
ANALYZING LOCAL HISTORY

Local News and the Progressive Era, 1890s-1920s

GRADE LEVEL

9-12

SUBJECT AREAS

History/Social Studies- US History

History/Social Studies- World History

English/Language Arts- Journalism

English/Language Arts- Media Literacy

LEARNING OUTCOMES

To develop students' skills in:

- Responding Critically to political and social movements of the 1890s-1920s
- Media literacy (through research and primary/secondary source documents)
- Evaluating and synthesizing ideas
- Understanding New Hampshire residents' response to various Progressive Era movements

OBJECTIVES

1. Read and analyze newspaper articles, magazine articles, town reports, and early state histories to determine what information was available to Cheshire County residents about
 - a. women's suffrage,
 - b. child welfare reform,
 - c. labor reform and conditions of the working class
 - d. American progress
 - e. Temperance
2. Identify political, social, and economic factors that may have influenced local news coverage of the period.
3. Make connections between historical events and current events.

BACKGROUND

Progressives at the turn of the 20th century struggled to resolve many of America's problems that had resulted from the US becoming a modern-industrial society. Progressives were diverse because progressivism included many political, social and economic movements. It's important to recognize that some progressive reformers fought for political reform but not all. Some people wanted to solve social ills in their communities or state. Some wanted to end racism and sexism, while other progressives were

racist and/or sexist. Some wanted to lift their neighbors out of poverty while others blamed the poor for their hardship. While the era we study extends between the 1890s-1920s, there were progressive reforms prior to that timeframe and afterwards.

ACTIVITY 1: DEFINING THE ERA

Split students up into small groups of three to four. Have them read **Theodore Roosevelt's 1912 speech** (abbreviated) *Who is a Progressive?* as well as the **1907 NH Women's Suffrage Association report**. Have students answer the following questions and then discuss their answers as a group.

Who were the Progressives?

What did they believe?

What reforms did they propose?

What is your definition of progressivism?

Next, assign each group a reform movement. Pass out reform movement photographs. Ask students to analyze the photographs and postcards found in their individual packets using the **photograph/postcard worksheet** provided. Each group should then report to the class what they have observed.

ACTIVITY 2: GETTING LOCAL

Ask students:

What do you think people from our NH town knew about Progressive Reform movements occurring throughout the country and around the world?

How do you think local people participated in progressive era movements?

Explain that they become amateur historians and will be investigating what their local community knew about Progressive Era events and how they may have participated on a local, state-wide, or even national scale.

OPTION 1: OFF-SITE RESEARCH

If you would like to take students to a library or historical society to do additional research on their topic, it is a good idea to make arrangements in advance. Historical societies often need time to locate and pull out related materials. Libraries often have local newspapers on microfilm; it is often easiest to do microfilm research in groups of 2 over a period of time. Be sure to guide students on how to use a microfilm reader and how to site a newspaper article. Students may want to use a smartphone to photograph a document or microfilmed article and then use their phones to enlarge the image.

OPTION 2: CLASSROOM RESEARCH: USE OF HSCC PACKETS

Pass out the document packets to each group according to the reform movement they have been assigned. Have students read through the materials while completing a **critical analysis worksheet** for each article.

Collectively, what does this packet tell you about your assigned progressive reform movement?

What did you hope to find? What was missing? What surprised you?

Students can do further research on national reform movements to contextualize the primary source information in their packets. How did your local community compare to national level reform movements?

ACTIVITY 3: CREATIVE WRITING

INVESTIGATIVE NEWS REPORTING

Have students investigate a social or political movement in our nation today.

1. What information is available to Americans today about events as they are happening?
2. What does this news tell you about America's response to these events? To New Hampshire's response? To our community's response?
3. How does access to information influence our response to news today?

WRITE A FICTIONAL LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Imagine you're a turn-of-the 20th century student reading about the reform movement you were assigned in class? Write a *Letter to the Editor* that explains your position on the topic within your own community.

Consider your position and why you are writing to the newspaper. Perhaps you are angry about something and want others to know it; you think that an issue is so important that you have to speak out; you are part of a group who's strategy is to persuade others to take a specific action.

Use the following format for your letter to the editor.

1. OPEN THE LETTER WITH A SIMPLE SALUTATION. A simple "To the Editor" is sufficient.
2. GRAB THE READER'S ATTENTION. Your opening sentence is very important. It should tell readers what you're writing about, and make them want to read more.
3. EXPLAIN WHAT THE LETTER IS ABOUT AT THE START. Throughout your letter, remember the rule: Be quick, Be concise, and then Be quiet. Don't make the editor or the general public wait to find out what you want to say. Tell them your key point at the beginning.
4. EXPLAIN WHY THE ISSUE IS IMPORTANT. The general public probably doesn't share your background or the interest. Explain the issue and its importance simply. Use plain language that most people will understand.
5. STATE YOUR OPINION ABOUT WHAT SHOULD BE DONE. Be specific. And the more good reasons you can give to back up your suggestions, the better.
6. KEEP IT BRIEF. Generally, shorter letters have a better chance of being published. So go back over your letter and see if anything can be cut or condensed
7. SIGN THE LETTER. Be sure to write your full name and town.

ACTIVITY 4: CLASS DISCUSSION

At the conclusion of these activities, lead a class discussion about progressive era reforms and the role of the government vs. the people.

Here are some questions that may help:

1. How did Progressives attempt to save America from itself?
2. How did NH react to/involve themselves in national reform movements?
3. Did their efforts make a lasting impact on NH?
4. Can we draw parallels between the reaction to progressive reforms of the turn-of-the-20th century and what's happening in our country today?