

Lesson: Diary Exercise: 1910, One Day in the Dawes House

Below you will find a basic exercise that will help structure a visit to the Dawes House.

Pre-Visit Activity:

Discuss the various roles of the many people living in the Dawes House in the early 20th century. Explain how the house had as many as ten people living in it: General and Mrs. Dawes, two of their younger children, Carolyn and Dana Dawes; a downstairs maid, an upstairs maid, a cook, nanny, chauffeur, and groundskeeper; other servants were day laborers only and came one or two days a week to do their work, such as the laundress.

Discuss with students the ways that the experience of living in the Dawes House on a daily basis would vary depending upon one's position within it. For a maid, the day was full of tasks and work, with only one evening off and half a day on Sunday. These maids were always female and they were also immigrants, usually having little or no family of their own nearby. For one of the Dawes' children, however, life was a great deal easier, involving school and chores, but also entertainment and playing.

During their visit, students will learn more about the various roles individuals played in the house, from the servants to the family members. They will also have a chance to view the places in the house used by different people, from the servants' areas such as the kitchen, "day room," and butler's pantry, to the family and guest areas such as the parlors, library, and dining room.

Post Visit Activity:

Ask students to write a single day's diary entry as if they were someone living in the Dawes house in 1910. (You may either assign specific roles or have students choose for themselves.) They may choose to write from the point of view of a maid, chauffeur, gardener, or cook, General or Mrs. Dawes, Dana or Virginia, or perhaps, a guest or visitor to the home.

What did they do on that day? What rooms were they in? What did they see? How did they spend this day? What might they have been thinking about their life in the Dawes house? Encourage students to be creative in imagining what their day would be like.

Next, talk with students about how this imaginary diary helped them think about life in the Dawes house over one hundred years ago. How did their imaginary day differ from the ways they spend their days today? What were some of the most interesting things about their days? What were some of the most dramatic or challenging? In what ways were things better or worse than today?