High School U.S. History
Gilded Age
Content Module

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Gilded Age Content Module

This guide is designed to walk you through the Gilded Age unit. As you read about the Gilded Age you will be answering questions and completing activities.

Preview of the Gilded Age

To most historians, the Gilded Age refers to the post-Civil War and Reconstruction decades of the late nineteenth century, from the presidency of Rutherford B. Haynes in the late 1870’s through the presidency of William McKinley in the late 1890’s.

The term gilded means to put a thin layer of gold on top of a dull metal to make it shiny and glittery. To the observer the gilded item is shiny and expensive, but underneath is another item altogether. Mark Twain used the term to describe the time from Civil War to the beginning of the 20th century. He wanted to illustrate a time period when on the surface one saw excessive wealth and the life that wealth provided, but underneath there was also corruption and hard times.

Mark Twain once said, “It is a time when one is filled with vague longings; when one dreams of flight to peaceful islands in remote solitudes of the sea, or folds his hands and says, What is the use of struggling, and toiling and worrying anymore? Let us give it all up.”

Draw a personal illustration of what Twain’s quote means to you.
Characteristics of the Gilded Age

As you read the following characteristics, highlight three key ideas that would help you remember the Gilded Age.

Four years after the conclusion of the Civil War, the completion of the Transcontinental Railroad established a permanent link between the East and West coasts. This connection created new markets for the goods being produced as a result of industrialization. It also signaled the beginning of tremendous economic growth spurred on by big business especially in production of steel, oil, and the building of more railroads.

While some gained extreme wealth during this time period, not everyone in this period enjoyed the privileges that this wealth provided. It is often asserted that the real movers and shakers of the period were not the men in the White House or Congress but “the captains of industry” or, as some have called them, “the robber barons.”

As industrialization exploded, workers experienced harsh and unsafe labor conditions. Children were often forced to work in factories as families struggled to eke out a living. Finally, immigration was at a height due to the unrest in Eastern and Southern Europe. This influx of new immigrants faced a multitude of social and economic problems.

Politics in the period were dominated by political machines especially in the urban areas. While these machines did provide some relief for the conditions many faced, they also led to corruption and greed.

Circle three areas on the collage, below, that illustrate the three key ideas you highlighted above.

If you were in one of the pictures, which one would it be and what would you be doing?
**Gilded Age Terms**

1. **Read and highlight the words you know and write a personal definition of 7 words or less OR draw an illustration that helps you remember the term in the Gilded Age.**

2. **For the words that you are not familiar with, read the definition carefully and write a personal definition of 7 words or less as they relate to the Gilded Age.**

3. **Decide if the term had more of a social, economic, or political impact on the Gilded Age and write one sentence for your choice.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Personal Definition or Illustration</th>
<th>Economic, Social, Political</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Populism</td>
<td>A movement mainly made up of farmers favoring government control of the railroad and other large industries because of the high prices farmers had to pay to move their crops on the railroads.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Political</td>
<td>An organization that often controlled the local government by offering incentives like jobs and housing to immigrants and the poor in exchange for political support—Example—Tammany Hall and Boss Tweed.</td>
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<td>machines</td>
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<tr>
<td>Civil service</td>
<td>Reform that required government jobs to be granted on merit NOT political favors—established by the Pendleton Act.</td>
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<td>Homestead</td>
<td>A family’s parcel of land and home where they settled. Example—Homestead Act of 1862 during the Civil War gave 160 acres of land out west in exchange for promising to cultivate or farm the land for five years.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Labor strike</td>
<td>A method of stopping work used by workers and labor unions to protest unfair and often dangerous working conditions, wages and work hours. Examples—Great Railroad Strike of 1877; Chicago’s Haymarket Riot of 1886; Pittsburgh's Homestead Strike of 1892; and the Pullman Strike of 1894 which began in Chicago but spread nationwide. Violence and property damage occurred in all four as labor unions struggled to unify workers.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
### Gilded Age Terms

1. **Labor Day**
   - **Definition:** A federal holiday established in 1894 at the conclusion of the Pullman Strike to honor and recognize the American labor movement and the workers for their role and contributions to achievements in the United States. It is celebrated on the first Monday in September.

2. **Free enterprise**
   - **Definition:** System in which private business is allowed to operate and expand their business with little or no government control.

3. **Rural**
   - **Definition:** A term referring to living in the country rather than in a town—Prior to 1870’s the majority of the people in the rural areas of the U.S.

4. **Urban**
   - **Definition:** A term referring to living in a town rather than the country. 11 million people moved to urban areas from 1870 to 1920. By 1920 more people lived in urban areas than the rural areas of the United States.

5. **Entrepreneur**
   - **Definition:** Individuals who developed new ideas and capital (money) to create business opportunities; often took financial risks to do so.
### Gilded Age Terms

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<tr>
<td>Assimilation</td>
<td>Process of absorbing a group into the culture of the larger group. Example--Dawes Act</td>
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<tr>
<td>Laissez faire</td>
<td>A lack of government interference in business organization and practices</td>
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<tr>
<td>Big business</td>
<td>Large scale financial or commercial activity--usually employs several hundred employees</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interstate commerce</td>
<td>Goods and services moving from state to state</td>
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<tr>
<td>Industrialization</td>
<td>Process of making goods by machine rather than by hand; characterized by mass production, assembly lines, and factories</td>
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<td>Gold Standard</td>
<td>The value of currency is backed by gold for which the currency could be exchanged. In the Gilded Age, the Populists also wanted to have money backed by silver due to the shortage of gold.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tenement</td>
<td>Usually refers to a overcrowded and often run-down building housing multiple families; Found in the urban areas</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gospel of Wealth</td>
<td>Written by Andrew Carnegie encouraging wealthy industrialists to donate their money to meet the needs of society often called philanthropy. Examples: Carnegie builds libraries, Rockefeller provides funding for medical research.</td>
<td>-Example: Carnegie builds libraries. Rockefeller provides funding for medical research.</td>
<td>Economic, Social, Political</td>
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<tr>
<td>Monopoly/Trust</td>
<td>Total control of a type of industry by one person or company. Examples: U.S. Steel, Standard Oil.</td>
<td>-Examples: U.S. Steel, Standard Oil</td>
<td>Economic, Social, Political</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Gospel</td>
<td>A religious principle that encouraged helping the poor and trying to solve the problems of urbanization as a means to personal salvation.</td>
<td>-Example: The Social Gospel encouraged industrialists to improve the lives of the poor.</td>
<td>Economic, Social, Political</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transcontinental railroad</td>
<td>A railroad that crossed the country connecting east and west. Example: The first Transcontinental railroad was completed in 1869 when the work crews from the East met workers from the West in Provo, Utah.</td>
<td>-Example: The Transcontinental railroad connected the eastern and western parts of the United States.</td>
<td>Economic, Social, Political</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Grange</td>
<td>Organizations of farmers who joined for the purpose of demanding help from the state and federal government to help improve their economic conditions.</td>
<td>-Example: The Grange organizations helped farmers by obtaining better prices for their crops.</td>
<td>Economic, Social, Political</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demographic</td>
<td>Term that relates to the organization of the population by race, religion, ethnicity, etc.</td>
<td>-Example: Demographic studies help understand the diversity of the population.</td>
<td>Economic, Social, Political</td>
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Answer these questions using the paragraph below:

1. **What groups of people do you think would be interested in settling on the Great Plains?**

2. **What problems do you predict will occur between the settlers of the Great Plains and the Native Americans?**

**Settlement of the Great Plains:** The Great Plains include an area from west of the Mississippi River to just east of the Rocky Mountains which is approximately 500 miles wide. It is characterized by flat land prairies, few trees, little rainfall and covered in tall grass. The Great Plains include the current states of North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas, Oklahoma, Texas, New Mexico, eastern Colorado, Montana, and Wyoming. Even though the dream of Manifest Destiny had been fulfilled in 1859 with the Gadsden Purchase (a small strip of land at the southern border of Arizona and New Mexico purchased from Mexico while planning the Transcontinental Railroad), this middle section of the continental U.S. lay unsettled. As a result, it was home to many of the Native American tribes known as the Plains Indians as well as other tribes who had been moved there with the expansion of the country. With the discovery of gold in the far West in 1849, the need to connect the East with the West prompted the need for a transcontinental railroad. Following the Civil War, the Great Plains was last to be settled.
The federal government subsidized or assisted the growth of the railroad industry by providing land grants or free land to railroad companies between 1850 and 1870. The private railroad companies then sold the land to settlers to finance construction of the railroads. In 1869, the Union Pacific and Central Pacific railroads met in Utah, completing the first **transcontinental railroad** in the nation. This provided faster transportation between the east and west coasts. The ability to move goods, resources, and people had a significant effect on the economy. Demand for goods spurred the growth of factories and businesses, creating jobs and putting more people to work. By 1883, refrigerated railroad cars carried meat and farm products to eastern urban markets while manufactured goods headed west. Mass-produced factory items were available in urban department stores or through mail-order catalogs such as Sears and Roebuck for those living in rural areas. Western settlement and business-friendly government policies like land grants to railroads, protective tariffs, lack of industry regulation, and low corporate taxes helped boost the national economy.

- **How did the railroad affect the U.S. economically?** Highlight the part of the passage above in yellow that helps you answer the question.
- **What would be the possible effects to the way of life of people in the U.S. after the completion of the railroad?** Highlight the part of the passage in pink that answers the question.
- **How did the railroad and people moving west help to bring about the close of the frontier?** Highlight the part of the passage in green that answers the question.
Economic Impact of the Gilded Age

The economic landscape of the United States changed dramatically during the Gilded Age with the advent of big business, the rise of entrepreneurs also known as the Captains of Industry, and significant developments in science and technology which changed both the lives of people living in rural America as well as those living in urban America. Not all of the effects of these economic changes were positive.

Read the following changes in the economic life during the Gilded Age and highlight three key ideas about each.

Agriculture

The 1862 Homestead Act gave individual homesteaders who paid a nominal fee and resided on the land for five years the opportunity to claim 160 acres of non-occupied surveyed public land as their own. Technological advances in agriculture [farming] were important to homesteaders’ success. In 1837, John Deere created the first steel plow, which allowed farmers settling in the Great Plains region to cut through the dense prairie soil easily. By 1875, the first riding plow was invented, allowing farmers to plow larger areas of land than before. Additionally, the invention of Cyrus McCormick’s mechanical reaper, which cut and bundled grain, required fewer workers. More efficient technology reduced the number of farm jobs available, which caused workers to move to the cities. Demand for food led to the growth of commercial agriculture as farmers worked to meet this demand. While farmers benefited from the railroads they used to ship their crops to the cities, they were often at odds with railroad companies over the high rates they were charged to store and haul their crops.

1. What were the positive effects of the developments in agriculture?

2. What is a possible negative effect?
Electric Power
The development of electric power by Thomas Edison in 1879 changed the way people lived and worked. The light bulb led to longer work days because laborers were no longer limited to working during daylight hours. By 1900, industries began to use electricity to run machines. This led to an increase in the number of factories and the growth of cities as people left their farms seeking factory work. Electricity lit streetlights, which made the streets safer. Electric streetcars made travel easier in cities. Electricity powered appliances such as washing machines, toasters, electric irons, and vacuum cleaners, which made life easier for women who did most of the domestic work.

Explain the positive effects of electric power on the way people lived and worked in the Gilded Age?

What might be a possible negative effect?

Steel Production
In 1850, the Bessemer process developed in England, allowing for a more efficient process in the production of steel. This development, along with the use of steam power, fueled the energy and transportation phases of the industrial revolution. As the Bessemer process made its way to the United States, steel production was used to manufacture equipment, tools, and railroads. The steel used in manufacturing equipment spurred even more industrialization following the Civil War. Eventually, structures like suspension bridges such as the 1883 Brooklyn Bridge were constructed, and skyscrapers followed soon after. The use of steel led to quicker and more efficient transportation systems, which had a significant impact on the economy. Cheaper transportation lowered the cost of goods, which increased demand for those items. To meet this demand, factories used an assembly line, a method in which individual workers worked on the same task over and over rather than building one item from start to finish. This was a much more efficient means of production, which also lowered the cost of goods. As a result, many Americans were able to afford items that had previously only been available to the wealthy.

Illustrate three ways steel production impacted American life in the Gilded Age in a positive way.

1

2

3
Petroleum Based Products

The oil industry began in the United States in 1859 when a petroleum entrepreneur drilled the first oil well in Pennsylvania. By 1870, John D. Rockefeller formed the Standard Oil Company. In addition to providing kerosene for lamps and fuel for automobiles, the petroleum industry became an integral part of the products we use on a daily basis, including items such as Vaseline, mascara, dyes, and many synthetic fibers. By 1939, the DuPont Company started commercial production of nylon, which was used to make stockings for women. This product had to be rationed during World War II, as the demand for petroleum resources increased. By the 1950s, new products developed, including both acrylic and polyester, which are used to create items from dresses to countertops. The widespread use of petroleum products in industrialized countries has caused widespread concerns about negative environmental impact.

Create an illustrated timeline that shows the impact of petroleum based products from 1859 to the present day. Include the following dates: 1859, 1870, 1939, 1950.

Which petroleum based product do you feel has changed the U.S. the most? Explain your choice.
People of the Gilded Age

Read the bios of the people living in the Gilded Age and highlight three significant ideas for each. After reading you are to prepare an analogy sentence for each. Select one of the following items to use in your analogy:

Key, Hole Punch, Tweezers, Battery, Flashlight, Ruler, Rubber Band, Glue Stick, Highlighter, White Out.

Fill in the blanks of the sentence to show how the item is similar to the beliefs or work of the person. (Name)__________ is like a (item)_________because_________________________ (explanation about the person that shows the similarity to the item).

Example--George Washington is like a FLASHLIGHT because as the Commander of the Patriot army he LED the way to victory over the British army in the American Revolution.

J.P. Morgan (1837-1913)
J.P. Morgan became one of the most influential bankers and wealthiest men in the world during the first years of the 20th century. Known for his shrewd business sense, he first began by restructuring the railroad industry. Later he consolidated the electric, steel, and manufacturing of agricultural equipment into the world’s first billion-dollar corporation known as U.S. Steel. He was the main force behind the idea of trusts. A trust was a way to control the major American industries of the day. Although he was respected for his civic responsibility and his endeavors to strengthen the U.S. economy, he was criticized for the economic power he wielded. He personally stepped in to resolve the crisis with the New York banks known as the Panic of 1907. With the support of Morgan who was worried about future problems with the banking system, the Federal Reserve System was created in 1913. Morgan was also a collector of fine gems and art that he later loaned or gave to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. This donation made the Met one of the most famous art museums in the world.

(Name)______________________ is like a (item)_________because_________________________

____________________________________________________________________________________

Cornelius Vanderbilt (1794-1877)
Cornelius Vanderbilt was an American businessman who accumulated great wealth in railroads and shipping. His support and improvements of the expanding U.S. transportation system greatly changed the nation and contributed to the change in the United States from a rural and agricultural economy to an urban and industrial economy. Known for being cunning and sometimes hard to deal with in business affairs, he was also generous. His philanthropy led to the establishment of Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee. The Vanderbilt’s became one of the wealthiest families in the United States. Their wealth is seen by the grand mansions they built on Fifth Avenue in New York City, Newport Rhode Island, and the Biltmore Estate in Asheville, North Carolina. These mansions became a symbol of the wealth possessed by a few in the Gilded Age.

(Name)______________________ is like a (item)_________because_________________________

____________________________________________________________________________________
People of the Gilded Age

Andrew Carnegie (1835-1919)
Andrew Carnegie was one of the richest men in the world in the early 20th century. He first started his empire by working in the rapidly growing railroad industry. Using the Bessemer process, Carnegie was able to mass produce steel and create a company to capitalize on the growing need for steel after the Civil War. A follower of Social Darwinism, he amassed great wealth by beating out all his competitors with his shrewd business sense. He justified this great wealth with his “Gospel of Wealth” doctrine. Following this doctrine, he believed it was the duty of the wealthy to spread their surplus wealth to improve the conditions of the poor who wanted to work hard to help themselves. During the last years of his life before dying in 1935, he donated more than $350,000,000 to worthy causes. These causes included ones dedicated to education, international peace, libraries, and cultural centers.

(Name)____________ is like a (item)________ because _________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________

John Rockefeller--(1839-1937)
Born in New York, John D. Rockefeller got an excellent education. He possessed excellent organization skills that allowed him to get very rich by mastering details, adopting new available technologies, and cutting costs. He founded the Standard Oil Company, the University of Chicago, and the Rockefeller Foundation. In 1870 Standard Oil controlled 10 percent of the petroleum industry in the United States, but Rockefeller was determined to gain control of the industry. In nine years, he was refining 90 percent of American oil. By 1883, Standard Oil was America’s first great trust as his monopoly of the oil industry was complete. Public opposition to the trust grew, leading to an investigation. The trust was dissolved after a 1911 Supreme Court decision and reorganized as a holding company that divided the stock into 20 component companies. A few of the companies became known as Exxon, Mobile, Chevron, and Amoco. Rockefeller retired in 1897 and spent the remainder of his life in philanthropic activities. He donated hundreds of millions of dollars to the University of Chicago, medical research institutes, educational boards, and other worthy causes.

(Name)____________ is like a (item)________ because _________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________

William Jennings Bryan (1860-1925)
William Jennings Bryan was a noted orator and politician of the era. He began by supporting such reforms as the income tax, prohibition, and women’s suffrage. As a Democrat, he ran for the presidency in 1896, 1900, and 1908, losing all three elections. In the 1896 campaign backed the Populists who had run a third party ticket in the 1892 election, Bryan attacked the use of the gold standard and protective tariffs in his famous “cross of gold speech.” He later supported Woodrow Wilson in the election of 1912, and then served as Wilson’s Secretary of State. He later resigned because of a disagreement over Wilson’s aggressive stance with Germany. In 1925, he volunteered to prosecute biology teacher John Scopes for teaching evolution in Dayton, Tennessee’s public high school. Evolution contradicted Bryan’s fundamental religious beliefs. Noted defense attorney Clarence Darrow defended Scopes. Bryan even testified in the trial as an expert on the Bible. During this testimony, Darrow was able to make the great orator appear tired and confused even though Scopes was convicted and fined $100. However, the stress of the trial and the subsequent criticism devastated Bryan. Within a week of the conclusion of the trial, he suffered a heart attack and died.

(Name)________________ is like a (item)________ because _________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________
People of the Gilded Age

James A. Garfield (1831-1881)

James A. Garfield was born in Ohio. In 1880 he was nominated by the Republicans to face Democrat Winfield Scott Hancock who he defeated to become the 20th President of the United States. Chester A. Arthur was elected as Vice-President. Garfield had little time to make an impact during his presidency as he was shot by Charles Guiteau in July of 1881, just four months after taking office. He lingered for eighty days before dying of his wounds. However, the impact of his assassination had a significant impact on the structure of the permanent federal government. Guiteau was a disappointed officer seeker who believed that he had personally played a role in getting Garfield elected and therefore deserved a government appointment. When he didn’t receive the appointment, Guiteau blamed Garfield and planned his revenge. Shooting Garfield twice in a train station, he claimed, “I did it. I will go to jail for it...Arthur will be President.” The assassination eventually led to civil service reform with the passage of the Pendleton Act in 1883. The Act now awarded government appointments on merit and passage of a competitive examination, rather than given as a reward for political support. The Pendleton Act served as a step in taking away the power of the political machines and ending the spoils system which rewarded supporters with government jobs for their support.

(Name)____________________ is like a (item)____________ because ________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________

Boss Tweed

William M. Tweed was nicknamed “Boss” Tweed for his role as the head of the Democratic Party’s Tammany Hall political machine in New York City. The influence of Tammany Hall extended throughout the state of New York. Born in 1823, Tweed rose to be one of the largest land-owners in New York City as well as served on several boards such as a gas light company, a railway company, and the company that managed the Brooklyn Bridge. With his status, he was in a position to control the politics in New York City and rewarded persons loyal to him with jobs on city-related projects in exchange for their vote in accordance to the political machine’s wishes. Immigrants and the rural poor moving to the urban area were especially in need of assistance and were often targeted by Tweed. The political corruption of Tweed and Tammany came under attack by the New York Times as well as the editorial cartoonist Thomas Nast of Harper’s Weekly. Tweed wasn’t concerned about the articles in the newspaper because he said, “My constituents don’t know how to read.” However he was upset about the unflattering pictures in Nast’s cartoons. Eventually, the paper and the cartoons began to build opposition to Tweed as evidence was uncovered of Tweed’s embezzlement and blackmail attempts to keep the evidence from coming forward to the public. Tweed was finally held responsible for stealing millions of dollars from New York City taxpayers. He escaped from jail once and fled to Spain. He was recaptured and returned to prison where he died in 1878.

(Name)____________________ is like a (item)____________ because ________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________

After meeting key individuals in the Gilded Age, who would you have most liked to have met? Explain your choice.
Social Changes in the Gilded Age
The major social issues in the Gilded Age involved children, minorities, and immigrants.

Children in the Gilded Age--Study the three pictures of children during the Gilded Age and then answer the questions that follow:

How would you describe the role children played in the Gilded Age? What evidence in the pictures support your conclusion?

What similarities do you see in all of the pictures?
Social Changes and Immigrants in the Gilded Age

View these pictures of the lives of immigrants during the Gilded Age. For each picture, you will complete three tasks in the box near the image.

1. Identify what you see in each picture.
2. Explain what you think [infer] each picture represents concerning the Gilded Age
3. Develop a caption for each picture that reflects the experiences of immigrants in the Gilded Age.

Ship landing at Ellis Island New York

Immigration Inspection Stations at Ellis Island
Social Changes and Immigrants in the Gilded Age
View these pictures of the lives of immigrants during the Gilded Age. For each picture, you will complete three tasks in the box near the image.

1. Identify what you see in each picture.
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3. Develop a caption for each picture that reflects the experiences of immigrants in the Gilded Age.

Angel Island, San Francisco Bay

Immigration Inspection Station Angel Island, San Francisco Bay

Immigration Inspection Station Angel Island, San Francisco Bay
Social Changes and Immigrants in the Gilded Age

View these pictures of the lives of immigrants during the Gilded Age. For each picture, you will complete three tasks in the box near the image.

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New York
Social Changes and Immigrants in the Gilded Age

View these pictures of the lives of immigrants during the Gilded Age. For each picture, you will complete three tasks in the box near the image.

1. Identify what you see in each picture.
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3. Develop a caption for each picture that reflects the experiences of immigrants in the Gilded Age.

Textile Factory

Meat Packing Plant
Social Changes and Immigrants in the Gilded Age

View these picture of the lives of immigrants during the Gilded Age. For each picture, you will complete three tasks in the box near the image.

1. Identify what you see in each picture.
2. Explain what you think [infer] each picture represents concerning the Gilded Age
3. Develop a caption for each picture that reflects the experiences of immigrants in the Gilded Age.

Now that you have viewed the different images of immigrants during the Gilded Age in America, answer the following questions:

1. What words come to mind to describe the immigrant’s arrival, working, and living conditions?

2. What problems did immigrants face upon coming into America? (Use some of the words you previously identified.)

3. How does the immigrants’ experience reflect characteristics of the Gilded Age?
The Constitution and Minorities in the Gilded Age

Following the Civil War, the United States entered a reconstruction period that included proposals to rebuild the nation after the war and address the issues over which the war had been fought. Three constitutional amendments were proposed and ratified as part of this period. These amendments promised social and political gains for African Americans. Let’s review the provisions of these amendments and then consider how these promises were not fulfilled.

*For each amendment, explain in your own words the meaning and then draw a picture to help you remember the meaning.*

**Thirteenth Amendment, 1865**—This amendment had been proposed and ratified as the Civil War was ending to constitutionally end the practice of slavery in the United States.

*Section 1.* Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for a crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction.

*Section 2.* Congress shall have power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation.

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**Fourteenth Amendment, 1868**—This amendment was proposed and ratified in 1868 when many believed that some Southern states intended to keep former slaves as persons in subordinate positions without political rights.

*Section 1.* All persons born or naturalized in the United States and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside. No State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without the due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.

*Section 5.* The Congress shall have power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation.

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The Constitution and Minorities in the Gilded Age

Following the Civil War, the United States entered a reconstruction period that included proposals to rebuild the nation after the war and address the issues over which the war had been fought. Three constitutional amendments were proposed and ratified as part of this period. These amendments promised social and political gains for African Americans. Let’s review the provisions of these amendments and then consider how these promises were not fulfilled.

For each amendment, explain in your own words the meaning and then draw a picture to help you remember the meaning.

Fifteenth Amendment--Finally the Fifteenth Amendment was ratified in 1870 to guarantee the right to vote to former African American slaves. Some wanted to extend the protections of the amendment to include the word gender which would have included giving the right to vote to women, but Congress chose not to include gender in the amendment.

Section 1. The rights of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude.

Section 2. The Congress shall have power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation.

Meaning

Illustration

Unfulfilled Promises

Despite the promises of the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments, by the late 19th century the economic, political, and social gains of African Americans slipped away as a result of legislation passed by state and local legislatures. These laws included voting restrictions such as requiring payment of a poll tax and passage of a literacy test to vote. Most white Southerners, who were eligible to vote before the Civil War, were “grandfathered in,” meaning they were not required to take the literacy test. Oftentimes these literacy tests were unreasonable and designed for failure. For example, one of the questions on a literacy test required the person to know how many seeds were in a watermelon or how many bubbles in a bar of soap.

Southern states also passed what were known as “Jim Crow” laws which required racial segregation (separation) in public facilities such as railroad cars, hotels, restaurants, schools, etc. In 1896, segregation was challenged in a case from the state of Louisiana in the case *Plessy v. Ferguson*. This time a key part of the protections of the 14th Amendment was at issue.
Read the following summary of the case *Plessy v. Ferguson*:

In 1890, the State of Louisiana passed a railroad transportation law "to provide equal but separate accommodations for the white and colored races." The law provided that:

... *[A]ll railway companies carrying passengers in their coaches in this state, shall provide equal but separate accommodations for the white, and colored races, by providing two or more passenger coaches for each passenger train, or by dividing the passenger coaches by a partition so as to secure separate accommodations.* 

*No person or persons shall be permitted to occupy seats in coaches, other than the ones assigned to them, on account of the race they belong to...* 

*Any passenger insisting on going into a coach or compartment to which by race he does not belong, shall be liable to a fine of twenty-five dollars in the parish prison....* 

*Should any passenger refuse to occupy the coach or compartment to which he or she is assigned by the officer of such railway, said officer shall have power to refuse to carry such passenger on his train, and for such refusal neither he nor the railway company which he represents shall be liable for damages in any of the courts in this state....*

In 1892, a committee was formed by black and Creole leaders to test the constitutionality of the law. They chose Homer Plessy, who was one-eighth black, to make their test case. Plessy was a resident of the state of Louisiana and felt that he was entitled to every right, privilege, and immunity due to citizens of the United States of the white race by its constitution and laws. On June 7, 1892, he bought a first-class ticket on the East Louisiana Railway that traveled from New Orleans to Covington, Louisiana. Plessy entered the train and walked past the car marked "for coloreds only," finding a seat in the coach marked "for whites only." When the train conductor, who was responsible for assigning seats according to race, asked Plessy to move to the other car, he refused. Plessy was then forcibly ejected by the train conductor and a police officer and placed under arrest. After being charged with violating the state law, he was found guilty and sentenced to jail. His conviction and the law were eventually appealed to the Supreme Court.

**Understanding the key facts of the case:**

Who is involved?

Where did this take place?

What happened?

What Constitutional question the Supreme Court had to answer? (Re-read the excerpt of the 14th Amendment to identify what part was at issue).
Read the summary of the decision in the Plessy case.

**Decision** - In 1896, the Supreme Court ruled that this law and other similar state laws were constitutional, as long as the facilities were “equal but separate.” For more than fifty years, this precedent was used in the South to continue the practice of segregation in public accommodations, schools, and public transportation.

What is your opinion of the decision?

How does this case illustrate the problems minorities faced during the Gilded Age?

Prepare an analogy sentence on the Case by selecting one of the following items to use in your analogy:

Key, Hole Punch, Tweezers, Battery, Flashlight, Ruler, Rubber Band, Glue Stick, Highlighter, White Out.

Fill in the blanks of the sentence to show how the item is similar to the beliefs or work of the person.

**Plessy v Ferguson** is like a (item)__________ because ____________________________

____________________________________________________________________________________
Political Impact of the Gilded Age

Read each law from the Gilded Age and consider what might have caused [or need for] the law and what the effects the law had. Complete the graphic organizer after each law.

Homestead Act

The federal government passed the **Homestead Act** in 1862 to encourage western settlement and provide opportunities for people to own land. The act required individuals to live on a homestead for five years, build a home, and farm the land. At the end of the five years, individuals could claim 160 acres of non-occupied surveyed public land as their own, providing they had made the necessary improvements. The federal government also supported westward migration by subsidizing the railroad industry. Between 1850 and 1870, railroad companies received land grants from the government with the expectation that the companies would sell the land to settlers to finance construction of the railroads. In 1869, the first transcontinental railroad was completed, providing quicker transportation between the east and west coasts. The ability to move goods, resources, and people had an impact on the economy. Demand for goods spurred the growth of factories and businesses, creating more jobs. By 1883, refrigerated railroad cars carried meat and farm products to eastern urban markets while manufactured goods headed west. Mass-produced factory items were available in urban department stores or through mail-order catalogs such as Sears and Roebuck for those living in rural areas. Western settlement and business-friendly government policies like land grants to railroads, protective tariffs, lack of industry regulation, and low corporate taxes helped create a national economy.

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Chinese Exclusion Act

In the mid to late 1880s, immigrants came to the west coast from China, pushed out of their country by hard times and pulled into the United States by the promise of greater opportunity. Many became part of the cheap labor force for companies trying to complete the Transcontinental Railroad. When the U.S. suffered economic depression after the Civil War, American workers, especially those in California, began to resent the Chinese who often worked for lower wages and took the few available jobs. This prompted Congress to pass the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act, which placed restrictions on Chinese already living in the United States and prohibited new immigration from China for a ten-year period. Congress reissued this law every ten years with few alterations, which caused a rift between the Chinese and American governments. The law was repealed in World War II, when China and the U.S. had to work together to fight the Japanese.

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Political Impact of the Gilded Age

Read each law from the Gilded Age and consider what might have caused [or need for] the law and what the effects the law had. Complete the graphic organizer after each law.

Dawes Act

The Dawes Act was an 1887 law passed by Congress and provided the head of a Native American family was given 160 acres from tribal reservation land; a single Native American adult was given 80 acres, and 40 acres was given to each dependent child. In return those who received the land were granted citizenship as long as they adopted “habits of civilized life” which meant they were to abandon their tribal culture. Native Americans were expected to cultivate the land and abandon nomadic traditions of living off the land to farm the land like white settlers. However, the land granted to them was often not the best for production of any crop. They were expected to farm the land for approximately 25 years before they were given title of ownership to their land. After surplus reservation land was sold to white settlers and due to the fact that after 25 years many were unsuccessful at farming and never able to take ownership, Native Americans lost approximately half of their reservation lands because of the Dawes Act.

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Sherman Antitrust Act

By the late 1880s, the large number of trusts threatened competition. Trusts form when stockholders in several companies transfer their shares to one group of trustees. Monopolies develop because one trust can include several large industries. Congress passed the Sherman Antitrust Act in 1890, to exercise its power to regulate interstate commerce (Article I, Section 8, Clause 3 of the U.S. Constitution). This made any contract, combination (monopoly or otherwise), or conspiracy in restraint of interstate or foreign trade illegal. Because the act failed to define specific terms like trust, conspiracy, or monopoly, the act initially failed to regulate industry. In fact, early Supreme Court decisions made the law more effective at limiting labor unions on behalf of business than at controlling business. It would take President Roosevelt’s “trust busting” crusades to bring about changes in business practice. The Sherman Antitrust Act was used successfully in 1911 against the Standard Oil Company and in the 1990s against Microsoft.

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**Interstate Commerce Act**

The federal government generally supported the growth of big business during the Gilded Age; for instance, offering land grants led to the growth and expansion of railroads. Later, farmers and small business owners petitioned the federal government for help in regulating what they considered unfair business practices by the railroads. In 1887, Congress passed the **Interstate Commerce Act**, which created the Interstate Commerce Commission (ICC) and established the first federal government regulation of industry. The ICC had power to regulate railroads by ensuring that companies provided reasonable and just rates to everyone, not just select shippers. To reinforce this, the act required that railroad rates be published so the public could see them. Weak enforcement of this act initially did little to curb the abuses by the railroad corporations. It took Progressive President Theodore Roosevelt’s leadership and subsequent acts of Congress to strengthen the enforcement power of the ICC. By 1906, the government had almost complete control over rail rates.

Now that you have examined the laws of the Gilded Age, rank these laws from most important to least important with #1 being the most important as to the positive impact you feel they had on the U.S.

- Homestead Act
- Chinese Exclusion Act
- Dawes Act
- Sherman Antitrust Act
- Interstate Commerce Act

*Give a one sentence justification for each ranking.*

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.

How do these laws show a change in the relationship of private business and the federal government?
Concluding the Guide Through the Gilded Age

Consider the information you have reviewed in looking at the Gilded Age and complete the following:

Would you have wanted to live in the Gilded Age?
Explain your reasons by using specific events and/or characteristics of the era.

We began our look at the Gilded Age, with a quote from Mark Twain,

"It is a time when one is filled with vague longings; when one dreams of flight to peaceful islands in remote solitudes of the sea, or folds his hands and says, What is the use of struggling, and toiling and worrying anymore? Let us give it all up."

Assume the identity of a person living in the Gilded Age (examples—child, immigrant, wealthy privileged, Native American, minority) to write about your life.

How would this person respond to the quote? Use examples of the political, social, and economic changes as support for your story.