

## **Lesson: The Dawes House and Literature**

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

### **Pre-Visit Activity:**

Assign an early 20th century novel or novella to your students to read.

As students investigate the book's structure, language, and meanings, the setting of the Dawes House can serve as a wonderful three-dimensional teaching opportunity for deepening their understanding of a work of literature. A variety of novels from the early 20th century can be paired with a tour of the Dawes House in order to add texture to the students' reading of particular works.

Books used by classes in the past include:

[Washington Square, Henry James](#)

[The House of Mirth, Edith Wharton](#)

[Sister Carrie, Theodore Dreiser](#)

These or other similar books provide an opportunity to reflect on American mores, social class and convention, wealth and class. They also make use of domestic spaces as important settings for the development of plot and character. Features that can be highlighted on a tour of the Dawes House include the separation of spaces and room function, the importance of privacy. "Victorian" design, and the statement of wealth and power in material form (i.e., the Dawes house exterior, the Great Hall, furnishings, etc.)

### **Post Visit Activity:**

Ask the students to talk about the ways in which a visit to an upper class home of the late 19th century helps to deepen their understanding of the time period. Ask them to consider the ways in which the house's decor, layout, and "sense of place" reveal something about how a setting shapes behavior and identity. Discuss the differences of the relative privileges and constraints of those who lived in and worked in the setting.