

THE GOOD OLD DAYS MYTH



Table of Contents

Lesson Description	3
Objectives.....	3
Concepts & Key Terms.....	3
Preview Activity	3
Viewing Guide Instructions	4
Answers to Viewing Guide.....	4
Viewing Guide.....	5
Discussion & Analysis.....	6
Discuss These Lines from the Video	7
Quotes for Discussion	7
Activities.....	8
Quiz: The Good Old Days Myth	13
Political Cartoon Activity	14
PMI Chart	15
K-W-L Chart	16
Exit Ticket.....	17
Transcript.....	18

The Good Old Days Myth

Video Length: 5:30

Lesson Description

Was life really easier in the “good old days?” John Stossel tests that belief by comparing past and present costs, homes, jobs, and wages. With clear data, he shows that while prices seem higher now, Americans enjoy bigger homes, better cars, cheaper travel, and more opportunities—challenging the idea that nostalgia tells the full story and encouraging students to think critically about how feelings and evidence shape their view of progress.

Objectives

Students will be able to:

- identify key claims made in the video about life in the “good old days” versus today.
- compare historical and current data on housing, wages, and consumer goods presented in the video.
- evaluate how feelings, nostalgia, and evidence influence people’s beliefs about the past.
- construct an argument about whether living standards have improved or declined, supported by evidence from the video and other sources.

Concepts & Key Terms

Inflation-adjusted: a way of measuring prices or wages that takes into account the changing value of money over time.

Inequality: differences in wealth, income, or opportunities among people or groups in society.

Prosperity: the state of having enough resources and wealth to live well and meet personal goals.

Standard of living: the level of comfort, goods, and services available to a person or community.

Preview Activity

Use Think, Pair, Share to have students answer and discuss these preview questions: What do you think people mean when they talk about the “good old days?” Do you believe it was easier for past generations to buy homes, cars, or pay for college? What examples from your own family’s experiences might support or challenge those ideas?

OR

Distribute copies of the K-W-L worksheet to the class. Have students fill in the K and W sections. After showing the video, have students complete the L section and answer the questions at the bottom of the worksheet.

Viewing Guide Instructions

We recommend that teachers show the video twice: first to allow students to view the video and focus on the issues presented, and second to allow them time to complete the viewing guide. After they complete the viewing guide, allow students a few minutes to work in pairs to share and verify answers.

Answers to Viewing Guide

1. believe
2. today
3. bigger
4. norm
5. security
6. tendency

The Good Old Days Myth

Viewing Guide

Name _____

Date _____

Class _____ Period _____

Teacher _____

Directions: As you watch the video, fill in the blanks with the correct words.

1. This meme is all over the internet. People _____ it.
2. Census data show more Americans own homes _____ than did when I was a kid.
3. Modern homes are much _____ than homes were when I was a kid.
4. Now it's the norm to go out for lunch. It's the _____ to go out for dinner or to order in or to get Uber Eats.
5. The idea that nobody had to work hard, that everybody had job _____, whereas opposed to now, nobody does, is absolutely ridiculous.
6. We always have a _____ to believe in the things that are wrong and that are bad.

Take a few moments to reflect on the video and answer these questions.

1. When you see a claim online, what steps can you take to test whether it's based on evidence or just opinions and/or feelings?

2. How might nostalgia affect the way people think about economics and society?

Discussion & Analysis

1. What is the main myth this video talks about?
2. What examples does John Stossel give to show life is different today than in the past?
3. How do homes today compare to homes in the 1950s and 1960s?
4. What data does the video share about food, clothing, and housing costs?
5. Why might people believe life was easier in the “good old days?”
6. How does inflation affect the way we compare prices from the past to today?
7. What role does social media and memes play in spreading the “good old days” story? What does this say about how we should consume materials we find on social media?
8. How does the video challenge the claim that “hard work is not enough to succeed?”
9. Why does the economist in the video say we are better off now?
10. How could focusing only on material goods give an incomplete picture of living standards?
11. How might nostalgia affect the way people think about economics and society?
12. When you see a claim online, what steps can you take to test whether it’s based on evidence or just opinion?
13. Do you think people today measure prosperity differently than past generations? Why or why not?
14. Based on the video and your own thinking, do you agree or disagree that Americans are better off today? Explain.
15. If you had to explain to someone whether life is truly better or worse now than in the past, what evidence would you use and why?
16. Which examples in the video are based on data and which examples are based on feelings or impressions?
17. Why do you think people often believe claims about the past without checking the evidence?

Discuss These Lines from the Video

But now it's damn near impossible for normal people to get ahead financially or shoot, even own a home.

Most people don't live in houses because it's too expensive.

Houses are more expensive today, but they're bigger and nicer.

Hard work alone is not enough because the deck is stacked against so many folks.

Income is definitely higher. Jobs are more plentiful. Opportunities are more plentiful.

Gen Z income are 50% higher than what we baby boomers are.

Families in the old days, they saved money. We don't have a great country anymore. We're going to go back to the old days.

Quotes for Discussion

The way most people remember 'those good old days' is remarkably inconsistent with what most historians report.

– Stephanie Coontz

The idea of nostalgia is an absurdity produced after-the-fact by wistful thinking.

– Philipp Blom

Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.

– George Santayana

True individual freedom cannot exist without economic security and independence.

– Franklin D. Roosevelt

We are alive, safe, healthy, educated, and prosperous, and getting safer, healthier, and richer.

– Steven Pinker

One of the saddest lessons of history is this: If we've been bamboozled long enough, we tend to reject any evidence of the bamboozle.

– Carl Sagan

The first principle is that you must not fool yourself—and you are the easiest person to fool.

– Richard Feynman

Pessimism is a luxury of the rich. In the rest of the world, people are too busy getting better off to have time for that kind of gloom.

– Johan Norberg

Activities

1. Have students complete the K-W-L chart in class or for homework. (Recall that the K and W sections are to be completed before watching the video and the L section after watching the video.)
2. Have students complete the political cartoon activity in class or for homework.
3. Have students complete the PMI chart in class or for homework.
4. Have students complete and submit the Exit Ticket as they leave class.
5. Students create a t-chart. One side is "good old days claims" and the other side is where they write the evidence from the video.
6. In small groups, students design a short skit or role-play where one person argues for the "good old days" and the others respond with data from the video.
7. Students write a reflection explaining whether they believe life is better today or in the past, using at least two pieces of evidence from the video.
8. Pairs of students examine inflation-adjusted prices for homes, cars, or flights online and compare them with claims made in the video.
9. Students make a simple infographic that shows how much bigger homes and cars are today compared to earlier decades.
10. Students write a short persuasive paragraph responding to the statement: "Hard work is not enough to succeed anymore."
11. In groups, students brainstorm a list of modern conveniences (Uber Eats, cheaper flights, durable cars) and vote on which ones most change daily life compared to the past.
12. In small groups, students list ways nostalgia might influence politics and then share examples from current campaigns or debates.
13. Students collect a short anecdote from a parent or grandparent about the "good old days," then compare it with actual data on wages, costs, or living standards.
14. In pairs, students go through the transcript or a summary and mark lines that are "evidence-based" versus "feelings-based," then share how those differences affect the argument.
15. Show students the original "Good Old Days" meme and the updated version created by Stossel TV. Discuss how each one tells a story — the first through emotion and nostalgia, the second through data and evidence. Then, have students work in small groups to find another meme online that makes a claim about life today or in the past (for example, about jobs, housing, prices, or fairness). Students should research whether the meme's claim is supported by real evidence and then redesign the meme to make it more accurate. Each

group should include a short explanation (2–3 sentences) of what data they used to revise the message and why.

Extension Option:

Groups can present both versions of their meme to the class and explain which one is more persuasive — and whether it appeals more to feelings or facts.

Original meme:



Updated meme:



16. AI Deep Research: Testing the “Good Old Days” Claims

Purpose:

Students practice fact-checking by comparing nostalgic claims with real evidence, using AI as a research assistant. This helps them see the difference between feelings-based claims and evidence-based arguments.

Teacher Instructions:

Have students **treat AI like an assistant, not an authority**. After the AI gives an answer, the next step is always: *“Click the source link. Is it reliable? Does it say what the AI claims?”* That step turns the exercise into a lesson in media literacy as well as economics.

Frame the activity. Explain that many claims about the “good old days” come from feelings or nostalgia, not evidence. Students will test those claims against real data.

Choose claims. Provide 3–4 short examples from the video or popular memes, such as:

One income could easily buy a house in the 1960s.

Flying was too expensive for most families back then.

People had more job security in the past.

Introduce AI as a tool. Tell students that AI can help find and summarize evidence, but it is not the final authority. Emphasize that AI is a starting point and students must always check the sources it gives.

Recommended tools:

Gemini (Google) with Deep Research – provides excellent overview reports with links and citations.

Perplexity AI – gives concise answers tied to clickable, reputable sources.

ChatGPT with web search – useful for comparisons and tables, but be sure to ask for source URLs.

Prompting AI for strong sources. Model clear, specific prompts for students:

“Find reliable data on the cost of buying a house in the 1960s compared to today. Include inflation-adjusted numbers and provide sources with links.”

“Give me your sources in a list with links.”

“Show me government or university data, not just opinion articles.”

Guide the process. In small groups, students should:

Enter one claim into the AI tool as a question.

Record the evidence AI provides along with the source link.

Cross-check by clicking at least one source to confirm accuracy.

Create a chart. Have each group fill out a two-column chart:

Claim (what people feel or say)

Evidence (what the data shows, with at least one source)

Share and discuss. Groups present one finding to the class. Ask: How did using AI help? Where did it fall short? Did the evidence match the nostalgic claim?

Optional Extension:

Have students write a short paragraph reflecting on whether AI made them more confident in separating fact from feeling.

Name _____

Date _____

Class _____ Period _____

Teacher _____

Quiz: The Good Old Days Myth

Directions: Select the answer that best completes the sentence.

1. Census data show that today _____ own homes than in the 1960s.
 - A. fewer Americans
 - B. more Americans
 - C. twice as many Americans
 - D. the same number of Americans

2. The video says people believe the “good old days” myth because _____.
 - A. evidence is clear
 - B. nostalgia sells politically
 - C. jobs were better back then
 - D. wages are falling today

3. The claim that “hard work is not enough anymore” is criticized in the video as _____.
 - A. misleading
 - B. completely correct
 - C. proven by data
 - D. partly true but not useful

4. The video uses evidence like inflation-adjusted prices and labor statistics to _____.
 - A. support nostalgia
 - B. show decline in living standards
 - C. prove inequality is shrinking
 - D. challenge misinformation

5. The main idea of the video is _____.
 - A. young people face more barriers than past generations
 - B. data supports the idea of the good old days
 - C. Americans today live with less comfort than before
 - D. evidence shows most people are better off now

Answer Key:

1. B
2. B
3. A
4. D
5. D

Name _____

Date _____

Class _____ Period _____

Teacher _____

The Good Old Days Myth

Political Cartoon Activity

Directions: Use the political cartoon to answer the questions.

How does the contrast between the news anchor and the fact-checker represent feelings versus facts? _____



Why might the audience in the cartoon choose to believe the anchor instead of the person holding the data? _____

How does this cartoon connect to the video's argument that the "good old days" are a myth? _____

What role do traditional and social media play in shaping how people see the past and decide what to believe? _____

Name _____

Date _____

Class _____ Period _____

Teacher _____

The Good Old Days Myth
PMI Chart

P = Plus: What might be some positive effects of trusting data over feelings when judging the past?

M = Minus: What might be some negative effects of trusting data over feelings when judging the past?

I = Interesting: What is interesting or surprising about trusting data over feelings when judging the past?

+ Plusses +	- Minuses -	I

Why might people choose to believe what *feels* true instead of checking the data? _____

What could happen in society if most people made decisions based on feelings instead of facts? _____

Name _____

Date _____

Class _____ Period _____

Teacher _____

The Good Old Days Myth

K-W-L Chart

Directions: Complete the **K** and **W** sections prior to watching the video. After you have seen the video, complete the **L** section and answer the questions below the K-W-L chart.

K	W	L
What I know about life in the “good old days”...	What I want to know about life in the “good old days”...	What I’ve learned about life in the “good old days”...

How does the video compare the cost of living in the past to today? _____

What evidence from the video challenged the idea of the “good old days?” _____

Exit Ticket

Name	
Admit One	Why do you think people often trust what <i>feels</i> true more than what the data shows, and how could that affect society?
EXIT TICKET	

Name	
Admit One	Why do you think people often trust what <i>feels</i> true more than what the data shows, and how could that affect society?
EXIT TICKET	

Name	
Admit One	Why do you think people often trust what <i>feels</i> true more than what the data shows, and how could that affect society?
EXIT TICKET	

Transcript

John Stossel

Have you heard how young people suffer today?

TikTok/@iitsme.madiiii

I scream at the top of my lungs. <screaming>

John Stossel

Social media is filled with videos that say:

YouTube/Economics Explained

...younger generations are finding it harder and harder to get reliable jobs, afford comfortable homes, start a family.

John Stossel

We baby boomers had things so much easier.

TikTok/@muststopmurad

Your father could somehow afford a house, a car, and also put multiple kids through college.

TikTok/@samfasterfreedom

But now it's damn near impossible for normal people to get ahead financially or shoot, even own a home.

John Stossel

This meme gets millions of views. Once upon a time, meaning when I was a kid, a family could own a home, a car, and send their kids to college all on one income. This meme is all over the Internet. People believe it.

Norbert Michel

And that's really a fantasy.

John Stossel

Economist Norbert Mishiel. It's not true?

Norbert Michel

No. It seems really great to think that everything was so awesome back then, but it wasn't. Materially, we are so much better off now than we were in the '60s and '70s.

John Stossel

While young people get clicks asking, what's the point of working?

TikTok/@gabecalhoun1

You can't even live in a house. Most people don't live in houses because it's too expensive.

Norbert Michel

That's just a factual mistake.

John Stossel

Census data show more Americans own homes today (65% in 2025) than did when I was a kid. (55% in 1950)

Jeremy Ney

People are still buying homes, but it is far more expensive for them to be buying homes.

John Stossel

Progressives like Columbia Professor, Jeremy Ney, here giving a TED talk about how Well, inequality is a matter of life and death, say the meme is right on. This is correct? (holding up meme)

Jeremy Ney

That is correct.

John Stossel

But it's misleading. Houses are more expensive today, but they're bigger and nicer.

Norbert Michel

The homes that we're buying now are not the homes that people were buying in the '50s, '60s, and '70s.

Speaker?

Four bed, three bath with a two-car garage.

Norbert Michel

We have bigger homes, better equipped homes.

John Stossel

Modern homes are much bigger (2023 – 2,286 sq feet median home size) than homes were (1963 – 1,354 sq feet median home size) when I was a kid. They're twice as likely to have central air, dishwashers, garbage disposals. Almost all homes now have washers and dryers. They didn't used to. The popular meme doesn't mention that. Homes were cheaper then because they're what people today call lousy homes.

Jeremy Ney

The costs are still 10, 20 times higher.

John Stossel

No, they're not. Not if you adjust for inflation.

Norbert Michel

Plus, we spend a smaller share of our income on food, clothing, and housing than we did.

John Stossel

Here's the data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Americans now spend less of our money on food, clothing, and shelter.

Norbert Michel

We have a lot more things, and we don't have to work as hard to get them.

John Stossel

When I was a kid, few people lived like people do now.

Norbert Michel

Now, it's the norm to go out for lunch. It's the norm to go out for dinner or to order in or to get Uber Eats.

John Stossel

My family never went out to eat.

Norbert Michel

People didn't have enough money.

John Stossel

Also, back then, families didn't fly places for vacation because flying cost so much more. Adjusted for inflation, a cross-country flight cost more than \$1,000. Now, it's about \$300.

Norbert Michel

People did not just go on vacation. People did not fly all across the country.

John Stossel

But TikTokers say, We young people have it so much tougher.

TikTok/@hopeyoufindyourdad

Hard work is not enough to make it anymore.

Jeremy Ney

The game changed on the younger generation. Hard work alone is not enough because the deck is stacked against so many folks.

Norbert Michel

The idea that nobody had to work hard, that everybody had job security, where as opposed to now, nobody does, is absolutely ridiculous. My dad would have laughed at that, and he should have. Income is definitely higher. Jobs are more plentiful. Opportunities are more plentiful.

UPS Ad

The job offer in under 30 minutes.

John Stossel

Unemployment today (Aug. 2025 4.3%) is half what it was when I was a young reporter. (Aug. 1975 8.4%)

Forrest Gump

I got a college degree.

John Stossel

Back to that meme, which says, A family then could afford to send their kids to college. Well, college was much cheaper then, but even so...

Norbert Michel

Most people didn't go to college. Roughly half of the labor force didn't even finish high school. That's unheard of nowadays.

John Stossel

Finally, yes, a family could own a car, but it was nothing like today's cars.

TopGear.com

American cars were so absolutely and unutterably awful.

John Stossel

They rusted quickly, and now cars last more than twice as long. Ney tweets that jobs that once provided high school grads with middle class stability now offer poverty wages. But overall, Gen Z does better. *The Economist* points out that Gen Z income are 50% higher than what we baby boomers, are. Still, this woman gets hundreds of thousands of likes saying:

TikTok/@realccodiesanchez

Gen Z is the first generation where, they're same age as their parents, they're making less money, not more.

John Stossel

No, they aren't. And it's not just progressives who spout these myths.

Pres. Trump

Families in the old days, they saved money. We don't have a great country anymore. We're going to go back to the old days.

John Stossel

Why do people put out this misinformation?

Norbert Michel

Politically, it sells, and it makes it really easy for a politician to say, I'm going to fix it. We always have a tendency to believe in the things that are wrong and that are bad. And that's unfortunate, because overall, most people have been doing much, much better.

John Stossel

To counter the misinformation, Stossel TV created a more accurate meme. Once upon a time, a family who never ate out, could afford a smaller home, a car that didn't last long, and they didn't send their kids to college, all on one income.