UNIT EIGHT:
Memory and History

INTRODUCTION FOR THE TEACHER

Key Topics
Memory, boosterism, historical significance

Summary
In this unit students will explore what the business class of founders believed to be historically significant about the creation and early development of the city. Students will also explore how significance is assigned to events in the city’s history.

Objectives
Students will:

a. analyze primary source documents such as visual images
b. explore concepts in historical thinking
c. determine historical significance
d. conduct research

State Goals and Standards of Learning met in Unit 8:

State Goal 1: A, C
State Goal 5: A, B, C
State Goal 14: D
State Goal 16: A, B, C, D
State Goal 17: A, C, D
State Goal 18: A, B, C
By 1881—ten years after the great fire that destroyed much of the city—Chicago was booming. Thousands of immigrants arrived in the city each year. Saving its early history became an urgent task while the founders of the city were still alive. You have read some of these sources already: *Chicago Antiquities*, *Autobiography of Gurdon S. Hubbard*, and the *History of Cook County*. Though primary sources existed, these authors also relied on their memories because many personal documents had been destroyed in the fire (as well as most of the documents at the Chicago Historical Society).

**Discuss in class:**

- Are the memoirs reliable? What kind of version of the past do these authors present? Was anyone’s version of history left out?

- Why were these people so concerned about constructing history 20-50 years after the founding? Besides their advancing ages, what might be going on in the city itself that would inspire the “city fathers” to record history as they know it?
Are the memoirs and compilations of history from the 1880s good sources? On the one hand, they are great evidence because they help people today see how some people from the past thought about Chicago. That does not mean the history portrayed is factual, however. When historians look at sources from the past, they are concerned with the credibility of a document or article, therefore they make sure to analyze the context in which the source is based and the perspective and audience to which that source was originally intended. For example, a historian using Gurdon Hubbard’s autobiography would keep in mind that Hubbard wrote this autobiography as an elderly—and successful—man. How would they differentiate the autobiography from a letter or journal entry that Hubbard might have written as a young man, sitting by the fire plucking leeches off his body? Historians might also try to find out Hubbard’s views about the rapidly changing human and industrial landscape of Chicago. Such views might influence his own memories.

In 1857, the Chicago Mechanics Institute published the Chicago Magazine (not the same one as today). Can a picture drawn in 1857 about a city that has been in existence for only 20 years be a good source for history? What would you like to find out about the magazine’s publisher? What might you infer about the publisher from the cover?
8.

Memory and History

Chicago Magazine, 1857.
Courtesy of the Newberry Library, Chicago.
**ACTIVITY ONE**

In 1857, what did the publishers think was important to know about the past, present, and future of Chicago?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Image in the picture</th>
<th>Meaning or purpose of image</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Who might have been the intended audience for this magazine?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

What kind of message was the magazine cover meant to convey to the audience?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

Create a title for the magazine cover:

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________
ACTIVITY

Design your own cover for the *Chicago Magazine*. You may want choose to do the cover as if you were the artist in 1857 or you may draw a cover reflecting Chicago at this point in time. Remember to use images to symbolize the past, present, and future.
LESSON 2
Make History!

Historians figure an event should be about 25 years or longer in the past in order to be considered history. Even then, it is considered “current history” and historians realize that 50 and 100 years later will really make a difference in understanding the importance and impact of any event. Why might they think this way? Do you agree or disagree?

Historians often engage in discussions about what is important to remember about the past. Be it local, national, or world history, decisions are made about the themes, events, or people that are important to commemorate. They also discuss the relative importance of different kinds of history: social, economic, political, or cultural. Every textbook or history book reflects the historian’s ideas about what is important to know, whose story is being examined, and how society works.

After doing Activity 1 and/or 2, consider the following questions:
• What do “officials” and historians consider the key events in Chicago history?
• How might the thoughts of non-officials differ?
1. Each component of the Chicago flag represents key events or places in Chicago history. Brainstorm about what they symbolize. Then find out what they really represent. You might want to do some additional research and find out how those particular events were selected and why.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Star 1</th>
<th>BRAINSTORM</th>
<th>ACTUAL SYMBOL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Star 2</td>
<td>BRAINSTORM</td>
<td>ACTUAL SYMBOL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Star 3</td>
<td>BRAINSTORM</td>
<td>ACTUAL SYMBOL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Star 4</td>
<td>BRAINSTORM</td>
<td>ACTUAL SYMBOL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Stripes</td>
<td>BRAINSTORM</td>
<td>ACTUAL SYMBOL</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If you could add a fifth star, what event would it represent and why?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
ACTIVITY

Create your own Chicago flag. Develop the criteria upon which you would base your choices and decide upon the symbols you would use. Brainstorm your list of important events, people, or themes. Along with your flag, write an essay which would persuade citizens to adopt your flag for the city.
CONCLUSION

How did people remember the Portage Site in late 19th century Chicago? And how did that memory change and grow in the 20th century? What will the Portage Site mean for this new century?