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Changing American Values: Victorian vs. Modern America in Catalogs: Lesson Plan for Grade 10

Carl Hopple

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Lesson Plans

Changing American Values: Victorian vs. Modern America in Catalogs

Author: Carl Hopple

Grade(s): 10

Suggested Time: 1, 50 minute class

Materials

copies of pages from the Sears and Roebuck catalog from the late 19th or early 20th centuries
printed pages of Sears.com's online catalog.

Core Instruction

This lesson requires that students have first been exposed to a general understanding of the transformations that the industrial revolution made upon America, specifically in the areas of merchandising and the standardization of products.

Teacher will explain why the year ca. 1870-1900 is called the "Victorian Era".

Copies of advertisements from both the Victorian and modern catalogs are distributed.

Teacher will direct students to compare the two catalogs according the following themes: a) views on sexuality as inferred by clothing and fashion b) views on bodily functions as inferred by toiletry articles and water closet ads c) advertising methods and the use of images verses words, overall visual design, type of ad copy used and targeted audiences

Students summarize their understanding of Victorian customs and values from the catalogs comparison and explore areas where Victorian values may be present in modern America.

Students are asked to evaluate how the mass production and marketing of products would affect social norms and the level of cultural variety verses standardization.

Students are directed to explore how studying primary sources that are popular advertisements may also be part of a serious study of history.

Follow-up Activity

Students are asked to evaluate where they may agree more with the Victorians and where they may disagree with them. This activity can be connected to current cultural battles in America.

Assessment

Ongoing monitoring of student responses to the verbal inquiries directed to them during the activity. A verbal quiz may be given at the end that covers the main points summarized, including:

Victorian views of the body and sexuality

Victorian tastes regarding advertising style and product design

industrialism's effects on cultural standardization

mass production's contribution to the creation of a middle class

how history can be seriously studied through popular culture

Standards

History 9-10, Benchmark B: Explain the social, political, economic effects of industrialization.

- *Indicator:* Grade 10, GLI 1. Explain the effects of industrialization in the United States in the 19th century including: e. the emergence of a middle class and its impact on culture