



Smithsonian
National Museum of American History
Behring Center

TEACHER'S GUIDE

A Century of Invention School Tour

- Audience:** This tour is appropriate for students grade 5 and above. The docent leading your tour will adjust his/her presentation as necessary for the grade level.
- Duration:** The tour lasts approximately one hour and fifteen minutes.
- Program Content:** This tour emphasizes the impact of inventions on life in the 19th century. Students visit the “Engines of Change” and “Information Age” exhibitions, as well as the Halls of Electricity and Agriculture. Throughout the tour students are shown how to analyze or “read” objects while they discover for themselves the effects technological developments had on 19th century society.

The following are some items which may be featured on the tour:

- The *John Bull*, the oldest operable railroad locomotive.
- A demonstration of the operation of 19th-Century machine tools.
- A 19th-Century harvesting machine.
- A cotton gin.

- Purpose:** The tour aims to develop students’ awareness of inventions created in the 19th-century and the impact these inventions had and still have on society.

Objectives: Students will be aware that the 19th Century was a period of great technological change.

Students will learn about the reasons why many inventions were created during the 19th Century and will become familiar with some 19th Century inventions.

Students will be aware of the effects of inventions on everyday life during the 1800's.

SUGGESTIONS FOR PRE-VISIT ACTIVITIES

1. Construct a timeline using the suggested events listed below or events appropriate to the curriculum unit your class is studying. One way to do this is to make a string timeline. Run a string from one end of the room to the other and drape folded sheets of paper, with the event and the date written on it, over the string. Constructing a timeline will provide students a reference point for the time period 1790-1900 which is covered in the tour.

EVENTS FOR TIMELINE:

200_... Class prepares to visit the National Museum of American History
19/200_... Year of birth of students in class
1976... U.S. celebrates its Bicentennial
1974... Little League Baseball, Inc. votes to allow girls to play on its teams
1969... Astronauts land on moon; Golda Meir becomes Israel's fourth prime minister
1937... Jackie Robinson becomes the first African-American to sign with a major league baseball club
1933... Frances Perkins becomes first woman cabinet member

2. Be specific with the students about your objectives for the trip. Emphasize how the trip fits with your curriculum or area of study.
3. Have students develop some general questions to ask the docent during the tour.
4. Share the brochures you receive with the class.
5. Ask your students to read a book or articles about some of the objects

they will see.

6. Discuss the National Museum of American History and the Smithsonian Institution with your students. Provide them with maps to locate the museum. Discuss museum behavior.

SUGGESTIONS FOR POST-VISIT ACTIVITIES

1. Have students add the following events to the timeline developed in the pre-visit activity. Have students discuss each event had on American life.

1831 The *John Bull* is first used on the Camden and Aboy railroad

1846 Elias Howe invents the sewing machine.

1880 The combine is developed.

1888 The Kodak box camera is developed.

2. Ask students to list three 19th-century inventions that, in their opinions, had the most effect on people's lives and have them give reasons for their choices. Ask older students to write a paragraph about a 19th-century invention, its impact on people's lives and why it had such an impact.