

Lesson:

Gender in a Nineteenth-Century Railway Town

Content Area: American History Grade: 9th-12th

Tech Needs: Whiteboard or Projector, laptop. Estimated Time: 50 min.

Essential Question:

How can material culture from a nineteenth-century railway town challenge the narrative about gender?

Objectives:

- (1) Introduce students to the concept of varying frameworks
- (2) To understand cultural norms for various immigrant groups
- (3) To analyze the historical role of women
- (3) To analyze the historical role of those within the LGBTQI community
- (4) To learn about the discrimination faced by those who were not cis-men
- (5) To acknowledge the presence of diverse people in nineteenth-century railway towns
- (6) To evaluate how legacies of gender and sexuality are remembered and narrated
- (7) To consider potential similarities/differences to contemporary issues within the United States today

Materials:

- PowerPoint slides
- census data
- deeds
- table
- Wordwall game
- Pencil
- Composition books

Learning Context:

Gender roles in typical nineteenth-century railway towns were much more strictly defined

than they are today. Men were expected to work outside the home, while women were expected to stay home and care for the household. These gender roles were reinforced by social

norms and expectations, as well as by laws and regulations.

In a railway town like Winnipeg Junction, Minnesota, it was common for men to stay only for a night or a few days while traveling. Still, those who lived there permanently worked in various jobs related to the railway industry, such as engineers, conductors, brake workers, and track workers. These jobs required physical strength and endurance, seen as masculine traits. Men were often the town's business owners, such as shop and saloon owners, and were expected to be the providers for their families.

Women in the railway town had limited job opportunities outside of domestic work. They were

expected to marry young and devote themselves to their husband and children.

Women outside the home often worked as domestic servants, courtesans, or barmaids. The strict division between men's and women's work was reinforced by laws prohibiting women from working specific jobs or more than a certain number of hours per day. For example, many states had laws that prohibited women from working in mines or factories for more than ten hours per day.

Gender roles in nineteenth-century American railway towns highly restricted both men and women. While men enjoyed more economic opportunities than women, they also faced pressure to conform to traditional masculine ideals. Women faced even more significant limitations on

their employment opportunities but found ways to challenge gender norms through activism and entrepreneurship. For example, Mary Harris Jones ("Mother Jones") was a prominent labor activist who fought for better working conditions for miners and other industrial workers. Other women started small businesses, such as boarding houses or laundries. Gender and sexuality are two essential aspects of human identity that have been discussed and debated. Although they are often discussed separately, it is essential to recognize the interconnection of these two concepts. Both are socially constructed. Gender identity influences how we see ourselves about others, while sexual orientation affects who we are attracted to.

Gender roles, expectations, and norms vary across cultures and periods, while social norms, values, and beliefs shape sexuality. By discussing these two concepts together, we can better understand how they interact and shape our

experiences as individuals, and by recognizing the diversity within these categories, we can work towards creating a more inclusive society in which everyone feels valued regardless of gender or sexual orientation.

Lesson Sequence:

1. Introduction to the topic by reviewing the lesson context and the PowerPoint slides.
2. Initiate a class discussion about why gender and sexuality must be discussed together. Ask the students whether they agree or disagree with this notion and why.
3. Analyze census data and deeds from Winnipeg Junction. Make observations and fill out this table.
4. Artifact sort- in small groups, have students make their best guess as to who they think each artifact belonged to and why? Wordwall game
5. Click on the artifact page. Have students write a profile for someone they think may have used the item.

Extensions/Adaptations:

Write 2-3 journal entries from the perspective of someone living in Winnipeg Junction, Minnesota. Please write from the perspective of a man, woman, and non-binary person. You may research real people from American boomtowns to help guide you along the way, or you may refer to the profiles you created above. Try to focus on daily life- what is your schedule like, what job or role do you have in town, who are your family members, and so on. Students may challenge themselves to write from a perspective outside of their ethnicity.

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