



“From Horses to Cars” Study Guide Questions

“From Horses to Cars” is an article about the introduction of the automobile to Renton around the turn of the 20th century, which rapidly affected the layout of the city and the ways in which local people traveled.

This activity is designed for readers in 7th grade and above. Questions can be used for discussion or as writing prompts. You can find the original article from [March 2015 on Renton History Museum’s Newsletters Page](#).

1. What kind of farming was the dominant industry in Renton in the 1880s-1900s and why? What kinds of other businesses became common as a result?
2. Who was the Priebe family, and how did they contribute to Renton’s economy between 1885 and the 1940s?
3. What was the function of a livery? Name at least three that existed in Renton.
4. In the 1900s and 1910s, automobiles became a viable alternative to horse-drawn carriages. Who were some of the first people in Renton to own and sell cars? How did the local press react?
5. How did teamsters and blacksmiths adapt when automobiles entered the market?
6. How did the city try to resolve conflicts between horses and cars in May 1916? How did their action reflect the changing state of transportation?
7. How did the introduction of automobiles to Renton change its economy?



8. What leisure activities came about later in the 20th century due to the existence of the automobile?

Essay Question: What were some of the hazards and inconveniences of using horse-drawn vehicles as a mode of transportation? Compare and contrast with the upkeep required for automobiles. Why do you think people in Renton ultimately chose to use cars rather than horses?

Creative Essay Question: Imagine that you work at a livery in Renton in the 1910s. Write a diary entry describing your work and highlight some of the changes you notice in the transportation industry. How do you think you would try to adapt?



Answer Guide for Parents and Teachers

1. What kind of farming was the dominant industry in Renton in the 1880s-1900s and why? What kinds of other businesses became common as a result?

Dairy farming was the most prevalent form of farming in Renton. Animals were easier to move than crops when the Black and Cedar Rivers flooded. Erasmus Smithers, Claus and Christian Jorgensen, and Fred Nelsen all made a living from farming. Cattle, horses, and mules were commonly used for hauling and transport in farming, mining, and other industries before automobiles were widely available, and as a result, blacksmiths, livery stables, and harness-makers were common in Renton as well.

2. Who were the Priebe family, and how did they contribute to Renton's economy between 1885 and the 1940's?

Hermann and Henrietta Priebe emigrated to the U.S. from Germany. They made their home in Renton in 1885. Hermann started a blacksmith shop, which was passed down to his sons Oscar and Herman in 1902. The shop, Priebe Brothers, was located on Third Street near Williams Ave. Besides shoeing horses, the Priebe family also repaired carriages and buggies with various types of metal that were kept on site. Though the shop looked very much the same as the years went on, they found ways to adapt their business to the changing times. In 1923 the Priebe Brothers helped the Renton Volunteer Fire Department turn a Model T into a motorized fire truck by equipping it with a 40-gallon water tank, fire extinguishers, ladders, and a hose. When the automobile gradually became more prevalent, most blacksmiths turned to other trades, but the Priebe Brothers' shop remained open until 1942.

3. What was the function of a livery? Name at least three that existed in Renton.

Liveries were businesses that rented out horse-drawn vehicles and cared for horses. Livery stable operators needed to maintain carriages, keep teams of horses in good health, board horses, provide equipment for moving and hauling goods, and occasionally had to teach inexperienced drivers how to handle horses and carts. Examples in Renton include Storey Livery, OK Livery, Renton Wagon Works, and N.P. Livery.

4. In the 1900s and 1910s, automobiles became a viable alternative to horse-drawn carriages. Who were some of the first people in Renton to own and sell cars? How did the local press react?

Renton's local doctors, Adolph Bronson and Charles Dixon, were among the first Rentonites to own cars. They registered their vehicles in 1910, although they likely owned the cars prior to registration. Former Mayor Joseph Henderson Wood became the first automobile salesman in Renton, dealing in Fords and Buicks. Local newspapers published regular notices touting Wood's sales skills. Local print media also spread the news when a prominent Renton resident, like Lou Cross, purchased a new car.

5. How did harness-makers, teamsters, livery workers, and blacksmiths adapt when automobiles entered the market?

Harness-makers, teamsters, blacksmiths, and people who worked at liveries had to adapt to the changing economy and applied their skills in other areas. Fortunately, many of their skills were transferrable, and they diversified into new areas of business. For example, Ivor Williams, a former



blacksmith, became an auto mechanic with the Ford Motor Showroom in Seattle, and later opened his own service station after returning to Renton after World War I.

6. How did the city try to resolve conflicts between horses and cars in May 1916? How did their action reflect the changing state of transportation?

The City Ordinance passed on May 16, 1919 effectively banned horses from downtown Renton, as animals were no longer allowed to be staked or tied up in such a way that they would be on sidewalks, parking strips, public streets, or right-of-ways. It was a sign that automobiles were filling the roles horses and other beasts of burden once held in Renton's economy, and that auto transportation had become the preferred method of travel.

7. How did the introduction of automobiles to Renton change its economy overall?

Before automobiles, much of Renton's economy supported livestock farmers and teamsters. After the introduction of motor vehicles, businesses in Renton began to transition from servicing horses and horse-drawn vehicles to selling and servicing automobiles. For example, Charles Campbell was contracted to grade streets while he was still part owner of the OK Livery. While employing harness-makers and teamsters, OK Garage also served as the agent for Hudson Automobiles. By 1919 the OK Livery had been rebranded as the OK Garage. By 1929, Renton was home to twelve auto dealers or garages, fifteen service stations, four tire shops, two auto painting services, and one auto parts store.

8. What leisure activities came about later in the 20th century due to the existence of the automobile?

Leisure activities such as joy rides, auto parties, drive-in movies, and cruising the Renton Loop became popular in the mid-20th century as a result of increased access to automobiles, especially among Renton's youth.

Essay Question: What were some of the hazards and inconveniences of using horse-drawn vehicles as a mode of transportation? Compare and contrast with the upkeep required for automobiles. Why do you think people in Renton ultimately chose to use cars rather than horses?

SAMPLE ANSWER: There were many health hazards and dangers associated with horse travel. People who rented horses from livery stables did not necessarily know how to care for them properly. For example, in 1909, James Harrison rented horses and a buggy from OK Livery for his travels. He did not properly hitch the horses upon his arrival in Kenndale. The horses fled, uncontrolled, back to the livery, completely demolishing the buggy.

Horse carriages became affordable to the average family in the mid-to-late 19th century, with some as inexpensive as \$20. However, the increase in horse-drawn vehicle travel led to increased public safety risks. Inexperienced drivers, horse manure, and the problem of caring for live horses while disposing of dead ones were all challenges that Renton faced at the height of horse-drawn transportation's popularity.

After 1910 automobiles began to share the roads with horses. New infrastructure and laws made it safer and easier to travel by automobile. Like horses, automobiles also required maintenance, and the number of auto repair shops and service stations increased to keep up with the demand. Access to automobiles and shops that serviced them increased. As the local transportation industry made the shift towards automobiles, cars probably became more appealing than horse-drawn transportation



because of the accessibility to cars and related services. In addition, the new laws that prohibited horses from being hitched in the downtown area probably discouraged people from wanting to buy horses and carriages. Cars were also likely chosen over horses because they are not only easier to control, but less costly, unpredictable, and dangerous to operate.

Creative Essay Question: Imagine that you work at a livery in Renton in the 1910s. Write a diary entry describing your work and highlight some of the changes you notice in the transportation industry. How do you think you would try to adapt?

This essay question invites students to think critically about how changes in the transportation industry affected everyday people. It also encourages them to use creative writing skills and their imaginations to craft a short work of historical fiction based on facts. Encourage students to reread the article to take note of everyday tasks associated with liveries, and compare and contrast with the skills needed in the auto industry. Invite them to draw their own conclusions about how workers adapted their skill sets to keep up in a changing environment and how they felt about those changes in their work, their everyday interactions with other, and their changing city.



Supplemental Resources (all available at no cost)

The History of Transportation in Cities

The Smithsonian Institution's online exhibit, *America on the Move*, explores the many ways Americans used transportation and how it reshaped cities and towns through history.

<https://americanhistory.si.edu/america-on-the-move>

Horse-Drawn Transportation around the U.S.A.

A copy of the E.A. Richmond Carriage Company Catalogue in New York from 1890 that showcases various designs of horse-drawn vehicles is available through archive.org's Open Library.

<https://archive.org/stream/carriagesleighs00eari?ref=ol#page/n5/mode/2up>

R.S. Luqueer & Co.'s Catalogue, also published in New York in 1890, showcases an extensive amount of horse accessories with illustrations, from boots and bridles to grooming tools, medicines and slings. Some of their products were imported from Britain.

https://openlibrary.org/works/OL15743502W/illustrated_catalogue_price_list_of_harness_and_every_article_necessary_for_the_horse_stable_carriag

"Wagon and Carriage Industry" is an entry in Case Western Reserve University's Encyclopedia of Cleveland History. It discusses the rise and fall of the wagon and carriage industry in the Midwest, including significant contributions to the carriage trade by German immigrants and the transition from horse-drawn transportation to automobiles around the turn of the century.

<https://case.edu/ech/articles/w/wagon-and-carriage-industry>

"Horse and Buggy: The Primary Means of Transportation in the 19th Century" is a blog entry published by newspapers.com that showcases various types of horse-drawn carriages used in the United States, as well as what each type was used for and by whom. It also mentions some of the challenges of using of horse-drawn vehicles. <https://blog.newspapers.com/horse-and-buggy-the-primary-means-of-transportation-in-the-19th-century/>

"Mail and Migration for Educators: Primary or Secondary Sources? Stagecoaches" is part of a series of educational activities designed by the Smithsonian's National Postal Museum. In this activity, students are invited to look at photos and descriptions of stagecoaches and model stagecoaches to determine if they are primary or secondary sources. <https://postalmuseum.si.edu/exhibition/mail-and-migration-for-educators/stagecoaches>

"Carriage Stones" is a short online article by the Spokane Historical Society that explains the purpose and prevalence of carriage stones. Though a few are still in place today, unused, they have mostly vanished along with other horse-related infrastructure. <https://spokanehistorical.org/items/show/616>

Critical Thinking Questions: Which aspects of the carriage industry do you think were similar throughout the United States, and which aspects do you think varied based on location? Why were there so many different types of horse-drawn vehicles? How do variations among horse-drawn vehicles compare to the differences in the motor vehicles we use today? How were the carriage industries in the U.S. and Europe connected?



Early Automobiles in the U.S.A.

“America’s First Automobile: The Duryea Brothers’ Role in Reforming Transportation, 1890-1930” is an online article published by St. Mary’s University History Media. Through photographs and writing, it tells the story of the Duryea Brothers, two bicycle makers who designed and built an early horseless carriage and went on to start their own automobile companies. <https://stmuhistorymedia.org/americas-first-automobile-the-duryea-brothers-role-in-reforming-transportation/>

An illustrated retelling of Frank Duryea’s hard-fought victory in the *Chicago Times-Herald* Race—America’s first automobile race—can also be borrowed for free from Open Library with an account on archive.org. https://openlibrary.org/books/OL3940486M/The_great_horse-less_carriage_race

The Smithsonian Automobile Collection is an online exhibit featuring a wide variety of antique and modern cars, from electric and steam-powered vehicles to very early versions of the gasoline-powered cars we drive today, such as Jeep and Chevrolet. Some entries also contain comprehensive descriptions of the cars and their inventors. <https://www.si.edu/spotlight/smithsonian-automobile-collection>

“Did Cars Save Our Cities from Horses?” by Brandon Keim debunks myths around the problem of horse manure in urban settings. <http://nautil.us/issue/7/waste/did-cars-save-our-cities-from-horses>

“Why Did People Think Steam-Powered Cars Were a Good Idea?” is an online Smithsonian Magazine article that briefly describes early automobiles that were powered by steam rather than by gasoline. It talks about how the steam engines worked, how Fred Marriott broke a world record for speed in his modified Stanley Steamer in 1906, and it examines the possible reasons why ultimately Ford’s gasoline-powered cars came to be preferred. <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/why-did-people-think-steam-powered-cars-were-good-idea-180961872/>

Early Cars: Fact Sheet for Children – although this page on the Smithsonian’s website is intended for a slightly younger audience, it gives a lot of useful background on the evolution of the automobile, as well as a helpful list of other museums and websites where you can find out more about automobile history. <https://www.si.edu/spotlight/early-cars>

Changing Architecture of the Motor Car is a 1967 film produced by General Motors and preserved by King Rose Archives. It gives an overview of how early automobiles were designed and redesigned in order to meet consumer demands and keep up with changing technology. <https://youtu.be/m3NqWgkNO5U>

Critical Thinking Questions: Name at least three pioneers of the U.S. automotive industry and describe their innovations. Why did gasoline come to be the most widely used fuel for automobiles? How did cars change over time?