

## Learning about the Gorgas House: A Scavenger Hunt

**Lesson Plan Grade Levels:** *Grade 4*

**Introduction:** *The Gorgas family lived in a very different time than we do. Their home is set up with period furnishings and artifacts that provide a window into their daily lives. Analyzing artifacts, structures, and photographs from earlier times as compared to their modern equivalents will help students develop a better understanding of the history of our state and country.*

**Guiding Questions:**

*What can you tell about the daily lives of the Gorgas family members that would have been different from our lives today? How would you describe life of the townspeople of Alabama in the 19<sup>th</sup> century?*

**Learning Objectives:**

COS SS 4-6: Identify cultural, economic, and political aspects of the lifestyles of early nineteenth-century ... townspeople.

Examples:

cultural-housing, education, religion, recreation;

economic-transportation, livelihood

This field trip will give students an up close look at how townspeople in Tuscaloosa lived during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It will also acquaint them with some early history of the University of Alabama and events that occurred during the civil war.

**Background:** *The following site provides background information about the Gorgas family and the history of this house. [http://gorgashouse.ua.edu/?page\\_id=2](http://gorgashouse.ua.edu/?page_id=2)*

**Lesson Preparation Instructions:** *Students will benefit from a review of basic daily living facts of the 19<sup>th</sup> century: no electricity, no indoor plumbing, wells for water, etc. Tell them that they will be conducting a scavenger hunt in the Gorgas House. This will require that they read all the artifact labels and look at each item carefully. They need to use their prior knowledge of the times to infer some of the answers to the hunt. Careful listening to the tour guide will uncover clues, as well. Clip boards and pencils will be needed.*

**Lesson Activities:** 1) *Show students the page on the Gorgas House history at [http://gorgashouse.ua.edu/?page\\_id=2](http://gorgashouse.ua.edu/?page_id=2) Read together as a class. 2) Click on the Restoration Process link to the right of the history. Point out the floor plan to the students and name the various rooms. Discuss what the residents might have used them for. Tell them that there will be 2 – 3 questions for each room in the house. Inform students that the tour guide will give them a lot of information that will help them with the scavenger hunt. 3) Remind students that this house is a museum and that they should not touch any of the artifacts.*

**Field Trip Activities:** 1) Have students listen to the tour guide as a group. 2) Divide class into groups of 4 or 5 and assign each group to an adult. (You may want to give a copy of the key to each adult.) 3) Pass out scavenger hunt paper, clip boards, and pencils. 4) Have groups begin in different rooms and determine a flow pattern to prevent congestion. Allow about 5 minutes per room. Have students spread around the room so that all are not trying to read the same tag at once. Those finding the answers should help their team mates. 5) If there is time, have the tour guide pull the groups back together and ask each of the questions to verify students' answers and offer further explanations.

**Extending the lesson:** 1) Students could walk to, or be driven past, the Gorgas Library. 2) Ask students to write about the trip when they are back at school. This could be an imaginary diary entry for one of the Gorgas family members, or they could write about their favorite room in the house and what they liked about it. They could also create a Venn to compare the lives of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Tuscaloosa family to their own.

**Time Required:** The background building should take around 30 minutes. The scavenger hunt and tour of the Gorgas House could take 1 ½ - 2 hours.

**Subject Areas:** Social Studies for Alabama history, language arts – writing skills

**Skills:** Students will use listening skills, make observations, make inferences based on prior knowledge, and write answers to questions.

**Author:** Cindy Fisk, 4<sup>th</sup> grade teacher, Martin Luther King Jr. Elementary School

**This lesson plan was developed with funds provided by a U. S. Department of Education grant for the Teaching American History Program (TAHP), Tuscaloosa, Alabama**

## **Gorgas House Scavenger Hunt Activity Sheet**

### **Room 1 – Sitting Room**

1. What was the original use for the downstairs front room?
2. Why did that change?
3. Notice the framed sketches that Josiah Gorgas made. Why might he have drawn them?

### **Room 2 – Hall**

4. Notice the “loving cup” in the picture of Amelia Gorgas. Where in the house do you see this item?
5. What would have been put inside the carriage warmer?

### **Room 3 – Dining Room**

6. When might the cannon balls have been used according to the label?
7. The Gorgas family used the bayonet to pick up trash. What might have been its original use?

### **Room 4 – Bedroom**

8. Draw the button hook, the middle tool on the right side in the sewing kit. How might it have been used?
9. What do you notice about the glass in the windows?

### **Room 5 – Back Hall**

10. What would finger bowls have been used for?
11. What is the ceramic jar with a stick in the lid?

### **Room 6 – Upstairs Parlor**

12. By how many books did Amelia grow the library?
13. Who gave Amelia the “love cup?”

### **Room 7 – Upstairs Hall**

14. Why would ladies have used fans?
15. Notice the little fan that was a dance card with names written on it. How was that used?

### **Room 8 – Blue Bedroom**

16. What happened to the sewing machine?
17. How would the foot warmer have been used?

### **Room 9 – Green Bedroom**

18. Why might you need steps by the bed?
19. What was one thing that might have been stored in the middle step?

Room 10 – Peach Bedroom

20. What do you think the use for the little sword was?
21. Why might all the bedrooms have wash stands and fireplaces?

Outside

22. Compare the brick work on the front wall and on the front porch. What do you notice? Why do you suppose?
23. Out the back door is a small enclosure over the well. Write a sentence about using well water instead of using indoor faucets.

## Gorgas House Scavenger Hunt – Key and Information

1. The front 3 rooms were all one room that was the original dining hall for the University of Alabama.
2. The students were all boys, many who were very unruly. After much disruptive behavior, such as food fights, the university president closed the dining hall and made the students eat elsewhere. The room was then divided into 3 rooms for the building to be a faculty home.
3. Josiah would have made sketches of scenes he saw in Europe as a way to remember them. This was before cameras were readily available.
4. The actual “love cup” is in the upstairs parlor on the mantle.
5. Hot coals were placed inside the carriage warmer to heat up the inside of the carriage in cold weather.
6. The cannon balls were probably used for military training exercises when the University was a military school.
7. The bayonet would have originally been on the end of a musket.
8. Button hooks were used to button the many little buttons on the sides of ladies boots.
9. The window glass is wavy due to way glass used to be made by pouring the molten glass and rolling it into panes.
10. Finger bowls were put at each place setting on the table so people could rinse their fingers when they got sticky.
11. The ceramic jar with the stick in the lid is a butter churn. Fresh cream was poured into the jar. A person would pull the stick, which has a flat circle of wood on the bottom of it, up and down until the butter fat separated from the cream. It was called churning butter.
12. Amelia increased the library books by 14,000 books during her time as librarian at the University of Alabama.
13. The Alumni of the University of Alabama gave Amelia Gorgas the “love cup” or “loving cup.”
14. Ladies used fans to make a little breeze to cool themselves. There was no air conditioning. They also used them as decorative accessories.
15. The small fan was actually a dance card. A girl would write the names of the gentlemen that asked to dance with her at a ball or party on the card.
16. When Richmond was being burned during the Civil War the Gorgases gave the sewing machine to one of their servants when they were fleeing the city. Later the servant brought back the machine.
17. The foot warmer would have been filled with hot water and a cork stopper put it the top. A person would place their feet against it during cold weather.
18. Many beds used to be taller than beds now days. People would climb the steps to get into bed.

19. The center step lifted up to access a storage space, often used to keep the chamber pot.
20. The little sword was used as a letter opener.
21. Bedrooms had wash stands because there was no indoor plumbing or bathrooms. There were fire places in each room because they were the only source of heat during the winter.
22. The brick work on the front wall is a different color and texture from the bricks on the front porch columns because the porch was added later.
23. People had to get water from wells by pulling a rope with a bucket tied to it. They would pour the water into another bucket and carry it into the house to have water for cooking, drinking, and cleaning. Children often were given the job of drawing and carrying water.