

PRE-VISIT



The following information is designed to teach students basic facts about 19th-century life in the Southern United States. We use primary and secondary sources, such as artifacts, documents, publications and photographs to compile our pre-visit introduction.

1. Allow students to read the points for each section. Answer any questions they may have.
2. Review the facts about 19th century New Orleans and open a discussion on the best and worst aspects of life during that time in New Orleans.
3. Critique student choices regarding the best and worst aspects of life during that era.

IMPORTANT DATES:



1803 Transfer of colony from France to the United States

January 1812 Arrival of the first steamboat in New Orleans

April 1812 Louisiana became a state

1815 Battle of New Orleans

1841 Establishment of the city's first public school system

1850 Capitol of Louisiana is moved from New Orleans to Baton Rouge

1862 General Butler leads siege of New Orleans during the Civil War

GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE OF NEW ORLEANS:



- Designers of New Orleans homes were challenged by our hot climate. Homes were built with high ceilings, large windows, and doors were placed for maximum air flow.
- Many houses had galleries (porches) which were used as a space to stay cool.
- Before refrigeration, food preparation and spoilage was a problem in the hot city. It was necessary to shop daily and cook most foods immediately. Food poisoning was a daily threat!
- Levees were built to control where the Mississippi River flowed and to stop it from overflowing.
- Many buildings were also raised to prevent flooding because New Orleans was built on top of swampy land.
- During the winter, it was difficult to retain heat so homes had “winter dress” of wall-to-wall carpeting and heavy draperies.



CHILDREN OF THE 19TH CENTURY:



- Signs of respect upon meeting someone older were curtsying (girls) and bowing (boys).
- Girls were expected to be able to play music, sing, and dance to entertain guests. Girls were brought up to be proper, cultured, and protected.
- Fathers had very little interaction with their children.
- Children spent most of their time with a female slave whose job it was to care for them.
- Children were not allowed to dine with adults in the formal dining room and in general were to “be seen and not heard.”
- There were very strict rules regarding how one dressed and behaved in public. Ladies and gentlemen always wore hats and gloves and followed customary rules on visiting and greeting one another.



EDUCATION:



- Girls' education would have consisted mainly of learning how to manage a household, supervise cooking, maintain inventories, and entertaining.
- Boys and girls usually started their education around the ages of eight or nine years old.
- Tutors would visit the home and teach etiquette and domestic arts, although sometimes the girls would attend a day school (such as Ursuline Convent School) for a year or two.
- Boys were educated in many of the same subjects they are taught today. Boys were generally sent to a boarding school around the age of fifteen. Wealthy young men from New Orleans typically went to school in Paris to continue their education.



HEALTH AND DISEASE



- Diseases and epidemics were a problem throughout the 19th century.
- Summer months were the most problematic due to mosquitoes spreading Yellow Fever and Malaria.
- Households used netting around beds and some furniture to protect themselves from insects.
- Wealthy families typically left the city and visited plantations or the Gulf Coast during the summer months.
- Hospitals were typically for the poor, with the wealthy receiving their care at home.

