



**Grade Level:**  
1st-3rd

**Subject Area:**  
Social Studies  
Language Arts

**WI Model Academic Standards:**

Social Studies:  
A.4.4, B.4.1

Language Arts:  
C.4.2, C.4.3

**Email Contact:**  
[curriculum@mpm.edu](mailto:curriculum@mpm.edu)

**Website:**  
[www.mpm.edu](http://www.mpm.edu)

# Beginnings: Life in Milwaukee

## Lesson Guide

**Overview:**

Students visit the Streets of Old Milwaukee gallery to learn about daily life and communication in Milwaukee's early years and contrast it with modern living.

**Background:**

The land that became the city of Milwaukee featured an abundance of natural resources at the junction of three waterways which flowed into what is now Lake Michigan. Just as Native Americans before them, early French traders and immigrant settlers made this bounty the foundation of their economy. By 1846, Milwaukee had evolved from a trading post to a vibrant, growing city poised for modernity. Early Milwaukee boasted ample labor, great harbor potential, and visionary leaders. The city attracted diverse immigrant groups, including farmers, laborers, and tradesmen from New England and several European countries including Ireland, Germany, Poland, Italy, Norway, and Sweden. African Americans from the South streamed into the city in the late 1800's following the abolition of slavery. In the early 1900's Milwaukee was a bustling "city of nations," a renowned cultural and industrial center.

The Streets of Old Milwaukee exhibit represents a Milwaukee neighborhood during the period of approximately 1880-1917. Exhibit structures are represented at about three-quarter scale. Materials were salvaged from several downtown Milwaukee buildings targeted for demolition. Many of the doors, windows, furnishings and street features are authentic.

The exhibit features private homes, shops, and businesses typical of the era. Lending authenticity to the gallery are advertising bills and posters, gaslights, a vintage saloon, print and woodworking shops, and a horse trough. Also included is the Watson Family Home, a tribute to one of Milwaukee's first prominent African American families. The exhibit includes facades representing well-known historic Milwaukee businesses and establishments still thriving today such as Roundy's grocery store, Mader's restaurant and the Pfister Hotel.

Fully as important as the buildings themselves are their contents. Businesses display stained glass and authentic goods and materials from early Milwaukee. In addition to artifacts from the museum's own collections, the exhibit contains many objects generously donated by the community, including those found in the General Store, which houses nearly 3,400 individual artifacts.

**Student Objectives:**

1. View the Streets of Old Milwaukee exhibit as a window into the past.
2. Use artifacts in the Streets of Old Milwaukee exhibit to examine daily life in early Milwaukee.
3. Investigate how early Milwaukeeans overcame language barriers through the use of symbols in shop signs.

**Assessments:**

1. Students can differentiate between an artifact and a specimen.
2. Students can describe and give an example of a symbol.
3. Students can explain how early Milwaukeeans used symbols to communicate in a multilingual environment.
4. Students are able to discuss and describe differences between 1880s-1910s life and modern life, especially regarding chores and leisure activities.

**Program Vocabulary:**

Artifact: An object created by or modified by humans.

Communication: The act of conveying a message through words or images.

Specimen: An object found in nature not altered by humans.

Symbol: An image or idea that represents something else, especially in resemblance.

**Enrichment Vocabulary:**

America	City	Communication	Community
Country	Emergency	Entertain	Entertainment
First Aid	Fur trade	Identify	Illness
Immigration	Injury	Language	Mother Tongue
Multicultural	Past	Recognize	Reuse

**Procedure:**

Meet your Museum educator in front of the elevator on the first floor five minutes before your scheduled program start time.