

**Picturing America Lesson Plan**  
**Comparing American Industry and Technology**  
**Between the End of the Civil War and 1930**

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**Objective:** By comparing Charles Sheeler's "American Landscape," 1930, with Winslow Homer's "The Veteran in a New Field," 1865, students will understand how modern America emerged so quickly in comparing and contrasting technologies of those eras.

**Subject & Grade Level:** American History, Grades 8-11

**Guiding Question:** How does a comparison of Winslow Homer's 1865 "The Veteran in a New Field" and Charles Sheeler's 1930 "American Landscape" show the tremendous changes in America, even after the era historians categorize as "The Industrial Revolution" was over?

**Background for the Teacher:**

Winslow Homer's 1865 painting and Charles Sheeler's 1930 landscape were both painted after the era considered the Industrial Revolution. Yet, by 1930, a decade of major advances in technology had occurred. Students may relate Sheeler's painting immediately to the Industrial Revolution, while not so much with Homer's. It is significant that Sheeler's painting shows an American landscape representing a culmination of decades of industrial growth. Indeed, just in the 1920s some of the following events can be highlighted:

- For the first time, the 1920 census indicated a population in the United States over 100 million people.
- First motion pictures and talking pictures
- Mass production of automobiles
- The explosion of radio
- Flights of Charles Lindberg and Amelia Earhart and flights to the North Pole and back
- First liquid fueled rockets
- Air Commerce Act is passed
- Work on the gigantic sculpture at Mount Rushmore began.
- Television begins to emerge when American inventor Philo Taylor Farnsworth invented a complete electronic television system
- Beginning of Hoover Dam construction

Understanding how these advances may have influenced Sheeler, and how times were vastly different from 1865 will help students realize how by 1930 modern America had definitely emerged. In this activity, students will explore the advances prior to 1930 and compare them to life in 1865 as the Civil War ended.

**Vocabulary/Terms:** *industrialization, commerce, technology, factory system, assembly line, mass production, progressive movement*

**Activities:**

- **Analysis of the painting:** Use the Describe and Analyze questions on page 67 of the teacher manual to discuss the Sheeler painting. Especially focus on the last discussion about the size of the buildings in comparison with the man.
- **Comparison with Homer's painting:** Use the Describe and Analyze questions from the teacher manual on page 41. The interpretation questions tie this painting more to the Civil War and will be more applicable to other activities. The point of this lesson is to consider how people were making a living after the Civil War. Compare the paintings using the Interpretation discussion of the Sheeler painting on page 67. Encourage students to imagine how the Homer painting landscape turned into something similar to the Sheeler landscape over time.
- **Analysis of paintings in larger historical context:** Have students brainstorm a set of events that occurred between 1865 and 1930 using their textbooks or other sources and timelines. Events would include both the invention and implementation of new types of technologies as well as movements such as progressivism and labor unions. Students may also discuss the influence of big business and monopolies to more advanced economic discussions about the lack of regulations on banking and so on.
- **Complimentary activities:** Students will be split into two groups. One group will be assigned to research industries/technologies of the decade after the Civil War. The other group will do the same for the 1920s. Preferably each student will have something different with few repeats in the class. Students will create an advertisement for their technology/industry and present it. Ideas for formats are: pamphlets, podcasts (like a radio spot), infomercials (although TV obviously isn't quite developed, this is still fun to watch) and so on. After presenting their ads, students will have a wide overview of technologies of the different time periods to compare and contrast for the assessment.

**Assessment:** Students will complete a Venn Diagram comparing and contrasting American industry/technology at the end of the Civil War to that of 1930.