

Pre-Visit Lesson Plan

“Progress, Progress, Progress”

Overview

The materials provided on the Lessons and programs page can be used to introduce Thomas Wolfe and the changing nature of his world during the early 20th century before your group visits the Thomas Wolfe Memorial.

Narrative for Teachers

The Asheville of Thomas Wolfe’s childhood was very different from the Asheville of today. Wolfe was born in the midst of a period of immense change for the city of Asheville, as the area’s population had been steadily growing since 1880. Before that year, Asheville functioned only as a small, rural crossroads town with limited commerce due to its location deep within the Appalachian Mountains, accessible only by roads that were often difficult to navigate. However, the railroad would arrive in Biltmore Village on October 3, 1880 opening the town to a greater flow of people and materiel.

As a result of the railroad and a new influx of people, the city grew quickly to accommodate its growing population. By 1890, Asheville’s streets were brightened by electric lighting during the night, an electric trolley system transported residents and tourists alike, and the newest fashions in clothing, furniture, architecture, and home technology became available in local stores.

Thomas Wolfe’s mother’s boarding house, Old Kentucky Home, was equipped with modern utilities. The house had central heat provided by a hot-air furnace, was hooked up to electricity, and had limited indoor plumbing (including a sink in the kitchen and one bathroom on the back porch). Wolfe wrote about the household chores in the house, such as cutting weeds from the kitchen garden kept in the back yard, cooking, ironing fabrics, hauling coal for fireplaces and stoves, and washing laundry.

The tools used for household chores are still common in households today, though different in design to our modern appliances. For example: electric irons had been invented in the 1880s, but many people (including Julia) still used “sad irons” or flat irons that were heated on stovetops due to the tendency of early electric models to overheat. Laundry was another time consuming chore of the day. Electric washing machines would not hit the market until the 1920s, meaning households would have to use a simple washboard and washtub to clean soiled

fabrics. The process was so time consuming that an entire day of the week was dedicated to the chore. The electric washing machine's availability to the masses in the 1920s exponentially decreased the required time for laundry.

Nationwide industrialization that took place throughout the 19th century would lead to the replacement of centuries-old technology, such as flat/sad irons, with electric models that made the work much quicker and easier, but also meant more of the work could be done. These would soon be replaced again by improved models that ran more efficiently (for example: electric irons coming with temperature control as an improvement over those that did not). The household world described in *Look Homeward, Angel* was rooted in traditional means of everyday living, and show signs of rapid technological change that would completely change the way people lived, and set the foundation for our lives today.

Procedures

Step 1: Use the Multiple Choice Questions with Readings "Who was Thomas Wolfe?"

Adaptation/Extension: Open class for further discussion on the reading with the questions below, or any other questions you may want to address.

-Thomas Wolfe was famous for writing about his life, but he would sometimes add events into the story. Would this make his writing fiction or nonfiction? Is it a mix of both? What do you think?

-Have you ever read any stories written by a person about their own life? What did that person talk about?

Step 2: Use the Multiple Choice Questions with Readings "What was the Old Kentucky Home"

Adaptation/Extension: Open class for further discussion on the reading with the questions below, or any other questions you may want to address.

-What happened in Wolfe's family situation that made for an unpleasant childhood? Why was this hard for him?

-Why would people stay in boarding houses? Where do people on vacation stay today? Is there anything similar to a boarding house still in use?

Step 3: Use the Multiple Choice Questions with Readings "Asheville, 1900-1920"
Discuss the rapid changes occurring in the city during Wolfe's childhood (i.e. introduction of electric lighting, rapid transportation, improved home

appliances, high rate of urban growth). Follow with discussion/multiple choice questions optional.

Points for discussion:

- What happened in Asheville that would open the door for people to visit the city?
- How did life change for people living in Asheville after the railroad reached the city?
- How did change in Asheville affect how Wolfe saw his hometown? Was it still “home” for him?

Step 4: Hand out Artifact Identification sheet found on the lessons and Programs page to students and ask them to list the equivalent of each object found in homes today.

Modern Equivalents:

- Coffee Grinder (1906) = Electric Coffee Grinder (present day)
- Ice Cream Freezer (1906) = Ice Cream Freezer (same technology still in use today!)
- Ice Box (1906) = Electric Refrigerator/Freezer (the principle behind the ice box is still in use today in the form of coolers)
- Clothing Fluter (1906) = Clothing is fluffed in electric dryers (present day)
- Stereoscope (1906) = 3D Glasses (present day)
- Sad Iron (1906) = Electric Iron with steam press (present day)
- Washboard (1906) = Electric Washing Machine (present day)
- Phonograph (1906) = mp3 Player (present day)
- Treadle Sewing Machine (1906) = Electric Sewing Machine (present day).
- Washstand w/Pitcher and Bowl (1906) = Sink with running water (present day)
- Coal Scuttle (1906) = (How is your home heated today?)