulfinch Press, 2000.

Prown, Jules David. "Mind in Matter: An Introduction to Material Culture Theory and Method." (1982).

Volz, Candace M. "The Modern Look of the Early-Twentieth-Century House: A Mirror of Changing Lifestyles." In *American Home Life, 1880-1930: A Social History of Spaces and Services*, edited by Jessica H. Foy and Thomas J. Schlereth, p. 25-48. Knoxville, Tenn.: University of Tennessee, 1992.

A good general overview of the American home from the 1880 to 1940.

## Electronic Resources

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Geffrye, Museum. "Interiors (Flash) - Geffrye." July, 2008 <http://www.geffrye-museum.org.uk/virtualtour/interiors-flash/>

This virtual tour allows the students to observe and interact with eleven separate pictures of parlors and living rooms dating from 1665 to 1998. There are brief descriptions of each of these rooms and some of the objects.

The Metropolitan Museum of Art. "Works of Art: Virtual Reality Tour." 2008 [http://www.metmuseum.org/Works\\_of\\_Art/vr/index.asp](http://www.metmuseum.org/Works_of_Art/vr/index.asp)  
.July 20

Through this site students can have access to a virtual tour of two period rooms. The Hart room ca. 1639, from Ipswich, Massachusetts depicts a traditional New England settler home. The Verplank room, ca. 1767 is a collection the possessions of Verplank displayed in a room from an Orange County home, New York. Students can zoom in and have 360 degree camera control. Some of the items can be selected to find out more information about the object.

## Student Resources

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Bateson, Margaret, and Herman Lelie. *A Victorian Doll House*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991.

This paper dollhouse recreates a Victorian home. Unfortunately, it does not do justice to the period. This book can be used to dispel all the myths about Victorian interior and exterior material culture.

## Endnotes

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1. With the inability in the early years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century to reach a consensus on what the social studies standards should be for K-12, the following Framework is the most up-to-date document as far as I know. Connecticut State Department of Education, "Social Studies Curriculum Framework," [http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/pdf/curriculum/Curriculum\\_Root\\_Web\\_Folder/frsocst.pdf](http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/pdf/curriculum/Curriculum_Root_Web_Folder/frsocst.pdf).
2. For an extensive discussion of the State Department of Education literacy/language arts standards see the SDE curriculum and instruction website at [http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/cwp/view.asp?a=2618&q=320866&sdenav\\_gid=1757](http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/cwp/view.asp?a=2618&q=320866&sdenav_gid=1757)
3. Thomas J. Schlereth, "Material Culture and Cultural Research," in *Material Culture: A Research Guide* (Lawrence, Kan.: University Press of Kansas, 1985).
4. Jules David Prown, "Mind in Matter: An Introduction to Material Culture Theory and Method," (1982).
5. Thomas J. Schlereth in Carroll W. Pursell, "The History of Technology and the Study of Material Culture," in *Material Culture: A Research Guide* (Lawrence, Kan.: University Press of Kansas, 1985).
6. E. McClung Fleming, "Early American Decorative Arts as Social Documents," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 45, no. 2 (1958).<sup>1</sup> It is worth noting that in terms of Jules Prown's methodology these elements fall mainly within the stages of description and deduction.

7. Melinda Young Frye, "The Beginnings of the Period Room in American Museums: Charles P. Wilcomb's Colonial Kitchens, 1896, 1906, 1910," in *The Colonial Revival in America*, ed. Alan Axelrod and Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum. (New York: Norton, 1985). Wilcomb describes what his goal is as 'With it I propose to illustrate in a simple but effective manner the modes of life of our forefathers and ancestors. To accomplish this the interior of the exhibition room should be made to harmonize with the exhibits. All I require is a low ceiling with rafters, ceilings and walls covered with plain pine boards; two or three windows, and an imitation fireplace.' P.223-224
8. Ibid.
9. Katherine C. Grier, "The Decline of the Memory Palace: The Parlor after 1890," in *American Home Life, 1880-1930 : A Social History of Spaces and Services*, ed. Jessica H. Foy and Thomas J. Schlereth (Knoxville, Tenn.: University of Tennessee, 1992).
10. Ibid.
11. Ellen Lupton, J. Abbott Miller, and MIT List Visual Arts Center., *The Bathroom, the Kitchen, and the Aesthetics of Waste : A Process of Elimination : Mit List Visual Arts Center* (Cambridge, Mass. New York, NY: The Center; Distributed by Princeton Architectural Press, 1992).
12. Ibid.
13. Connecticut State Department of Education, "The Condition of Education in Connecticut," (Hartford, CT: Connecticut State Department of Education, 2007).
14. -, "Connecticut's English Language Learners 2000-2005," (Hartford, CT: Connecticut State Department of Education, 2007).
15. -, "Connecticut Strategic School Profiles," Connecticut State Department of Education, <http://www.csde.state.ct.us/public/cedar/profiles/index.htm#go..>
16. Margo H. Gottlieb, *Assessing English Language Learners : Bridges from Language Proficiency to Academic Achievement* (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Corwin Press, 2006).
17. Ibid.
18. Ruth Helen Yopp and Hallie Kay Yopp, "Ten Important Words Plus: A Strategy for Building Word Knowledge," *The Reading Teacher* 61, no. 2 (2007), Schlereth, "Material Culture and Cultural Research."
19. [http://www.noogenesis.com/pineapple/blind\\_men\\_elephant.html](http://www.noogenesis.com/pineapple/blind_men_elephant.html)
20. [http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Image%3ABlind\\_monks\\_examining\\_an\\_elephant.jpg?uselang=en](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Image%3ABlind_monks_examining_an_elephant.jpg?uselang=en)
21. Schlereth, "Material Culture and Cultural Research." pp. 3-4
22. Prown, "Mind in Matter: An Introduction to Material Culture Theory and Method."
23. Thomas J. Schlereth in Pursell, "The History of Technology and the Study of Material Culture."
24. Victorian magazine: <http://www.victorianamagazine.com/>
25. Here there is a great website to find blueprints of homes that the students can use for such an activity: <http://www.eplans.com/>
26. Ellen Richards, "Housekeeping in the Twentieth Century," *American Kitchen Magazine*, March 1900 1900.
27. <http://www.nrm.org/page109>
28. [http://www.allposters.com/-sp/Breaking-Home-Ties-Posters\\_i52202\\_.htm](http://www.allposters.com/-sp/Breaking-Home-Ties-Posters_i52202_.htm)
29. [http://www.the-athenaeum.org/art/display\\_image.php?id=48454](http://www.the-athenaeum.org/art/display_image.php?id=48454)
30. <http://rpo.library.utoronto.ca/poem/1338.html>



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