Life In America 1800

Synopsis

The United States began as a largely rural nation, with most people living on farms or in small communities near farmland. In 1800, Thomas Jefferson was president, Philadelphia boasted the largest city population – some 41,000 residents – and 90% of Americans still lived the rural life. It was a time of growth and change, as the emerging new nation began to develop a culture and way of life that was truly its own. The new industrial machinery, style of work, and ideology of England’s Industrial Revolution had not yet taken firm hold in the U.S. Most of the things people bought were imported or made in the home or in small shops. In this program, viewers are invited to follow members of the Wilson family through a typical day, to see where and how they live, learn of their daily activities, and understand the challenges and rewards of rural life in the 1800s. This intriguing program provides valuable insights to help students more clearly understand where we are today and how we got here.

Questions to ask after viewing

1. In 1800, who was president of the United States? (Thomas Jefferson)
2. What percentage of the population lived on farms or in rural communities? (about 90%)
3. How did people bathe on a daily and weekly basis? (During the week, they used warm water poured into a washstand to bathe as best they could. Then once a week, on Saturday night, they would take a full, hot bath in a tub.)
4. How was soap made? (Ashes from the fire were placed outside in a tub; rainwater poured over the ashes dripped through to form lye water; this was boiled with waste cooking grease to form soap.)
5. Why was the fire kept burning in the kitchen, even during summer? (Starting a fire was difficult, and fire was a daily necessity.)
6. What is bartering and why was it frequently used? (Bartering is the exchange of your own goods or services for other goods and services you need. It was frequently used because hard cash for making purchases was difficult to come by at that time.)
7. Why was the work of the town blacksmith so highly valued in 1800? (He made and repaired tools – important items to daily life and farming. He also made horseshoes – important at a time when horses were the main means of transportation and required for heavy farm labor.)
8. One-room schoolhouses appeared everywhere in America following what war? (the Revolutionary War)
9. Why was travel so difficult at that time in history? (Stagecoaches were cramped and uncomfortable; roads were muddy, and full of ruts and holes; the coach was often in danger of tipping over; fairly short trips by today’s standards took many days to complete.)
10. What were some typical evening family activities? (reading the newspaper, going over the household accounts, knitting, reading books, doing homework, playing checkers, making clothes for a doll)
Annotation
In 1800, Thomas Jefferson was president, Philadelphia boasted the largest city population, and 90% of Americans still lived the rural life. It was a time of growth and change, as the emerging new nation began to develop a culture and way of life that was truly its own. This intriguing program provides valuable insights into the daily activities of a typical American family, and paints a rich portrait of the challenges and rewards of rural life in the 1800s.

Length
16 Minutes

Subject Areas
Social Studies, American History

Audience Level
Grades 4-12, Adult

Catalog Number
4146-EN-VID

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Discussion Guide

Life In America 1800

Objectives
- To provide insight into the pattern of everyday life in rural America of the 1800s
- To demonstrate the challenges encountered in daily living
- To examine the various domestic, business and social roles of men and women during this period
- To present an overall portrait of life in the emerging new nation