“Day in the Life” Research Project

A great way to immerse your students in a time period you are studying while helping them hone their research skills.

One of our favorite features in Scope is our “day in the life” essays. These short narrative texts tell your students what life would be like if they lived in another time and place. These texts are also a blast to research because we get to uncover so many rich, fascinating details about the past. (Did you know that some Ancient Greeks refused to eat beans because they thought beans contained the souls of the dead?) All of this got us thinking: Writing a “day in the life” essay would make a great research project for middle schoolers! So, we made one for you.

Here’s how it works:

1. **Choose a time period.** It can be a time period you are already studying (for example, the 1930s, as you read To Kill a Mockingbird), or you can ask students to choose their own time and place.

2. **Research.** Use our list of research questions and recommended sources on the following page to guide students’ research.

3. **Study the model texts.** Use our essays as model texts. Analyze students, “How does the author evoke the sights and sounds of the time? What details does she include? What mood does she create?”

4. **Have students write their own “day in the life” narrative essays.** Optionally, have students work in groups to create their own videos or slide-shows.

**Tip:** Coordinate with your colleagues in social studies by assigning whatever time period or historical event they are covering in their social studies class at the time.
“A Day in the Life” Essay
Research Questions

Time Period:

Place:

What did people eat?

What did people wear?

What was school like?

What kind of chores were kids responsible for?

Where did most people live?

What did most adults do for a living?

What did kids do for fun?

How did people get around?

What major events were happening in the world? (war, famine, diseases, etc.)

What were people afraid of or worried about?

What was the average life span?
Source Guidelines:
You can go to your school or public library and ask your librarian or teacher to help you find nonfiction books or articles about your chosen time period. The Internet is also a great source of information, as long as you make sure that the websites you’re using are trustworthy. (Sites that end in .gov, .org, or .edu are usually a safe bet.)

Here are a few types of reliable resources that we often use in our research and that you might find useful:

- Online encyclopedias to which your school has a subscription, such as Grolier Online or Encyclopedia Britannica
- The series A History of US, by Joy Hakim
- The Eyewitness series published by Dorling Kindersley
- Primary sources from people who were alive at the time: speeches, letters, diary entries
- Newspaper and magazine articles from the time
- Government websites like the Library of Congress website
- Museum curators and websites