



Pre-Visit Lesson Plan

“Thomas Wolfe and Progress, Progress, Progress”

This lesson plan and the information and materials provided at this website’s History pages and the Lessons and Programs page can be used to introduce Thomas Wolfe and the changing nature of his world during the early 20th century to your class before your visit to the Thomas Wolfe Memorial.

Objectives:

At the end of this activity students will be able to:

- Name Thomas Wolfe as an author from Asheville, NC who wrote *Look Homeward, Angel*.
- Describe Thomas Wolfe’s childhood home as his mother’s boardinghouse.
- Identify household changes over time and how they effected people’s lives.

Materials: (on the Lessons and Programs Page)

Multiple Choice Questions with Readings

Who Was Thomas Wolfe?

What is the old Kentucky Home?

Asheville 1900-1920

Asheville & Technology Timeline

Word Games/Artifact Worksheets

Artifacts at the Old Kentucky Home

Answers to Artifacts at the OKH

Artifact Word Scramble

Answers to Artifact Word Scramble

Artifact Clues

Answers to Artifact Clues

Paper/Crayons/Color Pencils/Markers for Closing Activity

Photos:

Thomas Wolfe 1901

Thomas Wolfe 1937

Pack Square 1880s

Pack Square 1910

Pack Square 1929

Pack Square 1950

Narrative for Teachers:

The Asheville of Thomas Wolfe's childhood was very different from the Asheville of today. Wolfe was born in a period of immense change for the city of Asheville. The area's population had been steadily growing since 1880. Before that year, Asheville was a small rural crossroads town of 2,500 people with limited commerce due to its location deep within the Appalachian Mountains. The town was accessible only by roads that were often difficult to navigate. However, the railroad arrived in Biltmore Village on October 3, 1880 opening the town to growth. When Wolfe was born in 1900 the population had reached 14,000.

With the railroad and a new influx of people, the city changed quickly. By 1890, Asheville's streets were brightened by electric lighting, 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.

When Thomas Wolfe moved to his mother's boarding house in 1906, Old Kentucky Home, it was already 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). As an adult Wolfe remembered the household chores of his childhood, such as keeping the kitchen garden in the back yard, cooking large meals, washing laundry and ironing the fabrics, hauling coal for fireplaces and stoves.

The nationwide industrialization that took place throughout the 19th century would lead to the replacement of many centuries-old home technologies. The modern tools used for household chores in 1906 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 often several days of the week were dedicated to the chore. The electric washing machine's availability to the masses in the 1920s exponentially decreased the required time for laundry.

The household world seen in the Old Kentucky Home boarding house and described by Thomas Wolfe's in his book *Look Homeward, Angel* were rooted in traditional means of everyday living, and provide us examples of the rapid technological changes in Asheville that set the foundation for our lives today.

Procedures:

1. Tell the class that you will be visiting the childhood home of Thomas Wolfe and examining changes in our homes since his lifetime. Basic biographical and historical information about Thomas Wolfe, his family, and his community is available in our History pages. Define Thomas Wolfe as the Asheville author who wrote *Look Homeward, Angel*, which was based on his childhood.

Use the photos Thomas Wolfe 1901 and Thomas Wolfe 1937 to talk about when and where he lived. Students might note how he physically changed over time. Did his face change? How are his clothes different? What else is seen in the 1937 photo? Note the Old Kentucky Home sign and the significance. Discuss the definition of a boarding house and how it might be different from where students live.

2. Have class complete “Who was Thomas Wolfe?” Readings with Multiple Choice Questions

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?

3. Have class complete “What was the Old Kentucky Home?” Readings with Multiple Choice Questions.

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 like a boarding house still in use?

4. Have class complete “Asheville, 1900-1920” Readings with Multiple Choice Questions.

5. Follow-up the reading/multiple choice worksheet with discussion questions:
 - 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?

6. Briefly discuss with the class how homes were before electricity, running water, TV and the Internet.

After the short discussion pass out the “Artifacts at the Old Kentucky Home” and “Artifact Identification” sheets found on the Lessons and Programs page. Give the class about 10 minutes to complete the activity.

7. Ask students 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) = CD 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?)

Adaptation/Extension: You may also choose to use the Asheville & Technology Timeline, Artifact Word Scramble, and Artifact Clues sheets found on the Lessons and Programs page.

8. Now that we have examined changes inside of houses you might use the four pictures of Pack Square in downtown Asheville to show how the city itself has changed since the 1880s.

1880's- Photograph of the south side of the public (Pack) square with dirt road, hay wagons, hitching posts, oxen, covered wagons and no electrical poles

1910- Photograph of Pack Square looking east with trolley cars, two automobiles and several horse-drawn carts in view. Left of Vance Monument the dome of the 1903 Courthouse is visible and on the far right of picture is the Public Library.

1929- Photograph of Pack Square looking south and east with commercial buildings around the square including; Asheville City Hall (1929), and both the 1903 and 1928 Buncombe County Courthouses left of Vance Monument. Right of the Monument (R to L): Pack Memorial Library; Legal Building; Commerce Building; Westall Building; and Jackson Building. Also visible are trolley cars, automobiles, and no more horse and carriages.

1950's- Aerial photograph of Pack Square looking north. Shows the Vance Monument and surrounding streets with automobiles and no signs of a trolley.

Closure:

Ask students to draw a picture of a household tool that may be used at home in the future that will replace a tool in use today or draw a picture of how our future cities might look.