Unit 3: Latimer House Tour: The Man Behind the Invention

**Grade Level:** 6-8th Grade

**Unit Objectives:**

Students will.....

1. Learn about the life and scientific contribution of inventor Lewis Howard Latimer, through a virtual tour of the Lewis Latimer museum.

2. Build an understanding of the cultural context in which Latimer lived, and how it affected his living space as an inventor in the 1800s.

3. Gain knowledge for differentiating between various types of historic preservation used for artifacts, and the importance of recording personal history.

4. Work in small groups and participate in a scavenger hunt, finding important objects within Latimer’s Home/Makerspace, and gaining a deeper appreciation of the man behind the invention. Students will also brainstorm what would be in their personal tours if their homes were turned into a museum.

**Concepts/Skills:**

African American history, understanding the importance of primary sources in the study of history, problem solving skills, understanding lab facilities and equipment.
The Inventor’s Home

Learn about Latimer’s Home and History

Challenge
Create a Historic Museum for Your Life!

Learning Objective
Build an understanding of Latimer’s Personal History through a House Tour, and construct a personal museum that’ll document your life in the future.

Duration
Suggestion time 60 minutes

Lesson Outline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Duration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Engage</td>
<td>10 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explore</td>
<td>10 minutes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Explain</td>
<td>20 minutes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Elaborate</td>
<td>15 minutes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Evaluate</td>
<td>5 minutes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ENGAGE

10 minutes

Introduce the concept of a museum to your students. Make sure they know when they have entered the museum, and ask them to notice their surroundings to see where they are. Most students have an already made-up assumption of what museums look like (large, structured, a place where historical objects live), ask them what museums they have visited before!

Once entering the museum of Latimer’s Home, give a brief introduction of who Latimer was as an inventor and important historical figure. Brainstorm with your class what objects of Latimer’s would be exciting to archive for reference.

Have you ever been to a museum before? Can a house be a museum? What objects do you see? Which are you excited to learn more about?

THINKING PROMPT:

Think about the museums that you have visited before. Usually, museums hold historic artifacts such as art, objects, tools, or anything that provides a historical context for a time period.

Let’s talk about Latimer’s time! When looking around the room, what time period do you think we’re in? Are there any clues to the time period that could help us figure out where we are?

Answers could include: There’s no TV, microwave, or any other type of modern device, so we aren’t in the present day. The furniture and living space looks older too, and the pictures on the walls are in black and white. Let your students explore the space and find more clues!
INQUIRY QUESTIONS:

- Have you ever been to a museum before?
- What do you love about museums? What types of things do you learn in them?
- Who’s house is this? How do you know it’s Latimer’s? Are there any clues that tell us he lived here?
Lewis Howard Latimer (1848-1928), was an African-American inventor, electrical pioneer, and a son of fugitive slaves. With no access to formal education, Latimer taught himself mechanical drawing while in the Union Navy, and eventually became a chief draftsman, patent expert, and inventor. Latimer’s home was constructed between 1887 and 1889 with a Queen Anne Style of modern architecture design, with its vibrant yellow exterior standing out in the crowd. Latimer lived here from 1903 to 1928, living his life as an inventor behind some of history’s most important advancements!
KEY VOCABULARY:

**Museum:** a place that carries collections of artifacts and other objects of historical, cultural, or scientific importance. Many museums are open to the public, and have exhibits that highlight specific time periods or movements.

**Museum Exhibit:** a curated space where objects are on display for public consumption. Like the Latimer Museum, exhibits have the ultimate goal of educating its visitors about historical figures.

**Museum Curator:** a person in charge of collecting, managing, and presenting works of historical objects for public viewing in museums. The aim is to educate, while also thinking about the best way to present many different artifacts as a one unified collection.

PLACES WHERE HISTORY COMES TO LIFE

For some students, the concept of a museum that is not in a large space is difficult to understand. Guiding students to the realization that any curated space can be a museum (including a home). Explore some new possibilities of how someone’s home can be turned into a museum!

**What is a historic home museum?**

A **historic house museum** is a home that has been transformed into a fully functioning museum. All furniture, pictures, and household items have all been preserved and displayed in their original placements, in order to give visitors an authentic historic experience!

Here, at the Lewis Latimer House Museum, we have many of the historical artifacts of Lewis Howard Latimer. This house holds many of Latimer’s possessions, and they give us an idea of who he was as a father, scientist, and artist.
What did homes look like (and how were they built) in the 1800s?

Similar to today, households and how they’re built depend on their location, price, and function. From the mid-1800s through about 1900, house prices were much cheaper than today, and mostly had between two and four rooms depending on a family’s socio-economic status.

Unlike today, there was no wide-spread sanitation system, which means that entire streets (in some areas) had to share an old-fashioned toilet pump. Most homes were either built from brick or stone. In the suburbs (where Latimer lived) homes were also built from a wooden frame.

Latimer made two major renovations to his home once purchasing it, the most important of which resulted in the creation of his home laboratory and maker’s space in his attic. This addition made it easier for Latimer to explore his inventions and scientific discoveries from the comfort of his own home.
THINKING PROMPT

Lewis Howard Latimer was an inventor whose life is forever preserved in the museum of his home. For this prompt, put yourself in the shoes of a Museum Curator. Think about what objects you think would be important to preserve? Remember, a Historic House Musuem’s goal is to educate! Every object in this museum reveals a new aspect of Latimer’s life.

- What does Mr. Latimer's entrance/living room say about his life?
  “He enjoyed spending quality time with his family when not working on inventions, which can be seen by the number of chairs and wide open spacing.”

- How are Mr. Latimer’s inventions seen in his home? How are they used today for this very tour?
  “Latimer is the reason why we have lightbulbs today, and on this tour, lightbulbs are used to make our experience better.”

- Are there any challenges in preserving historical artifacts?
  “To preserve Latimer’s objects, they have to be stored and highly protected in temperature controlled areas so that the materials aren’t ruined over time.”
ACTIVITY:

Mr. Lewis Howard Latimer’s home is preserved in time for all to see. Look around the room, and write a list of objects that catch your eye. Try and record as much as you can, paying extra attention to why certain objects of Latimer’s were kept instead of others.

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____________________________________________________

____________________________________________________

____________________________________________________

Pick a room in Latimer’s House to sketch. Be as detailed as possible.
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

What are objects that you found around Latimer’s home?

Why do you think these artifacts were kept by the Museum?

How are these objects similar or different from the historical objects in other museums you've been to?

What kind of objects were your favorite to find? Why?
Lewis Latimer was an inventor who lived and invented in the late 1800’s. His ideas brought new inventions to people in the United States and around the world. His innovations - and the tools used - are the foundation of a few machines we have today, for example:
BRAINSTORM

Explain to your students that inventions come from ideas, and that the best inventions are developed in teams that work together. Ask your students to also consider the differences of working in a large industrial Science Laboratory, a home-based Inventor’s Workshop, and the various unit measures needed to develop a working makerspace.

Inventing Something New: 3 minutes discussion

Take notes on a board or Padlet. Exploring Lewis Latimer’s workspace will support students as they gain an understanding that there were many inventions that changed the world. Where would we be without the lightbulb? What are other cool inventions that have changed our lives?

Examples: Perhaps a car that could fly? Or galactic space pods to explore different planets.

Classroom Workspace for Inventing: 3 minutes discussion

Students can also brainstorm how creation can be sparked in their classrooms, as well as which tools are needed to facilitate their own workspace. Whether at home or with their peers, have your students discuss what their ideal workspace might look like. Are there pictures of inventions they want to create? Are there workspace safety rules?

Examples: Making sure that one inventor’s workspace is not messy, or distracting from another’s experiment. Masking sure that experiment materials are safely used and transferred between scientists.
ELABORATE

15 minutes

After learning about Lewis Latimer’s home, we will ask students to complete a short design challenge to consider what their own personal museums would look like if their homes were preserved for the future!

Work with students to complete a simple design of a space that would be used to create their own personal museums.

What would be included in your museum? What object/artifacts of your life would you want others to see in the future? How would these objects represent who you are as a creator/inventor?

Remember students should consider:

1. The space of their museum. What room would be preserved?
2. How would their museum be an educational experience for others?

The sky’s the limit for this activity! Encourage students to think big. Many students will not know exactly how to create a fully functioning museum, this is not important for this assignment. The focus is demonstrating an understanding of the importance of house museums, while envisioning a world where their future aspirations are on full display!
ACTIVITY:

Latimer and all of his personal household items have been permanently housed in the Lewis Latimer Museum. Think about a room in your home that means a lot to you. Use the space below to list the objects in this room. Remember, these objects are meant to paint the full picture of who you are!

List these objects below:

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☐ __________________________
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☐ __________________________
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☐ __________________________
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☐ __________________________
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☐ __________________________
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☐ __________________________
EVALUATE

5 minutes

Assessment Rubric

Use the students' design and written descriptions to evaluate students’ ability to determine the layout of their personal historic home museums.

Evaluate their room description for the use of descriptive adjectives, voice, and organization and their illustration based on relative accuracy of size and dimensions.

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<th></th>
<th>Excellent</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Satisfactory</th>
<th>Needs Improvement</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student demonstrated understanding of the requirements of a Home Museum.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student provided a clear understanding of the function of a Home Museum.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student shared their work successfully.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student clearly depicted their Home Museum using grade level descriptive language.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student shared their work confidently to the class and were able to communicate with others.</td>
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Common Core Standards

Speaking & Listening

**SL.6.4**
Present claims and findings, sequencing ideas logically and using pertinent descriptions, facts, and details to accentuate main ideas or themes; use appropriate eye contact, adequate volume, and clear pronunciation.

Speaking & Listening

**SL.7.4, SL.8.4**
Present claims and findings, emphasizing salient points in a focused, coherent manner with pertinent descriptions, facts, details, and examples; use appropriate eye contact, adequate volume, and clear pronunciation.

Next Generation Science Standards

**MS-ETS1-1**
Define the criteria and constraints of a design problem with sufficient precision to ensure a successful solution, taking into account relevant scientific principles and potential impacts on people and the natural environment that may limit possible solutions.