

Vacation Week

What is the history of vacations in the United States?

Duration: 45 minutes

Grade Level: Grades 2 – 8

Learning Objectives:

- Learn about the history of vacations in the United States
- Understand why people began taking vacations and what they did
- Learn about Visual Thinking Strategies and how it helps with looking at images

Outcomes:

- Students will learn critical thinking skills by answering open-ended questions about images
- Students will be introduced to the idea of rest and relaxation as a way to take care of one's social and emotional well-being
- Students will be introduced to simple, fun projects to encourage fun and relaxation

Associated Activities:

- Calder-Inspired Sculptures, 60 minutes
- Jigsaw Puzzles, 45 minutes
- Mini Museum, 60 minutes
- Portraits, 45 minutes

When did people take vacations?

Vacations were traditionally the time when teachers and students left school for a certain amount of time. Most people did not take trips during this time.

Beginning in the nineteenth century, only wealthy families went on vacation, oftentimes to a country home or the seaside. Doctors encouraged people to get away from the urban areas to avoid suffering from “brain fatigue” and travel to places where the air was cleaner.

In the mid-nineteenth century, railroads were built, which allowed people to travel from urban areas to the shore more quickly. It allowed more people to travel and travel for shorter periods of time.

Activity: Are you looking for something to do while on Spring Break? Create your own jigsaw puzzle and then put it together! Make a second one and challenge a family member to a race.

What did people do on vacation?

People went on vacation to get away from the stress of the city. Doctors and religious leaders encouraged people to engage in activities that promoted rest and relaxation. This included writing, reading, hunting, going for walks, and participating in sport and leisure activities.

Because of this, there are many journals, letters, and artworks that were created by people while on vacation historically. What can we learn from those?

Activity: People were encouraged to use their time on vacation to be creative, including painting. Try to draw or paint a self-portrait.

What is visual thinking and how can I use it?

Visual Thinking Strategies is a way to look at art that encourages critical thinking skills and both oral and written literacy. It can give insight into works of art and encourages collaborative work.

There are no right or wrong answers to the following questions. Take this as an opportunity to think deeply about what you are looking at and then explain your thought process. Why did you give a specific answer to a question? Someone else might think differently from you. Respect their answer and learn from their thinking process.

Question to ask yourself when looking at an artwork:

1. What is happening/going on?
2. What makes you think that?
3. What else do you see?
 - What colors/shapes do you see?
 - Describe the lines/shapes/colors you see.
 - What feelings do you get looking at it?
 - Is this artwork the beginning, middle or end to a story? Why do you think that? What might be other parts of the story?
 - What do you think the artist was thinking when they made it?
 - If you were the artist, what would you have done differently?

Think: Use these questions from now on to look at works of art and photographs. Try on the next page.

Atlantic City

James Van Der Zee. 1930. Silver print on paper.



Questions for Viewing:

- What do you see?
- What do you notice about the place they are visiting?
- How does a photograph give you different information from a painting?

Activity: You can't build a sand castle, but you can build a sculpture! Try your hand at making sculptures inspired by Alexander Calder.

Niagara Falls from American Side

John Vanderlyn. No date. Oil on canvas.



Questions for Viewing:

- What do you see?
- What colors do you notice? Is there anything special about the way it was painted?
- Why do you think people vacationed at Niagara Falls?
- Do you want to visit this place?

What was a Grand Tour?

The Grand Tour was another type of vacation that many wealthy individuals went on as a coming of age trip. Chaperones, often family members, travelled with these young men and women to Europe, Asia, or across the United States for an extended period of time. This was an educational rite of passage where young people were encouraged to visit important sites, learn more about art and history, and meet other individuals who were also travelling. Many artists went on Grand Tours to improve their skills, view famous art in Europe, and study with art teachers in Europe.

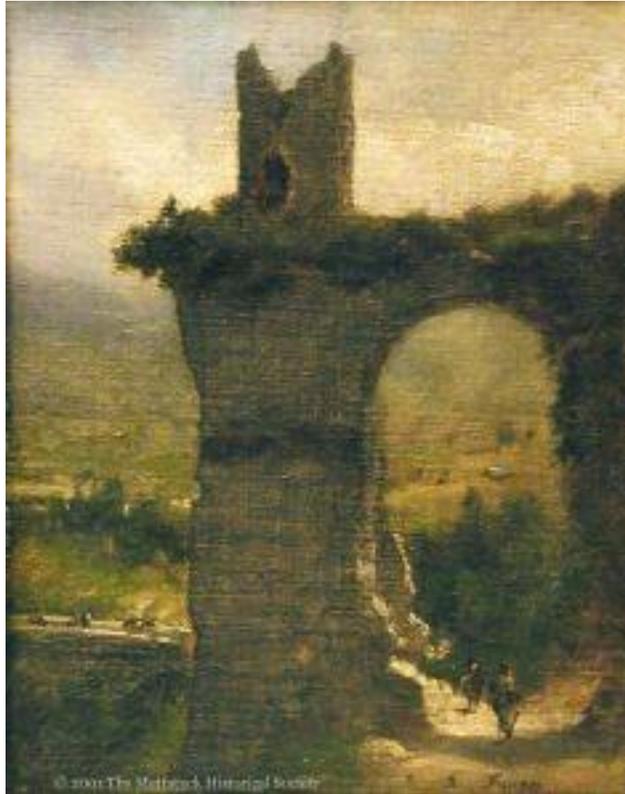


John Ferguson Weir, *Venice*, 19th cent., oil on canvas.

Activity: When people went on a Grand Tour, they often visited historic collections to learn about culture and history. Since you can't visit a Museum this year while on Spring Break, create your own!

Rome, The Appian Way

George Inness. 1872. Oil on canvas.



George Inness painted this view of Rome for the Boston art dealer who funded his Grand Tour of Italy.

Questions for Viewing:

- What do you see?
- What is happening in this photograph?
- What is the mood of the scene?
- Why do you think they made all of these signs?