

Chicago Historical Society



# PLAY WITH A PURPOSE

**Grade level:** Third through fifth grades

**Estimated time:** Four class periods **Specific Topic:** The purpose of toys

**Subtopic:** The invention (and inventors) of construction and transportation toys

#### **Teacher background information**

e all know that the main purpose of a toy is for a child to play with it. But, if we take a closer look, toys actually have specific purposes, besides play. Parents, as consumers, often look for toys with educational value, as educational toys can help develop children's creativity and imagination. Children, as consumers, whether they know it or not, also look for toys that hold their attention and captivate their imagination. Inventors of toys hope to gain financial success with innovative ideas. This unit will help students understand that toys have more than one function, while also teaching them about the history of the toys and the toy industry in Chicago.

Many people are unaware of Chicago's influence on the toy industry. Around ninety years ago, Chicago was a leader in toy manufacturing, including transportation toys, called Tootsietoys, and construction toys, such as Tinkertoys and Lincoln Logs. With these inventions, three innovative thinkers helped define the history of toys and made Chicago a home for the growing toy industry.

#### Samuel Dowst and Tootsietoys

Samuel Dowst was the son of Charles O. Dowst. The father and son team owned a publishing business on the West Side of Chicago called the Dowst Brothers Company. The company, founded in 1876, was known for their trade paper publication, called the *National Laundry Journal*.

Historical accounts of the invention of Tootsietoys vary. In 1893, Samuel Dowst attended the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago and was inspired by the Linotype, a keyboard-operated typesetting machine that made a cast out of molten metal to set lines of type. Dowst purchased a Linotype and used it to make the printing of the *National Laundry Journal* much more efficient.

Dowst thought the Linotype could be used for more than typesetting and began experimenting with creating other kinds of metal casting. In doing so, he invented a new kind of casting, called die-casting, using a machine similar to the Linotype. Die-casting is the process of forcing molten metal into a mold called a die. When the metal cools, it takes the shape of the die. With his invention, Dowst founded the Dowst Manufacturing Company.

Dowst's die-casting machine dramatically changed the toy industry. Some of his first die-cast toys were



lead charms and trinkets. Cracker Jack, another famous Chicago company, purchased and used the trinkets as prizes in their caramel corn treats. Dowst later sold the lead charms to the creators of the game Monopoly, who used them as players' pieces. While these other avenues were fruitful, Dowst Manufacturing Company found its greatest success in making transportation toys.

Around 1911, Dowst invented the first die-cast toy car, a replica of a Model T Ford. Dowst intentionally made his toy Model T look real, a practice that altered and became standard in the toy industry. This allowed children to imagine driving, riding, or flying as adults did in real life. Dowst sold more than fifty million of his Model T toys, which earned Dowst Manufacturing Company a prestigious position in the toy industry.

The catchy, if slightly unusual, name for the toys did not come until much later. Tootsie was the name of Samuel's daughter and Charles's granddaughter. In 1924, Tootsietoy became a registered name for the company. The success of Tootsietoys continued as the company grew and expanded their toy lines. In 1964, the company purchased the Strombecker Corporation to expand their business. The Strombecker Corporation is located on the West Side of Chicago and Tootsietoys are still being sold there today.

#### Charles Pajeau and Tinkertoys

Charles Pajeau was a stonemason from Evanston, Illinois. His inspiration for Tinkertoys came when he saw a child constructing an object with discarded wooden thread spools and sticks. Pajeau's Tinkertoy spools had eight holes around the edges and one hole in the middle. With wooden sticks of different sizes and lengths, children could connect the spools together to make various three-dimensional objects. In 1914, Pajeau invented Tinkertoys and founded the Toy Tinkers Company.

That same year, Pajeau introduced Tinkertoys at the New York Toy Fair. At the fair, his invention went virtually unnoticed, because his display was hidden in a corner. Afterward, Pajeau approached the manager of two drugstores located in busy parts of New York City. He proposed that if the manager would let him put displays of Tinkertoys in the drugstore windows,

he would give the stores forty cents out of every dollar sold. The manager agreed. Pajeau set up Tinkertoy windmill displays and used electric fans to make the windmills turn. At one location, this eye-catching display sold fifteen hundred Tinkertoy sets in five days. Pajeau took on a partner, who helped him develop a tube shaped container for the Tinkertoys.

The creative displays and the new cylinder-shaped container prompted an instant success. In the first year alone, Pajeau sold 900,000 Tinkertoy sets. Tinkertoy's success continued, and by its fiftieth anniversary in 1964, two million sets were sold each year.

Tinkertoys have provided entertainment for generations. Parents like Tinkertoys because they are safe, nontoxic, and educational; playing with Tinkertoys requires hand-eye coordination and concentration. And most importantly, Tinkertoys offer hours of creative and imaginative play for kids.

Pajeau changed the toy industry and Chicago's toy history with his invention of Tinkertoys. The Toy Tinkers Company expanded over the years and was eventually sold to the Playskool Company, which still manufactures the toys. This beloved classic proves that stimulating toys never go out of style.

#### John Lloyd Wright and Lincoln Logs

John Lloyd Wright was the son of famous architect Frank Lloyd Wright. At a time when the popularity of construction toys was increasing, the younger Wright created a toy called Lincoln Logs.

Wright and his siblings grew up in Oak Park, Illinois, a suburb of Chicago. The Wright family had a playroom in their home filled with toy blocks and games. At the time, several companies sold versions of toy logs. Wright probably played with these early toy logs, and it is possible that they gave him the idea for Lincoln Logs, which he created between 1916 and 1917.

Wright may have also been influenced by his father. Around 1917, Frank Lloyd Wright was building the Imperial Hotel in Tokyo, Japan, and the younger Wright made a visit to his father's construction site. The building used a unique foundation of interlocking beams, which were intended to make the structure earthquake proof. The beams were joined

together so when one part moved, they all moved. Seeing this building may have contributed to Wright's idea for Lincoln Logs.

Lincoln Logs were made of redwood and notched at each end. The notches allowed the logs to interlock, similar to the foundation of the Imperial Hotel. Children could use the logs to build cabins, forts, and fences and use their imaginations to think about what it would have been like to live in pioneer times. Parents approved of Lincoln logs, because they were safe and educational. Lincoln Logs fostered children's concentration, hand-eye coordination, and imagination.

Wright's company, the Red Square Toy Company, first marketed Lincoln Logs in 1918. Wright chose the name for his toy very carefully. The logs were introduced around the time of the World War I, when Americans were encouraged to buy products made in America. Wright decided to name the logs after Abraham Lincoln, because the name conjured up a positive image of pioneer life, especially in Illinois. Wright eventually changed the name of his company to the John Lloyd Wright Toy Company.

Lincoln Logs were an instant success. Production remained strong through the 1940s, even during World War II. During the war, many toy companies had to stop or delay toy production because the government restricted the use of certain materials, particularly metal. Being made from wood, Lincoln Logs were not affected by the restriction of materials. After the war, small metal figures were included in the log cabin sets, including metal people and animals: pioneers, American Indians, horses, and other livestock.

In the 1950s, Lincoln Logs were one of the first toys to be advertised on television. In 1953, the toy was promoted on a show called *Pioneer Playhouse*. The television advertisements were aimed at a target audience, most likely middle- to upper-class families who had a television in their home and could afford to purchase educational toys for their children.

Lincoln Logs continue to be a favorite construction toy. While no longer in the height of popularity, they are still in production. Generations of parents and grandparents have enjoyed seeing children play with this toy from their own childhood.

#### **Key concept**

Studying inventors and their inventions helps determine the purpose of toys and the role they play in Chicago history.

#### **Key questions**

How do toys teach us about history? What can toys teach us, besides how to play? Do toys show an inventor's creativity? How do toys help your imagination?

#### Goals of this lesson

Students will begin to consider toys as more than items for playing. By comparing and contrasting inventors and the toys they created, students will discuss the purpose of specific toys, including, if the toy was created for education, financial success, or both.

#### **Objectives**

- 1. Students will draw conclusions about the purpose of toys by working cooperatively in small groups.
- 2. Students will interpret history by gathering information from primary sources (examining artifacts) and secondary sources (summaries of the inventors).
- Students will construct arguments to defend their original conclusions about the purpose of a toy or defend a new conclusion based on information learned about the inventors and their inventions.

#### **Materials**

Master copies of artifact photographs and student handouts are provided.

- Photographs of toy artifacts—Lincoln Logs, Tinkertoys, and Tootsietoys
- 2. "Toy Analysis Chart" (one per group)
- 3. "Glossary" (one per pair)
- 4. "Toy History" handout (three pages, one per pair)
- 5. "Toy History Question Sheet" (one per pair)
- 6. Overhead projector and blank transparencies (or chalkboard)
- 7. Chart paper and basic art supplies: paper, pencils, and markers

#### **Procedures**

#### Day 1

On the overhead write, "What are toys used for, besides to play?" Begin by having small groups or partners brainstorm this question for two to three minutes. Emphasize that "to play with" is not an acceptable answer. Come back together and, as a class, make a list of ideas on the overhead.

Next, on the overhead write, "What were toys used for ninety years ago?" Repeat the same brainstorming activity and record the ideas on the overhead. Have the students look for similarities and differences between the two lists and discuss.

Ask the class to define the word "purpose" (purpose: something set up as an object or end to be attained; an aim or goal). Hold a brief discussion about the purpose of any object: a chair, desk, pencil, etc. Then ask, "What purpose do toys have?" Answers should be similar to the original answers to "What are toys used for?" If your students do not make the connection, guide the discussion in this direction. Make a master list of possible answers. Post the list, either on a transparency or on chart paper, so students can refer to it throughout the unit.

Transition by explaining that students are going to analyze toys that were invented around ninety years ago to find out their purpose. If your students have difficulty grasping the concept of ninety years ago, you can provide examples of life in the early 1900s and discuss the period beforehand by illustrating major points with a time line or images on bulletin boards.

Divide students into groups of three and assign each group a number from one to three. Distribute a toyartifact photograph and a "Toy Analysis Chart" to each group. On the chalkboard or overhead projector write: 1 = child 2 = parent 3 = owner of a toy store (the same key is listed at the top of the "Toy Analysis Chart"). On their charts, have students circle the number that corresponds to their group number. This is the point of view they will use to complete their analysis.

Students should work as a group to analyze the toy and complete the chart. Conclude the lesson by collecting the artifact images and toy charts. Explain to students that the following day they will share their analysis with the class.

#### Day 2

Have students return to their groups from the previous day. Begin with a quick review of the ideas about the purpose of toys from day 1.

Distribute the artifact images and completed toy charts. Give each group chart paper and markers. Have the students create a display illustrating their discoveries. Inform students that each group will have two minutes to present their information to the class. Each analysis should include the name of the toy analyzed and the adopted point-of-view (child, parent, or toy store owner). Allow them to display their findings about the toy in whatever manner they want, as long as the two criteria are met. Give students time to create their displays.

Give each group two minutes to present. Groups that have the same toy should go one after the other, because they will (ideally) be presenting different points of view. If space permits, allow groups to display their ideas next to one another for comparison among groups. Initiate discussion: When you are looking at the toy from a different point of view does its purpose change? Discuss the ideas as a class before moving to a new toy. Conclude with a summary of the ideas for the purpose of Lincoln Logs, Tinkertoys, and Tootsietoys.

#### Day 3

Begin by reviewing the ideas from day 2. Transition to a discussion about the inventors of these toys by referring to the last question on the toy chart, "Think about the inventor of this toy. What two things does this toy tell you about him?"

Divide students into partners. Distribute the "Glossary" and the "Toy History" handout. Review the glossary terms with students. Educator note: the toy history handout contains many challenging words, so, if possible, each pair of students should contain a strong reader. Other options are to have the whole class read round-robin style or for the instructor to read the history aloud.

After reading the toy history handout, distribute the "Toy History Question Sheet." Have students work in partners to answer the questions. Allow time to complete the questions. Conclude with a discussion of the questions as a class and a review of the key points from the past several days.

#### Day 4

Begin with a review of the questions from Day 1, "What purpose do toys have?" and "What can we learn from them?" During the discussion, write key points on the board or overhead, including:

- 1. Educational benefits: imagination, hand-eye coordination, creativity, etc.
- 2. Teaching us about history
- 3. Shows the creativity of the inventor
- 4. Success for the inventor
- 5. Teaching us about the toy industry
- 6. Fun and enjoyment for the child

The following questions will be helpful to initiate discussion: What was it like to analyze the toys, from another point of view (not as yourself)? Did the purpose of the toy change when you were a child, parent, or toy store owner?

Discuss: Did learning about the inventors of these toys influence your ideas about the purpose of the toy? Did your ideas change once you learned about the inventors or did this reinforce the thoughts you already had? Did the inspiration for the invention change your mind about the purpose of the toy?

Ask the class to think of their favorite modern toys. Call on a few students to share their answers. Distribute handwriting paper to each student. While passing out the paper, ask students to think to themselves about the purpose of their favorite toy.

Instruct students to write a letter to a child in the future about the purpose of their favorite toy. The letter needs to have a heading, greeting, body, closing, and signature. The greeting can be specific or general, for example, "Dear Children of the Future." Encourage students to review the list of key points from the earlier discussion to help them write the letter about the purpose of their toy.

Following is the suggested rubric:

- 25 points = 5 points for each of the five parts of the letter, (heading, greeting, body [description of toy and explanation of its purpose], closing, and signature).
- 15 points = Toy description, including explanation and examples of what makes it an important toy.
- 5 points = Describing the toy, without stating its purpose and "play" attributes.
- 5 points = Using vocabulary words and language acquired from the toy history lesson.

#### Suggestions for student assessment

Formal assessments can be done through the Toy Analysis Chart, the Toy History Question Sheet, the chart paper displays, the presentations, and the Letters to Future Children (see suggested rubric above).

#### **Extension activities**

- 1. Provide a set of Lincoln Logs, Tinkertoys, and die-cast toys for hands-on examination of the purpose for creating such toys.
- Have students imagine they are a toy inventor living in the early 1900s (at the time of Samuel Dowst, Charles Pajeau, and John Lloyd Wright). Charge students with creating a toy to compete with Lincoln Logs, Tinkertoys, or Tootsietoys.

#### **Additional resource**

Korbeck, Sharon, ed. *Toys and Prices*. 5th ed. Iola, Wisconsin: Krause Publications, 1997.

#### Web resources

"Fascinating Facts" about Lincoln Logs www.ideafinder.com/history/inventions/lincolnlogs.htm

Tootsietoy website www.tootsietoy.com

Playskool website www.hasbro.com/playskool

## This lesson fulfills the following Illinois Learning Standards:

#### **English Language Arts**

State Goal 3: Write to communicate for a variety of purposes.

State Goal 4: Listen and speak effectively in a variety of situations.

State Goal 5: Use the language arts to acquire, assess, and communicate information.

#### **Social Science**

State Goal 16: Understand events, trends, individuals, and movements shaping the history of Illinois, the United States, and other nations.

State Goal 18: Understand social systems, with an emphasis on the United States.

History Lab is made possible through a generous grant from the Polk Bros. Foundation. These materials were written and researched by TeNnile Goff. Images and artifacts included in this lesson are for classroom reference and research use only and are not to be used for commercial reproduction, display, broadcast, or publication unless authorized by a letter of permission from the Chicago Historical Society. History Lab project coordination by Heidi Moisan of the Chicago Historical Society. The Chicago Historical Society gratefully acknowledges the Chicago Park District's generous support of all of the Historical Society's activities.



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#### TOY ANALYSIS CHART

Name	Date_
Put vourself in someone else's shoes	Imagine that you are a child a parent or the owner of a toy store

Put yourself in someone else's shoes. Imagine that you are a child, a parent, or the owner of a toy store in the 1900s. Your duty is to analyze this toy to find out its purpose. Your teacher will tell you which point of view you will have while looking at the toy.

1 = Child

2 = Parent

3 = Owner of a toy store

Name of toy\_\_\_\_\_

Questions	Answers
Describe the toy.  What are its color, shape, and size?  What is it made of?	Color(s): Shape: Size: Made of:
If you are a child, imagine playing with this toy. Is it fun?	YES or NO Why or why not?
If you are a parent, would you buy this toy?	YES or NO Why or why not?
If you are the owner of a toy store, would you sell this toy?	YES or NO Why or why not?
Think about the inventor of this toy. What two things does this toy tell you about him?	1.       2.

#### **TOY GLOSSARY**

#### advertise

to publicly announce all of the good things about a product so people will buy it. Products can be advertised in the newspaper, on television, and on the radio.

#### classic

to have lasting worth and importance

#### construct

to build something by combining parts

#### construction toys

toys containing separate parts. Children can use construction toys to build structures.

#### coordination

actions working together in the same or a similar way

#### earthquake

a movement of the earth's surface caused by volcanic activity

#### foundation

a base that an object or building stands on for support

#### interlocking

to connect parts together so each part affects another part when moving

#### marketed

to promote the sales of a product by advertising and packaging

#### Model T

an automobile developed by Henry Ford

#### mold

a hollow form for shaping a liquid substance (metal, wax, chocolate, water, etc.). When the liquid cools and hardens, it takes on the shape of the mold.

#### publishing

to prepare printed material to be sold and distributed. Printed materials include books and newspapers.

#### publishing house

an office or factory where books and newspapers are printed

#### replica

a small or miniature copy of an original

#### stonemason

a person who prepares and lays stones when building

#### target audience

a group of people that will be influenced or changed by an advertisement. Commercials have a target audience.

#### toy industry

all of the companies that make and sell toys. Toys are made in large amounts by machines in factories.

#### trade paper

a type of newspaper that advertises goods and services of one type to sell or trade. Cars are sometimes sold in trade papers.

#### transportation toys

toys such as cars, trucks, or planes. Transportation toys are smaller versions of real vehicles that kids play with to imagine moving people or things from one place to another.

#### **World's Columbian Exposition**

a fair in Chicago in 1893. The fair featured arts, crafts, science discoveries, and industrial products from all over the world.

#### **TOOTSIETOYS**

Invented by Samuel and Charles O. Dowst

Charles O. Dowst and his son Samuel owned a publishing business on the West Side of Chicago called the Dowst Brothers Company. The publishing company was started in 1876 and printed a newspaper called the *National Laundry Journal*.



In 1893, Samuel Dowst attended the World's Columbian Exposition, a big fair in Chicago. At the fair, new products were shown for visitors to see. Dowst saw a machine called the Linotype. This machine poured hot, liquid metal into shapes called molds. When the metal cooled, it would harden and become the shape of the mold. The Linotype had a mold in the shape of letters of the alphabet, which were used in printing. Dowst bought a Linotype machine, because it made printing the *National Laundry Journal* easier and much faster.

Dowst began to think that the Linotype could be used for more than printing his newspaper, and he began to experiment. Dowst invented a new way of using molds he called dies. He made dies for toys in the shape of tiny cars, trains, and airplanes.

People loved Dowst's invention, and he began to make toys rather than printing newspapers. His new company, named Dowst Manufacturing Company, changed the toy industry. His first toy was a miniature model of a very popular car called the Model T Ford. With this replica of the Model T, transportation toys looked real for the first time in history. This allowed kids to imagine driving, riding, or flying, as adults did in real life. In the 1920s, Dowst Manufacturing was the leading make of metal toy cars. Dowst eventually named the new toys Tootsietoys after his daughter, whose name was Tootsie.

Tootsietoys were very popular and the company began to grow. In 1964, to make their business bigger, the company purchased another company called the Strombecker Corporation. The Strombecker Corporation is located on the West Side of Chicago, and Tootsietoys are still being sold there today.

#### TINKERTOYS

Invented by Charles Pajeau

Charles Pajeau came up with the idea for his invention while watching children play. Pajeau was a stonemason, who cut tombstones. His job had nothing to do with toys, until he saw a child build a toy with wooden thread spools and sticks. Watching the child gave Pajeau the idea to invent Tinkertoys in his garage in the Chicago suburb of Evanston, Illinois.

The spools in Tinkertoys had eight holes around the edges and one hole in the middle. These holes were the perfect place to put wooden sticks of different sizes. Children could connect the spools and sticks to build any object they liked! Toys that can be used to build structures are called construction toys. Tinkertoys were a hit with parents, because they were safe, educational, and gave kids hours of fun.

In 1914, the year he invented Tinkertoys, Pajeau started the Toy Tinkers Company. Later that year, he brought his toy to the New York Toy Fair. At the fair, the Tinkertoys did not get noticed, because Pajeau's display was in a corner. However, he did not let that disappointment stop



him. Pajeau made a deal with a manager of two drugstores in busy parts of New York City. He told the manager he would give him forty cents out of every dollar of Tinkertoys sold, if the manager would let him put a display of the toys in the store window. The manager agreed to let him set up a Tinkertoy windmill. Pajeau used an electric fan to make the windmill turn. The eye-catching window display made Tinkertoys very successful. One of the drugstores sold 1,500 sets in five days!

The creative displays and new cylinder-shaped container made Tinkertoys an instant success. In the first year alone, Pajeau sold 900,000 Tinkertoy sets. Tinkertoy's success continued, and by its fiftieth anniversary in 1964, two million sets were sold each year. Today the Playskool Company, still manufactures Tinkertoys. The invention of this classic toy is an important story in Chicago's history.

#### **LINCOLN LOGS**

Invented by John Lloyd Wright

John Lloyd Wright was the son of famous architect Frank Lloyd Wright. At a time when the popularity of building toys was growing, John Lloyd Wright created a toy called Lincoln Logs.

Wright grew up with his brothers and sisters in the Chicago suburb of Oak Park, Illinois. The Wright family had a playroom in their home filled with toy blocks and games. At the time, several

companies sold versions of toy logs. Wright probably played with these early toy logs, and it is possible that they gave him the idea for Lincoln Logs, which he created between 1916 and 1917.

Around 1917, John's dad, Frank Lloyd Wright, was building the Imperial Hotel in Tokyo, Japan. John visited his father's construction sight. The building had a special base made from beams that fit together. The beams were joined together so when one part moved, they all moved. This was to help earthquake proof the building. Seeing the construction site may have helped John Lloyd Wright to think up the idea for Lincoln Logs.

Lincoln Logs were made of redwood and cut at each end. The cuts allowed the logs to fit together, similar to the foundation of the Imperial Hotel. Kids could use the logs to build cabins, forts, and fences and use their imaginations to think about what it would have been like to live in pioneer times. Lincoln Logs were considered an educational toy because they required concentration.

Wright's company, the Red Square Toy Company, first sold Lincoln Logs in 1918. Wright chose the name for his toy very carefully. The logs were introduced around the time of World War I, when Americans were encouraged to buy things made in America. Wright decided to name the logs after Abraham Lincoln, America's sixteenth president, who was born in a log cabin, because Lincoln's name gave people a positive image of pioneer life, especially in Illinois. Wright eventually changed the name of his company to the John Lloyd Wright Toy Company.

In the 1950s, Lincoln Logs were one of the first toys to be advertised on television. In 1953, the toy was on a show called *Pioneer Playhouse*. Advertisements for different kinds of toys always try to attract the people who are most likely to buy the toy. The people advertisements are for are sometimes called a target audience. The target audience for this first Lincoln Log commercial was probably people who had a television in their home (TV was new at the time and not everyone had one) and parents who liked to buy educational toys for their children.

Lincoln Logs are still being made and continue to be a favorite construction toy. Generations of parents and grandparents have enjoyed seeing children play with this toy from their own childhood.

## TOY HISTORY QUESTION SHEET Name Date Think about what you have just learned about these toys. Answer the questions below. Use the reading sheets to help you. Be ready to discuss your answers with the class. 1. Name one thing you learned about Chicago history from the reading. 2. Inventors are people who have lots of ideas and think about things in new ways. Use three words or phrases to describe the inventors of these toys. 3. Besides being fun to play with, toys can teach us too! Name one thing you could learn by playing with each of these toys. A. Tootsietoys B. Tinkertoys \_\_\_\_\_ C. Lincoln Logs\_

#### **HISTORY LAB** | FEEDBACK FORM

Please give us your feedback! After reviewing and using this History Lab lesson, please send us your

feedback. Your ideas and honest assessment will ensure that these lessons keep improving and will provide us with useful insight for future teacher fellows. To fill out this form online or discover additional History Lab activities, visit the educators section of the Chicago Historical Society's website at www.chicagohistory.org. Name:\_\_\_\_\_ E-mail:\_\_\_\_\_ School:\_\_\_\_ Grade you teach:\_\_\_\_ Are you a CHS member? (circle one): yes no Name of unit you are evaluating \_\_\_\_\_ Name of lesson you are evaluating: 1. On a scale of one to five (with five being the best) rate this lesson in terms of the quality of the student learning experience it provides (circle one): 3 1 2. What were the strengths of this lesson? \_\_\_\_\_ 3. What aspects of this lesson needed additional fine-tuning? 4. What advice, tips, or suggestions would you give to future users of this lesson? 5. Where does this lesson fit in your course of study (scope, sequence, unit)? 6. If applicable, how did the use of primary sources impact student learning? ag y Thank you for your time. Please send the completed form to: Chicago Historical Society, Clark Street at North Avenue, Chicago, Illinois, 60614-6071, Attn: History Programs Fax: 312-266-2077