Louis Comfort Tiffany was one of the most important and influential American artists of the late 1800s and early 1900s. He and his firm, Tiffany Studios, were famous throughout America and Europe for revolutionary creations in colored glass. But though it was Tiffany’s stained-glass windows, mosaic works, and blown-glass vases that launched him on the world stage, it was his lamps more than anything else that expanded his popularity beyond wealthy society and into the American heartland. With his lamps, Tiffany made practical household objects beautiful. He was among the first artists to see the invention of electric light for its potential as an art form in the home.

Illuminate: To provide with light; to turn or focus light upon.
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LAURELTON HALL LIGHTING ACTIVITY

1. Take a close look at the photographs of Tiffany’s living room. What kind of lamps or lighting would you put in your living room?

2. Go to Gallery IV and find the exhibit of objects from the dining room of Laurelton Hall. The light fixture for the dining room is believed to be the largest lamp Tiffany made for a home. It is composed of more than 5,000 pieces of Favrile glass. Could you identify the lamp? Describe it. Is there any light source or lighting fixture that you would use in your home that is similar to this lamp?

3. Notice how Tiffany used similar shapes in the ceiling shade, the table, and the rug. In this way, he created “design unity.” What shape did Tiffany use? What is your favorite shape, and why? What shape is most common in your bedroom? House? Tiffany used an eight-sided object called a chandelier.

4. Go to Gallery X and study the pictures of Laurelton Hall and the interior of the chapel. How many lighting fixtures do you see pictured in the dining room, reception hall, and living room photographs?

3000 B.C. – First use of candles in Crete and Egypt.

1855 – Invention of the Bunsen burner for laboratories that led to the mass use of gas lighting.

1879 – Thomas Edison patented the incandescent light bulb.
About Tiffany Lamps

There were many different types of Tiffany lamps, including floor, desk, table, hanging, and wall-mounted lamps. In addition, there were many styles. Some Tiffany lamps have blown-glass shades while others have leaded-glass shades. What most of these lamps had in common is they in some way showed nature, the source of Tiffany's greatest inspiration. In Tiffany's garden of glass delights, wisteria and tulips bloom, dragonflies alight on water, and spiders climb their webs.

DID YOU KNOW

Workers of Tiffany Studios cut glass for leaded-glass lamps, windows, and other objects with a hand-held diamond cutter. Today, craftsmen still use diamonds to cut glass, but more often, they use cutting tools made out of steel or a very hard material known as carbide.

1. Why would a diamond be a good cutting tool?

Answer: Diamonds are very hard and very sharp.

2. Why do you think other materials are used to cut glass today?

Answer: Materials such as diamonds are expensive.

The lamps and lighting decorations in Gallery XII depict these small creatures:

- Peony library lamp
- Ten-light Lily lamp
- Dragonfly & Water lamps
- Turtleback design

Here are some of the types of glass in Tiffany lamps:

GLASS TYPES

- MOLDED GLASS
- Blown glass
- Lead glass

SALES AND SELECTION

Customers could purchase a Tiffany lamp in many ways. They could:

- Buy one from Tiffany Studios (it was at Tiffany Studios that customers could pick the type of lampshade they wanted from sample panels that were on display)
- Buy one at a department store or art gallery
- Order one through a catalog

Tiffany Studios' designers were always adding to lampshade and lamp base designs. Customers had more than 400 choices each for Tiffany shades and bases. The shades and bases had numbers, and buyers could put them together just the way they liked.

AWARDS

In the days before television and the Internet, a world's fair was an important way for manufacturers to promote what they made to the world's consumers. Held as often as once a year in major cities, these large shows offered art and science attracted millions of people.

Tiffany won 54 awards at the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago, including one for a hanging lamp and several for his chapel. Tiffany also displayed his lamps at the Exposition Universelle (a world's fair) in Paris, 1900. Once again, he was awarded many medals. One medal was given for the design of the Dragonfly & Water lamp.

FLOWERS AND CREATURES SEARCH

- See how many different kinds of flowers you can find represented in the Tiffany lamps in the galleries. How many have you seen growing where you live?
- The lamps and lighting decorations in Gallery XII depict these small creatures: a mushroom, a snail, a spider, a dragonfly, a moth, and a butterfly. See if you can find them. Do they look real to you?

TOOLS AND TECHNIQUES

Tiffany himself did not personally develop or create every lamp; instead, he employed hundreds of artists and craftsmen who carried out his designs or designed lamps under his guidelines. Tiffany approved everything himself. Tiffany did not write down the exact steps that he or his craftsmen used to make lampshades, but photographs and materials remaining from Tiffany's workshops show us that the making of a leaded-glass lampshade was a process that included many steps. The first step in making a lamp was an artist's drawing or watercolor sketch.

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In Gallery XXI, find the matching lampshade sample pattern and lamp. (Hint: You'll also find a photograph from Tiffany Studios of this lamp.)

Tiffany was a master of the art of glass blowing. Blown glass is gathered at the end of the long pipe and is blown like a bubble into a particular shape. Tiffany's Ten-light Lily lamp has 10 individual, blown-glass pieces.

Studying the bronze lamp bases. Can you see how they were also inspired by nature? Can you find the three bases that are the same? Can you find the three bases that are different? Can you find the three bases that are, in fact, the same?

If the lamp was made of leaded glass, it was an example of leaded glass. Lead glass is an example of leaded glass.

Tiffany Glass and Decorating Company was in the arts and crafts movement. Tiffany created at least 10 lampshade designs for Tiffany Studios, including this one. Earning more than $10,000 a year, she was one of the highest-paid women in America.

The lamps and lighting decorations in Gallery XII depict these small creatures: a mushroom, a snail, a spider, a dragonfly, a moth, and a butterfly. See if you can find them. Do they look real to you?
Louis Comfort Tiffany was born in 1848 in New York City. He was the son of the famous jeweler, Charles Lewis Tiffany, who founded Tiffany & Co. of New York City, which is still in business today.

Louis Comfort Tiffany started his artistic career as a painter and then became an interior designer. At 24, he began studying the chemistry and techniques of glassmaking and eventually developed new types of glass of amazing color and texture. In doing so, he helped revive the art of stained glass in America. The glass and other objects were created in opalescent glass and also, because of its origins in this country, American glass. The glass came in an unending variety of bold colors, which were unique in the way they were streaked with all kinds of other colors.

Tiffany introduced lamps with blown-glass shades in 1894 and leaded-glass shades in 1898. These lamps, however, were not Tiffany's first experiments with lights or lighting. The lamps that became so popular were in many ways a natural result of the artist's long fascination with color and light. As an interior designer, Tiffany designed lighting for author Mark Twain's house in Hartford, Connecticut, in 1881 – 1882 and for President Chester Arthur's White House in 1882 – 1883 Tiffany, who loved to go to the theater, worked with inventor Thomas Edison on the lighting for the Lyceum Theater in New York in 1884 – 1885. The theater was said to have included the first-ever electric footlights.

Enlightenment: To provide with light; to turn or focus light upon.

About Louis Comfort Tiffany and his home, Laurelton Hall

Tiffany constructed Laurelton Hall, an 84-room mansion on Oyster Bay, Long Island, from 1902 – 1905. He decorated the interior of the mansion with thousands of interesting objects he had collected from around the world. Inside the mansion, Tiffany also showed off the variety of bold colors, and light. He was among the first artists to see the invention of the incandescent light bulb. As an interior designer, Tiffany designed lighting for author Mark Twain's house in Hartford, Connecticut, in 1881 – 1882 and for President Chester Arthur's White House in 1882 – 1883 Tiffany, who loved to go to the theater, worked with inventor Thomas Edison on the lighting for the Lyceum Theater in New York in 1884 – 1885. The theater was said to have included the first-ever electric footlights.