

Pre-Visit Lesson #2: Life in 1900

Objectives

- Students will compare and contrast nineteenth-century life to life today.
- Students will explore carriage production as an example of nineteenth-century industrialization.
- Students will create a newspaper article dated 1900 to explore various aspects of life at that time.

Materials

- Handout “Nineteenth-century Industrialization and the Carriage Industry” (follows this lesson)

Student Instruction

1. Tell the class you are taking a field trip to see *Going Places*, an exhibit at your local museum. Explain that you’re going to talk a bit about the exhibit before you go so that they can best be prepared for the experience.
2. Write on the board: “Imagine you can travel in a time machine back to 1900. Look around at the people you see, what they are doing, and what the surroundings look like. What do you see?” Allow the students about 15 minutes to write on this topic.
3. Discuss the student responses to the question. Some questions to ask include:
 - What kinds of horse-drawn vehicles would you have seen on an average city street in 1900?
 - How was commerce dependent on the horse-drawn vehicle?
 - How would horse-drawn vehicles have affected sanitation, firefighting, public transportation, and street crowding?
 - What do you think the main differences between life in 1900 and life today are?
 - What similarities between life in 1900 and today can you think of?
4. Explain that you want to explore as a class what life was like at the turn of the twentieth century, when horse-drawn vehicles were in their heyday. Daily life for Americans in 1900 was remarkably different from life today. It’s hard to imagine a world without cars, buses, and trucks, but in 1900, every city was full of stables. The blacksmith was an important man, running a business like a modern car repair garage. City dwellers depended on horses for their daily needs and for getting around. City horses had to be fed, and there was big business in supplying oats, barley, hay, and straw. Before the invention of trains and automobiles, animal power was the main form of travel. Horses, donkeys, and oxen pulled wagons, coaches, and buggies.

The age of the carriage flourished in the U.S. for less than a century, with the height of the carriage era from about 1850 to 1910. Poor roads held back wheeled travel in this country until well into the nineteenth century, while the invention of the automobile doomed the horse-drawn vehicle as a necessity of life and transportation in the early twentieth century.

5. Read with the class Handout “Nineteenth-century Industrialization and the Carriage Industry.” Discuss the following questions:

- Was the Industrial Revolution really a revolution? Why not?
- How does the carriage industry mirror other industries of the time?
- How did a small owner-operated carriage shop work?

- Why did carriage factories have to take over the work of making carriages?
- What are the two types of factories and how did each work?
- How did standardized parts contribute to industrialization?
- What were the different goals of the Brewster & Company and Studebaker Brothers?
- How did industrialization change the lives of workers?
- How did industrialization contribute to the creation of a new middle class? How did this new middle class affect the production of carriages?

Student Activities/Products

Ask students to write a newspaper article dated from the year 1900. Tell them to describe an event that could have happened in that time: a crime, an accident, a discovery, a political event, a society event, a death, etc. (Older children may want to do some research before writing their articles.) Somewhere in the article, students must refer to a horse-drawn vehicle; it can be a peddler wagon, a hansom cab (the taxi of the day), a private carriage, a firefighting vehicle, a sleigh, a doctor's buggy, a mail coach, etc. Have them illustrate the article as well. If time permits, ask students to present their articles to the class.

Extensions

1. Have students research the Industrial Revolution that occurred in the late 1800s. Ask them to address the following questions:

- What was the Industrial Revolution?
- What was so revolutionary about it?
- Prior to the Industrial Revolution, how was a carriage made?
- What types of people worked to make carriages?
- What are some key inventions that allowed carriages to be mass-produced?
- How did technology change professions that were once based solely on physical labor?

2. Ask students to research different industries developed during the Industrial Revolution and/or to create a "How It Works" poster outlining how a nineteenth-century factory worked.

3. Have students draw map of a village of 1900 and include one kind of transportation that might come to that village.

4. Ask students to research an area of life in 1900:

Entertainment

Health concerns

Clothing

Eating habits

Politics

The home/daily life

Transportation

Immigration

Inventions/Technology

Social reform/temperance

Rise of labor unions

Courtship and marriage

Role of women/Women's rights
Factory work/industrial revolution
Working children
Education

Nineteenth-century Industrialization and the Carriage Industry

Industrialization was actually not a “revolution” but a slow-moving, complex process. Industrialization started in America in the 1780s, but we didn’t become an industrialized society until after the Civil War. Between 1870 and 1920, changes in the production and distribution of carriages mirrored major changes in other areas of consumer products. The effect of industrialization on the process of manufacturing carriages was huge. Between 1850 and 1900, carriage production in America exploded, partly because of the factory system of production, which foreshadowed the rise of the automobile industry. In 1850, the value of annual carriage production in the U.S. was \$18 million; by 1890 it had grown to \$102 million.

Carriages were complex vehicles to manufacture because they involved many parts that had to be made by skilled tradesmen. Before industrialization, carriages were produced in small owner-operated shops. A master carriage maker carried out the work, assisted by skilled craftsmen trained through a traditional apprentice system: woodworkers, wheelwrights, blacksmiths, upholsterers, painters, stripers, and varnishers. The first carriage makers were immigrants who had learned their trade in Europe and based their carriages on European designs.

As the nineteenth century progressed, more demand for horse-drawn vehicles created a need for faster production that was impossible in the small owner-operated shop. The factory system of production was able to meet this increased demand. Two types of factories developed during the nineteenth century. One concentrated on the production of a particular carriage part and was called a specialty factory. The parts produced in this type of factory were sold to companies and shops where the pieces were assembled to build an entire vehicle. Machines changed production by allowing for standardized parts. Up until this time, handmade parts were used, and each part was unique; once machines were used, mass production was possible and repair became easier. The other type was the vertically integrated factory. In this factory, all the work required to produce a carriage were performed. Both types of factories dominated carriage production after the Civil War, but the traditional carriage shop still had a considerable share of the market. The small owner-operated carriage shops continued throughout the nineteenth century.

The story of industrialization can be told through the carriage industry using two well-known carriage companies, Brewster & Company and Studebaker Brothers. Both companies were born in the small shop craft tradition. While both companies adopted factory production, Brewster made its reputation (although not its profits) through production of highly customized and expensive vehicles. Studebaker, by contrast, committed itself fully to the most modern methods of factory organization and mechanization and adopted a policy of underselling its competition by reducing costs.

Industrialization had a major impact on the nature of work and workers’ lives in the carriage industry as elsewhere in America. During the nineteenth century, machines automated many skills and eliminated work for many craftsmen, who were replaced by unskilled laborers. By bringing all the trades under one roof, fewer workers were needed, and unskilled boys rather than trained craftsmen could fill many positions for lower wages.

The rise of national retail outlets such as Sears and Montgomery Ward also had a great impact on purchasing patterns. The audience for these marketing tools, and the vehicles they advertised, was not only the rich. While industrialization made some people extremely wealthy, it also drew immigrants to the U.S. to work and created a new middle class of managers, professionals, and clerks who could afford to consider the purchase of their own vehicles.