

Teaching with Museum Collections
The Etiquette of Calling
April 2005

The National Park Service [NPS] *Teaching with Museum Collections* provides lesson plans for teachers to use NPS museum collections in student-centered educational activities. The collections tell the story of America; its peoples, cultures, varied habitats, significant events, and ideas that continue to inspire the world. *Teaching with Museum Collections [TMC]* emphasizes the links between the ‘real things;’ the collections, and the sites where those collections were found, collected, or used. NPS collections include cultural objects, natural history specimens, archival documents and photographs. Lesson plans are linked to national education standards.

Lesson Plan Elements

□Title: The Etiquette of Calling
▪Darla Hostetler

□Grade Level: 5-8

□Length of Lesson: 1-3 days, may be adapted as needed

□Overview of Object-based Lesson Plan

▪*Topic:* Social Etiquette

▪*Park name and collections:* Harry S Truman National Historic Site

▪*Goal:* Teach students about the social customs of calling and how this custom related to the developing nation.

▪*Background:* Victorian Society (1837-1901) had very strict ideas about how people should behave. Good manners and proper social etiquette were extremely important to one’s social standing in the community. “Calling” or “Visiting” was the most important leisure time activity. Proper etiquette dictated everything about the visit including the time of day, length of the visit, and what should or should not be worn.

Additional background information is included with this lesson.

☐National Educational Standards

Social Studies: Middle Grades

I. Culture – (c)

The students will be able to explain and give examples of how language, literature, the arts, architecture, artifacts, traditions, beliefs, values, and behaviors contribute to the development and transmission of culture.

V. Individuals, Groups, and institutions – (a)

The students will demonstrate an understanding of concepts such as role, status, and social class in describing the interactions of individuals and social groups.

Missouri Standards

▪Performance (Process) Standard Goal 1: Students will acquire the knowledge and skills to gather, analyze and apply information ideas.

1.5 comprehend and evaluate written, visual and oral presentations and works

1.8 organize data, information and ideas into useful forms (including charts, graphs, outlines)

1.9 identify, analyze and compare the institutions, traditions and art forms of past and present societies.

▪Social Studies Knowledge (Content) Standard 6: Students will acquire a solid foundation that includes the knowledge of relationships of the individual and groups to institutions and cultural traditions.

☐Student Learning Objectives:

▪Students will be able to critically analyze objects from the museum collection.

▪Students will use the analysis to develop an understanding of how these objects fit into the relationship of an individual or group to the cultural traditions of a developing nation.

▪Students will be able to effectively communicate their ideas and analysis through oral or written presentations and group activities.

☐Material/Objects and Collections:

- HSTR 24791 – Card Receiver

- HSTR 21008 – Calling Card

Both artifacts belonged to Mrs. David W. Wallace, the mother-in-law of President Harry S Truman

☐Vocabulary

Artifact: an object produced or shaped by human workmanship.

Etiquette: rules concerning correct behavior.

Calling: paying a social visit to someone.

Calling Card: a card bearing one's name that is used to announce an intended visit.

Card Receiver: a dish or other item used to hold calling cards.

Parasol: a light, small umbrella carried by a woman to shield her from the sun.

Reading: giving a detailed description of an artifact.

Victorian: Era of society during the time of Queen Victoria (1837-1901).

Visiting Toilette: the name used for the wardrobe worn while calling.

☐Lesson Implementation/Procedure:

Activity #1- Introduction and Warm-up

Offer the students some examples to start the discussion. One example of a question might be: What do you wear when you visit your friend's house?

Familiarize students with the social customs and cultural traditions in the mid to late 1800s. Possible topics for discussion might include: How communication today between households differs from that of the 1800s; Formality of visits then versus informality of today (ie. length of visit, dress, manners, etc.)

Use the blackboard to list the vocabulary words as they come up during the discussion. For reinforcement ask them to do the Activity 1-Word Search Puzzle that is included with this lesson.

You may want to ask the students one of the following questions or one you may think better suited to your group: What forms of communication do they use with their friends

and family? *How do they feel their lives would be affected without those forms of communication?

Activity #2 – Reading an Artifact (part 1)

Divide the students into groups of 2. Have the students visit the Harry S Truman National Historic Site American Visionary Webpage to view the card receiver and calling card. Have the students choose one or both of the artifacts if you prefer, have them to discuss the object(s) including the size, date of manufacture, material, function and use, and cultural significance.

Explain to the students that historians often use documents to learn more about the past. Artifacts can also be used to learn about history. When we learn how to **read** an artifact (ie. Describe and document it), we allow the artifact to tell us its own story: who used it, how it was used, what changes in daily life it reflects.

Reading an Artifact (part 2)

Have the students do an actual reading of an artifact. You may choose to have them read an object in their home or you may use objects from your classroom. Hand out the Activity #2 – Artifact Reading Worksheet and ask them to fill in their findings and be ready to discuss them with the class or have them read their findings to the class and see if the class can guess the identity of the object by its description.

Activity #3 – Create an appropriate version of a calling card

Depending on the particular age group of the students you may choose to have them read Chapter 16, “Name Cards” in *Little Town on the Prairie* by Laura Ingalls Wilder. Then using the supplies listed in the resources section, have the students design and create their own calling card. Have the students role play making a social call using proper calling etiquette. Assign one student the role of the caller, another student the person being called on, and a third student the maid or butler. This activity works well with small groups of no more than three students.

Wrap-up Activity: Short quiz

Students will be able to answer simple fill- in- the- blank questions regarding the information given to them during this lesson.

A wrap-up activity sample quiz is included.

Resources:

- for additional examples of fashionable nineteenth century calling cards go to:

<http://scriptorium.lib.duke.edu/ea/scrapbooks>

- Supplies for calling card project:

- plain and decorative edged scissors

- heavy white or ivory paper (card stock works well for this project)

- stickers

- colored pens, pencils, or markers

- Little Town on the Prairie* by Laura Ingalls Wilder

The Etiquette of Calling

Calling was a somewhat ritualized version of the old American custom of visiting. It was not nearly as important for the gentleman as it was for the lady. In the middle to late nineteenth century the woman of the house was responsible for the social standing of her family in the outside world. Victorian Society (the Victorian Period was from 1837 to 1901) had very strict ideas about how people, especially women should behave. Etiquette of the day mandated that Victorian ladies pay visits or social calls to each other. If the woman was genteel, she was presumed to have the time to devote to this activity of conspicuous leisure. Middle class women ventured forth each afternoon to keep their social contacts alive.

Calling was considered the most important leisure activity for women. To be proper and considerate calls were made between three o'clock and five o'clock in the afternoon. Calling at any other time of the day or during the evening was considered rude and improper. When a woman set forth from home to attend to her social duty she was often dressed in special garb known as a visiting toilette that included a fine dress for daytime wear, hat, gloves, and parasol.¹ Ladies did not call on gentlemen except on matters of business. Men making calls were allowed to do so in the evening whereas women were not. Gentlemen called on one another with little ceremony. A gentleman made formal calls dressed in a proper suit, hat, and gloves.

At each home the visits lasted no more than fifteen to thirty minutes and the time was spent in polite general conversation. Several calls could be made in a single afternoon in an effort to maintain acquaintances, climb the social ladder, and offer condolences or congratulations. One was to depart early and quietly, as soon as possible after the arrival of other visitors, but not as to let it appear that their arrival was the cause.² Not to have participated in the calling ritual with its extremely strict rules was to risk being considered ill bred.

Calling cards were an important part of the social responsibility. Introduced in the 1850s, they quickly became popular. If a lady found the subject of her visit not at home or unavailable, or she simply had no intention of visiting in the first place, she simply left her calling card and two of her husband's. Husbands did not normally accompany their wives when they paid social calls. If the lady being visited was home and wished to receive callers, the guest left two of her husband's cards. One was for the lady being visited and the other for her

¹ Ellen M. Plant, *Women at Home in Victorian America*. New York: Facts on File, Inc., 1993, p. 123.

² Alexander V. Hamilton, *The Household Cyclopaedia of Practical Receipts and Daily Wants*. Springfield: W.J. Holland and Company, 1873, p. 309.

husband for business purposes. The caller did not leave her own card since she had already seen the lady of the house.³

Although the calling card supplied only the name of the caller, certain messages could be left to a person by folding the card in a variety of ways. By folding the upper right corner, the visitor signified that she had come in person rather than sending the card by way of a second party. Folding the upper left corner meant congratulations. Folding the lower right corner meant goodbye and folding the lower left corner signified that the visit was a condolence call. If the entire left end of the card was folded, it was an indication of an intended visit to all the women in the house, rather than only the peer of the visitor.⁴

The calling cards were required to be in good taste, and the card of a well-bred lady was never to appear too large or too small. The name was to look as if it had been engraved in a medium size script, clear and without flourish. The prefix of 'Mrs.' or 'Miss', which was reserved for older, unmarried women, was included on every card. It was not considered proper for a young lady to have cards of her own. Her name would be printed beneath her mother's name on her mother's card. Cards were often saved and put into scrapbooks as keepsakes or mementos.⁵ The cards of the more socially prominent visitors were never left on display as to impress callers of the social status of the household.

This well-mannered domestic drama always took place in the front entrance hall of the home. The front hall was considered the most public space in the home. A dish or tray known as a card receiver, carried by a servant was placed on a table or shelf of the hall tree located at the front of the hall near the door. If the caller was accepted into the home, she would be escorted to the parlor, which served as the main social area of the home. The use of cards, servants, and entrance halls as barriers protected the social positions and privilege of the lady of the house without fear of embarrassment. Whatever the intention of the caller, to actually pay a visit or just to keep up the appearance of appropriateness, the person receiving the card was obliged to reciprocate. A card for a card, a call for a call, kept the cycle of "calling" a seemingly never-ending process.

Calling or name cards were also used by young people in much the same way. The cards were exchanged among friends and acquaintances and kept as mementos. These card exchanges did not involve paying a visit.

³ Kenneth Ames, in *Material Culture Studies in America*. p. 220.

⁴ Harvey Green, *The Light of the Home*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1983, p. 144.

⁵ Plant, p. 123.

Activity 1

Word Search

The words run up, down, forward, backward, diagonally, or a combination of both.

C	J	B	K	V	I	S	I	T	I	N	G
A	A	L	J	L	O	R	Y	Y	O	I	T
C	L	L	A	C	L	A	I	C	O	S	O
H	A	L	L	I	V	E	M	S	U	R	I
D	T	E	T	I	Q	U	E	T	T	E	L
F	S	N	O	N	N	V	C	S	T	N	E
R	B	R	O	O	E	G	H	L	E	N	T
O	P	A	H	R	Y	U	C	M	R	A	T
L	M	H	A	T	F	O	I	A	R	M	E
R	Q	C	N	S	L	O	S	A	R	A	P
A	Z	R	E	V	I	E	C	E	R	D	P
P	G	A	H	A	L	L	T	R	E	E	E

parlor
calling card
etiquette
visiting toilette
card receiver
hat

front hall
manners
hall tree
parasol
social call

Activity 2

Artifact Reading Worksheet:
What Artifacts reveal about the past and the people who used them

1. WHAT IS THE ARTIFACT?

2. WHAT IS THE ARTIFACT MADE OF?

Describe the material from which the object was made: bone, pottery, metal, wood, stone, leather, glass, paper, cardboard, cotton, wood, plastic, other material.

3. SPECIAL QUALITIES OF THE ARTIFACT

Describe how it looks and feels: shape, color, texture, size, weight, movable parts, anything printed, stamped or written on it.

4. USES OF THE ARTIFACT

A. What might it have been used for? _____

B. Who might have used it? _____

C. Where might it have been used? _____

D. When might it have been used? _____

5. WHAT DOES THE ARTIFACT TELL US?

A. What does it tell us about technology of the time in which it was used?

B. What does it tell us about the life and times of the people who made it and used it?

C. Can you name a similar item today? _____

6. BRING A SKETCH, A PHOTOGRAPH, OR THE ARTIFACT LISTED IN 5C TO CLASS.

Wrap-up Activity: Sample Quiz

1. If a visitor was permitted to visit, they were escorted into the _____.
2. _____ were important to social standing in 19th century America.
3. The usual visit lasted no more than _____ minutes.
4. The _____ was the proper time of day to call.
5. "Calling" was the most important _____ activity.
6. A visitor was greeted in the _____ of the home.
7. The calling card was placed in a _____.
8. It was very important to deliver your card _____.
9. If you were female it was considered _____ to pay a call during the morning or evening hours.

If you were male you were allowed to make calls in the _____.
10. Describing an artifact is the same as _____ an artifact.