

# A Teacher's Guide

*To*



[www.lifeinwesternpa.org](http://www.lifeinwesternpa.org)

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Library & Archives

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IN ASSOCIATION WITH THE SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION

# Life in Western Pennsylvania Website: A Resource Guide for Teachers



## What is it?

The website provides a visual record of changes in economic, social, and environmental life in the region as depicted in the evolving technology of photography. The time period covered in the website begins with the announcement in the *Pittsburgh Gazette* of the invention of a chemical process by Louis Daguerre. This process would later become known to the world as photography and would be used by generations of photographers to explore life and changes in Western Pennsylvania. "Life in Western Pennsylvania 1840-1970" is organized into three major categories:

- 1) Searchable database
- 2) Timeline
- 3) Section on preservation and identification of photographs.

There are also sections on student activities, picture puzzles, e-cards, a teacher's guide, and project documentation.

All photographs are accompanied by descriptions that provides context and background. Through this website, students can examine the visual history of Western Pennsylvania beginning in 1840, including the Civil War era, industrial expansion, social history, the world wars, and the renaissance of Pittsburgh.

# HOW TO USE IN THE CLASSROOM

Educators may use this website to enrich curriculum and support classroom activities. The website can provide a gateway for research projects and in-class assignments in a variety of subjects. Its complement of visual records with accompanying text allows students to utilize multiple skills and aptitudes, as well as provide context for studying the community in which they are living and learning.

Motivation to learn can increase when the history of life in the region comes alive, and students share the results of their research with family and friends. Involving extended family members and members of the community through supplemental oral and photographic history projects can be a great way to enhance learning through the process of discovery which provides identity in place and time.

## Content Areas and Grade Levels

The “Life in Western Pennsylvania 1840-1970” website covers a broad range of subject areas and is suitable for cross-disciplinary studies. Some of the major content areas include **Art and Photography, History and Social Studies, Science and Technology, and Literature.**



# Suggestions for Teachers

The website is a unique source of inspiration for research projects for secondary school students. While the website is an excellent starting place for research, students should be encouraged to visit the History Center's Library & Archives. Collections include more than a half million photographs and the largest collection of books, maps, and archives documenting Western Pennsylvania history in the area. Students should also be encouraged to visit their local libraries, as well as use other online resources including:

Library & Archives catalog of the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania (<http://pghhistory.org>).

Historic Pittsburgh website (<http://digital.library.pitt.edu/pittsburgh>).

History Center Affiliates Program (<http://www.historycenteraffiliates.org>).

Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh (<http://www.clpgh.org>).

Pittsburgh History and Landmarks (<http://www.phlf.org>).

WQED multimedia education resource center (<http://www.wqed.org>).

Explore PA history (<http://www.explorePAhistory.com>).

## Possible projects include:

- **An introductory research project designed to familiarize students with resources available to them on the “Life in Western Pennsylvania” website.** Teachers may devise questions like the ones suggested in subject areas below. Students can be encouraged to execute keyword searches or to browse the subject areas on the site to find answers to the questions posed.
- **A research or term paper in any subject area.** Topic areas may be suggested or assigned based on photographs and information on the website. Students may choose their own topics based on browsing the website. Questions listed under various subject areas below should arouse curiosity and lead students to expanded research on the website and in other local and regional sources.
- **A thematic collage using appropriate photos from the website** (and elsewhere if research is extended to other sources). The collage could be accompanied by supplementary informative graphics and text. Refer to subject areas for questions which might suggest themes for a collage.
- **A poem or a book of poetry inspired by dramatic photos in the collection.** Photographs and information can inspire creative writing, as well as research writing.
- **A biographical essay suggested by photos and supplemented by research.** The website includes photos of many people in the Western Pennsylvania region, both humble and famous, who might inspire a student to do a creative biography.
- **An original story based on some of the photos of people and their lives during various eras in the history of Western Pennsylvania.** Excellent fiction often grows out of factual material. Students could also use archival material to inspire a brief fictional account or a complete short story.

# Subject Areas

These areas have been chosen as examples of ways in which the website may be categorized for the purpose of planning research and classroom projects. Suggested research questions are included under each subject area. The questions are based upon material included in the website or material that can be found by using the History Center Library & Archives as well as local libraries and other online sources mentioned above.

## HISTORY AND SOCIAL STUDIES

Students can research changes in social and economic life as well as see physical changes to the environment, architecture, and geography of the region using the images and text on the website. One can imagine research projects or in-class activities in such subject areas as U.S. history, economics, or world cultures at every grade level.

Suggested activities range from simple identification and knowledge-based activities dealing with neighborhoods. Upper grade levels could concentrate on more advanced analysis, prediction, and critical thinking activities.

The website can serve as an entry point for research activities and papers and as a supplement to class discussions and presentations. Pittsburgh and Western Pennsylvania history is often taught as a supplement to other courses in social studies. This site is well suited to complement teaching regional history and culture. It can be used as a preparatory tool for field trips and associated activities on a variety of topics ranging from biography to places and images that evoke particular time periods and themes being covered in a unit of study.



## ■ Pittsburgh History

Comedians once made jokes on the radio, on TV, and in the movies about Pittsburgh and its dirty, smoggy skyline. People who had visited the city often sneered at the town. Few people wanted to visit the city and everybody called it “the Smoky City.” Then things changed. A few years ago Pittsburgh was named America’s “most livable city.” How did that change take place?



Incorporated in 1944, under the direction of Richard K. Mellon, Robert Doherty, Mayor David L. Lawrence and Allegheny County commissioners, the Allegheny Conference on Community Development began making long range plans for the future development of the region. Later, older private civic organizations, major corporations and other agencies of the region provided leadership and financial backing.

### ***Research questions:***

When did the idea of a renaissance for the city of Pittsburgh begin?

What industrialists and politicians were most responsible for the city’s renaissance?

What major fire in downtown Pittsburgh played a major role and hastened the demolition of buildings and rail yards?

What were some of the sources of funds to pay for Pittsburgh’s “Renaissance”?

What did the city look like before redevelopment?

What were the city’s only skyscrapers before redevelopment? Can you list the city’s skyscrapers in order from highest to lowest? How many floors do they have?

Where was the Nixon Theatre located in 1950? What is there now?

How many department stores were in downtown Pittsburgh before 1960? What were they?

What was the first movie theater in the United States?

What were some of the stores or buildings which stood where PNC Plaza now stands?

Where is the Dollar Savings Bank located? What year was it founded?

What company originally financed most of Gateway Center?

## ■ Mountains, Roads and Bridges

Pittsburgh is known for its unusual topography. Its hills and rivers have made transportation a challenge for highway builders and public transportation authorities. Known as “the city of bridges,” Pittsburgh can boast many bridges which are considered engineering masterpieces. Highway building has required much excavation and the construction of tunnels through mountainous terrain. Many fascinating stories can be told about the network of roads, tunnels, and bridges that link the parts of Pittsburgh.



### ***Research questions***

Before 1927, what were the longest underground passenger tunnels in the world permitting the use of gasoline vehicles?

What Pittsburgh bridge was designed by the same man who designed the Brooklyn Bridge?

What is the highest bridge in Allegheny County? What building material was used for its construction?

Approximately how many bridges are in Allegheny County?

Where were the Point Bridge and the Manchester Bridge located?

What was “the bridge to nowhere”?

Where does the Allegheny River begin? How many locks and dams are on the Allegheny River?

Where does the Monongahela River begin? How many locks and dams are on the Monongahela River?

How many inclines operated in Pittsburgh in the early 20th century?

Where was “the hump” in downtown Pittsburgh?

What is the longest street in Pittsburgh?

## SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Science classes can access the website during discussions of the practical applications of various kinds of science. Activities and projects centered on the development and evolution of photography can provide a window into the understanding of the processes used in creating photographic images over the years. Additional scientific subjects allow for exploration in the areas of medicine, metallurgy, electricity, aviation, and others.

### ■ Scientific Innovations and Personalities

Pittsburgh today is considered a center of science and technology. It has a long tradition of noteworthy accomplishments in architecture, medicine, metallurgy, robotics, and other fields. Today Carnegie-Mellon University leads the world in robotics, and the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center is one of the finest hospitals and research facilities in the world. Learning about any one of these fields could lead to an interesting research paper filled with fascinating details.

#### ***Research questions***

In what hospital were the laboratories where the first polio vaccine was developed? What scientist is credited with developing the vaccine? When?

What physician has led in the development of organ transplant surgery? Where?

What Pittsburgher was a major pioneer in the development of aviation? What local high school is named for him? Can you tell his story?

Who pioneered in the development of aluminum? What company was founded by Arthur Vining Davis and Roy Hunt. How is that company linked to the architecture of Pittsburgh?

How many buildings in Pittsburgh are constructed from materials made by the company that owns the building? Name these buildings?

Can you name several industrialists who helped make Pittsburgh a center of steel making?

What natural resources were responsible for making Pittsburgh a steel making center?

What major exhibition at the 1893 Chicago World's Fair was designed by a Pittsburgher? Can you tell the story of this work?

What role did Pittsburgh play in the development of electricity? Who was the major Pittsburgh scientist and inventor in this field? What was his relationship to Thomas Edison? How and where is he still recognized in Pittsburgh today?

What was the original name of Carnegie Mellon University? What architect designed many of the buildings on the CMU campus?

Name two Pittsburghers who played a role in the science of astronomy. What was the contribution of John Brashear? Where is he buried?

Can you tell the story of the Allegheny Observatory? How many telescopes designed by Brashear are still in use at the Allegheny Observatory?



## LITERATURE

English classes can use the website to enhance the study of literature. Teachers can use the website to enable students to visualize neighborhoods or time periods discussed. In addition, stories taking place in other times and places can be supplemented by comparisons to life in the Pittsburgh region as captured in the website. Also, the website can be used as a research supplement in preparation for a field trip when studying a work and/or writer associated with this region.

### ■ Regional Writers and Writing

Western Pennsylvania has been the birthplace and inspiration for many authors, poets, and playwrights. These people and their works make fascinating subjects for essays, biographies, and even poetry.

#### ***Research questions:***

Who was Nellie Bly? What positions did she hold at a local Pittsburgh newspaper?

In what Pittsburgh high school did Willa Cather teach? What famous short story did she write about a troubled boy in Pittsburgh? What can you tell about her life in Pittsburgh?

What part of Pittsburgh did Annie Dillard write about? What is the title of her book about that neighborhood?

Who was Marc Connelly? What kind of literature did he write? What was his association with Pittsburgh?

Where did August Wilson grow up? What has he written? Can you tell the unusual story of how he became a writer?

Who wrote the book entitled *Silent Spring*? How did the book change attitudes throughout America and the world? What town in Allegheny County was the writer's home? Is there any recognition of her there today?

Who wrote *The Valley of Decision*? Why is the book significant to Pittsburghers?

What part of Pittsburgh was the home of writers Gertrude Stein and Mary Roberts Rinehart? What is that part of Pittsburgh called today? What kind of stories did Rinehart tell? Can you find her house in Pittsburgh today and where it is located?

Which member of the playwriting team of Kaufman and Hart was originally from Pittsburgh? What plays did he write? Can you find any other famous writers from the Southwestern Pennsylvania region?

## THE ARTS

Visual arts classes can find inspiration in the landscapes and architecture of the region as it changed and evolved over the years, while photography classes can explore the evolution of technique and technology. Other arts such as music and dance may also be explored through pictures of events or famous personalities. The website can be used for research activities or as an adjunct to other visual aids and graphics in the classroom.

### ■ Visual Arts

While the Southwestern Pennsylvania region has made enormous contributions in all the arts, a study of the visual arts such as painting and photography is especially rich in possibilities. The following research questions only begin to touch the richness of this field of inquiry.

#### ***Research questions:***

- What were some of the earliest photographic techniques for creating pictures?
- Can you explain these techniques? Can you find any photos which are examples of these kinds of photographic techniques?
- Can you tell the story of how early photographic techniques developed into modern photography? Can you create an illustrated essay using some of these old photos?
- Can you tell a pictorial story of Pittsburgh using dramatic photos of the city and its architecture?
- Can you create a pictorial story of engineering feats in Pittsburgh by using construction photographs of buildings and bridges?
- What are some of Pittsburgh's most spectacular landscape scenes?
- What did Pittsburgh look like in 1850? 1865? 1890? Can you create a pictorial essay on the changes in Pittsburgh's cityscape?
- Where did Mary Cassatt live before she went to Paris to become one of the most famous Impressionist artists?
- From what city high school did Romare Bearden graduate? Can you tell the story of Romare Bearden? What kind of paintings did he do?
- Who is Philip Pearlstein? What city schools and colleges did he attend? What other great Pittsburgh artist did he know?
- Who is Samuel Rosenberg? What kind of paintings did he do? Why is he considered to be important in depicting the life of Pittsburgh?
- Who is Henry Koerner? For what important national magazine was he a cover illustrator? What Pittsburgh bridge did he do a famous painting of? Did he do other Pittsburgh scenes?
- What is the Pittsburgh Center for the Arts? What was it originally called?
- Who was Henry Hornbostel? What is he most famous for?
- Who was H. H. Richardson? Where can you go in downtown Pittsburgh to see famous examples of his work?

## Note to teachers:

You are invited to make suggestions for additional ways to use the “Life in Western Pennsylvania 1840-1970” website. As students use the website for various projects, it is hoped that they will contribute innovative ideas for improving and expanding the site. Please contact Sharon Watson-Mauro, Director of Library Services, 1212 Smallman Street, Pittsburgh, PA 15222, 412-454-6369, or [swmauro@hswp.org](mailto:swmauro@hswp.org).



## [www.lifeinwesternpa.org](http://www.lifeinwesternpa.org)

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