Lesson 7: A Spirit of Reform

Overview:
To what degree did reform movements of the 1800s improve people’s lives? As the Industrial Revolution changed how people lived and made new opportunities available, the 1800s also saw the growth of a number of reform movements aimed at removing evils in society. Not everyone saw the changes of the time as positive. Religious revivals swept across the nation in what has been called the Second Great Awakening. Dorothea Dix played an active role in the movement to improve conditions of the mentally ill and prisoners. Horace Mann led the movement for public school education.

Suggested time allowance: 3 class periods

Unifying Themes:
- Development and Transformation of Social Structures
- Civic Ideals and Practices

New York State Social Studies Framework
- Standard 1: History of the United States and New York
- Key Ideas and Conceptual Understandings
  - 7.7 REFORM MOVEMENTS: Social, political, and economic inequalities sparked various reform movements and resistance efforts. Influenced by the Second Great Awakening, New York played a key role in major reform efforts.
    - 7.7a The Second Great Awakening, which had a strong showing in New York, inspired reform movements.
- Social Studies Practices:
  - Civic Participation
    - Identify how social and political responsibilities developed in American society.
    - Identify, describe, and compare the role of the individual in social and political participation in, and as an agent of, historical change at various times and at various locations in colonial North America and in the early history of the United States.
  - Gathering and Using Evidence
    - Describe and analyze arguments of others with supports.
    - Make inferences and draw general conclusions from evidence.
  - Comparison and Contextualization
    - Connect historical developments to specific circumstances of time and place and to broader regional, national, or global processes.

Common Core Learning Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy
- RH.6-8.1: Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.
- RH.6-8.2: Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of the source distinct from prior knowledge or opinions.
- WHST.6-8.1: Write arguments focused on discipline-specific content.
- WHST.6-8.9: Draw evidence from informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.
- SL.6-8.1: Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.
- SL.6-8.2: Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.
- SL.6-8.3: Evaluate a speaker’s point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric.
Enduring Understanding:
- Disagreements over social, political, and economic matters led to the need for reform.

Unit Essential Question:
- To what extent does the growth of a new nation transform people’s lives, beliefs, and values?

Resources/Materials for this lesson:
- “A Plea for Simplicity” (included)
- “A Plea for Simplicity Power Point” (included)
  “During the 1800s, missionaries settled in Oregon in order to convert Native Americans to Christianity. While these efforts were mostly unsuccessful, news of Oregon’s beauty and fertile soil drew settlers.” (District subscription required.)
  Connects the religious revival to social reform.
- “Sinners Bound to Change Their Own Hearts” (included)
- “Social Reform in the 1800s.” (included)
- “Images Dorothea Dix.” (included) PowerPoint
- “Argumentative Essay Rubric” (included)

Activities/Procedures:

Day 1

1. Ask, “Was the Industrial Revolution more positive or more negative for the United States and its people?” Have students create a T-chart of positive and negative effects, and then discuss.
2. Duplicate and distribute “A Plea for Simplicity” (included) Read introduction and explain that not everybody saw the changes in the United States as positive. Have students unpack the term “materialistic.” Explain the idea of “utopia.” Project and follow the sides in the “A Plea for Simplicity Power Point” (included) as you conduct a Socratic Seminar.
3. Before reading the text, define the terms marrow, Spartan, superficial, unwieldy, elevation.
4. Read the text aloud. Ask students to annotate key ideas.
5. Discuss:
   - Is this a primary or a secondary source? How do we know?
   - What is Thoreau’s opinion of the industrial culture growing up around him?
   - What are two examples Thoreau gives of how to simplify life? What others can you think of?
   - According to Thoreau is industrialization more helpful or more harmful to American society?
   - What would Thoreau say is the purpose of life?
   - What would Thoreau say about life in the United States today?
   - Do you agree or disagree with Thoreau’s perspective of life?
Day 2

1. Why were some people unhappy with life in the United States in the early 1800s?
2. What about the Industrial Revolution “pushed” people to think about society’s values in different ways?
3. How would Manifest Destiny have “pulled” people toward a renewed belief in God?
4. Tell the students, during this time period, many religious movements swept through the country. One minister, Charles Grandison Finney was a leader in what has been called the “Second Great Awakening.”
   - Show the YouTube video “The Second Great Awakening.”
   - What does it mean to “wake up”?
   - Religious leaders of the early 1800s were trying to “wake up” Americans and have them think about their values and responsibilities in society.
   - Define Second Great Awakening.

   Note to teacher: The Great Awakening (first Great Awakening) has not been mentioned prior to this lesson. This was an evangelical and revitalization movement in the American colonies in the 1730s and 1740s, leaving a permanent impact on American Protestantism. It challenged the traditional churches and resulted from powerful preaching that gave listeners a sense of deep personal revelation of their need of salvation by Jesus Christ.

5. Show “Religious Missionaries and the Growth of the American West” (2:36).
   - How did some Americans use religion to justify taking over land that wasn’t originally theirs?
   - Do you think religion influenced westward expansion more or did westward expansion influence religion more?

6. Distribute “Sinners Bound to Change Their Own Hearts” (included) by Charles Grandison Finney. Discuss:
   - What does Finney mean by a “change of heart”?
   - How does Finney’s language reflect the era of “Jacksonian democracy”?
   - What impact will leaders like Finney have on Americans of the 1800s?

Day 3

1. Religious leaders like Charles Grandison Finney encouraged people to take action to make society better… Define the term “reform.” Ask, “What kinds of characteristics would an effective reformer need to have?” Two important reformers of the time period were Dorothea Dix and Horace Mann.
2. Project “Images Dorothea Dix.” PowerPoint (included)
3. Have students read short excerpts by Dorothea Dix and Horace Mann from “Social Reform in the 1800s” (included) and identify conditions that they wished to change.
4. Questions for discussion:
   - What are these accounts about?
   - What did Dorothea Dix say was her reason for describing the horrible conditions that existed for the mentally ill?
   - Was Ms. Dix successful in making you feel that change was necessary? Why/why not?
   - According to Horace Mann, what should be the goals of education?
   - What do the statements of Dorothea Dix and Horace Mann have in common? How do they differ?
5. Consider: To what extent have the goals of these reform movements been accomplished today? Explain. What areas of life today might Dorothea Dix and Horace Mann feel still need reform? Explain.

6. For homework students can either:
   - Pretend to be Henry David Thoreau, Charles Grandison Finney, Dorothea Dix or Horace Mann and write an editorial for a newspaper that responds to conditions in cities, communities, hospitals or schools today.
   - Choose an area of society in which they feel reform is still needed today (i.e. homelessness). Using Dorothea Dix’s piece as a model, create a “call to action” for a modern problem. Students should identify specific examples of why reform is needed, and then conclude with a passionate defense of the need for change.

**Evaluation/Assessment:**
- Editorial
- Call to Action

**Vocabulary:**
- utopia
- Second Great Awakening
- reform