



Comparing the Lives of Rich and Poor

Teachers' Guidance Notes

Learning Objectives

- To investigate two contrasting families living at Froncysyllte, near Pontcysyllte Aqueduct and Canal
- To compare the lives of a rich and poor family in the Victorian period
- To develop investigation, research and fact gathering skills using varied sources

Resources

- Fact File for the Graesser Family
- Fact File for the Davies Family
- 1881 Census sheets and transcripts for each family
- Comparison Table

Activity Instructions

Learners will use primary sources and the fact files to compare a rich and poor family living and working near the Pontcysyllte Aqueduct and Canal. They will investigate the family of Robert Graesser, an industrialist living in Argoed Hall Froncysyllte, and the Davies Family who were boatmen on the canal.



Census notes

The census is a survey that takes place every 10 years in the UK. It gives the most accurate estimate of all the people and households, helping to build a detailed picture of society in that year. The census asks questions about who is staying in each household on the night of the census, their ages, occupations, place of birth etc.

NB In 1881 John Davies was away from home on his boat on the night of the census and so is recorded on the census where his canal boat was berthed, whilst his wife is recorded on the census at their home in Fron. Eight year old Franz Graesser was also away from home on the night of the census as he was a boarder at Ruabon Grammar School and is recorded on the census there. All 1881 census extracts featuring members of the two families are included here.

NB Samples of the original census pages are included here but some children may find them hard to decipher so a transcript has also been provided.

Starter Activity Ideas:



Discuss: What is a census? What can it tell us? What can it not tell us? ('Looking at Population Changes' in 'How has the area changed over time?' learning bundle gives more background.)

Further Activity Ideas:



Write: A letter or diary entry from the point of view of Mary Graesser and Sarah Williams or Robert Graesser and John Davies. What would they say to each other? How are their lives different?

Brief for Learners:



Each Fact File contains brief background information about the Davies and Graesser families, some images and extracts from the 1881 census.

Read the Fact Files and use the 1881 census sheets to fill in the table for each family. Then answer the questions below and compare the lives of the two families.

What can you find out about the family before and after 1881 using the Fact Files and your own research?

What does your table of facts tell you? What doesn't it tell you?

What differences can you identify between the two families?

How do you think the role of women changed since the 1800s?



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Graesser Family Fact File

Background information:

Robert Graesser was born in Saxony, Germany in 1845. He trained as a chemist and moved to North Wales as a young man. He went on to play an important part in the industrial development of the area.

In 1867 he established a chemical works in Cefn Mawr to extract paraffin oil and paraffin wax from the local shale (a type of rock). By 1880 the works had changed to produce coal tar and carbolic acid – an antiseptic and disinfectant used in soap – and became the world’s leading producer of these chemicals.

In 1870, aged 25, he married his wife Mary (who was the daughter of a shop manager) and they lived in the High Street in Cefn Mawr.

He became a British citizen in 1874, along with his children. This allowed him to own property in Britain. He bought Argoed Hall and the surrounding land in 1880 for the sum of £3,750 so that his growing family could live close to his chemical works.

Work in progress on Argoed Hall

He extensively altered Argoed Hall to provide a comfortable home for his family and servants. The 1891 census records 11 people in residence. Three sons and a daughter were living at home, as well as a niece. They were all scholars and their governess was living in the house too along with a cook, housemaid and kitchen maid. Argoed Lodge and Argoed Cottage were built for his coachman and gardener.



When he died in 1911 crowds of people lined the streets to watch his funeral procession as he was so well respected in the area. He left over £100,000, equivalent to over £13 million in 2021!

Funeral procession of Robert Graesser



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1881 Census: Argoed Hall, Graesser Family

Page 2] The undermentioned Houses are situate within the Boundaries of the															
Civil Parish [or Township] of		City or Municipal Borough of		Municipal Ward of		Parliamentary Borough of		Town or Village or Hamlet of		Urban Sanitary District of		Rural Sanitary District of		Ecclesiastical Parish or District of	
Llyffty						Pontcysyllte		Pontcysyllte		Llanerch		Llanerch		Llanerch	
No. of Schedule	ROAD, STREET, &c., and No. or NAME of HOUSE	HOUSES Inhabited (T), or Building (B)	NAME and Surname of each Person	RELATION to Head of Family	CON-DITION as to Marriage	AGE last Birthday of		Rank, Profession, or OCCUPATION	WHERE BORN	If (1) Deaf-and-Dumb (2) Blind (3) Imbecile or Idiot (4) Lunatic					
						Males	Females								
6	Canal Basin	1	Elias Roberts	Head	Mar.	45		Boatman & Coal Dealer	Deulightshire Llanerch						
			Jennings De	Wife	Mar.	40			Deulightshire Llanerch						
			Zonah De	Son	Unm.	18		Coal Miner	Deulightshire Llanerch						
			Gomer De	Son		13		Scholar	Deulightshire Llanerch						
			Morris De	Son		12		De	Deulightshire Llanerch						
			Zonah Elias De	Son		8		De	Deulightshire Llanerch						
			William De	Son		7		De	Deulightshire Llanerch						
			Sarah De	Daughter		5		De	Deulightshire Llanerch						
7	Argoed Hall	1	Robert Graesser	Head	Mar.	36		Manufacturing Chemist	Wales - Glamorgan						
			Mary E De	Wife	Mar.	33			London - Chelsea						
			Alice S. De	Daughter	Unm.	9		Scholar	Deulightshire Pwllheli						
			Ernest H. De	Son		5		De	Deulightshire Pwllheli						
			Edgar R. De	Son		3		De	Deulightshire Pwllheli						
			Albert J. De	Son		1			Deulightshire Pwllheli						
			Normand N. De	Son		4 mo.			Deulightshire Pwllheli						
			Martha Williams	Mother-in-law	Wid.	71		no occupation	Caerdydd - Gwynedd						
			Marie Graesser	Niece	Unm.	16		no occupation	Pwllheli - Gwynedd						
			Sarah Roberts	Serv.	Unm.	25		Laundress	Deulightshire Pwllheli						
			Mathew Griffith	Serv.	Unm.	21		Cook	Deulightshire Llanerch						
			Mary Evans	Serv.	Unm.	20		Nursemaid	Deulightshire Llanerch						
			Mary Parker	Serv.	Unm.	15		Nursemaid	Cheshire - Crewe						
8	Argoed Farm	1	Edward Williams	Head	Mar.	52		Fanner (without Fanner)	Deulightshire Llanerch						
			Mary Williams	Wife	Mar.	42			Deulightshire Llanerch						
			Mary Williams	Daughter	Unm.	22		Dressmaker	Deulightshire Llanerch						
			Mary Aulon	Niece	Unm.	12		Scholar	Deulightshire Llanerch						
9	Total of Houses...	3	Total of Males and Females...			12	13								

Note.—Draw the pen through such of the words of the headings as are inappropriate.

Transcript of 1881 Census: Argoed Hall, Graesser Family

Road, street and number or name of house	Name and surname of each person	Relation to head of the family	Married?	Age and sex		Rank, Profession, or Occupation	Where born
				Male	Female		
Argoed Hall	Robert Graesser	Head	Married	36		Manufacturing Chemist	Mosel, Saxony
	Mary E	Wife	Married		33		London, Chelsea
	Alice S	Daughter	Unmarried		9	Scholar	Denbighshire, Ruabon
	Ernest H	Son		5		Scholar	Denbighshire, Ruabon
	Edgar R	Son		3		Scholar	Denbighshire, Ruabon
	Albert F	Son		1			Denbighshire, Ruabon
	Normand H	Son		4 mths			Denbighshire, Ruabon
	Martha Wilson	Mother in law	Widow		71	No occupation	Cambridgeshire
	Maria Graesser	Niece	Unmarried		16	No occupation	Prussia
	Sarah Roberts	Servant	Unmarried		28	Governess	Denbighshire, Ruabon
	Marther Griffith	Servant	Unmarried		21	Cook	Denbighshire, Cefn
	Mary Evans	Servant	Unmarried		20	Housemaid	Denbighshire, Cefn
	Mary Parker	Servant	Unmarried		15	Nursemaid	Cheshire, Crewe



1881 Ruabon Census:

Franz Graesser at Ruabon Grammar School

Road, street and number or name of house	Name and surname of each person	Relation to head of the family	Married?	Age and sex		Rank, Profession, or Occupation	Where born
				Male	Female		
Grammar School	Alfred L Taylor M.A	Head	Married	53		Head master	Lancashire, Rochdale
	Annie Taylor	Wife	Married		50		Surrey, Bermondsey
	Emily Taylor	Daughter	Unmarried		21		Denbighshire, Ruabon
	Alice G Taylor	Daughter	Unmarried		19		Denbighshire, Ruabon
	Lillian M Taylor	Daughter	Unmarried		9		Denbighshire, Ruabon
	Alfred B Taylor	Son	Unmarried	14			Denbighshire, Ruabon
	Guy L Taylor	Son	Unmarried	5			Denbighshire, Ruabon
	Joseph Deeley	Assistant master	Unmarried	30		Assistant Master	Staffordshire, Brierly Hill
	Edward L Hitch	Border	Unmarried	15		Scholar	Denbighshire, Ruabon
	Alfred H Hitch	Border	Unmarried	13		Scholar	Denbighshire, Ruabon
	Charles E H Poole	Border	Unmarried	16		Scholar	Caernarfonshire, Caernarfon.
	Hugh R A Poole	Border	Unmarried	12		Scholar	Derbyshire, Buxton
	Charles J W Heatley	Border	Unmarried	11		Scholar	Lancashire, Rainhill
	Frank Graesser	Border	Unmarried	8		Scholar	Denbighshire, Ruabon
	Elizabeth Stephens	Servant	Unmarried		18	Housemaid	Denbighshire, Ruabon
	Catherine Jones	Servant	Unmarried		34	Cook	Llansantffraid, Merionethshire
	Charlotte Jones	Servant	Unmarried		20	Housemaid	Gwersyllt, Denbighshire



Davies Family Fact File

Background information:

The Davies family were boatmen, based in Fron but working canal boats along the Ellesmere Canal (now called the Llangollen Canal) and beyond.

In 1851 William Davies and his wife Sarah had five sons and two daughters aged between 14 and 6 months. The eldest Walter, age 14, was a forge boy.

His wife had died before the 1861 census as William is recorded as a widower. At the time of the census, he was working away on his boat 'Durable' and so is recorded on the census at Christleton, Cheshire with his eldest son Ben, aged 13, who was a 'hand'.



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Narrowboat at Glyn Valley Tramway Wharf, Chirk

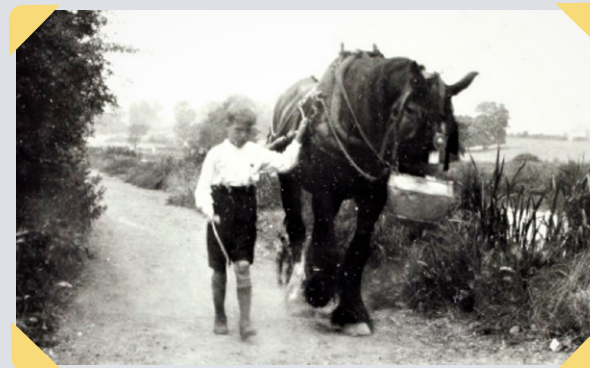
In the 1871 census William was away with two of his sons - Walter and Ben - who are also in charge of other boats.



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Their younger brother John, also became a boatman.

He married Sarah, a miner's daughter, when he was 24 in Llangollen in 1868. By 1871 they were living in Sion Cottages, Fron and had a son William aged 2. Henry Jones, a servant, aged 11 was also living with them. He is recorded on the census as a boatman's driver. (Drivers led the horse along the canals.)



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1881 Census: Whixall, Shropshire – Davies Family

The undermentioned Houses are situate within the Boundaries of the

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Civil Parish [or Township] of	City or Municipal Borough of	Municipal Ward of	Parliamentary Borough of	Town or Village or Hamlet of	Urban Sanitary District of	Rural Sanitary District of	Eccelesiastical Parish or District of	If (1) Deaf-and-Dumb (2) Blind (3) Imbecile or Idiot (4) Lunatic	
<i>Whixall New</i>				<i>Whixall</i>		<i>New Union</i>	<i>St Mary's Whixall</i>		
No. of Schedule	ROAD, STREET, &c., and No. or NAME of HOUSE	HOUSES Inhabited (A), or Building (B)	NAME and Surname of each Person	RELATION to Head of Family	CON-DITION as to Marriage	AGE last Birthday of	Rank, Profession, or OCCUPATION	WHERE BORN	
98	<i>Rye Hills</i>	1	<i>Henry Coanson</i>	<i>Head</i>	<i>Mar</i>	<i>42</i>	<i>Basket-Maker</i>	<i>Salop. Pres</i>	
			<i>Hannah do</i>	<i>Wife</i>	<i>Mar</i>	<i>45</i>	<i>do Wife</i>	<i>do do</i>	
			<i>Philip do</i>	<i>Son</i>		<i>11</i>	<i>Scholar</i>	<i>do do</i>	
			<i>Alfred do</i>	<i>do</i>		<i>7</i>	<i>do</i>	<i>do do</i>	
			<i>Edward do</i>	<i>do</i>		<i>4</i>	<i>do</i>	<i>do do</i>	
99	<i>Moss Hd</i>	1	<i>Henry Slack</i>	<i>Head</i>	<i>Mar</i>	<i>32</i>	<i>Turf Merchant</i>	<i>do do</i>	
			<i>Hannah do</i>	<i>Wife</i>	<i>Mar</i>	<i>40</i>	<i>do Wife</i>	<i>do Wren</i>	
			<i>Elizabeth Brooks</i>	<i>Daughter</i>		<i>11</i>	<i>Scholar</i>	<i>do Pres</i>	
			<i>John Brooks</i>	<i>Brother-in-law</i>	<i>Unm</i>	<i>45</i>	<i>Labourer</i>	<i>do Wren</i>	
100		1	<i>John Poughy</i>	<i>Head</i>	<i>Mar</i>	<i>69</i>	<i>Small Farmer</i>	<i>do Market Drayton</i>	
			<i>Martha do</i>	<i>Wife</i>	<i>Mar</i>	<i>64</i>	<i>do Wife</i>	<i>do Pres</i>	
101	<i>The Moss</i>	1	<i>Sarah Gregory</i>	<i>Head</i>	<i>Unm</i>	<i>64</i>	<i>Small Farmer</i>	<i>Cheshire, Bickerton</i>	
			<i>William do</i>	<i>Son</i>	<i>Unm</i>	<i>22</i>	<i>Labourer</i>	<i>Salop. Pres</i>	
102	<i>Rye Hills</i>	1	<i>John Parsons</i>	<i>Head</i>	<i>Mar</i>	<i>60</i>	<i>Turf dealer</i>	<i>do - do</i>	
			<i>Sarah do</i>	<i>Wife</i>	<i>Mar</i>	<i>63</i>	<i>do Wife</i>	<i>do do</i>	
			<i>William do</i>	<i>Son</i>	<i>Unm</i>	<i>20</i>	<i>do - Son</i>	<i>do do</i>	
			<i>Joseph do</i>	<i>do</i>	<i>do</i>	<i>18</i>	<i>do do</i>	<i>do do</i>	
103	<i>Platt Lane (Boat) Canal</i>		<i>Benjamin Davies</i>	<i>Head</i>	<i>Mar</i>	<i>32</i>	<i>Boatman</i>	<i>Wren</i>	
			<i>Lizaman do</i>	<i>Son</i>		<i>10</i>	<i>do - Son</i>	<i>do</i>	
104	<i>" (Boat)</i>		<i>John Davies</i>	<i>Head</i>	<i>Mar</i>	<i>35</i>	<i>Boatman</i>	<i>Wren</i>	
			<i>William L. do</i>	<i>Son</i>		<i>12</i>	<i>do - Son</i>	<i>do</i>	
Total of Houses...		<i>5</i>	Total of Males and Females...			<i>15</i>	<i>6</i>		

John and William Davies

NOTE.—Draw the pen through such of the words of the headings as are inappropriate.



Transcript of 1881 Census: Whixall, Shropshire – Davies Family

Road, street and number or name of house	Name and surname of each person	Relation to head of the family	Married?	Age and sex		Rank, Profession, or Occupation	Where born
				Male	Female		
Platt Lane (Boat)	John Davies	Head	Married	35		Boatman	Froncysyllte
	William Davies	Son	Unmarried	12		Boatman (son)	Froncysyllte

1881 Census: Froncysyllte – Davies Family

Road, street and number or name of house	Name and surname of each person	Relation to head of the family	Married?	Age and sex		Rank, Profession, or Occupation	Where born
				Male	Female		
Near Board School (one of six properties)	Sarah Davies	Wife	Married		33	Boatman's wife	Denbighshire, Llangollen
	Catherine Davies	Daughter	Unmarried		9	Scholar	Denbighshire, Llangollen
	Sarah A	Daughter			7	Scholar	Denbighshire, Llangollen
	John Davies	Son		5		Scholar	Denbighshire, Llangollen
	Joseph Davies	Son		3		Scholar	Denbighshire, Llangollen



1881 Census Comparison Table



Question	Graesser Family		Davies Family	
	Argoed Hall	Grammar School	Froncysyllte (cottage)	Whixall (Boat)
Who was in the household in 1881? How old are they?				
What are the children doing in 1881?				
What job does the mother have?				
What job does the father have?				
Is there anyone else living in the property in 1881? What do they do?				