

Communication and Technology: Then and Now

Background:

The world that formed Harry Truman was vastly different from the one he shaped as president. He was born in Lamar, Missouri, in 1884. He lived on farms until he was six where his father plowed the fields with horses. His family had no electricity or running water. Without indoor plumbing, rural households, like Harry's, had to use outdoor water wells and buckets to bring water into the house. They used chamber pots and outhouses. For heat, rural Missourians needed to chop wood to use in wood-burning stoves. In place of electricity they used candles and oil lamps. There were no cars or paved roads.

Travel from the Grandview farm to Independence took hours by horse and buggy or by train. Like most Americans in the 1880s, the Trumans wrote letters to communicate with friends and relatives. Their household did not have a telephone, until much later. During their courtship, Harry wrote hundreds of letters to Bess. They had to communicate without text messaging, e-mail, or social media. Handwriting letters was their primary way of keeping in touch. Harry needed stationery, envelopes, stamps, pens, and ink. All needed to be bought in town and trips into town were rare.

The Trumans enjoyed natural gas for heat and finally had indoor plumbing in their home for the first time after moving to the city where it was more available. They did eventually get telephones but they didn't work very well. Harry was about 27 years old in 1914 when he purchased his first car. This made the trips to see Bess easier but still he didn't have paved roads. The roads could be very muddy and rough.

Standard:

SS.5.E (3,4,5) Describe, analyze and/or evaluate how changes in communication and transportation technologies affect people's lives.

4.TS.7.B.b Create products such as maps, graphs, timelines, charts, models, diagrams, etc. to communicate information and understanding

Materials Needed:

Photographs (5)

Timeline

Photograph analysis:

https://www.archives.gov/files/education/lessons/worksheets/photo_analysis_worksheet_novice.pdf

Stationery/envelopes

Vocabulary:

Chamber pot - a bowl kept in a bedroom and used as a toilet at night

Outhouse - an outbuilding containing a toilet, typically with no plumbing

blotty ink - dipped pen in ink and it would spatter or smear leaving stains and unwanted marks

Bushel - a measure of capacity equal to 64 US pints

Invest - time or money into something, hoping that there will be returns greater than what was originally put in.

Stationery - writing paper, especially with matching envelopes.

Assessment:

Using 4 facts from activity 1 and 2 students will write a letter to their grandparents on stationery telling them what they learned about how things have changed between the 1900's and 2000's. Students should include 3 questions to ask what it was like when their grandparents were growing up.

Procedure:

1. Discuss background information
2. Activity 1: Analyze photos, complete chart
3. Activity 2: Read excerpt from letter: use math to answer questions about cost/earnings

Activity 1: Using Photo Analysis Worksheet, background information and photos students will compare how life has changed from when Harry was young and lived on the farm to their lives today. (5 photos - 5 groups)

Compare and contrast travel, communication, heat, plumbing and electricity then chart the difference between then and now.

Discussion questions:

1. What did a day look like for Harry when he lived on the farm in 1890?

- How did his family heat the house? (chop and haul wood)
- How did they get light? (make candles, purchase oil for oil lamps,)
- How did they get water to cook with, brush their teeth? (use bucket outside and carry into the house)
- How did they take a bath? (carry several buckets in to heat up then pour into tub and several family members would share water)
- Where did they go to the bathroom? (chamber pot, outhouse)
- How did they communicate with friends and family? (letters: needed paper, ink, envelope, stamps to mail letter and limited travel)

- What did they do for groceries? (plow, plant seeds, harvest, cook and trade with neighbors, travel to grocery store)
- How did they travel? (horse and buggy, train and streetcar)

2. Ask students to think about how their life is different from Harry's life. How is it the same? Draw or list how these things were then and now below on the chart.

Then

Now

Light		
Heat		
Cooking		
Bathroom		
Water		
Bath		
Grocery Store		
Talk to friends and family		



Mary Jane Truman (right) and two unidentified women at the well on the Truman Farm, 1906. <https://www.trumanlibrary.gov/photograph-records/84-12-09>



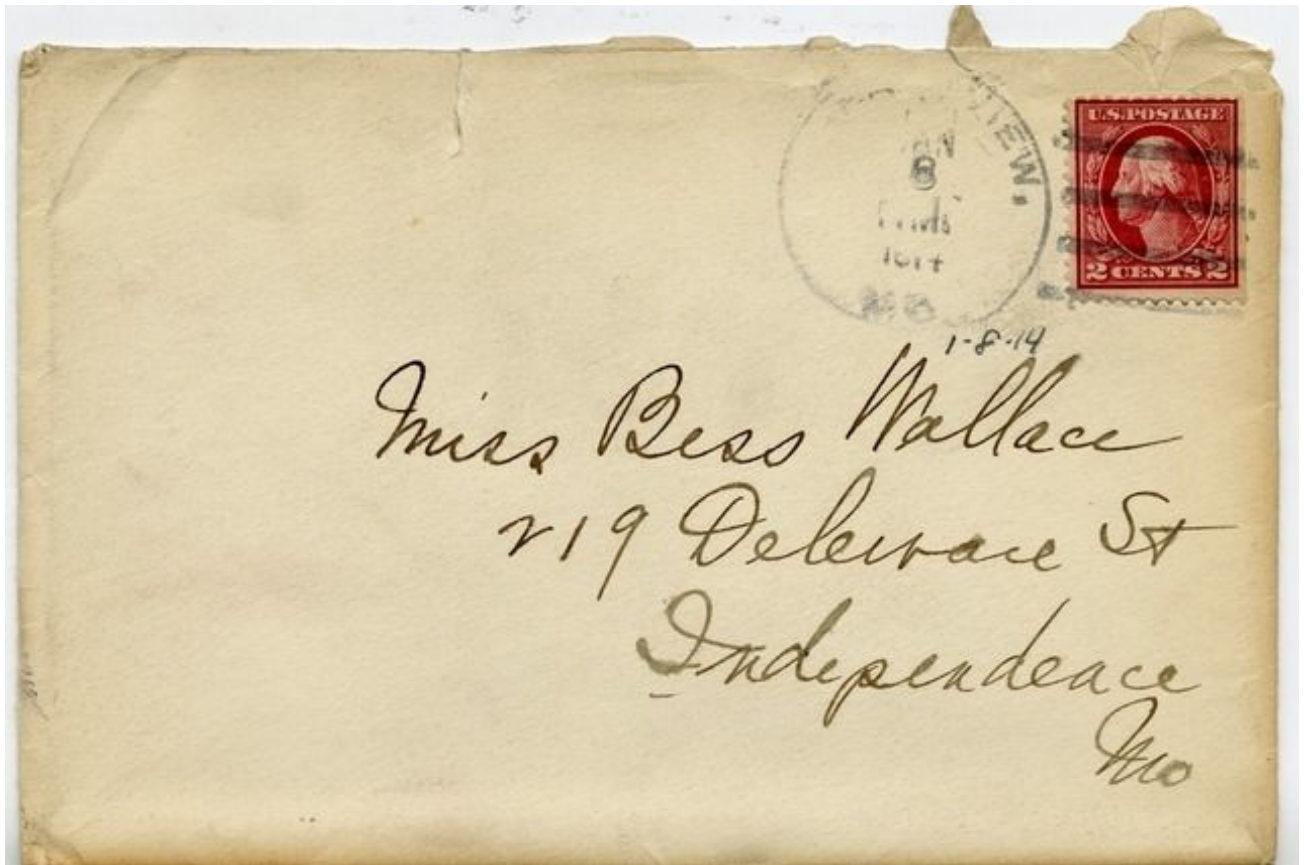
Grandview Missouri Main Street. 1911

<https://www.trumanlibrary.gov/photograph-records/62-22>

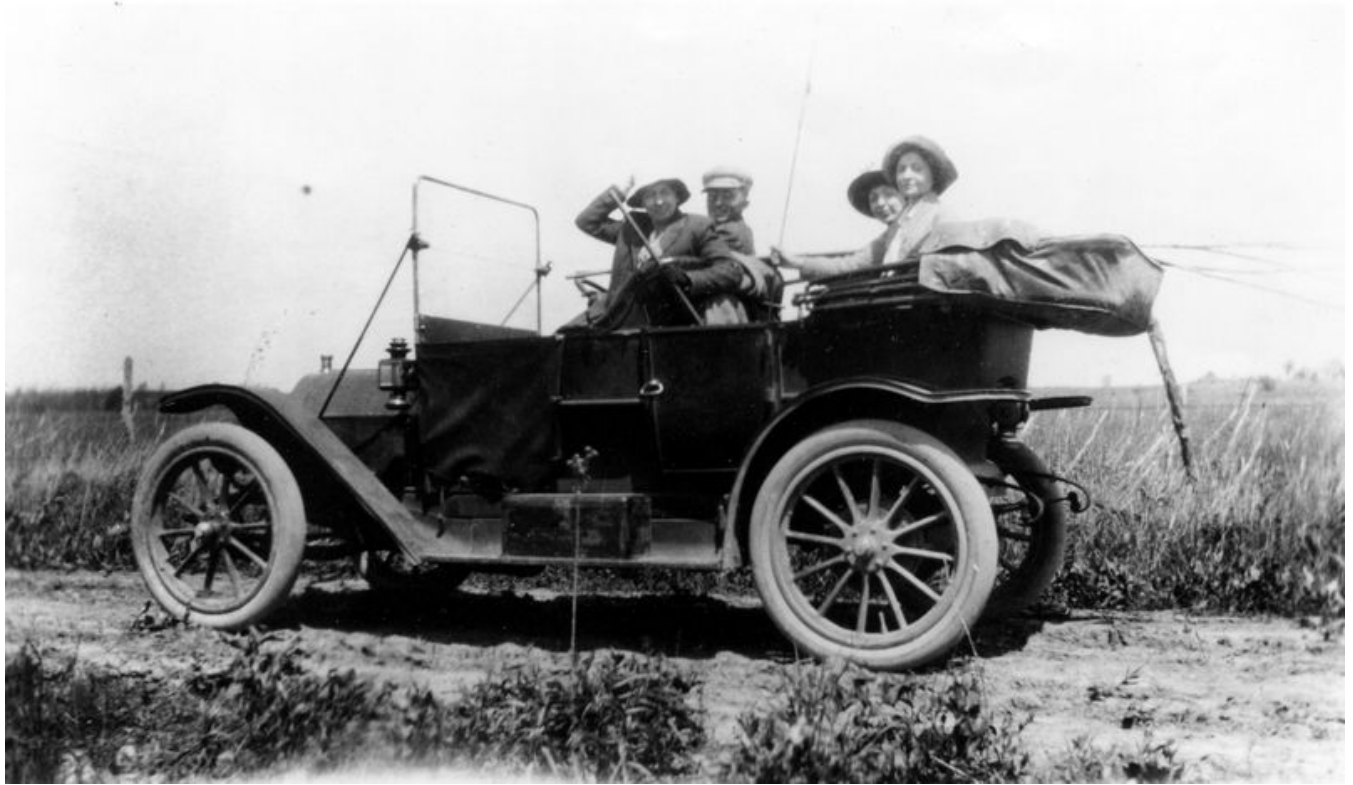


In front of the house, left to right: Martha Ellen Truman, Harry Truman's mother; Harriet Louisa Gregg Young, Truman's grandmother; and a young Harry S. Truman in farm clothes. 1907.

<https://www.trumanlibrary.gov/photograph-records/84-13>



Envelope from a letter sent by Harry Truman (from Grandview) to Bess Wallace, 1914



From left to right: Bess Wallace, Harry S. Truman, Nellie Noland, and Mary Jane Truman are riding in Harry S. Truman's Stafford car, probably around the Grandview farm area. Mary Jane appears to be holding a fishing pole. 1915.
<https://www.trumanlibrary.gov/photograph-records/84-37>

Activity 2: Read and discuss excerpt from a letter Harry wrote to Bess on November 6, 1912. Students should understand that it requires ink, pen, stamps, stationery, and envelopes in order to write a letter to communicate with Bess. Each of these cost money so he had to decide how to spend his money.

“This is the most blotty ink I ever saw. If I had any more stationery I'd make a new start but this is all I can find. Mary took hers to town. I fear I'm going to have to finish up on toilet paper. I use a good envelope though and no one will know what's inside. I'll try and invest in some stationery when I go to town again. I forgot it this time and beside I blew myself to things I like better this time. I wish I could find a bargain in men's paper somewhere. I'd buy a bushel or so. I have envelopes enough to trade for a whole box of paper.”

out of him and that ~~was~~ as he's pulled them back everything will be all right. I told him to do the job up in a hurry as I had no time at this season to be going to see him. He told me that if I was going to carry any more cows on my land to begin when they were calves and then let them grow up thus raising a little more weight every day and then I wouldn't get jerked in two.

This is hay day since enough we have a lot cut down and will cut a lot more today then business begins since enough. I suppose I'll stand around and look on while the show goes on. It'll sure add to my reputation as a worker in the community. I wish Ethel could see me. Would she ^{not} mean a pleased I told you so expression.

I suppose you'll have a good time this week playing tennis. It's evidently not going to rain because we have hay down. My reputation as a

Harry and his family would travel into town to buy some of the things they needed. Much like we do today they would have to decide how much money they had and what they could buy for their needs. The amount of money people made for work then and now is much different but so was the cost of things. Answer the questions below and compare the difference from then and now.

Answer key: 1. .17/.22 2. 6.8/7.81 3. 13.60 4. 2.72 day/varies 5. 5.88 6. 5.88/6.18
hours 7. varies

** Discuss rounding up or down

Life of American Workers in 1915

<https://www.bls.gov/opub/mlr/2016/article/the-life-of-american-workers-in-1915.htm>

1901 Average pay \$0.34 per hour
2020 Average pay \$ 12.12 per hour

<u>1901</u>		<u>2020</u>	
Postage	.02	Postage	.55
Doctor Visit	2.00	Doctor Visit	75.00
Bread	.05	Bread	2.08
Milk	.36	Milk	3.37
Eggs	.37	Eggs	2.57
Hershey Candy Bar	.05	Hershey Candy Bar	1.55

1. How many stamps can you buy with 1 hour of work?

1901 _____ 2020 _____

2. How many candy bars can you buy with 1 hour of work?

1901 _____ 2020 _____

3. How much could Harry make in a 40 hour week in 1901? _____

4. How would you decide to spend your money? Make a list of the things you could buy for 8 hours worth of work in 1901?

5. How many hours would Harry need to work to make \$2.00? _____

6. How long would you need to work to pay for a doctor visit? 1901 _____

2020 _____

7. How has the earnings and cost changed from 1901 to 2020? _____
