

## Deciphering the Past

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What was school like in the early 1900s? We can learn a lot by looking at historical photographs!

Photographs are an important document that historians use to understand what everyday life was like for people in the past. By carefully studying the scenes and people in pictures, such as what they are wearing, what they are doing and the objects around them, we can learn a lot about how their daily lives were similar to or different from life today. Photographs are a primary source – just like a diary or letter – and can be read and analyzed, too! Sometimes, photographs create more questions than they answer, though. Often, historians don't know who took a picture or who is in it. However, by looking closely at the photographs, we can find clues that help us investigate further!

### ACTIVITY 1

**Instructions:** Study the photographs below and answer the questions about each photo. It's okay to guess – remember that sometimes historians don't know the exact answers about photographs, too. Then, view the images on Ohio Memory by visiting the links in the citations to find more information about them and see if you were right!

#### Image 1

1. How did these children get to school? How is it the same or different than how you get to school?



<https://ohiomemory.org/digital/collection/p267401coll32/id/9270>

2. Which way do you think would get you to school quicker? How these students traveled, or how you do now? Why?

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<https://ohiomemory.org/digital/collection/p267401coll32/id/9293>

### Image 2

1. What objects in this photograph help you to figure out where it was taken? Why?

2. What grade do you think these students are in? Why?

### Image 3

1. Who do you think is the teacher?  
Circle them. Why?

2. How is the clothing these students wear to school the same or different than what you wear to school? How?



<https://ohiomemory.org/digital/collection/p16007coll19/id/1058>

3. What game do you think these students like to play? What clues in the picture support your answer?

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### Images 4 & 5 – Compare and Contrast



<https://ohiomemory.org/digital/collection/p267401coll34/id/8103>

1. What subject do you think the boys in the top picture are learning about? Why?

2. What subject do you think the girls in the bottom picture are learning about? Why?



<https://ohiomemory.org/digital/collection/p267401coll34/id/5400>

3. Why do you think some classes only had boys or girls?

4. Do you think there are any subjects that only boys could study or only girls could study? Why or why not?



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### Images 6 & 7 – Compare and contrast



<https://ohiomemory.org/digital/collection/p267401coll32/id/9176>

1. What game do you think the boys are playing on the ground in the first picture?

2. How do these playgrounds look similar or different to the playground at your school?



<https://ohiomemory.org/digital/collection/p267401coll32/id/10990>

3. Which photograph do you think is older? Which one do you think was taken more recently? Why?

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### ACTIVITY 2

**Instructions:** Find old photos in your home. Maybe someone in your house has kept a scrapbook, old yearbooks or even a shoebox of old photos that you can look through. Grab an adult and look through some of those photos together, and try to answer the following questions about each photo. Remember - Sometimes there is helpful information written on the back of the picture or in a caption! For an extra challenge, try to not look at these until after you've answered the questions about each picture.

1. When was this photo taken? What clues in the photo help you guess? Consider what clothes or hairstyles the people in the photo are wearing or what technology you can see like phones, appliances, toys or cars.
2. Who are the people in the picture? How do you know?
3. What is happening in the scene? What clues in the photo help you figure that out?
4. Where was the photo taken? Think about what landmarks or other clues you can see such as familiar buildings or street signs if it is outdoors, or things like hanging pictures or furniture indoors.

### WRAP UP

If you had fun digging through your old photos, check out our blog post that features a preservation guide that shows you how to preserve your family's history like an archivist at <https://www.ohiohistory.org/learn/collections/history/history-blog/april-2020/preservationguide!>

Let us know how it went! Tag us on social media or email us at [education@ohiohistory.org](mailto:education@ohiohistory.org).

