

Lesson Plan: Then and Now: Life in Maine

*This lesson was developed by Maine Historical Society for the Seashore Trolley Museum as a companion curriculum for *Teddy Roosevelt, Millie, and the Elegant Ride* by Jean. M. Flahive (2019). The lesson corresponds with themes and topics covered in Chapters 1, 2, 6, 9, 10, 12, 18, 20, 24, 25.*

Objectives:

- Students will practice the skills involved in analyzing primary sources.
- Students will be able to describe life on an early 20th century Maine family farm and how life has changed in Maine since the early 1900s.
- Students will be able to describe the differences between attending school in the early 20th century and attending school today.

Essential Questions:

1. What was life like on a family farm in Maine at the turn of the 20th century?
2. What was school like at the turn of the 20th century?
3. How has life changed in Maine in the last century?

Materials:

- computers with internet access for teacher and student use – teachers and students will need to access Maine Memory Network (www.mainememory.net) to examine the documents used in this lesson and may want to access **Additional Recommended Resources** (see below)
- pen/pencil
- copies of **My Day** worksheet (see below)
- copy (or copies) of *Teddy Roosevelt, Millie, and the Elegant Ride* by Jean Flahive – might be useful for students to have copies on hand, but not imperative for the completion of the activities in this lesson

Timeframe:

Will vary depending on length of class period, class size, etc.; 1 day/class period recommended.

Procedure:

1. Ask students to brainstorm, ***What does your average Monday look like?*** Ask students to be specific and to record their answers on the **My Day** worksheet (see below).
2. Ask students to next to think about, ***What do we know about a typical day for Millie and Nathan based on descriptions from the book? What kind of chores did they do? What did they do for fun? What was going to school like?*** Record students' answers on the classroom white board or a similar and equally visible place.

Answers will vary, but may include:

chores: collecting eggs early in the morning, putting eggs in containers to be sold, feeding and watering the chickens, cleaning the chicken coops/nests, helping buy supplies, driving the cows to the barn, plowing, spreading compost, planting, assisting with calving, building gates and fences, churning butter, picking berries, canning, cutting and wood, caring for animals, harvesting crops, helping with housekeeping and cooking

school: Millie and Nathan would walk to school, based on Millie's description it sounds like her school is just one classroom where students share desks, Millie stops going to school for a time after Nathan's death but eventually returns

fun: spending time with friends, rides on the trolley, Camp Fire Girls, going to the Cumberland Fair

Ask students to now consider, ***How much do you have in common with Millie and Nathan; how are you days the same? How are they different?***

3. Explain to students that today we'll discuss what a typical day would have been like for kids in Maine at the turn of the 20th century.
4. Explain that in the **early 1900s, nearly 40% of Americans lived on farms**, just like the Thayers. Today, farm workers make up just over 1% of the U.S. population. Though there are much fewer farms in the U.S. today, those farms are typically much bigger operations than the Thayer's family farm. The Thayer's farm probably would have looked much like this one, the [Daniel A. Gilman Homestead, Presque Isle, 1896](#). A typical day on farm usually began just as the sun was coming up (or just before) and didn't end until the sun went down again. Work on a farm was also **seasonal**. For example, planting was done in the spring, crops were tended in the summer and harvested in the fall. Review the types of chores that Millie and Nathan helped with that are described in the book (see above).
4. Explain that **life at the Thayer home would have been very different from what we are used to in Maine today**. The book begins in the year 1911. **At that time, most homes in Maine would not yet have had electricity, especially in rural areas. In the year the book ends, 1920, only 15% of farms in New England were electrified.** Based on descriptions from the book of the Thayers using lanterns and a woodstove, and because Millie asks her father what electricity is, we can assume they did not have electricity at home. Ask students, ***What would they Thayers have used for light without electricity?*** Answers will vary but could include natural light, candles, oil lamps, gas lighting. Ask students, ***What are a some of things that are part of our everyday lives today that no one would have had before electricity?*** Answers will vary but may

include refrigerators, television, light bulbs/electric lights, radio, computers, internet, movies/DVDS, recorded music, cellular phones.

a. Suggested images to help illustrate life before electricity:

- i. [Morning call, Vermont, ca. 1910](#)
- ii. [Home Clarion stove, Bangor, ca. 1900](#)
- iii. [Home kitchen - 1914](#)
- iv. [Music Around the Wood Stove, Parsonsfield, ca. 1899](#)

5. Explain that because we know Nathan walks his sister to the privy (outhouse) in Chapter 1, and because of the mention of a washtub and kitchen pump, we can also assume that **the Thayers did not have indoor plumbing or running water on their farm**. Their kitchen pump may have been connected to a well or some kind of cistern. Without running water, the Thayers **probably did not take a full bath daily** but would have instead washed up each morning and evening with a pitcher of water and basin. To do laundry, water would have to be collected from a well, boiled on a stove or over a fire, and clothes would have been washed by hand and hung out to dry. **Because laundry was a chore that typically took a full day** and was such strenuous work it was usually the least favorite chore and **clothes were not necessarily washed every time they were worn**; you would rely on undergarments (washed regularly) and aprons to keep other clothes clean between washings. Collecting and chopping wood for the stove/fire was a chore that would have usually been the responsibility of Nathan or Mr. Thayer, while collecting and heating the water, washing the clothes, and hanging them to dry would have fallen to Millie and Mrs. Thayer.

a. Suggested images to help illustrate life before running water:

- i. [Farm sink, Littleton, ca. 1910](#)
- ii. [Longfellow washtub, Portland, ca. 1860](#)
- iii. [Charles Dunn, Ragged Lake, 1895](#)
- iv. [Four Sanford Ladies Smile Their way Through Washday, ca 1900](#)

6. Explain to students that in the early 20th century, kids like Nathan and Millie might only get a **few years of formal schooling** and almost 20% of American children did not attend school at all. Because families who lived on farms produced so much of their own labor, children often did not have time to go to school if their family needed their help to work the farm. Other families relied on children to help earn money; it was not uncommon for children in poorer families to have jobs and thus not be able to attend school. Those children who did attend school would usually stop going after what today we would consider 8th grade. Most rural schools were **one room buildings** with students of different ages and levels all in the same class and with just one teacher. The youngest students would sit at the front of the classroom, the older students in the back. Sometimes the older students would help teach the younger ones. Education at schools like the ones the Thayer children attended **focused on reading, spelling, grammar, and arithmetic with learning through memorization and repetition**. The **school year was much shorter** than it is today and attendance for many students was not always strong; a typical school year at the turn of the century was 151 days, but students only attended an average of 105 days. Most children would have walked to school and the school day usually began around 9am and would end between 2-4pm; there would be an hour break in the middle of the day for lunch and recess. Lunch was not provided by the school, everyone had to bring their own.

a. Suggested images to help illustrate school in the 1900s:

- i. [Coal Kiln School, Scarborough, ca. 1900](#)
- ii. [School class, Garland, ca. 1910](#)
- iii. [Phys ed, North Scarborough School, ca. 1900](#)

- iv. [Interior, Scribner Hill School, Otisfield, 1924](#)
- v. [Scribner Hill School, Otisfield, 1924](#)
- vi. [Students attending class at the Village School, Blue Hill, 1894](#)

7. Explain that when it came to having fun, **children didn't have quite as much leisure time as they do today** (although middle- and upper-class Americans were beginning to experience more leisure time than ever before). Again, children who lived on family farms would have been expected to help daily with the farm work and other chores, and children from poorer families often had jobs. But that doesn't mean life was *all* work and no play! For families like the Thayers **picnics and community socials** (picnics, dances, suppers, etc.) were popular. In her free time, a girl like Millie might try **arts and crafts activities** like needlework or arranging dried flowers, seeds, or shells. She might also **read** for pleasure; books written especially for young people became more and more common starting in the 1880s. Popular books included *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm*, *The Wizard of Oz*, and series like *The Bobbsey Twins*, *Hardy Boys*, and *Nancy Drew*. **Fishing, swimming, camping, and hiking** were fun when the weather was nice. People enjoyed making **music at home** with parlor organs and pianos. Children would have had **toys and games** like dolls, Lincoln Logs, puzzles, blocks, bicycles, sleds, and kites. Country fairs like the one Millie and her friends attend in Chapter 18 marked the harvest time and were an opportunity for neighbors to socialize and enjoy entertainment and educational displays, as well as shop for goods.

a. Suggested images to help illustrate play in the 1900s:

- i. [Toy Stove](#)
- ii. [Child's horse and buggy, ca. 1900](#)
- iii. [Mission San Gabriel Puzzle](#)
- iv. [Students and blocks, North School, Portland, ca. 1910](#)
- v. [Picnic, Waterford, ca. 1910](#)
- vi. [North New Portland Fair, ca. 1908](#)

8. **Conclusion/Exit ticket:** Ask students to share **the one way in which they think life in Maine has changed the most over the past 100 years or the change that they think is the most important and why.**

Extension Activities:

1. Make your own butter as a class in a method similar to the one Millie would have used. All you need is 1 pint of heavy whipping cream and a mason jar with a tight-fitting lid. Fill the jar with the cream, secure the lid, and pass the jar around asking students to take turns shaking it. Watch as the cream solidifies and turns to butter! Explain that heavy cream has a lot of fat in it and that by shaking the cream the fat molecules begin to separate from the liquid and clump together forming a solid (the butter). Putting a marble in the jar can help speed up the process but isn't necessary (and be careful if you decide to sample the butter that the marble isn't left inside). You can also add salt to flavor the butter if so desired.

a. Show students images of butter churns, and listen to Dorothy Campbell describe butter making on Maine Memory Network:

- i. [Swish churn, Littleton, ca. 1860](#)
- ii. [Butter churn and mixer, ca. 1910](#)
- iii. [Making butter, Littleton, ca. 1935](#)

Additional Recommended Resources:

Maine Memory Network exhibits, stories, slideshows:

[Blueberries to Potatoes: Farming in Maine](#)

[Laboring in Maine](#)

[Wired! How Electricity Came to Maine](#)

[Fair Season: Crops, Livestock, and Entertainment](#)

[Back to School!](#)

film:

[Harvesting blueberries, ca. 1930](#)

Name: _____

My Day

MORNING:

AFTERNOON:

NIGHT:

Maine Learning Results for Social Studies (2019):

Social Studies, Grades 6-8 – Geography: Students draw on concepts and processes from geography to understand issues involving people, places, and environments in the community, Maine, the United States, and the world.

- **Geography 1:** Students understand the geography of the community, Maine, the United States, and various regions of the world and the geographic influences on life in the past, present, and future by: **(D2)** Describing the impact of change on the physical and cultural environment.

Social Studies, Grades 6-8 – History: Students draw on concepts and processes using primary and secondary sources from history to develop historical perspective and understand issues of continuity and change in the community, Maine, the United States, and world.

- **History 1:** Students understand major eras, major enduring themes, and historic influences in the history of Maine, the United States, and various regions of the world by: **(F1)** Explaining that history includes the study of past human experience based on available evidence from a variety of primary and secondary sources; and explaining how history can help one better understand and make informed decisions about the present and future. **(F2)** Identifying major historical eras, major enduring themes, turning points, events, consequences, and people in the history of Maine, the United States, and various regions of the world. **(D2)** Analyzing major historical eras, major enduring themes, turning points, events, consequences, and people in the history of Maine, the United States, and various regions of the world.

Common Core State Standards: English Language Arts Standards » History/Social Studies » Grade 6-8:

Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.10

By the end of grade 8, read and comprehend history/social studies texts in the grades 6-8 text complexity band independently and proficiently.