



Lesson Plan: What would Stickley say?

Collection Spotlight: Furniture

Subject Area: Visual Arts, Social Studies

Grades: 6-12

Theme: Rebelling against Victorian era aesthetics

Student Learning Objectives:

- 1) Students will be able to compare aesthetic ideals of the Victorian Era with the American Arts and Crafts movement.
- 2) Students will be able to examine the influence of social and cultural ideas on artists' work.
- 3) Students will be able to analyze ways art can be expressions of resistance and rebellion to earlier artistic and social movements.

Artist Biography: Gustav Stickley was an American furniture manufacturer, design leader, publisher, and a leading voice in the American Arts and Crafts movement. Stickley's design philosophy was a major influence on American Craftsman architecture. Stickley's work is a direct response to industrialization and mass production, evoking the moral philosophy of the movement —that is, the craftsman produces only that which is true to architectural form, of aesthetic value, and crafted masterfully. The pieces produced were a direct reflection of the moral character and values of both the craftsman and the owner. Arts and Crafts artists valued simplicity, honest materials, honest labor, natural motifs, restraint, and utility.

Stickley believed that: 1) A house ought to be constructed in harmony with its landscape, with special attention paid to selecting local materials; 2) An open floor plan would encourage family interaction and eliminate unnecessary barriers; 3) Built-in bookcases and benches were practical and ensured that the house would not be completely reliant on furniture from outside; 4) Exposed structural elements, light fixtures, and hardware are all considered to be decorative; and 5) Artificial light should be kept to a minimum, so large groupings of windows were necessary to bring in light.

Curricular Connections

SS.912.W.6.4 Describe the 19th and early 20th century social and political reforms and reform movements and their effects in Africa, Asia, Europe, the United States, the Caribbean, and Latin America.

SS.912.A.3.9. Examine causes, course, and consequences of the labor movement in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

VA.912.H.2.2 Analyze the capacity of the visual arts to fulfill aesthetic needs through artwork and utilitarian objects.

VA.912.H.2.5 Analyze artwork from a variety of cultures and times

VA.912.H.2.6 Analyze artistic trends to explain the rationale for creating personal adornment, visual culture, and/or design.

Learning Activities Sequence

Lesson Opener:


After reviewing the student learning goals, advance to Slide 4 in the *What would Stickley say?* Power Point presentation. Briefly describe to students Victorian Era aesthetics reflected in furniture during the 19th century. You may find it necessary to review the term **aesthetics** with students, a set of principles underlying and guiding the work of a particular artist or artistic movement. The following guided questions can be used to engage students in the historic context of the Victorian Era.

How might a Victorian room feel?

If your living room was decorated according to Victorian aesthetics, what negatives might you encounter?


In what ways would machine made furniture present challenges to local furniture makers?

What benefits could exist to creating furniture with machines?

 Encourage students to explore the lithograph of Queen Victoria sitting in a Victorian room. Can you find evidence of Victorian Era aesthetics?

Main Learning Activity:


Advance to Slide 5. Provide students with a brief introduction to Gustav Stickley. (You may incorporate the Artist Bio found at the beginning of this lesson plan). After introducing Gustav Stickley, read the quote found on Slide 5.

 Encourage students to identify words within the quote that best represent Stickley's view of **decorative arts**. The decorative arts are arts or crafts whose object is the design and manufacture of objects that are both beautiful and functional.

Ask students to hypothesize what Stickley furniture might look like.

Advance to Slide 6. Introduce students to Stickley's furniture mark. Explain to students the Stickley logo incorporates a joiner's compass and the Flemish saying, *Als Ik Kan* which translates into, "As best I can." Discuss with students, "Why do you think Gustav Stickley chose this phrase and symbol to be his maker's mark?" "How does this mark reflect the ideals of Gustav Stickley?" "How does this mark reflect the ideals of the American Arts & Crafts movement?"

Advance to Slide 7. Review the tenants of the American Arts & Crafts movement with students. Instruct students to examine the writers desk created by Gustav Stickley.

 Can students identify the aesthetics of the Arts and Crafts movement in Stickley's writers desk? In what ways does Stickley's writers desk rebel against the Victorian aesthetics of the 19th century?

Lesson Closure:

Advance to Slide 8. Distribute the *What would Stickley say?* handout and Stickley Notes. (teachers may choose to precut the Stickley Notes.) With a partner, or individually, explain to students they will now step into the mind set of Gustav Stickley! Ask students to examine the Victorian room on their handout (and shown on the slide). If they were Gustav Stickley, how would they critique the furniture found in the Victorian room? What would Stickley say to the Victorian designer? Encourage students to incorporate the tenants of the American Arts and Crafts movement when they write their Stickley critic on their Stickley notes. When students are done writing their notes, ask students to glue their Stickley notes onto their handout – just like a sticky note!

Evaluation

Students may submit their What would Stickley say handout and Stickley notes for assessment.

Learner Accommodations

Visually-rich Power Point presentation

Guided scaffolded inquiry questions

Materials & Resources

Laptop

Screen

Projector

Pens or pencils

What would Stickley say? handout

Stickley notes

Scissors

glue

References

Cathers, D. and Montgomery, S. (2012). *Arts and Crafts furniture from the collection of the Two Red Roses Foundation*. TRRF.

Victorian Furniture. (2022) Newel Co. New York, New York. Retrieved from <https://blog.newel.com/a-brief-history-of-victorian-furniture/>



Access presentation and handouts here!