

CHAPTER
8

GUIDED READING *The Dawn of Mass Culture*

Section 4

A. As you read about the emergence of modern mass culture, give *either* an example of each item *or* mention one of the people who invented or popularized it. Then note one reason why the item became so popular around the turn of the 20th century.

	1. Amusement parks	2. Bicycling	3. Boxing	4. Baseball
Example				
Reason				

	5. Shopping centers	6. Department stores	7. Chain stores	8. Mail-order catalogs
Example				
Reason				

B. On the back of this paper, describe the impact that **rural free delivery** had on the country.

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SKILLBUILDER PRACTICE *Creating Visual Presentations*

Use the chart below to list four types of visuals you could use—and how you would use them—to create a visual presentation on the discrimination and segregation that the nation’s minority groups endured during the turn of the 20th century. (See Skillbuilder Handbook, p. R37.)

Visual	Purpose



Section 4

RETEACHING ACTIVITY *The Dawn of Mass Culture***Reading Comprehension**

Choose the best answer for each item. Write the letter of your answer in the blank.

- _____ 1. The sport that the novelist Mark Twain referred to as the symbol of the “booming nineteenth century” was
- football.
 - baseball.
 - soccer.
 - boxing.
- _____ 2. Dime novels were inexpensive books that often told glorified adventure tales of
- the sea.
 - the West.
 - escaped slaves.
 - the business world.
- _____ 3. The man who originated the department store was
- Stephen Crane.
 - F. W. Woolworth.
 - Thomas Eakins.
 - Marshall Field.
- _____ 4. By 1910, the number of Americans who shopped by mail had reached
- 5 million.
 - 10 million.
 - 15 million.
 - 20 million.
- _____ 5. The popular Ashcan School of American art stressed scenes of
- nature.
 - Southern living.
 - urban life.
 - the wealthy and elite.
- _____ 6. The activity that the suffragist Susan B. Anthony said “has done more to emancipate women than anything else in the world” was
- bicycling.
 - baseball.
 - shopping.
 - tennis.

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LITERATURE SELECTION *from Ragtime*
by E. L. Doctorow

In this novel, the lives of three fictional families are entwined with those of such historical figures as industrialist J. P. Morgan, architect Stanford White, social reformer Emma Goldman, and magician Harry Houdini. Read this excerpt to find out what life was like for a typical middle-class white family at the turn of the 20th century.

In 1902 Father built a house at the crest of the Broadview Avenue hill in New Rochelle, New York. It was a three-story brown shingle with dormers, bay windows and a screened porch. Striped awnings shaded the windows. The family took possession of this stout manse on a sunny day in June and it seemed for some years thereafter that all their days would be warm and fair. The best part of Father's income was derived from the manufacture of flags and buntings and other accoutrements of patriotism, including fireworks. Patriotism was a reliable sentiment in the early 1900's. Teddy Roosevelt was President. The population customarily gathered in great numbers either out of doors for parades, public concerts, fish fries, political picnics, social outings, or indoors in meeting halls, vaudeville theatres, operas, ballrooms. There seemed to be no entertainment that did not involve great swarms of people. Trains and steamers and trolleys moved them from one place to another. That was the style, that was the way people lived. Women were stouter then. They visited the fleet carrying white parasols. Everyone wore white in summer. Tennis racquets were hefty and the racquet faces elliptical. There was a lot of fainting. There were no Negroes. There were no immigrants. On Sunday afternoon, after dinner, Father and Mother went upstairs and closed the bedroom door. Grandfather fell asleep on the divan in the parlor. The Little Boy in the sailor blouse sat on the screened porch and waved away the flies. Down at the bottom of the hill Mother's Younger Brother boarded the streetcar and rode to the end of the line. He was a lonely, withdrawn young man with blond moustaches, and was thought to be having difficulty finding himself. The end of the line was an empty field of tall marsh grasses. The air was salt. Mother's Younger Brother in his white linen suit and boater rolled his trousers and walked bare-

foot in the salt marshes. Sea birds started and flew up. This was the time in our history when Winslow Homer was doing his painting. A certain light was still available along the Eastern seaboard. Homer painted the light. It gave the sea a heavy dull menace and shone coldly on the rocks and shoals of the New England coast. There were unexplained shipwrecks and brave towline rescues. Odd things went on in lighthouses and in shacks nestled in the wild beach plum. Across America sex and death were barely distinguishable. Runaway women died in the rigors of ecstasy. Stories were hushed up and reporters paid off by rich families. One read between the lines of the journals and gazettes. In

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New York City the papers were full of the shooting of the famous architect Stanford White by Harry K. Thaw, eccentric scion of a coke and railroad fortune. Harry K. Thaw was the husband of Evelyn Nesbit, the celebrated beauty who had once been Stanford White's mistress. The shooting took place in the roof garden of the Madison

Square Garden on 26th Street, a spectacular block-long building of yellow brick and terra cotta that White himself had designed in the Sevillian style. It was the opening night of a revue entitled *Mamzelle Champagne*, and as the chorus sang and danced the eccentric scion wearing on this summer night a straw boater and heavy black coat pulled out a pistol and shot the famous architect three times in the head. On the roof. There were screams. Evelyn fainted. She had been a well-known artist's model at the age of fifteen. Her underclothes were white. Her husband habitually whipped her. She happened once to meet Emma Goldman, the revolutionary. Goldman lashed her with her tongue. Apparently there *were* Negroes. There *were* immigrants. And though the papers called the shooting the Crime of the Century, Goldman knew it was only 1906 and there were ninety-four years to go.

Mother's Younger Brother was in love with Evelyn Nesbit. He had closely followed the scandal surrounding her name and had begun to reason that the death of her lover Stanford White and the imprisonment of her husband Harry K. Thaw left her in need of the attentions of a genteel middle-class young man with no money. He thought about her all the time. He was desperate to have her. In his room pinned on the wall was a newspaper drawing by Charles Dana Gibson entitled "The Eternal Question." It showed Evelyn in profile, with a profusion of hair, one thick strand undone and fallen in the configuration of a question mark. Her downcast eye was embellished with a fallen ringlet that threw her brow in shadow. Her nose was delicately upturned. Her mouth was slightly pouted. Her long neck curved like a bird taking wing. Evelyn Nesbit had caused the death of one man and wrecked the life of another and from that he deduced that there was nothing in life worth having, worth wanting, but the embrace of her thin arms.

The afternoon was a blue haze. Tidewater seeped into his footprints. He bent down and found a perfect shell specimen, a variety not common to western Long Island Sound. It was a voluted pink and amber shell the shape of a thimble, and what he did in the hazy sun with the salt drying on his ankles was to throw his head back and drink the minute amount of sea water in the shell. Gulls wheeled overhead, crying like oboes, and behind him at the land end of the marsh, out of sight behind the tall grasses, the distant bell of the North Avenue streetcar tolled its warning.

Across town the little boy in the sailor suit was suddenly restless and began to measure the length of the porch. He trod with his toe upon the runner of the cane-backed rocking chair. He had reached that age of knowledge and wisdom in a child when it is not expected by the adults around him and consequently goes unrecognized. He read the newspaper daily and was currently following the dispute between the professional baseballers and a scientist who claimed that the curve ball was an optical illusion. He felt that the circumstances of his family's life operated against his need to see things and to go places. For instance he had conceived an enormous interest in the works and career of Harry Houdini, the escape artist. But he

had not been taken to a performance. Houdini was a headliner in the top vaudeville circuits. His audiences were poor people—carriers, peddlers, policemen, children. His life was absurd. He went all over the world accepting all kinds of bondage and escaping. He was roped to a chair. He escaped. He was chained to a ladder. He escaped. He was handcuffed, his legs were put in irons, he was tied up in a strait jacket and put in a locked cabinet. He escaped. He escaped from bank vaults, nailed-up barrels, sewn mailbags; he escaped from a zinc-lined Knabe piano case, a giant football, a galvanized iron boiler, a rolltop desk, a sausage skin. His escapes were mystifying because he never damaged or appeared to unlock what he escaped from. The screen was pulled away and there he stood disheveled but triumphant beside the inviolate container that was supposed to have contained him. He waved to the crowd. He escaped from a sealed milk can filled with water. He escaped from a

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Siberian exile van. From a Chinese torture crucifix. From a Hamburg penitentiary. From an English prison ship. From a Boston jail. He was chained to automobile tires, water wheels, cannon, and he escaped. He dove manacled from a bridge into the Mississippi, the Seine, the Mersey, and came up waving. He hung upside down and

strait-jacketed from cranes, biplanes and the tops of buildings. He was dropped into the ocean padlocked in a diving suit fully weighted and not connected to an air supply, and he escaped. He was buried alive in a grave and could not escape, and had to be rescued. Hurriedly, they dug him out. The earth is too heavy, he said gasping. His nails bled. Soil fell from his eyes. He was drained of color and couldn't stand. His assistant threw up. Houdini wheezed and sputtered. He coughed blood. They cleaned him off and took him back to the hotel. Today, nearly fifty years since his death, the audience for escapes is even larger.

The little boy stood at the end of the porch and fixed his gaze on a bluebottle fly traversing the screen in a way that made it appear to be coming up the hill from North Avenue. The fly flew off. An automobile was coming up the hill from North Avenue. As it drew closer he saw it was a black 45-horsepower Pope-Toledo Runabout. He ran along the porch and stood at the top of the steps. The car

came past his house, made a loud noise and swerved into the telephone pole. The little boy ran inside and called upstairs to his mother and father. Grandfather woke with a start. The boy ran back to the porch. The driver and the passenger were standing in the street looking at the car; it had big wheels with pneumatic tires and wooden spokes painted in black enamel. It had brass headlamps in front of the radiator and brass sidelamps over the fenders. It had tufted upholstery and double side entrances. It did not appear to be damaged. The driver was in livery. He folded back the hood and a geyser of white steam shot up with a hiss.

A number of people looked on from their front yards. But Father, adjusting the chain on his vest, went down to the sidewalk to see if there was something he could do. The car's owner was Harry Houdini, the famous escape artist. He was spending the day driving through Westchester. He was thinking of buying some property. He was invited into the house while the radiator cooled. He surprised them with his modest, almost colorless demeanor. He seemed depressed. His success had brought into vaudeville a host of competitors. Consequently he had to think of more and more dangerous escapes. He was a short, powerfully built man, an athlete obviously, with strong hands and with back and arm muscles that suggested themselves through the cut of his rumpled tweed suit, which, though well tailored, was worn this day inappropriately. The thermometer read in the high eighties. Houdini had unruly stiff hair parted in the middle and clear blue eyes, which did not stop moving. He was very respectful to Mother and Father and spoke of his profession with diffidence. This struck them as appropriate. The little boy stared at him. Mother had ordered lemonade. It was brought into the parlor and Houdini drank it gratefully. The room was kept cool by the awnings on the windows. The windows themselves were shut to keep out the heat. Houdini wanted to undo his collar. He felt trapped by the heavy square furnishings, the drapes and dark rugs, the Oriental silk cushions, the green glass lampshades. There was a chaise with a zebra rug. Noticing Houdini's gaze Father mentioned that he had shot the zebra on a hunting trip in Africa. Father was an amateur explorer of considerable

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reputation. He was past president of the New York Explorers Club to which he made an annual disbursement. In fact in just a few days he would be leaving to carry the Club's standard on the third Peary expedition to the Arctic. You mean, Houdini said, you're going with Peary to the Pole? God willing, Father replied. He sat back in his chair and lit a cigar. Houdini became voluble. He paced back

and forth. He spoke of his own travels, his tours of Europe. But the Pole! he said. Now that's something. You must be pretty good to get picked for that. He turned his blue eyes on Mother. And keeping the home fires burning ain't so easy either, he said. He was not without charm. He smiled and Mother, a

large blond woman, lowered her eyes. Houdini then spent a few minutes doing small deft tricks with objects at hand for the little boy. When he took his leave the entire family saw him to the door. Father and Grandfather shook his hand. Houdini walked down the path that ran under the big maple tree and then descended the stone steps that led to the street. The chauffeur was waiting, the car was parked correctly. Houdini climbed in the seat next to the driver and waved. People stood looking on from their yards. The little boy had followed the magician to the street and now stood at the front of the Pope-Toledo gazing at the distorted macrocephalic image of himself in the shiny brass fitting of the headlight. Houdini thought the boy comely, fair like his mother, and tow-headed, but a little soft-looking. He leaned over the side door. Goodbye, Sonny, he said holding out his hand. Warn the Duke, the little boy said. Then he ran off.

Activity Options

1. Create a chart about life in the early 1900s. Use such headings as Entertainment, Politics, Sports, Race Relations, and Transportation and add details based on your reading of this excerpt.
2. With a small group of classmates, create a collage that captures life at the turn of the century as described in this excerpt and your textbook.
3. Imagine that *Ragtime* is to be distributed as an audio book. With a group of classmates, choose several ragtime compositions that you would use as background music to accompany this excerpt.

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AMERICAN LIVES **Lillian Gish**
Lifetime Actress, First Lady of Film

"She loves her work and is always ready to tackle the daily responsibilities of whatever role, big or small, she has undertaken. . . . [She] contributed in no small degree to the early development of the art of film making."—Peter Glenville, Preface to Gish's autobiography, The Movies, Mr. Griffith, and Me (1969)

Through a lifetime of acting, Lillian Gish (1896–1993) always behaved professionally. One of the first movie stars, she helped establish the film industry by using a natural acting style that moved audiences deeply.

Abandoned by her husband when her daughters were young, Gish's mother struggled. She became an actress and soon put daughters Lillian and Dorothy on stage as well. Acting had a bad reputation, and the Gishes often did not tell other people exactly what it was that they did for a living. Lillian Gish grew up on stage, with hardly any formal schooling. But she developed her mind by reading constantly.

In the course of their performances, the Gishes met a young actress named Gladys Smith. One day they visited Smith—now calling herself Mary Pickford—on the set of a moving picture, an industry that was just beginning. She introduced her friends to director D. W. Griffith, who immediately cast the girls in his film. Unable to tell them apart, he had Lillian wear a blue bow and Dorothy a red one.

For the next decade, the two sisters made many films with Griffith. Lillian's work included some of the pioneering director's most famous works, including the landmark *The Birth of a Nation* (1915). Griffith used Lillian to show his view of the ideal woman—an innocent in a harsh world. She was a sweet farm girl in *True Heart Susie* (1919). In *Broken Blossoms* (1919), she played a victim of abuse who is eventually killed by her father because she had fallen in love with a Chinese immigrant. In *Orphans of the Storm* (1922), Lillian added to this character type. While still an innocent, she shows fierce determination in trying to find her blind sister, played by Dorothy, in the midst of the turmoil of the French Revolution.

Griffith liked Gish because she could display a wide range of emotions. According to some critics, she invented the art of acting on film. She abandoned the broad, sometimes extreme gestures typi-

cal among stage actors. Instead, she used smaller, more subtle movements and facial expressions. The results had a profound impact on audiences. In *The Mothering Heart* (1913), they felt her sorrow and rage when—after her baby died in childbirth—she shredded the petals off a rose. In *Broken Blossoms*, they felt her terror as she hid in a closet from her rampaging father.

Griffith respected Gish's professionalism. In 1920, he asked her to direct Dorothy in *Remodeling Her Husband*. Though the movie succeeded, Gish decided that directing was too much of a burden.

By the time of *Orphans of the Storm*, Gish had grown to be a huge star. Griffith, an independent producer, could not afford to pay her what she could command. He suggested that she sign a rich contract with a studio.

Lillian Gish starred in many films during the 1920s, often suggesting projects to producers. Most notable were her roles in *La Boheme* (1926), *The Scarlet Letter* (1926), and *The Wind* (1928). Then movies became talkies, and audiences began to crave tougher female leads. Gish continued to act, but less frequently in movies. Beginning in 1933, she spent more and more time in the theater, starring in such plays as *Hamlet*, *Life with Father*, *The Family Reunion*, and *Uncle Vanya*. She still made occasional movies and, after 1948, appeared from time to time on television. Her last film role was with Bette Davis in the film *The Whales of August*. She was 90 at the time, a complete professional until the end.

Questions

1. Why do you think acting had a bad reputation in the early 1900s?
2. How do you think Gish's childhood shaped her life?
3. What made Gish's acting style different?