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The Victorian Age: A People in Search of Themselves as Seen Through Their Architecture

Curriculum Unit 91.01.04 by Valerie Ann Polino

INTRODUCTION

In 1979, as a member of the seminar Remarkable City, Industrial New Haven and the Nation, 1800-1900, I developed a unit entitled, *New Haven and The Nation, 1886-1900: A Social History—Labor, Immigration, Reform.* This unit dealt with the "other side " of life in the City—the poor, slums, tenements, and problems of the laboring class. This year's unit covers the life style of the middle and upper class of New Haven. The attitudes, values and beliefs of these people of *The Victorian Age—A People in Search of Themselves as Seen Through Their Architecture.*

Today, the Northeast has developed into a heavily populated industrial region with large cities that have become major centers of manufacturing and service related businesses. How and why this region of the United States developed into what it is today is an important idea for students to comprehend.

Between 1820 and 1870 the Northeast region of the United States was transformed from agrarian to industrial. This change profoundly affected all aspects of life in the region. Industrialization developed an unshakable faith in free enterprise, rugged individualism and material progress. In this new industrial age there emerged, in American society, a broad middle class. If one word can be used to express this age it would be MONEY. The new patrons of art and architecture took progress as their creed and architecture as not only the symbol of progress but, a reflection of their status in the social order.

Many in this newly developing middle class had strong feelings about what was "appropriate" architecture. When speaking of home nineteenth century American Victorians were referring to a social institution, a testimony to material progress and family stability. Home, a "House Beautiful", was considered the foundation of moral development and social values that set the standards for a civilized world. The American dream had become an individually owned home on a nicely landscaped lot. The idea set forth by many was that a home should reflect, not the current status of its inhabitants, but what they hoped to be like in the not to distant future. Tradesmen, clerks, factory workers set aside money for the day when they could move their family into a house in a respectable part of town.

The Victorian Age (Reign of Queen Victoria of England, 1837-1901) does not really refer to a chronological

period in history as much as a characteristic that penetrated all of society. The age was called Victorian, what was produced was termed Victorian and the people called themselves Victorians.

When viewing the architecture of the period the term that can best describe the age is "eclecticism", the liberty to choose from many styles. Victorians felt that they were heirs to all that was beautiful in past styles, therefore they adopted the style or styles they believed best fitted their new economic status in society. As a result of this eclecticism the following styles came and went, overlapping and flowing one into another during the period we call the Victorian Age.

1820-1860		1860-1900
Greek Revival	Italianate	
Egyptian Revieal	Second Empire	
Early Gothic Revival	Victorian Gothic	
Romanesque Revival	Stick Style	
Italian Villa	Shingle Style	
Renaissance Revival	Queen Anne	
Octagon Style	Richardsonian Romanesque	

Chateauesque

Beaux Arts

The New Haven area is rich in Victorian architecture, designed by some of the most renowned architects of the age. The homes of the area reflect the images of the past, giving a distinct character of "place". "Seeing" architecture in our city for the first time, students can learn to develop an understanding of how architecture reflects the hopes and dreams of the people who lived in the area, making New Haven, and our region, what it is today.

This unit is designed to show the richness of the area's Victorian past by using the varied styles of architecture as a way of understanding the culture—life style—of the age. By using two types of visual aids, slides of various styles of architecture and a walking tour, I hope students will be stimulated and gain an understanding of the Victorian Age.

GREEK REVIVAL

In the years between 1820 and 1850 America's admiration of Greek culture reached an all time high. Americans felt a kinship with the people of Greece for three reasons: the country had developed as a republic, just as the United States had done; at the time (1820-1830) the Greeks were at war with the Turks in an effort to gain their independence from Turkish rule; and there was an increased interest in archaeology, especially that of Greece and Egypt.

The number of Greek Revival style buildings erected during the first half of the 1800's was so widespread that it almost became the only acceptable style, as it was thought of as the style that symbolized democracy upon which our nation was founded.

Built by Ithiel Town in the 1830's in the Doric style—1900 postcard.

(figure available in print form)

Men like James Stuart and Nicholas Revette traveled to Greece to explore Greek architecture first hand. Making detailed drawings they reproduced them in books like *Antiquities of Athens*. Style was spread by pattern books, the most influential were written by Asher Benjamin and Minard Lafever— *The Practical House Carpenter; The Builders Guide* and *The Modern Builders Guide, The Beauties of Modern Architecture*. This type of book was indispensable to architects, most of whom had never seen, first hand, the buildings of Ancient Greece. A man of the period needed only three things to build a home that would reflect his status in life, one of dignity and permanence—money, land and a carpenter. At the time "professional" architects were hired to design public buildings but were rarely employed to build private homes. Anyone wanting to build a home would look around at what was already built, study plan books then turn to an "architect" to build the desired home. The everyday builder, carpenter, and bricklayer all called themselves "architects". Following plan books architects took the classical lines of the Greek temple and converted the style into a home.

New materials and techniques were developed for use in the Greek Revival home. Stucco penciled to look like ashlar (square cut granite) and brick painted to resemble stucco were widely used. Cream color and white were the dominant colors with soft hues of rose, brown, green and black used to suggest the look of marble and granite. The modest homes were constructed of wood, better homes a combination of wood, brick, stucco, sandstone, marble and granite.

The period between 1820 and 1840 was one of great wealth for the residents of New Haven. The population of the City had already reached over 10,000. With its busy harbor and developing manufacturing the City was expanding in all directions; east along the harbor toward Wooster Square, to the west out toward Westville, itself developing into an industrial area (see note), north from the Green out along the parallel streets of Whitney and Orange. Within the expanding city there was an explosion of buildings. Be it cottage, villa, or mansion, many reflected the Greek Revival style.

The explosion in construction in New Haven brought noted architects, who designed high style buildings in the Grecian style, to the city. One such man was Ithiel Town (1784-1844). Born in Connecticut, he received his training in Boston and opened an office in New Haven in 1810. Town is an excellent example of the new breed of highly educated architects emerging in the United States. With the wealth he acquired from royalties on his design s he established one of the largest architectural libraries of his day. Town was committed to the Greek classical style but did design other styles for his clients. The architectural firm of Town and Davis, along with men like James Hillhouse, a prominent citizen and patron of architecture, helped make New Haven the "Athens of Connecticut" and one of the most beautiful cities in the region.

note:

Polino, V. *The Life and Times of The West River, 1776-1896; A Study of Early Industrial Westville*. Yale New Haven Teachers Institute, 1984. Vol.VI.

Another notable architect of New Haven was Henry Austin. Born at Mt. Carmel in 1804 he eventually went to work for Town. Since Town and Davis spent much of their time working outside of New Haven, Austin supervised many of the firms projects in the city. By 1826 he had established such a reputation for his own work that he helped found the National Academy of Design and in 1836 opened his own office. Austin's early designs reflected the Greek Revival style. He also designed the entrance gates to the Grove Street Cemetery (1845) in the classical Egyptian style. Throughout the years, until his death in 1891, Austin built so many private homes that many streets in New Haven reflect some of his talents. (figure available in print form) Grove Street Cemetery Gates from a 1906 postcard.

Many fine examples of Greek Revival architecture are still visible throughout the New Haven area today.

LESSON ONE

GOTHIC REVIVAL

By the mid 1840's many people in the United States began to criticize the Greek style of architecture. A home should look like a home, they felt, and with the Greek Revival style one could not tell if the structure was a home, bank, court house, church or college. This period was a time of political change and technological advance in the United States from which emerged a rising middle class and an increased aristocracy. These changes and advances were reflected in a change in architectural style, both public and domestic, from Greek Revival to Gothic Revival. By 1845 the Gothic style was nearly as well established as the Greek style had been twenty years earlier, and by the outbreak of the Civil War Gothic had replaced Greek as the predominant style of architecture in the United States.

Trinity Church, on the Green, New Haven, Conn.—Built by Ithiel Town in 1817 (added to in 1845) Trinity Church, on the Green, is one of the oldest Gothic Churches in the United States.

(figure available in print form)

One of the most important trends affecting art, literature and ultimately architecture was the Romantic Movement. The growing love of the long age and far away was largely fostered by the writings of Scott, Irving, Hawthorne and Longfellow. While nineteenth century American was making great strides in science, industry and social reform, architects were trying to recapture the romance of Medieval society. The world described in the writings of the Romantic Movement was one of chivalry and valor amid castles, knights in shining armor and fair maidens in distress. Americans saw a relationship between the heroes glorified in these novels and their own national heroes.

The medieval castle came through very clearly in the writings of Sir Walter Scott. He even built for himself a Gothic castle, called Abbotsford, setting a trend in England that spread rapidly to the United States. The American writer James Fenimore Cooper upon returning from a visit to Abbotsford in the early 1830's remodeled his home at Cooperstown, New York into a Gothic castle. This style became so popular that the fashion became one of "modernizing" already existing homes, as Cooper had done, by applying Gothic designs to the structure.

(figure available in print form)

Illustration from: Waverly Novels , Sir Walter Scott. New York, Collier Press, 1842.

Gothic Revival won wide spread acceptance and was endorsed by the leading architects, Andrew Jackson Downing and Alexander Jackson Davis. Downing was the most influential critic of his time and Davis was the country's most prolific Gothic Revival architect. Together these men became the trend setters and largely determined the direction of architecture between 1830 and 1870. The association of Davis and Downing resulted in many architectural handbooks and builder's manuals. Davis' plans were widely publicized in books by Downing such as *Rural Residences* published in 1837 and *Cottage Residences* published in 1842. These

books contained not only hand colored lithographs of homes but descriptions, plans, estimates of the cost, summary of materials needed and the layout of the grounds and gardens. In his writings Downing set forth his philosophy of the "ideal" American way of life.

There were only a few full-blown Gothic stone mansions built in the United States. Of those that were built most have been torn down. One excellent example remains, Lyndhurst at Terrytown, New York built by Davis in 1834 for William Paulding. With the help of industrialization and mass production the costly stone Gothic structures were translated into wood, making the "Carpenter Gothic" affordable for many middle class American families. Downing believed a home expressed the personality of its owners, " fine man or woman built a fine home", he stated in *The Architecture of a Country Home* published in 1850. He felt that a typical dwelling should be a frame house with a veranda, beautiful lawn and garden. "When smiling lawns and tasteful cottages begin to embellish a country, we know that order and culture are established", he further stated. Downing emphasized that the difference between Europeans and Americans was that Americans by working could obtain one of the goals of life a "house beautiful".

To introduce the American people to new developments in art and architecture the United States held an international exposition in New York in 1853. The characteristic American home of Victorian design, "American Gothic", was introduced as affordable to all Americans. Many forms of Gothic architecture can be seen in New Haven today, in both public and private buildings. Two excellent examples of public architecture are the Yale School of Art, now Street Hall and the New Haven City Hall.

LESSON TWO

CITY HALL AND COUNTY COURT HOUSE, NEW HAVEN, CONN. (figure available in print form) New Haven City Hall, 1861, Henry Austin.

ITALIANATE

At mid century the United States was a land of diverse interests, cultures and tastes. A new class of people, in American society, was on the rise. A group that would change the face of the country forever. These people were optimistic, they believed that any person with three important qualities; skill, imagination and energy, had the opportunity to earn a good living and even become a member of the *nouveau riches*, new rich. Members of the newly developing middle class lived comfortable lives and as the wealth of the nation increased many were able to enjoy more pleasures of the good life.

The transformation of the cities of the Northeast, from mercantile centers to manufacturing centers, was an important step and the impact was felt in every aspect of urban life. When the first census was taken in 1790 five percent of all Americans lived in urban centers. Seventy years later, in 1860, fifteen percent of all Americans lived in urban areas. The 1860 census listed thirty five urban centers with populations exceeding 25,000. New Haven, fast becoming one of the most important manufacturing centers in New England, had a population of approximately 40,000. Traveling throughout the city one could see a number of factories producing goods to be sold not only in the United States but throughout the world. The India and Candee Rubber Companies, Volcanic Repeating Arms, Mallory-Wheeler Hardware Company, New Haven Clock Company, and the carriage companies of Brewster, G.D.Cook and Collins and Lawrence were just a few of the

many that added wealth to the city and its residences.

Urban centers, like New Haven, continued to spread out from the center of the city. To meet the needs of the expanding population New Haven set upon a program of improving its transportation system. With transportation by horse trolley a man could move his family out of the center of town to a residential neighborhood in the suburbs that was more fitting their life style.

Within the rising class of the newly and nearly rich were many who had little interest in the "long ago" and "far away". To these the world of fantasy created by writers such as Scott were out of touch with reality. It was to this group in American society that the villa style of architecture of the Italian provinces of Tuscany, Urbina, Lombard and Vevetro had great appeal. The word "villa" in Europe simply meant a country home. To many Americans the "villa" was a country home of a person of sufficient wealth to build and maintain it with taste and elegance. Again it was the plans of Davis circulated by Downing's books that helped to popularize the style. The home became a reflection of the family, where beauty, taste and moral culture flourished. Downing stated it very well in his 1850 *Architecture of Country Houses* ; "It is in such a house that we should look for the happiness, social and moral development of our people It is there that the social virtues are more honestly practiced, that the duties and grace of life have more meaning."

The first Italianate villas built in America were dignified structures of brick and stone. Since few people could afford the expense of stone the design s were transformed into the less costly wood frame construction. The wood was scored to resemble stone and painted in tones of red, blue, green, violet, and gray giving a rich effect to the structure. The hallmark of the villa was the three to four story square tower with arched openings. These homes were also designed with large sliding doors allowing the first floor rooms to open into terraces and verandas where in the warm summer months the family would gather.

The interior rooms, or apartments as they were called, were designed to reflect the intellectual and moral character of the family's culture and taste. On the main floor there were at least three to four rooms beside the kitchen. Even in a villa of moderate size there was a separate room devoted to meals—called the dining room; another devoted to social conversation—the drawing room; and a third devoted to intellectual pursuits—the library. On the second floor were found the bedrooms, ladies boudoir (private room), and an office or private room for the master of the house and always a back stairway leading to the servants quarters.

The Italianate villa was in vogue throughout the Civil War period. Despite the war great building activity took place in New Haven leaving us many beautiful and distinctive homes.

LESSON THREE

THE GILDED ARE 1870-1900

QUEEN ANN SHINGLE RICHARDSONIAN ROMANESQUE CHATEAUSQUE

The North emerged from the Civil War confident of long-range prosperity. Although the War caused financial problems for many New Haven industries, many of their largest markets had been in the South, by the mid 1870's the City was on the road to a successful new future.

By 1888 the population of New Haven had reached eighty thousand and the city was ranked third largest in size and wealth in New England, and one of the leading manufacturing centers in the country. Nearly a thousand manufacturers were located within the city's limits. The city's business growth and prosperity was linked to the numerous means of communication that connected it with the rest of the nation. New Haven was not only an important railway center, with some seventy-five passenger and freight trains leaving the city every day, but also a port for steamships that traveled to and from New York daily. All this contributed to the expansion of the city and the increased wealth of many of its residences.

As the city expanded land was filled in, bridges built, streets widened and paved. New public safety, health and fire codes were set down as law. The city water, sewer, gas, electrical and telephone systems spread out in all directions. By the mid 1880's New Haven had six horse railroad companies whose tracks radiated from the Green throughout the central portion of the city, to the railroad station, steamship landing, parks and suburbs. The main streets had double tracks and streetcars ran every six minutes.

Junction Elm & Broadway, New Haven, Conn.

(figure available in print form) 1900 Postcard

Local civil improvement organizations launched a campaign for the beautification of the parks which they felt had a very moral and social value. Under the leadership of men like Donald G. Mitchell, landscape designer, New Haven's park system became one of the finest in the United States. By the close of the century the park system included ten separate areas for the citizens to enjoy: East Rock and West Rock essentially mountain parks; Waterside, Bay View, Fort Hale, Quinnipiac, and Clinton were marine parks; Edgewood extended along the West River; Fort Wooster on the heights of Beacon Hill; and finally Beaver Ponds, a chain of small lakes.

By the 1880's something new was happening to the social structure in America. Up to this point the gap between the have and have-nots was relatively narrow. And the tastes of the rich were only the tastes of the poor on a more lavish scale. As the rich grew richer and the poor grew poorer the gulf between them grew wider and wider. For the rich, newly rich and nearly rich, where social competition was acute, came the realization that wealth and social position could be visibly manifested by the size and lavishness of one's home. Home styles changed rapidly—Queen Ann, Shingle, Romanesque and Chateauesque. Money talked, all were rich extravagant displays, the excess so loved by the people of what Mark Twain called, "The Gilded Age".

The Victorians invented the concept of the "World Fair". The first held in London in 1851, followed by the New York Exhibition of the Industry of All Nations, in 1853, and the gigantic Centennial Exhibition at Philadelphia in 1876. Over 30,000 exhibitors form 51 nations showcased new forms of architecture, home furnishings, and household inventions. Between May and November of 1876 nearly ten million men and women were exposed to all that was new and exciting.

The style of architecture that caught the attention of many was the Queen Ann. By 1881 the style was being spread by pattern books like Palliser's *Model Homes for People* published in Bridgeport, Connecticut and the first architectural magazine "The American Architect and Building Magazine". This style was especially popular, by increasing the number of verandas and balconies with their steep pitched roofs, the size and impressiveness of the home could be magnified. Another style that grew out of the Queen Ann was the graceful refined Shingle style. This style was uniquely New England, reaching its highest point in the coastal resorts from Maine to Long Island.

If any one person could be held responsible for the development of American architecture during the last half of the nineteenth century the credit would have to go to Henry Hobson Richerdson. The large expensive showy homes reached a climax in the luxurious Richerdsonian Romanesque and Chateauesque styles at the close of the century. The Richerdsonian Romanesque home, constructed of stonework was expensive to build. For this reason they are not very common. Scattered examples can be found in the larger cities of the Northeast. Chateauesque is also a rare style used by architects for "landmark" homes. This style also called for massive masonry construction, stonework and elaborate expensive details. New Haven is very fortunate to have examples of all four styles.

LESSON FOUR

I hope students have come away from this unit not with, "oh, I live in new haven", but , "I live in New Haven with its rich and wonderful past", to take pride in their city as a unique region of the United States.

LESSONS

The four lessons set up for this unit involve the use of slides and or a walking tour of the New Haven area to view, first hand, the varied styles of Victorian architecture. There are some sixty slides covering the styles to be found in New Haven. The slides are available through the Yale New Haven Teachers Institute along with step by step directions. Seeing a style first hand is more impressive then a slide so three walking tours have been mapped out to correspond to the slides: TOUR A—covers the Hillhouse, Whitney, Orange Street area; TOUR B—Wooster Square; TOUR C—Westville. This unit also includes a Key to The Identification of Architectural Styles that can be reproduced and handed out to the students. There is also a blank activity sheet to be filled in by the students as they progress through the unit. A sample lesson follows.

OVERALL OBJECTIVE:

Through the use of slides and or a walking tour showing the various styles of architecture, in New Haven, during the Victorian Age students will develop an appreciation and understanding of the people—their attitudes, values and beliefs as reflected in their architecture.

LESSONS ONE GREEK REVIVAL ARCHITECTURE 1820-1850

Objective Students will be able to explain the similarities between ancient Greek architecture and homes built in New Haven during this period.

Handouts

- 1. Key to Identification of Architectural Styles
- 2. Blank activity sheet (duplicate for each lesson) to be filled in by students.

Characteristic Details to Look For : emphasis on columns, capitals and triangles all used to create the effect of a Greek temple.

TOUR A: HILLHOUSE AVENUE—LINCOLN STREET

STOP ONE

HILLHOUSE AVENUE was laid out by James Hillhouse in the late 1700's. Beginning in the late 1820's his son James with the help of architects like Town and Davis made the street one of the most beautiful in the region and the most prestigious in the city.

1. #46 Hillhouse Avenue. (fill in activity sheet)

New Haven's best example of the Greek Revival style, the Aaron Skinner House was built in 1822 by Alexander Davis. *Slide 1.* Designed after a Greek temple, the house is constructed of brick faced stucco that has been penciled marked to make the stucco look like stone. In the 1850's the house was remodeled by Henry Austin, filling in the second story to the right and left of the entrance.

(A). Students sketch house

(B). Identify the type of capital

2. #35 Hillhouse Avenue. Mary Prichard House, built in 1836 by Alexander Davis *Slide 2*. It is an excellent example of Greek Revival architecture.

- (A). Students sketch house
- (B). Identify the type of capital.

STOP TWO

LINCOLN STREET was opened up in the mid 1830's (originally Clinton Place). This is an area of basic middle class homes, built in the Greek Revival style. These homes were the type of respectable home in a respectable part of town that the average Victorian strove for. A home the would give them an air of importance and dignity.

- (A). Have students compare these homes to the homes on Hillhouse Avenue.
- 3. #10 Lincoln Street, built about 1840.
 - (A). Note Doric Columns on porch.
 - (B). Have Students sketch columns.
 - (C). The bay window was added in the 1890's.
- 4. #16 and 18 Lincoln Street, built 1836.

(A). Note columns and classic roof line.

(B). Have students sketch homes.

TOUR B. WOOSTER SQUARE AREA

This area was originally called the New Township. After the Revolutionary War the area developed into a maritime center. Many of the homes were built for the wealthy sea captains of the day. Wooster Square was named after General David Wooster, a hero of the American Revolution who grew up in the area.

5. #600 Chapel Street, built in 1844 for Henchman Soule. *Slide* 5

(A). Excellent example of the high period in Greek Revival.

(B). Note columns on porch, classic lines of the house.

(C). This house was in the transition period from Greek Revival to Italian Villa, note cupola top center.

TOUR C: WESTVILLE

This area was west of the West River and was not very populated at this time. Westville was not part of New Haven and had the name Hotchkissville.

STOP ONE

6. #512 Blake Street, built in the early 1840's an example copied from Minard LaFever's builders guide. *Slide 6*

(A). Sketch basic structure.

(B). Sketch honeysuckle pattern on piedmont and down side of building.

STOP TWO

7. #131 Oliver Road, built 1840's. very formal Greek Revival. Slide 7.

(A). Note unusual capital—great bunch of plumey ferns—only two others like it in New Haven—1108 Whitney Avenue and 19 Lyon Street.

(B). Sketch columns and capital.

Lessons Two, Three and Four can be found with the slides Lesson Two; Gothic Revival 1840-1860 Lesson Three; Italianate 1840-1880 Lesson Four; The Gilded Age 18-70-1900

OTHER ACTIVITIES

The following are three suggested trips outside of the New Haven area.

Hartford

Mark Twain—Harriet Beecher Stowe Houses

For information—Nook Farm Visitors Center

77 Forest St. Hartford CT 06105

(203) 525-9317

Norwalk

Lockwood Mathews Mansion

For information—295 West Avenue Norwalk, CT

(203) 838-2434

HANDOUT: KEY TO IDENTIFICATION OF ARCHITECTURAL STYLES

GREEK REVIVAL ARCHITECTURE

Pediment : A wide low-pitched gable surmounting the facade of a building in a classical style triangle.

Column : An upright shaft serving as a support

(figure available in print form) Classical Greek Columns (figure available in print form)

GOTHIC REVIVAL

Tracery : Ornate stonework.

(figure available in print form) *Lancet* : A window generally tall in proportion and topped by a sharply pointed arch. (figure available in print form) Oriel : A bay window located at an upper floor level, and supported by piers attached to the main wall. (figure available in print form) The Tower (figure available in print form) Pinnacle (figure available in print form) **Grouped Chimneys** (figure available in print form) Design XXX : Large country house.—Downing, Andrew J. Cottage Residence . New York; D. Appleton Co., 1850. (figure available in print form) Furniture also reflected Gothic style features. (figure available in print form) Design VII : Symmetrical Cottage.—Downing, Andrew J., Cottage Residence . (figure available in print form) **ITALIANTE STYLE**

Design XXII : Villa in the Italian Style.—Downing, Andrew J., Cottage Residence .

(figure available in print form) Design XXVII : Villa in the Italian Style.—Downing, Andrew J., Cottage Residence . (figure available in print form) Design VI : From, Downing's Cottage Residence . (figure available in print form) Lantern : Structure built on top of roof with open or windowed walls. (figure available in print form) QUEEN ANN

Types of Windows

(figure available in print form) Spindle Work Brackets (Gingerbread)

Furniture also reflects spindle work brackets.

(figure available in print form) SHINGLE STYLE (figure available in print form) RICHARDSONIAN ROMANESQUE (figure available in print form) CHATEAUESQUE (figure available in print form)

ACTIVITY SHEET ______ Style of Architecture

Background information and characteristics of style.
 Notes on Homes
 ADDRESS ADDRESS
 ADDRESS ADDRESS
 ADDRESS ADDRESS

Bibliography for Teachers

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Reading List for Students

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