

UNIT 1: THE RISE OF TECHNOLOGY (1870 - 1896)

Topic: Women

Lesson 12: Introduction to the Homemaker of 1880

Objectives:

1. Students will gain an understanding of the typical workweek of a homemaker of the 1880s in Iowa.
2. Students will gain an appreciation of the grueling tasks which confronted homemakers of the 1880s.
3. Students will understand the differences between housekeeping in the 1880s and today.

Materials:

The Iowa Housewife

Activities:

1. Introduce the lesson by reviewing the following generalizations about the roles of women and the rural setting of the post-Civil War period.
 - a. Women began to move into society in greater numbers during the latter part of the nineteenth century.
 - b. Most Iowa women assumed the role of a homemaker during this period.
 - c. Because of the average family size and the time needed to complete household tasks, it was impractical for most women to consider careers other than homemaking. In addition, the idea of women working outside the home was not well received.
 - d. Technological advances were modestly impacting the home during this period. (The introduction of electricity, which came later, had a much greater impact on the home.)
 - e. By the 1880s homemaking had become routine and regimented. Monday was declared universal washday across America. If a woman didn't have her first load on the line by 10:00 a.m. on Monday, surely there was illness or a death in the family. Tuesday brought ironing, Wednesday sewing, etc.
2. Provide students with access to *The Iowa Housewife*. Read and discuss each day's entry emphasizing the particular work which needed to be completed and any tools or implements which were available to aid in the work.
3. Have students identify particular tasks which are discussed in the magazine. Have students share how these tasks are done in their homes today.
4. Distribute copies of the activity sheet *Household Comparison*. Provide time for students to identify and describe household chores for which comparisons may be drawn between the 1880s and today. This activity can also be completed as a large group using a chart.
5. When students have had adequate time to complete the chart, discuss their entries. Focus a portion of the follow-up discussion on the particular family members who help with the work. In the 1880s domestic tasks were generally completed by females. In many homes today domestic tasks are shared by family members.

