THE BREAKERS AND THE GILDED AGE

TEACHER RESOURCE GUIDE
GRADERS 5-8
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**Note:** The following material is intended for use in the classroom. Permission is granted by the Preservation Society of Newport County to download and copy this material for use in the classroom only.
Introduction to *The Breakers and the Gilded Age* Tour

**Main Idea:**
Using research skills, curiosity, and imagination, students will gain an understanding of the role of the Vanderbilts during the Gilded Age. The Breakers tour enables students to understand the role of preservation in today’s society.

**Objectives:**

Students will:
- Learn vocabulary associated with the tour and use it appropriately.
- Gain a basic understanding of the social history of the Gilded Age.
- Create an art project or writing assignment that reflects their understanding of The Breakers and the social history of the period.

Teachers will:
- (At school) Prepare students for their visit to The Breakers by having them complete one or more pre-visit activities.
- (At The Breakers) Assist tour guide by encouraging student participation, helping them to make connections to the classroom, and reinforcing appropriate behavior.
- (At school) Reinforce the students’ experience at The Breakers by having them complete one or more post-visit activities.

Tour Guides will:
- Encourage students to look carefully at The Breakers, discuss what they see, and make personal connections.
- Reinforce vocabulary associated with the lesson/tour.
- Visually introduce the themes of symbols, communication and preservation to students.
Background Information for Teachers

The Breakers
44 Ochre Point Ave., Newport, RI 02840

The Breakers is the grandest of Newport's summer “cottages” and a symbol of the Vanderbilt family's social and financial preeminence in turn-of-the-century America. Commodore Cornelius Vanderbilt (1794-1877) established the family fortune during the 19th century, investing in steamships and later in the New York Central Railroad, which was pivotal to the industrial growth of the nation during the late 19th century. The Commodore’s grandson, Cornelius Vanderbilt II, became Chairman and President of the New York Central Railroad system in 1885, and purchased a wooden house called The Breakers in Newport during that same year. In 1893, he commissioned architect Richard Morris Hunt to design a villa to replace the earlier wood-framed house that was destroyed by fire the previous year. It was completed in 1895.

Hunt directed an international team of craftsmen and artisans to create a 70-room Italian Renaissance-style palazzo inspired by the 16th century palaces of Genoa and Turin. Allard and Sons of Paris assisted Hunt with furnishings and fixtures, Austro-American sculptor Karl Bitter designed relief sculpture, and Boston architect Ogden Codman decorated the family quarters.

The Vanderbilts had seven children. Their youngest daughter, Gladys, who married Count Laszlo Széchényi (Say-chay-nee) of Hungary, inherited the house on her mother's death in 1934. An ardent supporter of The Preservation Society of Newport County, she opened The Breakers in 1948 to raise funds for the Society. In 1972, the Preservation Society purchased the house from her heirs. Today, the house is a National Historic Landmark.
The Gilded Age

The Gilded Age refers to the period between the end of the Civil War in 1865 and the beginning of World War I in 1914. During these years, rapid industrial growth, immigration, and technological innovation transformed society. While an era of great progress in the arts, sciences and industry, the Gilded Age was also a time of social and economic inequity. The production of iron and steel rose dramatically; the abundance of resources, such as lumber, gold and silver, in the western part of the country intensified the need for improved transportation. Railroad development boomed as trains moved goods from the resource-rich west to the east. Steel and oil were in great demand. All this industry produced enormous wealth for a number of businessmen like John D. Rockefeller (in oil), Edward Berwind (in coal), and Andrew Carnegie (in steel).

The “Gilded Age” was coined by Mark Twain and Charles Dudley Warner in their 1873 book “The Gilded Age.”

Gilding is the art or process of applying gold leaf, or a paint containing or simulating gold, to a surface.

During the Gilded Age, homeowners would use gilding throughout their homes in order to show their wealth. This is an example of gilding from The Breakers.
Rhode Island Learning Standards Addressed During *The Breakers and the Gilded Age* Tour

**Arts**
- Students will observe and experience objects and ideas through a multitude of senses and form a sophisticated, informed response. (RI Standard 2)
- Students will demonstrate an understanding of how arts influence society, and how society influences the arts. (RI Standard 3)
- Students will relate works of art to their historical and cultural setting. (RI Standard 3)
- Students will apply process and knowledge from and to content areas and across the arts. (RI Standard 5)

**History**
- Students act as historians, using a variety of tools (e.g., artifacts and primary and secondary sources) by using sources to support the stories of history (*How do we know what we know?*). (RI Historical Perspective 1 (5-6) -1)
- Students connect the past with the present by:
  a. Identifying sequential events, people, and societies that have shaped RI today.
  b. Identifying and describing how national and world events have impacted RI and how RI has impacted world events. (RI HP 2 (5-6) -1)
- Students chronicle events and conditions by placing key events and people of a particular historical era in chronological sequence. (RI HP 2 (5-6) -2)

**National Educational Technology Standards**
- Students will use digital media and environments to communicate and work collaboratively to support individual learning and contribute to the learning of others. (NETS 2)
- Students will apply digital tools to gather, evaluate, and use information. (NETS 3)
- Students will exhibit a positive attitude toward using technology that supports collaboration, learning, and productivity. (NETS 5)
English Language Arts

- Students will apply information gathered from print and non-print media to achieve educational purposes. (RI Standard 1)
- Students will synthesize information from a variety of sources to make and communicate civic decisions. (RI Standard 1)
- Students will select text for a variety of informational purposes. (RI Standard 2)
- Students will apply conventions of standard language to create clear and meaningful text. (RI Standard 3)
- Students will develop the confidence and skills to communicate their ideas. (RI Standard 4)
- Students will develop and apply criteria for the appreciation of text. (RI Standard 5)
- Students will identify and use resources and tools appropriate for their purpose. (RI Standard 6)
- Students will draw conclusions and present findings in a manner, which includes the appropriate use of technology. (RI Standard 6)
- Students will demonstrate an understanding of universal themes across content areas and how they relate to historical context. (RI Standard 7)
- Students will identify and explore school, community and workplace resources and their issues. (RI Standard 8)
- Students will develop skills and knowledge in addressing school, community and work issues. (RI Standard 8)
Lesson Plan: Symbols

Lesson Goal: Students will recognize the meaning of symbols in life, and in relation to The Breakers.

Lesson Objective:
- By learning about the meanings and value of symbols, students will use a symbol(s) to represent an important aspect of their life: family, school, club etc.

How does this activity relate to The Breakers?
Many symbols appear throughout The Breakers. The symbols used most frequently were the acorn, oak leaf, scallop shell, and the dolphin. Acorns and oak leaves, representing strength and long life, were adopted as the family symbol. Dolphins are an ancient symbol of hospitality. Scallops are a symbol of fertility.

Materials: Symbol chart, list of symbols, photographs of The Breakers, picture of the Vanderbilt family arms, blank shields, overhead projector or a digital document camera projector, coloring supplies.

Activity:
1. Define symbols as something that represents something else by association, resemblance, or convention, especially a material object used to represent something invisible.

2. Using the Symbol Chart worksheet, ask students if they can brainstorm symbols that represent the United States, such as the eagle, the flag, the Liberty Bell, the Capitol building, etc. Ask if students know of any symbols for their city, town, or state. For example, Newport students can identify the pineapple as a symbol of hospitality. Ask the students to identify symbols that appear in their lives, such as sports logos, advertisements, scouting. Have students complete the chart as the teacher does the same using an overhead projector or a digital document camera.

3. Distribute the list of symbols or display it using a projector and let students read and discuss.

4. The Breakers has many symbols integrated in the design of the building. Show students the pictures of The Breakers highlighting the acorns, oak leaves, and dolphins. Discuss why these symbols were chosen by the Vanderbilts. Other important symbols for the family are located in the Great Hall. The symbols of the literature, architecture, science, and industry denote the success and interests of the family. Show students pictures of the overdoor sculpture at The Breakers.
Symbol Locations:

**Literature:** Over the door to the Morning Room

**Industry:** Over the door to the Music Room, to the left of the Great Hall fireplace (pictured at right)

**Science:** Over the door to the Music Room, to the right of the Great Hall fireplace

**Architecture:** Over the door to the Library

5. Show students the Vanderbilt family coat of arms.

**Alternative Lesson Ideas:**

- Create a family or individual herald crest using the attached worksheet.
- If your school does not have a symbol, have students choose their own symbols for the school and draw a picture to accompany the symbol(s). The class, grade or school could have a competition for the school symbol.
- Create a class symbol and decide how to illustrate the symbol throughout the room.

**Resources:**


Heiss, Renee E. “What’s on Your Coat of Arms?” *Fun for Kidz* 2, no. 6 (Nov/Dec 2003): 2-5, 4p


Vanderbilt Family Coat of Arms
Symbols Used in The Breakers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symbol</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acorn</td>
<td>Antiquity and strength</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bee</td>
<td>Efficiency, industry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dolphin</td>
<td>Hospitality, swiftness, diligence, love</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oak leaf</td>
<td>Strength and long life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scallop</td>
<td>Pilgrimage and fertility</td>
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</table>

Other Examples of Symbols

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symbol</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anchor</td>
<td>Hope</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Candle</td>
<td>Light, life and spirituality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deer</td>
<td>Peace and harmony</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flowers</td>
<td>Hope and joy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lightning bolt</td>
<td>Swiftness and power</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peacock</td>
<td>Beauty, power, knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Snake</td>
<td>Wisdom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sun</td>
<td>Glory and splendor, fountain of life</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The following colors were used in heraldry:
gold (yellow), silver (white), blue, red, green, purple, and black.
Symbol Chart

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>City or Town</th>
<th>School</th>
<th>Sports, TV, etc.</th>
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</tbody>
</table>
Symbols at The Breakers

Acorns

Detail: Great Hall door

Detail: Floor mosaic in the Billiard Room

Bees

Detail: Great Hall chair
Dolphins and Scallop Shells

Detail: Dolphin and scallop shell mosaic from the Billiard Room

Detail: Scallop shell mosaic on the Billiard Room ceiling

Scallop shell fountain under the Grand Staircase

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http://www.NewportMansions.org
The Breakers and the Gilded Age
Shield Template
Lesson Plan: Communication

Lesson Goal: Students will compare methods of communication during The Gilded Age and today.

Lesson Objectives:
- By learning how people communicated in The Gilded Age, students will have a better understanding of the lifestyles of people who lived during this period of history.
- Students will use the internet and print resources to find and record information about several types of communication.

How does this activity relate to The Breakers? How people lived and communicated during the Gilded Age is very apparent when visiting The Breakers. By preserving this house, The Preservation Society of Newport County has made it possible for students to gain an understanding of life and technology during this period of history.

Materials: Comparison chart, computer and internet access, Communication Research chart

Activity:
1. Discuss the meaning of the word communication. Ask students to name some types of communication.

2. Discuss how advances in technology have changed the speed and quantity of communication. Letter writing was the most common form of communication during The Gilded Age, a period of American history between 1865 to the early 1900s. How long would it take to write a letter, have a footman deliver the letter to the home of the recipient, and then, have a letter sent back in response? Sometimes a person would employ a personal secretary to help respond to all the letters. Countess Szápáry (Su-par-ee) recalls that in her youth, it was her job to make sure that all of the guestroom desks were stocked with stationery and writing utensils.

The telephone was in use by the late 1800s, but it was considered the worst kind of rudeness and bad manners to call on the telephone! The telephone was used only to call the housekeeper or another servant in the building. People wrote letters to communicate with their friends and family.

Sometimes people would visit friends and leave “calling cards.” It was called a “calling card” because visiting was known as “calling” on someone. The card stated the person’s name and address. Have students discuss how they communicate with friends and compare the two methods.

3. As a whole class, use a projector to fill out the comparison chart identifying ways to communicate today with those used during the Gilded Age.
4. Working in small groups, have students research the history of communication by using the chart provided and the following website: http://www.fcc.gov/cgb/kdszone/history.html.

Each group can be assigned 2 or 3 methods of communication from the research list. If the internet is not available, provide printed material.

5. Share group information and create a timeline of the history of communication. The following are directions for creating a timeline using Word SmartArt (Microsoft Office 2007 and later):
   1. In Word, go to Insert SmartArt.
   2. Choose Process and Basic Process.
   3. Design Suggestions:
      - Students can enter the 2 facts that they found in their research.
      - An illustration can be added by using the insert or draw command.
      - Change page layout to landscape to add more entries.

Alternative Lesson Ideas:
- Have students research the communication system used within The Breakers.
- For more information, teachers can refer to the article entitled Servant Life at The Breakers: A Room with a View by Holly Collins located on the Preservation Society website at: www.newportmansions.org/learn/research-reports
- Have students write letters to their friends or family.

Reflection: Today the art of letter writing is obsolete. Think about all the steps taken to write a letter: picking out the appropriate stationery, considering the wording and handwriting, having a stamped envelope. It is time-consuming, but what do you think may be the benefits?
## Comparison Chart

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>During the Gilded Age</th>
<th>Today</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Name: ___________________________ Date: ________________

Communication Research

Instructions: Using the following sources, research the history of following types of communication.
- Fact Monster at http://www.factmonster.com
- History of Inventions at http://www.cbc.ca/kids/general/the-lab/history-of-invention/default.html
- Federal Communications Commission at http://www.fcc.gov/cgb/kidszone/history.html
- Any printed materials, such as encyclopedias.
- Name two interesting facts about the history of each method of communication listed below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Technology</th>
<th>Date Invented</th>
<th>2 Important Facts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Radio</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Television</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cable television</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satellite TV systems</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telephone</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Answering machines</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pagers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cellular telephone</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet – email, blogs, wikis, podcasts</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Lesson Plan: This Place Matters!: Preserving our Heritage
Lesson Goal: This is a Web Quest designed for elementary students to learn about The Breakers and the importance of historic preservation. The following lesson is designed to be done on a computer, so that students can link to websites by holding down the Ctrl button and clicking the link. Teachers should copy the directions into Word documents for the students to use. An alternate worksheet is provided with the website addresses, instead of the hyperlinks.

Lesson Objectives:
- Students will be able to define preservation and explain the importance of preserving historical places.
- Student will learn about the importance of preserving The Breakers.

How does this activity relate to The Breakers?
Owned and operated by The Preservation Society of Newport County, The Breakers is a museum house in Newport, RI. Built by Cornelius Vanderbilt II during the Gilded Age, it is the grandest of Newport’s summer “cottages.” It was maintained by the Vanderbilt family until 1972 when the Preservation Society of Newport purchased the house. It was designated a National Historic Landmark in 1994. A National Historic Landmark (NHL) is a building, site, structure, object, or district, which is officially recognized by the United States government for its historical significance.

Activity:
1. Define preserve – to save, keep or maintain in unaltered condition; cause to remain or last. Define landmark – a structure that has significant historical, architectural, or cultural meaning.

2. Students need individual or group computer access. Complete step 1 as a whole class in order to model the linking process. Have class read the page together and answer the questions about preservation.

3. In small groups, have students complete the Web Quest.

4. When the Web Quest has been completed, have students share their findings. Discuss ideas about the importance and value of preservation.
5. Follow-up activities suggested by the National Trust for Historic Preservation:
   - **Explore Family History:** Ask your students to investigate the places that are significant to their relatives. Place may include where their parents went to school, lived, or got married.
   - **Ask Neighbors About the Neighborhood:** Encourage students to talk to people who’ve lived on their street for a long time. Find out what they remember about living there and about the people who have moved on.
   - **Visit Main Street:** Traditional commercial districts often have appealing buildings and feature locally owned stores that are vital parts of the community.
   - **Take a Hometown Tour:** Take your students to visit a historic site in your area or stop by the local historical society or museum.
   - **Read All About It:** Every community has a book about its local history, and many have more than one. They’re available at the local library (often a historic place itself) or at the historical society.

Preservation Society CEO Trudy Coxe, John North, Deborah Coleman and Greg Nardone of Fireman’s Fund Insurance Company, and Preservation Society Corporate Sales Manager Ivan Colon make it known that the Preservation Society’s properties matter to them. *Newport Gazette*, Spring 2009
This Place Matters!

Directions: Answer the following questions using information found on the web pages below. To follow the link, hold down the Ctrl button and click the link.

**Step 1: Preservation**
Why should we preserve buildings?
Find three reasons at The National Trust for Historic Preservation.

1. 
2. 
3. 

**Step 2: The People**
Built in 1893-1895 for Cornelius Vanderbilt II, The Breakers is a very large mansion located in Newport, RI. This 138,300 sq. ft. building has over 300 windows, 70 rooms, 15 bedrooms, 20 bathrooms, and over 750 doorknobs!

1. How did Cornelius Vanderbilt II’s grandfather, Commodore Cornelius Vanderbilt, start the family fortune?

2. Who was Richard Morris Hunt? What is his connection to Mr. Vanderbilt?
3. Who was Gladys Széchényi (Say-chay-nee)? How did she help preserve The Breakers?

Step 3: Art and Material Objects in The Breakers
1. Who painted a famous portrait of Cornelius Vanderbilt II?

2. The billiard room has walls made of Cipolino marble. What is Cipolino marble?

3. The walls of the library are made of Circassian walnut. What is Circassian walnut?

4. Many of the interior walls are made of Caen stone. What is Caen stone?

5. The ceiling and the floor of the billiard room is made of mosaics. What are mosaics?

6. The Music Room has a lot of gilt decoration. What is gilding?
This Place Matters!

*Offline version*

**Directions:** Answer the following questions using information found on the web pages below.

**Step 1: Preservation**

Why should we preserve buildings?
Find three reasons at The National Trust for Historic Preservation.

1. ________________________________________________________________
2. ________________________________________________________________
3. ________________________________________________________________

**Step 2: The People**

Built in 1893-1895 for Cornelius Vanderbilt II, The Breakers is a very large mansion located in Newport, RI. This 138,300 sq. ft. building has over 300 windows, 70 rooms, 15 bedrooms, 20 bathrooms, and over 750 doorknobs!

1. How did Cornelius Vanderbilt II’s grandfather, Commodore Cornelius Vanderbilt, start the family fortune?
   Go to http://www.factmonster.com/biography/var/corneliusvanderbilt.html
   ____________________________________________________________

2. Who was Richard Morris Hunt?
   Go to http://kids.yahoo.com/reference/dictionary/english/entry/Hunt_2
   ____________________________________________________________
3. What is Richard Morris Hunt’s connection to Mr. Vanderbilt?
   Go to http://www.newportmansions.org/page10001206.cfm

3. Who was Gladys Széchényi (Say-chay-nee)?
   How did she help preserve The Breakers?
   Go to http://www.newportmansions.org/page10001206.cfm

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Step 3: Art and Material Objects in The Breakers

7. Who painted a famous portrait of Cornelius Vanderbilt II?

---

8. The billiard room has walls made of Cipolino marble. What is Cipolino marble?
   Go to http://www.probertencyclopaedia.com/cgi-bin/res.pl?keyword=Cipollino+Marble&offset=0.

---

9. The walls of the library are made of Circassian walnut. What is Circassian walnut?
   Go to http://dictionary.factmonster.com/circassian-walnut
3. Many of the interior walls are made of Caen stone. What is Caen stone?
   Go to http://dictionary.factmonster.com/caen-stone

4. The ceiling and the floor of the billiard room is made of mosaics. What are mosaics?
   Go to http://www.factmonster.com/ce6/ent/A0834150.html

5. The Music Room has a lot of gilt decoration. What is gilding?
   Go to http://www.factmonster.com/ce6/ent/A0820820.html
The Breakers: A Study of the House

The Breakers was built for Cornelius Vanderbilt II in 1893-1895. When he purchased the property in 1885, there was an existing wooden house called The Breakers. That house was destroyed by a fire in 1892. The architect, Richard Morris Hunt, was commissioned to design a villa to replace the earlier wood-framed house.

The house measures approximately 250 feet by 150 feet. Arranged symmetrically around a central hall and distributed on four floors are approximately seventy rooms. The first floor contains the rooms for entertaining, the second and third floors are for bedrooms, and the fourth floor is the attic.

- Do you know what an architect does?
  An architect designs buildings

- What would the Vanderbilts have done for entertainment?
  Balls, dinner parties, teas, dances, carriage rides, sailing, birthday parties

This is the porte-cochère. It is a covered entrance to protect horses, carriages, cars or any vehicle from the weather. Carved in the stone of the porte-cochère are two medallions. One has the monogram C. V., the initials for Cornelius Vanderbilt. The other medallion contains the family symbol of oak leaves and acorns.
From the porte-cochère, the house is entered through a pair of massive carved oak doors. Off the entrance hall is a small room, paneled in oak. This room is called the Gentlemen’s Reception Room. There is a picture of Miss Gladys Vanderbilt in this room. Her mother and father built the house. When she grew up, she had five daughters who loved to visit The Breakers. The Ladies Reception Room is to the right of the entrance hall.
Great Hall
This is the Great Hall. It is a very large space that is 50 feet tall. A two-story house could fit inside!

The walls are made of Caen stone imported from France. The room has huge pilasters that are decorated with oak leaves and acorns. A pilaster is an architectural element that looks like half of a column. The oak leaves and acorns are symbols for the Vanderbilt family.

- The ceiling is very shiny. Can you guess why?
  It is covered in gold!

- What do you think the Vanderbilt children did here?
  Children had to be well behaved, but they were allowed to dance, put on their own plays, ride tricycles in this big hall and slide down the staircase on trays!
**The Breakfast Room**
This is the room where the whole Vanderbilt family ate together. One day, one of the Vanderbilt children had a party and the youngest one couldn’t come because she was too young. The younger sister wasn’t happy about this so she locked everyone in this room! In order to get out, the party had to go through the door that goes to the butler’s pantry.

- *How many people do you think can sit at this table?*
  - Sixteen

**Dining Room**
When the Vanderbilts had dinner here, many footmen helped serve dinner and there was lots of silver on the table.

Only adults ate dinner here. Women wore long dresses and jewels such as pearls or diamonds. The men wore black pants and jackets with a white shirt and black or white tie.

Mrs. Vanderbilt liked to have red or yellow roses at her table.

- *What might have been for dinner?*
  - Lobster, fish, beef, and very fancy desserts

- *Who do you think cooked for the dinners?*
  - There were two cooks and many helpers to make all the food
**Billiard Room**
This room is where men played a game called billiards. There is a billiard table in the center of the room and to the left are the sticks for hitting the billiard balls on the table.

Look at the walls. They are made of blue marble, which is a kind of stone. The pink colored stone above the doors is a kind of stone called alabaster.

The floor and the ceiling are made of lots of tiny pieces of stone. Making a floor or a ceiling out of hundreds of pieces of stone is called a “mosaic.” The floor mosaic has acorns in the design. There are scallop shells on the ceiling and dolphins on the floor. Shells and dolphins are found in the sea. This house looks out over the sea.

- *Where do you find marble?*
  Marble is found deep underground and it must be cut very carefully.
**Grand Staircase**

Can you imagine sliding down this staircase on a tray?
That’s what the Vanderbilt children did.

This scallop shell fountain is under the stairs. When you look up from here, you see a skylight made of colored glass that lets the light in.
**Loggia**
This was a porch where the Vanderbilts could sit in the daytime and watch the sea. There is a ceiling made of mosaics.

- *What are mosaics?*
  It is the making of pictures out of colored tile. It's like an enormous jigsaw puzzle.

- *What do the dolphins in the mosaic represent?*
  The sea and hospitality

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**Morning Room**
This is called the morning room. The Vanderbilts would sit here in the morning and watch the sun sparkling on the water.

The ceiling shows the four seasons of the year: winter, spring, summer and fall.

In the corners are beautiful oil paintings of women called “muses.” In mythology, they would whisper in your ear and give you ideas for music and poetry.
Music Room

This is the Music Room, where the family played the piano and held dances. The wall decoration is covered with gold leaf. Gold leaf is gold made very flat with a hammer. To attach it to the wall or ceiling, you cover the wood with gesso, which is a thin, sticky white paste and then put the gold leaf on the sticky gesso. Gold leaf is very, very expensive, so only the richest people could have gold leaf in the fanciest rooms of their houses. At the bottom of the wall, there is a stone called onyx.

This was a very important room, where the Vanderbilts had their friends over to dance.
**Library**  
The Vanderbilts would gather in this room to read or have afternoon tea.

There are many dolphins decorating the ceiling. Since this house is on the sea, you will see many dolphins used for decoration throughout the house.

The fireplace opening is so tall that a six-foot tall man could stand in it without hitting his head! The fireplace was taken from the 16th century chateau d’Arnay le Duc in Burgundy, France.

**Countess Széchényi’s Room**  
This is the bedroom of one of Mr. Vanderbilt’s daughters, Miss Gladys. Miss Gladys was 9 years old when The Breakers was built. She enjoyed tennis and loved to play the piano. When she grew up, she inherited this house from her parents and opened it to the public so people could come and enjoy the house and learn about American history here.
Mr. Vanderbilt’s Bedroom

Mr. Vanderbilt owned 49 railroad companies. In the 19th century, there were no cars or planes, so everyone took the railroad. Mr. Vanderbilt was named after his grandfather, Cornelius, who was called the Commodore because he made his fortune in the steamship business.

In this room, there is a photograph of Mr. Vanderbilt’s daughter Alice. She is dressed in a white dress made of cotton, linen or lace.

Even boys dressed this way until they were about 6 years old.

The other photograph in the room is of the Vanderbilt boys. About 100 years ago, boys wore short pants called “knickers” with jackets and ties. Young boys wore sailor suits and from age 7 to about 12. Girls wore sailor shirts like these with skirts.

Do you think the Vanderbilts enjoyed themselves? You can see Mr. Vanderbilt and his daughter Gladys in a pony cart. These were very popular. The Vanderbilts loved horses. They rode them and won many horse races.
**Dressing Room**
Where do you get dressed?

Mr. Vanderbilt has this special room called a “dressing room.” He had a man called a “valet” who would take care of his clothes, shave him in the morning, take care of his comb and toothpaste, and make sure his shoes were polished.

The valet was a servant. A servant is a man or woman who is paid to take care of someone, to clean their house, cook their food, or do other work in the house. This house needed 40 servants to take care of this big building and the family. The Vanderbilts called their servants the “household staff.”

There is a drawer for every shirt in the closet.

**Bath**
This bathtub has four faucets! There are two for hot and cold fresh water and two for hot and cold salt water. If you wanted, you could take a salt-water bath, just like swimming in the ocean. It was considered good for your skin and your health.

- *Where do you think the salt for the baths came from?*
  Salt water was pumped in from the ocean and kept in large cisterns (tanks)
Mrs. Vanderbilt's Bedroom
This is Mrs. Vanderbilt's bedroom. She was very busy taking care of her children, grandchildren and the 40 servants in this house. She also spent her time supporting hospitals and her church.

Mrs. Vanderbilt had call buttons next to the bed that were used to call the servants. You could ring for something you wanted.

When you called, a man called a “footman” would come to see what you wanted. If you were a lady and you were getting dressed, you would hit a “ladies maid” button and a maid would come to do your hair or get your clothes ready.

Every day the servants brought fresh flowers to your room. They also brought clothes, letters and, sometimes, served you breakfast in bed.

The Vanderbilts never used the phone to call other people. The telephone was used only to call the housekeeper or another servant in the building. They wrote letters to communicate with their friends.
Miss Gertrude Vanderbilt's Room

In the summer, Miss Gertrude Vanderbilt used this bedroom. She was the eldest surviving daughter of Cornelius Vanderbilt II and Alice Claypoole Gwynne and the great-granddaughter of Commodore Cornelius Vanderbilt. She met a young man called Harry Payne Whitney and they were married here at The Breakers in 1896.

Gertrude became a famous artist. On the table near the bed is a sculpture called “The Engineer.” In front of the window is the monument to American forces of World War I in St. Nazaire, France. Gertrude eventually founded the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York City in 1932.

Loggia
This house is called The Breakers for a good reason. When you look out to the ocean from the loggia, you see the waves or hear them crashing against the cliffs. These rocks are called breakers and that is why this house is called “The Breakers.”
Guest Room
This room was used for guests. One guest was the Vanderbilt’s granddaughter, Miss Ferdinandine, who was called “Bubby” by her family. Bubby stayed in this room when she was ten. Bubby had a servant who took care of her, cleaned the room and cared for her clothes, but she couldn’t make a mess of the room and expect the servant to clean up everything. She was expected to be considerate of the servants and polite to everyone she met. Bubby’s mother told her many things were given to her, but much was expected of her as well. Bubby helped coach a baseball team for children and did many other things for grown ups and children who needed help.

- Why do you think Bubby needed a desk?
  Bubby was expected to write thank you notes to people.

- What was a day like for a little girl here?
  Her day might have tennis in the morning, the beach with a picnic at lunch, riding horses in the afternoon, playing with her friends in the special cottage just for children.

- How does Bubby’s typical day compare with one of yours?

Helen Bjurberg was another little girl who summered at The Breakers in the 1920s. Her mother, Clara, was a cook for the Vanderbilts. She stayed in an upstairs room. She could play ball, skip rope, and play in the backyard. She would watch the grown ups dance at parties, peeking over the star railings. There were two separate worlds at The Breakers: Bubby’s elegant world and Helen’s world of the servants.
Second Floor Gallery
There are a number of family portraits hanging over the Grand Staircase. There is one of Commodore Cornelius Vanderbilt. He was born in 1794, and he owned steamships and then railroads, connecting New York to Chicago by the 1870s. He was the grandfather of the man who built this house.

There is also a portrait of the Commodore’s son, William Henry Vanderbilt. He took over the family business and became famous for racehorses and collecting art.

A portrait of Mrs. Cornelius Vanderbilt, hangs here too. She lived here until 1934. She is dressed in a silk gown.

There is a tapestry on the wall over the staircase. A tapestry is a picture that is created by stitching and tying knots onto a piece of fabric, like a carpet. This one shows Alexander the Great, a famous general of ancient times. It was created in 1619 by an artist named Karel van Mander.

Tapestry by Karel van Mander, over the Grand Staircase
The Kitchen
There is something called a “dumbwaiter” in the kitchen. It is a little elevator pulled by a rope. You could lower it into the ice room below to get ice and then pull the ropes to bring it back up. These were used in many houses about 100 years ago.

There were 6 cooks in this kitchen. They had to make breakfast, lunch and dinner for the Vanderbilts, their 5 children, and the 40 servants. That’s a lot of cooking, isn’t it?

Butler’s Pantry
This room is called a Butler’s Pantry. A butler was a man who was the boss of all the other servants. A pantry is a room where you keep things. The Vanderbilts kept their silverware and dishes here. They kept their silver in the safe, locked up because it was very valuable.

There is another floor above to store the dishes and glasses.

Now, if we were all servants, this is what would happen. All the men and boys would be footmen. Their boss would be the butler. Or you might work in the stables to take care of the Vanderbilt horses, or work as gardeners mowing the lawn or growing flowers. If you did these jobs, your boss would be the Head Coachmen in the stables or the Head Gardener. The women and girls would be maids, cleaning the rooms, washing dishes, or washing clothes. Their boss would be a lady called the Housekeeper.

Do you think you might like doing any of these jobs?

You would get up at 5:00 in the morning and work until about 10 at night. There would always be plenty of good food and sometimes the servants would have a party on the water near the house at the place known as “40 Steps.”

- Do you know where these steps are located? Have you ever climbed them?
Role of Servants

A servant is a person working in the service of another (especially in the household). A married couple who employed servants would be referred to as the Master and the Mistress of the house.

Upper Hierarchy

Butler
- Commands the operation of the butler’s pantry (storage room).
- Receives callers, directing meal services, managing silver and wine cellar.
- Present in the house during his Master and Mistress’s absence.

Valet
- Attends to wardrobe, toilet, and every personal need of Master of the house. For example, putting toothpaste on the brush and polishing shoes.
- The appearance of butler, footmen and valets was very important. The more elegant they appeared the more elevated the status of the household.
Housekeeper
- Organizes household.
- Pays servants and household bills and renders monthly account of receipts and expenditures.
- Responsible for the household linen.
- The housekeeper, chamber and parlor maids were not to be seen by family or guests (unlike butlers, valets and footmen).

Ladies Maid
- Attends to wardrobe (clothes), toilet (make-up, cosmetics), and every personal need of Mistress of the house.
- Skilled hairdresser and seamstress (person who sews).
- Assists guests who did not bring own servants by unpacking trunks (suitcases), finding space for their clothing and then packing them up again upon their departure.

Chef
- Preparing meals for family and household staff every day.
- Ordering food.
- Managing kitchen staff.
- Coordinating outside staff for large events.
Lower Hierarchy

Kitchen Maid
- Building a fire in the range (stove) every morning.
- Brushing the cast iron stove and polishing the doorknobs and all metal handles in the house.
- Scrubbing the kitchen floor.
- Washing all the dishes and dishtowels.
- Cleaning the icebox.
- Keeping the kitchen neat and orderly.
- Answering all calls from the chef, assisting food preparation, and cooking.

Parlor Maid
- Care of drawing room (sitting room), reception room (for welcoming guests) and library (for reading or having tea).
- Care of one flight of the main staircase.

Footman
- Assistant to the butler.
- Ran errands on foot, brought messages.
- Served at table.
- Rode on back of carriages.

Laundress
- Cleaning all linens (sheets, towels).
Chambermaid
- Care of bedrooms- cleaning room and bedding.
- Constantly changing linens (even after naps!).

The Useful Man
- Handyman
Members of the Service Staff at The Breakers

Norah Kavanaugh (1901-1987)
Chambermaid at The Breakers

The Breakers’ engineer

The Bauerbands in front of the caretaker’s cottage at The Breakers
Lawrence Bauerband served as superintendent for The Breakers in 1916-1917.
Mr. Ottilidge
The night watchman

The Széchényi staff on a day off
Commodore Cornelius Vanderbilt

Cornelius Vanderbilt (1794-1877), grandfather of Cornelius Vanderbilt II, the builder of The Breakers, was the son of a farmer and ship owner. He made his first fortune in steamboats. By the mid-1840s, he had become the leading steamboat owner in the United States. His ships sailed the east coast waters and ventured as far off as San Francisco and France. Early in 1844, Vanderbilt began investing in railroads in the New York region. In 1857, he purchased controlling interest in the Harlem Railroad and by 1865, he owned the Hudson River Railroad. He formed the New York Central Railroad, a conglomerate of smaller railroad interests. On July 1, 1869, he became the president of the New York Central Railroad, a post he held until his death in 1877.

Commodore Vanderbilt and his first wife, Sophia Johnson (1795-1868) had thirteen children. The Commodore had a few hobbies including driving and playing the card game, whist.
William Henry Vanderbilt
William Henry Vanderbilt (1821-1885) was the fourth child and eldest son of Commodore Cornelius Vanderbilt. He was the father of Cornelius Vanderbilt II, the man who built The Breakers. He began his career as a financier, and later moved on to managing railroads. He was named vice-president of the New York & Harlem Railroad, then president of the New York Central. He was elected president of the New York Central and Hudson River Railroads, and subsequently president of Lake Shore and Michigan Southern and Michigan Central lines.

Having proven his capabilities as businessman to his father, he inherited the bulk of his father’s fortune. In 1841, William Henry Vanderbilt married Maria Louisa Kissam, by whom he had nine children.

William H. Vanderbilt
**Cornelius Vanderbilt II**

Cornelius Vanderbilt II (1843-1899) was the eldest son of William Henry Vanderbilt and succeeded as the head of the family upon his father’s death in 1885. He started his career as a banker, where he learned about the brokerage and stock business. His career in railroads began when he was 22. In 1877, he became vice-president of the New York Central under his father and was in control of the finances of the railroad. After his father’s retirement in 1883, Cornelius Vanderbilt became chairman of the board of the New York Central and Hudson River lines and of the Michigan Central. In 1886, he was elected president of the New York and Harlem River Railroads.

Cornelius Vanderbilt married Alice Claypoole Gwynne in 1867. They had seven children.

Mr. Vanderbilt’s great hobby was books and reading. The Vanderbilt residences were known for their libraries. He was a patron of the arts and was involved with the Episcopal Church.
Richard Morris Hunt
Richard Morris Hunt (1827-1895) was the most celebrated architect of America’s Gilded Age. His grand houses for the Vanderbilt family in New York City and Newport, RI set the standard for the wealthy lifestyle of the Gilded Age. Born in Brattleboro, Vermont, Hunt had an extraordinary life and career. He was the first American ever to be educated at the École des Beaux Arts, the best fine arts school in Paris, France. At the time Hunt worked, most American architects did not receive formal education and did not enjoy very high status.

Hunt left France and returned to America in 1855. He quickly became well known due to his knowledge of architectural history and great skill as an architect. In addition to The Breakers (1895), Richard Morris Hunt also designed Marble House (1888-1892) and many other Vanderbilt estates. After his death in 1895, Hunt was honored with the label “Dean of American Architecture.”
Children of Cornelius Vanderbilt II

The Vanderbilt boys:
Cornelius (III), Reginald C, William Henry (II), and Alfred Gwynne

Gertrude – age 8

Alice Gwynne – age 4

Gladys Moore Vanderbilt
Gladys Moore Vanderbilt (1886-1965) was the youngest child of Cornelius Vanderbilt II. She was born in 1886 at The Breakers in Newport, RI. In 1908 she married Count Laszlo Széchényi, the Royal Hungarian Minister to the United States from 1921-1933. She was active in many charitable relief programs in both the United States and Hungary during the two World Wars.

In 1934, Gladys Vanderbilt inherited The Breakers from her mother, Mrs. Cornelius Vanderbilt. She opened it to the public in 1948 in order to generate revenue for the newly formed Preservation Society of Newport County. All major maintenance expenses, including real estate taxes on The Breakers, were paid by the Countess until her death in 1965.

Countess Széchényi
Bibliography

