



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute  
1991 Volume II: The Family in Art and Material Culture

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## **New Haven Families: Artifacts and Attitudes, 1770s to 1890s**

Curriculum Unit 91.02.08  
by Jeanne Sandahl

The school where I teach, Worthington Hooker in New Haven, has a strong middle class population. The children, often from Yale-connected families, come from all over the world. They are often sophisticated travellers and museum-hoppers. They do not, however, know much about New Haven, and they have only a dim perception of what the lives of families and children were like in New Haven's lively historic past. I intend this unit to remedy this lack, using the many "artifacts" which still abound in our city. I think it could be used in schools with less experienced students as well, and hope it will be more effective than textbook materials. I teach fourth grade, but the unit could be used up to sixth grade.

Since the past is present all around us in the form of relics of former cultures and the people who lived here before us, it should be possible through the examination of those artifacts to help the students have more direct experience with that past. I propose to try to make that experience more relevant by focusing on family life, especially children's roles in it, and where possible, the products children made and used. With close study, those products, whether buildings, tools, furniture, toys, or pictures, can help us deduce and to some extent share what the family and its enveloping culture experienced. Literature, clothes, household items, all are stamped with the influence of the producing culture, and a study of them ought to give an immediacy to the task of learning about the culture. All of these things reflect the changing attitudes and relationships of family life.

Products of a culture are dictated not just by attitudes, but by environment as well. Geography, natural resources, climate, and available skills all influence the culture and its products. It should be possible, then, by working backward from the object to discover the nature of the culture that created it, and since the family, itself a unit of production, created so much of what it required in pre-industrial times, the study of weapons, tools, etc., should reveal a good deal about life in the past.

Children love to make things, and this unit will be used to fit in with activities of our Art Supervisor, Penny Snow, who has written a companion unit that will give the students a chance to experience making some of the kinds of things pre-industrial children might have made—samplers, quilts, toys—as part of their art program. You may wish to look up her unit: *Changing Images of Childhood in America: Colonial , Federal and Modern New England* .

## AIMS

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In this unit I wish to combine social studies, language arts, and the visual arts to do these things:

1. Give the students direct experience with their city's cultural past.
2. Help the student to relate this knowledge and experience, through a focus on families, to his or her own life.
3. Help students enjoy objects from the past and convey some skill in the extraction of information about the past from them.
4. Where possible, in conjunction with the above mentioned companion unit, allow the making of similar objects.

## STRATEGIES AND RESOURCES

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Many products from pre-industrial New Haven still exist around us. Strategies emerge from those that are accessible. Some of those are:

- ¥ buildings from earlier times, like the Pardee Morris House
- ¥ historical sites, like Fort Hale and the New Haven Green
- ¥ gravestones, like the ones transferred to Grove Street Cemetery from the Green
- ¥ paintings and lithographs in the New Haven Colony Historical Society, the British Art Center, and the Yale Art Gallery
- ¥ toys and games in museums and books
- ¥ poems and publications in early books and magazines
- ¥ local inventions, as represented by models: and pictures in the New Haven Historical Society and the Eli Whitney museum
- ¥ people who have special knowledge of arts, crafts and methods of manufacture of products from pre-industrial times
- ¥ tools, weapons, and family possessions from Native American cultures (at the Peabody Museum) and from European Settlers (from the Historical Society and the Morris House.)

This unit will require about 12 weeks and should allow for frequent trips to study community resources such as I have listed. It could be expanded or contracted if time were a factor.

We will begin with a study of the land in New Haven, its shape and special features. A good start would be a trip up East Rock on foot in the company of the East Rock ranger or a volunteer geologist to view the terrain between East Rock and West Rock, and to discuss the geological history of the surrounding land and the features that made it attractive to the Native Americans who lived here. It should become evident how the natural—if shallow—harbor, the rivers, Long Island Sound, and the extensive natural wetlands influenced the

lives of the Indian peoples who lived here. A trip to the Peabody Museum to study the tools and products of local Native Americans on display should yield good discussions about how these were made—out of what needs and what materials—and how the families and their homes, clothing, weapons and tools related to geographic features and resources. Reports can be assigned on Algonquin and Quinnipiac family life and tribal structure, so that similarities and differences to later New Haven families can be understood. Maps will be made to relate to present day New Haven.

This will lead into the next period, the arrival of Europeans at New Haven. How different were their tools and family products from those of Native Americans, and why? A trip to the New Haven Colony Historical Society to see how the early 9 squares were laid out and to view the drawings and paintings of the terrain and uses of the Green in those early days would supplement information on geological and resource factors. Another trip, to the Pardee Morris House to see the household appliances common in the 18th century, would be useful.

Sleeping arrangements for children and smaller furniture sometimes made for them will be noted, along with the sparse storage available for clothes. This will be a good time to invite in people in our community who have mastered earlier domestic arts: spinning thread and using it to weave or knit cloth, or demonstrating the arts of quilting, butter-making, beekeeping, candle dipping, and so on. Our community has people who can perform all these “lost” arts.

Pictures and portraits can be studied for clues to relationships, cultural attitudes, children’s roles, and family power structures. The way children are dressed, posed, and what they carry gives clues for students to unravel as they piece together a background of understanding of families living before them.

Understanding community and family life would be incomplete without considering the role of religion. The three churches on the Green—at least as congregations if not buildings since the earliest of the three buildings, Center Church, dates from 1812—have a lot to offer as artifacts of colonial life. Center Church is built over the graves of some colonists, and its crypt has well-preserved stones under it. It also has monuments to the Regicides—the three judges who sentenced King Charles to death and then had to flee to the colonies when his son came to the English throne. Another monument is to Theophilus Eaton, founder of New Haven Colony. There is a Tiffany window showing the Rev. John Davenport and Eaton celebrating their landing in New Haven with prayer.

Finally, we will study the nineteenth century as an example of a culture changing because of advancing technology. New Haven became a town with less sea traffic and more industry, driven by the many inventions of the time, many of which were developed here. Tools and toys began to be manufactured in factories which adopted Eli Whitney’s pioneering manufacturing methods in his old Gun Factory which today is incorporated into the Eli Whitney Museum. Household articles became more complex, more sophisticated. A growing merchant-middle class could allow its children more play; they were not needed on farms nor in business until they were older. Of course, the children of the poor were exploited by the factories, but philosophically a change in the role of children occurred. They were no longer expected to be miniature adults, who have to be chiseled into moral beings through punishment and the constraints of adult clothing and expectations. They were increasingly regarded as essentially good in nature, until corrupted by society. They could be children and could enjoy childhood, a state which hardly existed in earlier times. School then became more important, because children’s roles in business would require it. Girls more often received formal education, and some work outside the home began to open up for women.

New Haven itself in the 19th century became more sophisticated and varied in its public and domestic architecture. Neo-classical and Georgian influences are still to be seen today in homes around our school. The

Eli Whitney barn and the Eli Whitney museum are within walking distance, and we can visit the latter to learn about Whitney's inventions and contributions to modern industrial technology. Sometimes it is possible to make wooden toys at the museum.

The colonial and early industrial ages meet in Grove Street Cemetery, where stones from the earlier days of the colony are propped along the walls, having been moved there from the Green when the churchyard of Center Church became too crowded. Many of the old stones are still in readable condition, with their death's heads, resurrection angels, and numerous epitaphs reminding us all of our mortality. Crowding around these are the less well-preserved stones of the 19th century, which have been more affected by city air pollution but bear the mournful but more hopeful symbols of the Romanticism current in the art and literature of that century. The gate of the cemetery, by Henry Austin, is derived from the Egyptian temple at Karnak. We will visit Grove street to see and decipher the inscriptions and collect symbols by means of rubbings, which will help students understand the differences in family life and beliefs of both centuries. We will discuss the religious ideas that lay behind the symbols, and write verses and inscriptions for our own tombstones, choosing a symbol to represent our own view of eternity.

This can be only a partial list of possible tie-ins to language arts, with opportunities for reports, diaries, role-playing skits, and special readings from the past. Copies of McGuffey Readers, which dominated school life across America for more than seventy years, with their poems, stories, homilies and information, are now in paperback. We will use excerpts from it to help us recreate a day in a 19th century schoolhouse, experiencing the activities and customs of the second half of that century.

As a culminating activity we will make a class trip to Mystic Seaport, a recreated "village" on a river which has many of the attributes of nineteenth century New Haven.

## SEQUENCE AND CONTENT OF LESSONS

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### Lesson 1

**Materials** *Opaque Projector, several pictures of modern families. Include a variety of race and family structure.*

**Objective** *To introduce the concept of family as a basic form of human organization, with special emphasis on its role as a basic unit of production; producing things that are needed in the larger society.*

**Discussion** *Elicit a definition of "family" (there are numerous ways to define it, but the idea is a group of persons living in one household under a parent or two, who form a social or economic unit.)*

Discuss what a family needs to maintain its members. What does it do to satisfy those needs? Modern families, unlike those of former times, generally perform services of some kind of worth to society as a whole. Earlier families tended to produce things, both for their own needs and perhaps to sell or barter.

As the pictures are shown discuss how these services fit into the larger needs.

**Culmination** Each student draws a picture of his own family group (those who live in the same home with him) and lists under each family member what services each performs. Children, of course, are “in training” to provide services to the larger economic unit, while “houseparents”, if any, serve the family so it can contribute more easily.

## Lesson 2

**Resources** *Park Ranger or volunteer geologist (if you don't have one in your school population, School Volunteers will help you find one). Handbook, East Rock Park , borrowed from the New Haven Public Library.*

**Objective** *To study geologic terrain, and some of the history of East Rock.*

**Activity** *Walking trip up East Rock to summit. On the way up, note the rocky face and discuss its composition. The handbook gives a fine short summary of the mountain's geological history and composition. At the summit, from various viewing points, identify the harbor, the river, West Rock, and the extensive wetlands between. Discuss the features that would attract Native Americans, Quinnipiac and Algonquins, who were area inhabitants. As you return through the wooded flatlands below, known as College Woods, point out that numerous Indian tools and artifacts have been found in the area of the tennis courts.*

## Lesson 3

**Resources** *Flint arrowheads or other Native American tools, if you can borrow some. If not, the resource book mentioned above, East Rock Park , has pictures of tools found in College Woods Park, and another fine book, The New England Indians (see bibliography), has many more in reproducible form.*

**Objective** *To learn about New Haven's Native Americans, especially their family life and family economic roles as producers, using artifacts of their culture.*

**Discussion** *Elicit complete description of objects. Include shape, color, texture, materials, etc. Progress to speculation on uses, and which members of the family might make it. What might a people who made and used such objects be like? What can we assume about the nature of their culture: What might their family structure be?*

**Follow up** *Assign reports on family, tribal structure, products, trade practices, etc. Take special note of what Native Americans of these tribes might be do as their chief form of subsistence. As to family structure, books say child-rearing practices among them were quite permissive, which can lead later to interesting comparisons with European culture.*

## Lesson 4

TRIP to the Peabody Museum

**Objective** *Visit to Native American artifacts on display there. Discussion should center on objects as products, made by the family for survival. Each student should pick one object or article of clothing, sketch it, note facts concerning it, and on return to class, write a full description of it. A pamphlet can be made by gathering these together with an appropriate cover.*

Meanwhile, reports should be in progress. Request a model or drawing for each. Algonquins had unique domed wigwams and winter long houses. *The New England Indians* (mentioned above) is excellent for this purpose because it shows details of manufacture.

## **Lesson 5**

**Report Day** *Hear reports, display models.*

## **Lesson 6:**

**Materials** *Slide projector, slides of Colonial era families (a set of slides is filed with the Institute office, to be lent on request with this unit).*

**Objective** *To introduce the European settlers and their family life and structure, to be compared with Native American families.*

**Procedure** *Using slide, The Gore Children , (painting, c. 1755), elicit first a complete description of the painting: principals, clothes, approximate ages, positions relative to each other. Include anything they carry; the direction of their gazes, backgrounds, colors. Try to establish who is most important (in this case, the boy, who is standing while his sisters are seated, is clearly dominant). Progress to a discussion of male and female roles (the boy is holding a riding crop; horses are a masculine pursuit, while the girls are holding flowers). You could progress to the Angus Nicholson Family (c. 1792) where the father is clearly dominant. Follow the same procedure. You could point out that at this time in history, though there was clearly affection, children were regarded as property of their parents, who had almost total. power over them, even choosing mates, etc. The children in the Paintings, of course, were of the privileged class but nonetheless children had clear roles as “producers”—the boys helping with the estate or father’s business; the girls supervising household servants or producing food or clothing. Poor children then might be indentured servants or farmworkers; the girls might be sent into domestic service. Education for girls was limited to “dame School” where they learned reading and writing and simple math. Later, if they were wealthy, they might learn needlework, singing, drawing, and other feminine arts. Poor girls might never learn to read, Discipline of children was often very strict; the poetic injunction to “spare the rod and spoil the child” was taken seriously. This can be contrasted with gentler Native American child-raising customs.*

## **Lesson 7**

TRIP to Center Church, New Haven, and the New Haven Green.

**Objective** *To learn more about Colonial life, especially religious aspects affecting family.*

Items of special interest are the crypt under Center Church, with its well-preserved stones. You could point out the many early deaths of children from disease. Upstairs there is a handsome Tiffany window showing Davenport and Eaton on landing in New Haven. Your guide will discuss the many quaint customs of Colonial church life. Outside, note the grave of Theophilus Eaton and memorials to the three judges, Whalley, Goffe and Dixwell. Discuss their story.

You should also point out features of the Green in Colonial times: the stream in the corner, the whipping post, the militia training ground, the grazing cattle. You might want to copy the famous Brockett map which shows where Davenport and Eaton had spacious house plans and a special walkway to the Green. You might also

point out that all around and behind Center Church are still buried hundreds of people, now forever anonymous, and though their headstones are now in Grove Street Cemetery, the bodies of 200 years of colonists are still there.

***On return to class Students could begin a journal about life in one of the 8 squares around the Green before the revolution, to be added to each day for two weeks. In language arts we will read excerpts from Sarah Knight's 1704 contemporary journal about her trip to New Haven from Boston. It's available from the public library.***

## **Lesson 8**

***Materials*** A borrowed spinning wheel with its owner (Mrs. Fenno Heath in our Class ) ready to demonstrate.

***Objective To learn about products of eighteenth century families, both as consumers and as traders. We will see how fibres are spun into thread or yarn and how they are woven or knitted into clothes. Any other of the crafts of the time—butter making, candle dipping, quilting, etc.-can be added or substituted. Students are to report on one way in which a family of that time could supply its own needs. (In New Haven, oystering, fishing, weaving, cobbling, coopers, blacksmiths, and many more are identified on the Wadsworth map of 1748, which the Historical Society also has).***

## **Lesson 9**

TRIP to Pardee Morris House, on the East Shore.

***Objective To learn more about an 18th century household, and family life, through this historic setting.***

Things to see and discuss: a formally planned herb garden; colonial kitchen with domestic equipment, trundle beds for children, furnishings, note lack of closets, ballroom, etc. Some docents will let the children hold or demonstrate some of the kitchen equipment.

A later separate trip might be one to Fort Hale, not far away and connected by Revolutionary War history with the Morris House, which was burned in Tryon's raid. There is the reconstructed "Black Rock" fort on the shore, the unique sliding drawbridge, the "moat" and the bunkers. The view of the harbor there gives you a chance to talk about the fisherman-oysterman economy that sustained the town for generations. You can also tell the story of the "phantom ship", which is the subject of two handsome 19th century paintings usually on exhibit at the Historical Society.

## **Lesson 10**

***Materials books on tombstone art and the art of rubbing. See bibliography for two fine ones. My favorite is the Friswell pamphlet, which gives a long list of the carved symbols found on early gravestones. It lists more than sixty symbols, and your class can have fun trying to decide what they mean. Many had solemn inscriptions and warnings about human mortality, often in verse. Some had portraits of the deceased. The Friswell pamphlet also gives a method of "profiling" stones by their basic shapes that helps to determine their approximate age.***

***Procedure Reproduce the symbols pages and some of the inscriptions; the students can save them for referral later when they write epitaphs. Demonstrate the technique of rubbing in the***



***classroom, showing how you can pick up any recessed design from a smooth surface, including basic texture of the surface, etc. The Gillon book has some charming rubbings. Having completed this introduction, the class will be ready for the next lesson.***

## **Lesson 11**

TRIP to Grove Street Cemetery

***Materials appropriate for rubbings; rolls of masking tape, strong bond paper, soft black lumber-marking crayons or charcoal.***

Available in the gate house are maps of the cemetery, with the many stones of special prominence marked. This is a place where the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries meet in the stone avenues named after trees.

Even the gateway is a symbol in stone, inspired by the temple of Karnak. Around the wall to the left are hundreds of stones that once stood on the Green around Center Church. They were moved during the nineteenth century. The students can look for symbols, including death angels, and for interesting epitaphs. These somber mementos can be compared with the more recent but more weathered marble stones of the nineteenth century (air pollution affects marble sooner than slate or sandstone). The symbols and inscriptions of the nineteenth century are quite different.

Our rubbings will be displayed at school, and will be the inspiration for the language arts period, when students will write an epitaph for themselves, and create a symbol to be carved on their own imaginary stone.

## **Lesson 12**

***Materials Slide projector, Opaque projector, slides of 19th century paintings of family(Earl, 1804 and Field, 1840), Book, New Haven , An Illustrated History (see bibliography; it's widely available in local libraries)***

***Objective To reveal the changes in New Haven culture and family life brought about by the rise of technology and the coming of the industrial age.***

***Procedure Show slide of the painting by Ralph Earl, "Family Portrait" (c. 1804) and later "Josph Moore and Family" by Erastus Field (c. 1840). With each, take the class through the same three steps as with the Colonial era slides: description, deduction, and speculation, What differences are apparent in relationships? What are the children like? Can any changes be noted in the way children are accepted in the family? Point out that between the two paintings a great deal has changed around them: factories have arisen, and poor women and children often work in them: Trains and canels and steamboats to New York widened the world. Children—at least those of middle and upper classes—are allowed to be children, not miniature adults. The status of women, too, was on the edge of change. But the father was still the dominant, most powerful figure in the family.***

Next, using the opaque projector and the book *The Illustrated History of New Haven* (see bibliography), show pictures of mid nineteenth century New Haven. Eli Whitney's radical methods of manufacture—interchangeable parts—have had astonishing descendants. New Haven entrepreneurs have been agents of change too, inventing the first telephone switchboard, asphalt paving, the cotton gin, the truss bridge, and many more.



## Lesson 13

TRIP, to Eli Whitney Gun Factory, now known as the Eli Whitney Museum. Inside are models of the many innovative machines and inventions by New Haven people.

***Objective To see and appreciate production skills as they were, and to understand how factory production changed society and families with it.***

Through previous arrangement, it has been possible for students visiting the museum to make something there, usually an old-fashioned toy. Discuss how Whitney's use of mass production techniques helped change society. Nearby is a reconstructed bridge modeled after Ithael Towne's truss bridge, and the Whitney barn, also nearby, is beautifully put together.

## Lesson 14

***Materials paperback copy of McGuffey Reader, Grade Four or Five. Copy of Tom Sawyer . The McCuffey Readers were standard in countless American schools in the nineteenth century; they were frankly Christian in basic slant. But through poems, stories, homilies, and fables, they had a deep influence on the ethics and attitudes of hundreds of thousands.***

***Procedure Begin by reading the chapter in Tom Sawyer in which Tom manipulates classroom customs to find a seat by Becky. This gives a feel for the classroom of that time Then conduct a day's reading and math as in a oneroom schoolhouse. Girls and boys are seated separately. Assign reading lessons from extracts from McGuffey. Assignments should include learning verses by heart and higher groups helping lower. Be tough with the ruler (though you can't hit anyone, however tempted) and sharp with the tongue. Conduct a couple of spelldowns and/or mathdowns.***

## CULMINATING ACTIVITY

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TRIP to Mystic Sea Village.

Mystic Village, though a reconstructed river town, has a fortuitous similarity to nineteenth century New Haven on Long Island Sound. Ships in those days were sailing vessels and steamships, neither of which draw much water, and the sea traffic was the lifeblood of both towns. Long Wharf, a long pier-like extension out into the Sound which was lined with shops catering to that traffic, existed into the present century. Mystic has all the trades necessary to that time and place. Your students will enjoy seeing a real blacksmith, a ship's chandlery, a country school, and many more—and may tour the sailing ship tied up at their pier, Besides, the gift shops are terrific!

***Follow up On returning to school the next school day, you can have each student choose one of the ways of being a "producer" from all those seen at Mystic, and can write about how the trade is conducted, and why they would choose it.***

## Bibliography

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Bartlett, Ellen Strong, *Historical Sketches of New Haven*. New Haven: Tuttle, Morehouse & Taylor. 1897. This venerable book, available in the Mitchell Library, has excellent pictures and gives specially good background on Center Church Crypt and Grove Street Cemetery.

Demos, John. *Past , Present and Personal: The Family and the Life Course in American History*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1986. From cradle to grave, from Founders to present day, this book describes the changes in attitude and social policy toward family members. Helpful!

Friswell, Richard. *Faces in Stone: the Early American Gravestone as Primitive Art* . Belmont, Mass. Richard J. Friswell, pub. 1973. Written by a psychologist, this pamphlet deals with the history, development and symbology of gravestones. Lists and explains many symbols

Gillon, Edmund Vincent Jr. *Early New England Gravestone Rubbings*. New York: Dover Publications, 1966. Large collection of early gravestone rubbings with sharp detail and information on how to do the same.

Humphreville, Frances T. and Van Dusen, Albert E. *This is Connecticut* . Syracuse, N.Y., The L. W Singer Co., 1963. This middle grade history is scattered throughout the school system and can be useful for reports. Puts New Haven in place among sister colonies.

Knight, Sarah Kemble, *The Journal of Madam Knight* . Boston, MA., David R. Godine, 1972. This journal chronicles a trip made in 1704 by Mrs. Knight from Boston to New Haven. She gives us a clear idea of the difficulties of travel in Colonial times and in the process is quite funny. She has the knack of humorous characterization of the inn keepers and lesser bumpkins she meets along the way. Could be read to students.

New Haven Colony Historical Society. *The New Haven Scene* . New Haven: published by the Society, 1970. A handsome collection of paintings, maps, watercolors and drawings from pre-industrial New Haven. Reveals the beauty of this small pastoral town long ago, when there was haying in Westville, at the foot of West Rock.

Shepherd, Jane Bushnell. *My Old New Haven, and Other Memories, Briefly told* . New Haven: Tuttle, Morehouse and Taylor Co., 1932. Somewhat rambling but charming reminiscences of New Haven life, from the Civil War up to the '20s. Makes you wish for those days back again.

Shumway, Floyd, and Hegel, Richard (Editors). *New Haven , An Illustrated History* . Woodland Hills, California: 1981. This book has many color pictures. In a rather disorganized way this collection samples the political, religious, artistic and social history of New Haven. The pictures are abundant and could make good slides, or be used with the opaque projector.

Wilbur, C. Keith. *The New England Indians* . Chester, Ct.: The Globe Pequot Press, 1978. A bright, breezy book with line drawings and illustrations on every page. Nearly everything the Native Americans of our area made or used is here, with a short history of New England tribes from 10,500 years ago up to King Philip's War in 1678. Marvelous for background information, or for student reports on tools, or figuring out how those artifacts were made.

Woodward, Sarah Day. *Early New Haven* . New Haven, Ct. (publishing information missing from library copy): 1929. For teachers' background information on New Haven Colony from the early theocracy to Revolutionary times.

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