

## **Homes of our Heritage: American Tycoons**

*Homes of Our Heritage: American Tycoons* tours the homes of some of America's most famous industrialists, providing a window into the lives of these prominent Americans. By exploring the architecture, decorative style, and furnishings, and by interviewing historians, curators and experts, a lesson is provided about the famous people who lived there and their dramatic connection to our nation's history. Hosted by Grant Goodeve, *American Tycoons* features these majestic homes: Frederick Vanderbilt's Hyde Park (Hyde Park, N.Y.), James Dooley's Maymont (Richmond, Va.), Alfred I Dupont's Nemours Mansion and Gardens (Wilmington, Del.), Henry Clay Frick's Clayton (Pittsburgh, Penn.), John Reitz mansion (Evansville, Ind.), and John D. Rockefeller's Kykuit (Tarrytown, N.Y.)

### **Vocabulary**

- ambitious
- antique
- authenticity
- emulate
- estate
- noble
- opulence
- pedigree
- pinnacle
- prosperity
- renaissance
- reproduction
- tapestry
- tycoon
- upholstery

### **Discussion Questions**

1. Before watching the episode, write the names of each tycoon on the board and ask students to share what they know about any or all of them. What do they imagine a tycoon's house would look like?
2. Ask students if they think the words "house" and "home" mean the same thing. If the answer is "no," in what ways are the words different?
3. Ask students what words they would use to describe their homes. Do they believe that a person's home tells a story about them? If so, what does their home say about them?
4. Ask students which featured house they'd most like to have lived in and why.
5. Several of the tycoons in the episode are described in the special as philanthropists who donated much of their fortunes to charity. Survey students to share what they believe wealthy people's responsibilities are when it comes to giving.
6. Students learn in the episode that one's place in society during Frederick Vanderbilt's time was defined by the house you lived in, the places you went, the parties you threw and the clothes you wore. Have students share their thoughts on this fact. Do they think it's fair? Do they think it's still true today? Why or why not?

### **Suggested Activities**

#### **Biography of a Tycoon (Social Studies, Technology, Language Arts)**

The tycoons featured in this special each left a unique legacy to our country aside from the homes seen here. For example, Alfred DuPont left his fortune to a trust dedicated primarily to children's health issues. Today that vision has become one of the nation's leading health care systems. Have student groups research the tycoons featured in this episode: Frederick Vanderbilt, James Dooley, Alfred I Dupont, Henry Clay Frick, John Reitz, and John D. Rockefeller. Have them answer the following three questions about their tycoon: How did the

tycoon accumulate his wealth, what contribution(s) did he make to society during his life, what long-lasting legacy has he left even after his death, and what is one unique challenge he had to overcome during his lifetime. **Extension:** Have students present their tycoon's story as the tycoon himself, a member of his family or a guest that has visited the home.

### **Architectural Influence (Visual Arts, Language Arts, Social Studies)**

As students "visit" each home in the episode, they learn about the different types of architecture that influenced it. Ask students to recall which homes are influenced by different types of European architecture. For example, Alfred duPont's home was influenced by French and Austrian architecture and John Reitz' home was influenced by Italian architecture. What do students recall from the episode about each European country's architectural type? Have student groups select one of the following types of architecture to research: Gothic, Classical, Romanesque, Norman, Renaissance, Medieval or Baroque. Their research should include a definition of the type of architecture; what influenced or preceded it; the time period and country in which it was famous; examples of what it looks like; and how it has influenced modern American architecture. **Extension:** Have students sketch a design that reflects their architectural style.

### **Home Design (Visual Design, Social Studies, Language Arts, Technology)**

Each of the homes in the episode is a reflection of the person or family who lived there. Have students support this statement with facts and details from the episode. How can a home tell a story about someone's life, family, values and contributions? Have students select a modern-day newsmaker from the newspaper, a news magazine or an Internet news site. Have them research 10 facts about this modern-day newsmaker. Then, based on what they've learned, have them use graph paper, drawing paper or the computer to sketch one room that could be in his or her home. The room should reflect the personality, life, family, values or contributions of their newsmaker. Have students present their sketches, along with justifications for their choices.