

COMPARISON: LIFE IN 1750 AND TODAY

Purpose

Learn to use the Comparison Tool to conduct and generate historical comparisons—in this activity, a comparison between life in 1750 and the life you live today. As you practice comparison throughout the course, you'll get better and better at describing and explaining the relevant similarities and differences between specific historical developments and processes. You'll also get better at explaining the relative historical significance of similarities and differences between the topics of study.

Key information

Comparison is a key process that historians use to help them better understand the past. Although comparing and contrasting may sound simple, it actually gets really complicated when what you're comparing is multidimensional, as is the case with historical topics. Because comparison is harder than it looks, in this course you'll use a tool to conduct historical comparisons using the frames you learned about earlier in this unit.

Process

1. Before you begin this activity, answer this question: Would you rather live in 1750 CE or today? Be sure to explain your choice.

COMPARISON: LIFE IN 1750 AND TODAY

2. Read the synopsis (summary) of life in 1750. This is a general story of what life was like in the eighteenth century, so the specifics would change depending on geographic location, ethnicity, age, gender, and social class.

Synopsis of Life in 1750—A General Overview

The vast majority of people were farmers living in rural areas. Only a small portion of the total population lived in urban areas, but cities had begun to grow more rapidly than ever before. Some communities, especially those of Indigenous peoples in the Americas and Australasia, were foragers or pastoralists. For those belonging to the lower classes, life consisted of work, usually on a farm where they grew and raised most of their food. Daily interactions were with other members of the same community, some of whom may have lived quite far from each other. Members of the same family may have gone to market once or twice a month to sell goods they'd raised or made. Both men and women worked to support the family, but their jobs could be different, depending on the region or society in which they lived. In some regions of the world, women sewed, tended to the house, and helped with farming duties including planting and harvesting. Men were generally farmers, who tended to the crops and animals. However, in agro-pastoralist communities (places where people both farmed and herded livestock) such as those in sub-Saharan Africa, women were the ones who did a large portion of the farming duties while men often were in charge of the animals. For those in the middle to upper classes, who usually had more wealth than those of the lower class, life could be very different. In certain regions, some children were educated, particularly boys, although girls were increasingly given access to education, such as reading, writing, and mathematical skills. Most children started working at a young age, either helping with the farm, family business, or learning a trade as an apprentice. Many women worked in the textile industry but produced items in their homes rather than in a factory or industrial setting (although this began to change in some regions during the eighteenth century). Those living in urban areas worked in a variety of industries as merchants, smiths (working with metals), carpenters, blacksmiths, and printers. People living in cities had many interactions in the course of their day and therefore may have belonged to different networks including those associated with their job, their faith, and their government. Most people didn't travel very far from their homes but some, such as those emigrating to the Americas, ventured out and explored new areas.

COMPARISON: LIFE IN 1750 AND TODAY

3. On the next page (page 3) you'll find the Comparison Tool. Since this is your first time using it, we've helped you with the Cases You're Comparing, Time Period, and Location boxes, but you'll fill those out on your own later in the course. Using "Synopsis of Life in 1750—A General Overview," which you just read, fill out the 1750 column of the worksheet.
4. Now, do the same thing to complete the sections for Today, using your own knowledge of life today to fill out those columns.
 - Remember that *community* focuses on how people organize into groups, usually with shared values or beliefs as well as being inhabitants of the same region or nation. *Production and distribution* refers to how people make goods and get them into the hands of other people. For example, do they make goods at home or in a factory? Do they travel to markets to sell these goods, or do they trade with neighbors? *Networks* is about how people connect with others, sometimes through work-related connections or through trade or, in the twenty-first century, via social media and the internet.
5. Your last step in the tool is to fill out the Similarities and Differences boxes. Compare the details you've recorded in the 1750 column and the Today column and think about the similarities and differences you see.

COMPARISON: LIFE IN 1750 AND TODAY

Topic of Comparison

Life in 1750 compared to life today

Part 1: Identifying and Describing

Cases you're comparing	1750	Today	
Time period	<i>1750 (eighteenth century)</i>	<i>2020 and beyond (twenty-first century)</i>	
Location	<i>Hint: You can choose any location, but it might make sense to pick where you live.</i>	<i>Hint: You can choose any location, but it might make sense to pick where you live.</i>	
P&D How were goods produced and distributed in each of these periods of time?		Similarities	
		Differences	
Networks What types of networks were people members of		Similarities	

COMPARISON: LIFE IN 1750 AND TODAY

in each of these periods of time?		Differences	
Communities How were communities structured in each of these time periods?		Similarities	
		Differences	

6. Once you've completed the tool, respond to the following questions:

- How are these time periods similar?

- How are they different?

- What's important about those similarities and differences?

COMPARISON: LIFE IN 1750 AND TODAY

- Would you change the answer you gave at the start of this activity about which period you'd rather live in? Explain your reasoning.

7. Look back at your completed tool and choose **one** similarity and **one** difference you think are most **significant** (important). Then, complete the sentence starters below and defend your choice using evidence.

The most significant **difference** between life in 1750 and life today is: _____

Because _____

The most significant **similarity** between life in 1750 and life today is: _____

Because _____