



THE EARLY YEARS: LIFE AT THE TURN OF THE CENTURY

Lesson Plan for Grades 4, 7-8, 11

Lesson Plan: The Early Years: Geography and Life at the Turn of the Century

Grade Levels: 4th State History , 7-8th U.S. History, and 11th U.S. History

Duration: 45-60 minutes

Overview: This lesson introduces students to Robert H. Jackson's early life. Students will explore historical maps, analyze photographs, and discuss how Jackson's childhood helped to shape his future career as Supreme Court Justice and Chief Prosecutor for the United States at Nuremberg.

Learning Goals

1. Identify key towns/cities on a map and understand their significance
2. Examine life in small-town America in the 1890s and early 1900s through historical photographs
3. Understand how Robert H. Jackson's childhood in Pennsylvania and New York shaped his values and future career

Learning Standards

- New York State
 - o Social Studies: 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 1.4, 3.1, and 5.1
 - o ELA Reading Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies: RH1, RH2, and RH7
 - o ELA Writing Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies: WHST3, WHST4, WHST6, and WHST7
- Pennsylvania
 - o History: 8.1.3, 8.1.6, 8.1.9, 8.1.12, 8.2.3, 8.2.6, 8.2.9, 8.2.12, 8.3.3., 8.3.6, 8.3.9, and 8.3.12
 - o Civics and Government: 5.2.3, 5.2.6, 5.2.9, and 5.2.12
 - o Reading in History and Social Studies: 8.5.6-8G, 8.5.9-10G, 8.5.11-12G, 8.5.6-8J, 8.5.9-10J, and 8.5.11-12J
 - o Writing in History and Social Studies: 8.6.6-8B, 8.6.9-10B, 8.6.11-12B, 8.6.6-8E, 8.6.9-10E, 8.6.11-12E, 8.6.6-8H, 8.6.9-10H, and 8.6.11-12H

Materials Needed

- Map(s) of NY/PA – See included maps. Google Earth has a good zoom level where you can see all three towns/cities at the same time.
- Historical photographs
- Worksheet for students for photograph analysis



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- Teacher Resource: Excerpts from Gail Jarrow, *Robert H. Jackson: New Deal Lawyer, Supreme Court Justice, Nuremberg Prosecutor* (Calkins Creek, 2008)
- Teacher Resource: Background information about life in 1890-1920 in small-town America

Lesson Flow

1. Introduction (5-10 minutes)
 - a. Map Activity: have students locate Spring Creek, PA; Frewsburg, NY; and Jamestown, NY on a map.
 - i. Discussion:
 1. How did travel from one of these places to another look in Jackson's day?
 2. How long would it take to get from Spring Creek to Jamestown in 1900?
 3. What would be different economically or socially about living in Spring Creek v. Frewsburg v. Jamestown?
2. Historical Photo Analysis (15-20 minutes)
 - a. Break students into groups and assign them each a town
 - i. Use historical photographs from the Robert H. Jackson Center's collection of Spring Creek, Frewsburg, and Jamestown
 1. Discussion:
 - a. What do you notice about the towns?
 - b. How are they different today?
 - c. What can you tell about transportation, work, or community?
 - b. Bring the class back together to compare and contrast the towns.
3. Robert H. Jackson's Early Life (10-15 minutes)
 - a. Read excerpts from Gail Jarrow, *Robert H. Jackson: New Deal Lawyer, Supreme Court Justice, Nuremberg Prosecutor* (Calkins Creek, 2008) to discuss Jackson's childhood.
 - i. Discussion:
 1. How did Jackson's childhood influence his work later in life?
 2. What values did he learn from his childhood?
 3. How does Jackson's story compare to your own experiences growing up?
4. Making Connections (10-15 minutes)
 - a. Reflection Activity:



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- i. Write 10 social media posts (draw/include pictures to go with them if you want) that Jackson may have posted if he had social media when he was growing up.
 1. Example posts might include:
 - a. Describe a typical day in young Jackson's life.
 - b. Imagine Jackson reacting to a historical event from his time
 - c. Post a "throwback Thursday" where Jackson reflects on something that happened earlier
 2. To integrate technology into this activity, you could have students use Padlet, or Google Slides.

Assessment/Evaluation

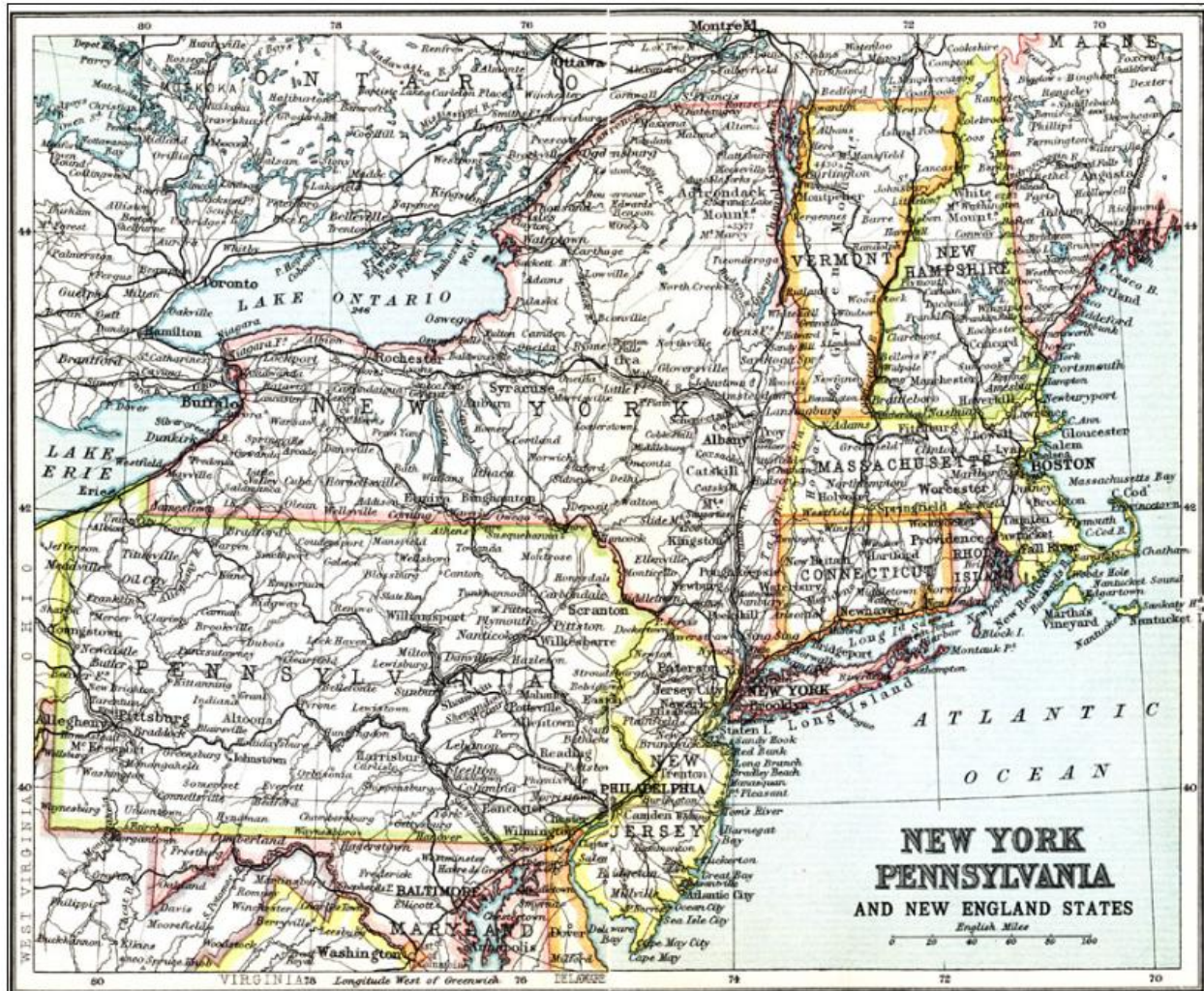
- Class participation in discussions
- Worksheet from photo analysis
- Reflection Activity – See suggested grading rubric.



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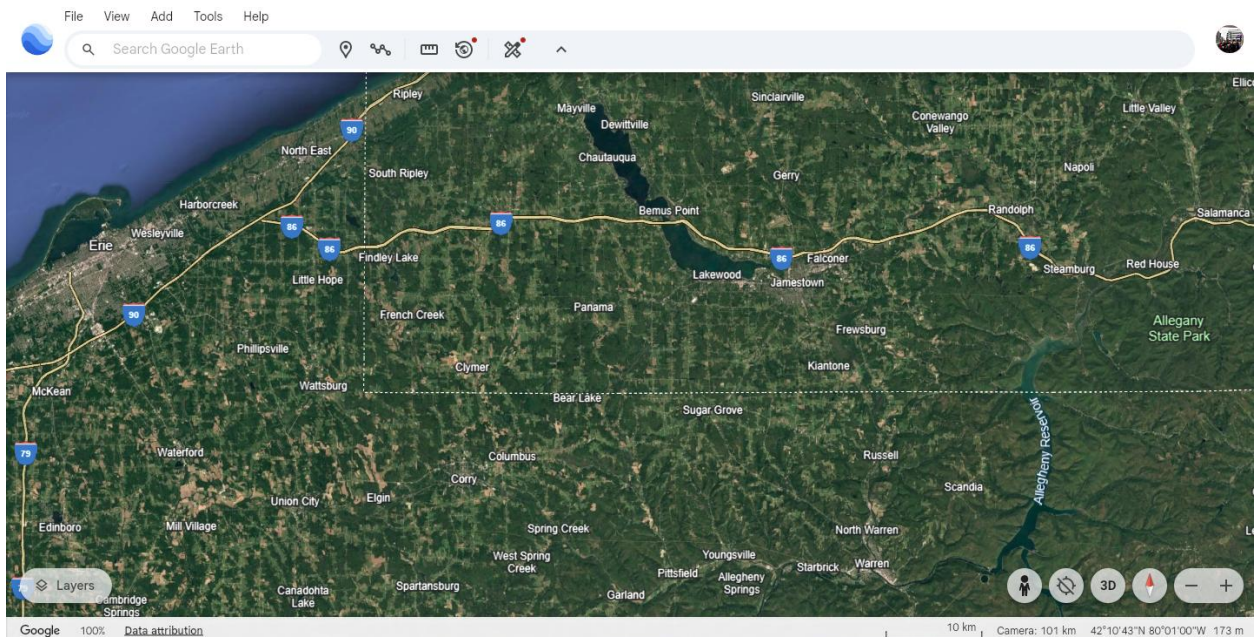
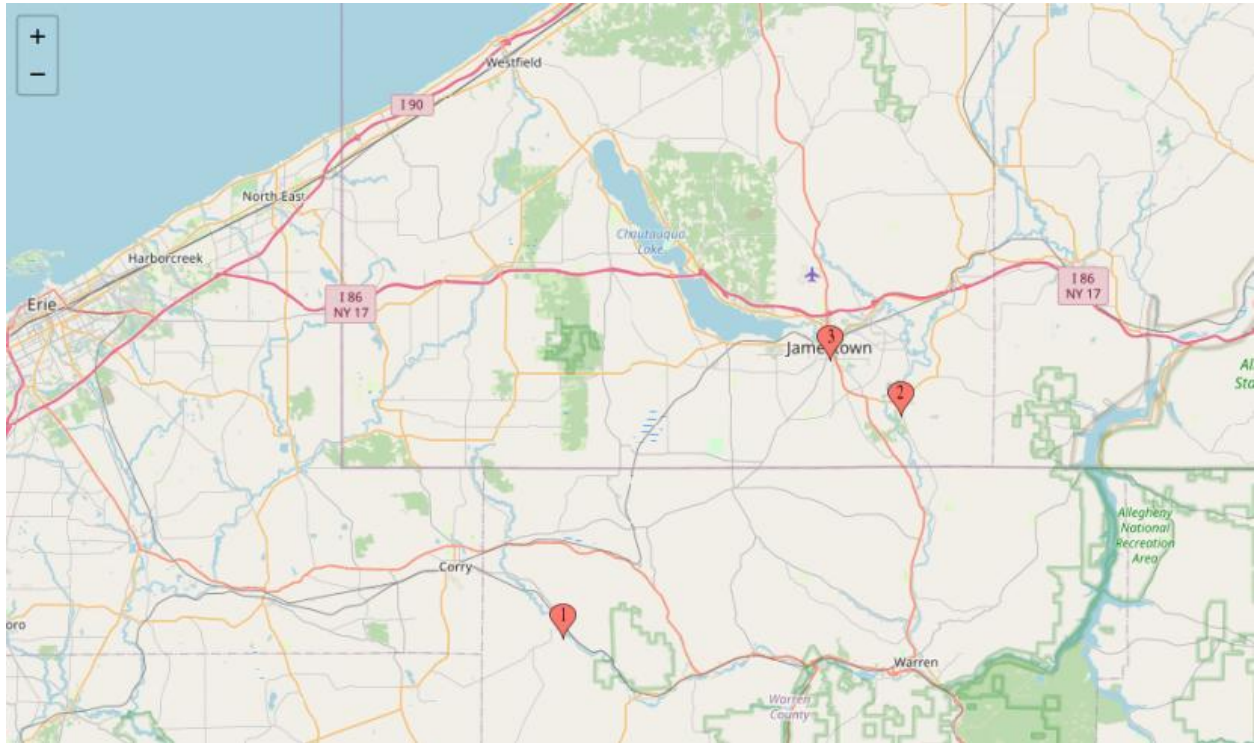
New York, Pennsylvania, and New England States, 1911





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Photo Analysis Worksheet: Life in Small-Town America (1890-1920)

Name: _____ Date: _____

Instructions:

Study the historical photograph assigned to your group. Use the questions below to analyze what life was like in Spring Creek, PA; Frewsburg, NY; or Jamestown, NY during Robert H. Jackson's childhood.

Basic Information

1. What town is shown in the photograph?

2. What year (or estimated time period) do you think this photo was taken?

Observations

3. What types of buildings or structures do you see?

4. What kind of transportation is visible (if any)?

5. What do people appear to be doing?

6. What does this photo tell you about work or businesses in this town?

Drawing Conclusions

7. How do you think daily life in this town was different from today?

8. What challenges might people in this town have faced?

9. If Robert H. Jackson grew up in this environment, how might it have shaped his values and future career?

Compare & Discuss

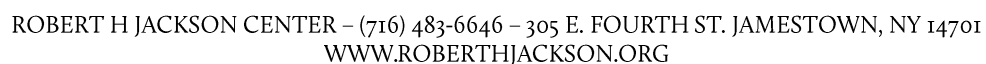
After completing this worksheet, discuss your findings with your classmates.

Be ready to share:

- One interesting detail you noticed in the photograph
- One question the photograph made you ask
- One comparison between Jackson's time and today



A sepia-toned photograph of the Spring Creek Hotel, a two-story wooden building with a porch, situated in a rural landscape. The hotel is surrounded by trees and a dirt road. In the background, a hillside is visible. The text "SPRING CREEK HOTEL" is visible on the building's facade. A small sign on the right side of the image reads "VASEL PHOTO".





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Teacher Resource: Excerpts from Gail Jarrow, *Robert H. Jackson: New Deal Lawyer, Supreme Court Justice, Nuremberg Prosecutor* (Calkins Creek, 2008)

“The United States was changing into an industrial nation of factories, large companies, and growing cities. But rural Spring Creek, Pennsylvania, remained much the way it had been when Robert’s great-grandfather Elijah built the farmhouse next to Brokenstraw Creek.

Elijah Jackson was one of the first settlers in the forests of northwestern Pennsylvania near Lake Erie after the Revolutionary War. He and his sons cut down trees on the farm and sold the lumber.”

“Uncle William showed Robert the springs where they could get a fresh, cold drink of water. He entertained his nephew with stories about the Indians living in the area when the Jacksons first settled there.

As they strolled along the Brokenstraw Creek, Uncle William told of his adventures taking lumber from the farm down the creek on a raft to the Allegheny River. Robert loved hearing how Uncle William had piloted the raft all the way to Pittsburgh to sell the lumber, then hiked more than a hundred miles back home.

Uncle William had been Spring Creek’s justice of the peace for thirty years, and neighbors regularly came by the house for legal advice. Robert first heard about courts and trials from him.

Robert and his sister Ella, two years younger, were expected to help their mother...

...Robert collected wood for the stove, churned butter, weeded the garden, and fed the chickens and hogs. He knew how to do the milking, but he tried to get out of that chore...

...When Robert was five, his father decided that he couldn’t earn a good living from the farm anymore. The best timber had been cut down and there wasn’t enough lumber to sell...

...He set his eye on Frewsburg, New York, thirty miles north of Spring Creek. The village of about five hundred people had dirt streets, wooden sidewalks, and a railroad station.”

“After living on the farm, Robert thought the village was exciting. Local farmers drove their horse-drawn wagons into town to visit the stores and businesses, and trains passed through.



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Teacher Resource: Background information about life in 1890-1920 in small-town America

Overview: Between 1890 and 1920, small towns in rural Pennsylvania and western New York were shaped by agriculture, industry, transportation, and community life. While urban centers grew rapidly during this period, towns like Spring Creek, Frewsburg, and Jamestown maintained close-knit communities with traditional values, strong civic participation, and evolving economic opportunities.

Economy & Daily Life:

- Agriculture & Industry
 - o In rural areas like Spring Creek and Frewsburg, many families relied on farming, lumber, and small-scale industry
 - o In Jamestown, furniture manufacturing was a key industry, bringing jobs and economic stability
 - o Local blacksmiths, general stores, and mills played a central role in daily life
- Work & Wages
 - o Most men worked in farming, factories, or skilled trades, while women often worked at home, in schools, or as domestic workers
 - o Child labor was common, young boys might work in sawmills, on farms, or deliver newspapers

Transportation & Communication:

- Railroads & Roads
 - o Travel was slow compared to today, railroads connected Jamestown to larger cities like Buffalo and Albany, while travel of smaller towns was by horse and buggy
 - o By the early 1900s, automobiles started appearing, but most roads were unpaved, making travel difficult
- Mail & Newspapers
 - o Newspapers were the main source of information, often publishing local and national news side by side
 - o Letters and postcards were common, as telephones were still rare in many rural homes

Education & Social Life:

- Schools



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- In rural areas, one-room schoolhouses were still common. Students of all ages learned together, focusing on reading, writing, and arithmetic
- In towns like Jamestown, students had access to more structured education, and high school attendance became more common
- Community & Entertainment
 - Churches were central to community life for most people, serving as social hubs
 - Families would gather together in the evenings for storytelling, reading, music, or radio programs

Social Changes & Values:

- Civic Participation
 - Community involvement was a cornerstone of small-town life
 - Local leaders often shaped town policies, and town meetings were important for decision-making
 - Young people were expected to contribute to family and community life from an early age
- Changing Roles for Women
 - The Progressive Era brought changes in women's rights, including increased participation in education and activism
 - In 1920, the 19th Amendment granted women the right to vote, influencing political engagement in small towns

Relevance to Robert H. Jackson:

- Jackson's upbringing in Spring Creek, Frewsburg, and Jamestown emphasized the value of education, hard work, and personal responsibility
- His experiences in a small town shaped his belief in civic duty and justice
- Limited formal schooling in Spring Creek and a small school in Frewsburg led Jackson to seek opportunities for additional education in Jamestown. This decision would influence his choice in a legal career.

Discussion Questions:

1. How did small-town life shape a person's opportunities?
2. What were the differences between life in Spring Creek, Frewsburg, and Jamestown?
3. What aspects of life seem most different from today? What has stayed the same?



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ROBERT H JACKSON CENTER – (716) 483-6646 – 305 E. FOURTH ST. JAMESTOWN, NY 14701
WWW.ROBERTHJACKSON.ORG



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Grading Rubric for Reflection Activity

Criteria	Excellent (4 Points)	Good (3 Points)	Fair (2 Points)	Needs Improvement (1 Point)
Historical Accuracy	All posts accurately reflect historical events, figures, and contexts relevant to Jackson's era.	Most posts are historically accurate, with minor inaccuracies that don't detract from overall understanding.	Some posts contain historical inaccuracies or anachronisms that affect the credibility of the content.	Posts show a lack of historical understanding with significant inaccuracies.
Creativity & Engagement	Posts are exceptionally creative, engaging, and demonstrate a deep understanding of Jackson's perspective.	Posts are creative and engaging, showing a good understanding of Jackson's viewpoint.	Posts show some creativity but may lack depth or engagement.	Posts are unoriginal and fail to engage, showing minimal effort.
Clarity & Organization	Posts are well-written, clear, and organized, effectively conveying the intended message.	Posts are clear and organized, with minor issues that don't hinder understanding.	Some posts are unclear or poorly organized, making the message difficult to follow.	Posts are poorly written and disorganized, hindering comprehension.
Use of Multimedia (if applicable)	Effectively integrates images or other media to enhance the narrative and engage the audience.	Uses media appropriately, though it may not significantly enhance the narrative.	Media use is minimal or somewhat disconnected from the content.	Little to no use of media, or media used detracts from the narrative.

Total ____/ 16 points