

Lesson: Technology of the Early 20th-Century Home

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

Pre-Visit Activity:

Provide students with a copy of the list of items below. Ask them to identify the objects if they can. Explain how each item represents a facet of luxury enjoyed in the home by the upper classes during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and explain that not all households in Evanston would have contained many of these items. Discuss how today some items from the list have disappeared entirely from the home, while others are staples in most homes.

The items below provide a rich foundation for students to learn about technology, class, domestic life, and material culture. During their tour, students will learn how and why each item was used, who used it, and what each item “said” about the family living in a home with these items.

Items to look for during your visit to the Dawes House:

- Annunciator Box and Buttons (Call system) (Kitchen)
- Elevator (Great Hall)
- Radiator (Great Hall)
- Tiffany Electrolier (Dining Room)
- Maytag Washing Machine (Kitchen)
- Electric/gas fixture (Kitchen)
- Telephone (Great Hall)
- Ice Door (outside of the Kitchen)
- Stereoscope (Library)

Post Visit Activity:

After your visit, discuss the various items they learned during the tour. Ask them to think about how the items made life easier and/or more enjoyable for those who used them. You may ask students to consider which items are no longer used today and which have become more prevalent. Why have some disappeared? Why have others become commonplace? What do these items reveal about how technology and the home have changed since the early 20th century?