

READ IOWA HISTORY

EDUCATOR MATERIALS

Buxton: A Lost Utopia

LESSON PLAN FOR SUPPORTING QUESTION

How was Buxton a unique community?



2ND GRADE

STATE HISTORICAL
SOCIETY OF IOWA
IOWA DEPARTMENT OF CULTURAL AFFAIRS

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Introduction to Read Iowa History

About Read Iowa History

Through the Library of Congress Teaching with Primary Sources grant, the State Historical Society of Iowa developed Read Iowa History — free, downloadable K-5 lesson plans to build and develop reading and critical thinking skills with primary sources in the classroom.

[Primary sources](#) (from the digital [Primary Source Sets collection](#)) are used to help students learn from multiple perspectives, develop primary source-based claims and evidence, and to interpret documents and images of the past. These lessons were developed with the Iowa Core Social Studies and Literacy Standards. Each lesson plan includes ready-to-use source material, student worksheets, educator lesson plans and assessment tools and activities. Educators are encouraged to explore the lesson plans, and use materials as they see fit for their students. Educators are welcome to alter lesson plans, worksheets and assessments to best align with their curriculum.

Please check out the [Primary Source Sets toolkit](#) to learn more about using primary sources in the classroom.

What's Included

Educator Materials

Sources are accompanied by an educator lesson plan. This plan includes: the compelling question, supporting question, objectives, background information, vocabulary cards (words bolded throughout lesson plan), a materials list and instructions. The plan also includes a brief activity (labeled “summative”) to wrap up each part of the lesson plan and to check for comprehension. Educators are welcome to use the activities that are suggested or create their own with the primary sources.

Student Materials

Many of the lesson plan instructions are accompanied by a worksheet that can be copied and distributed to students as they analyze the primary source(s) to assist in their application and comprehension. These worksheets are optional but may provide a structure for students to think critically about the primary sources they are analyzing. These student worksheets also are available in the “Student Materials” packet for this topic for easier reproduction located on the [Read Iowa History webpage](#).

Supporting Question Assessments and Scoring Options

The assessment activities and possible scoring options allow educators to evaluate how students comprehend and apply the knowledge they learned from the individual primary source activities. Assessment instructions, example worksheets and possible scoring options are located at the end of this Read Iowa History section in “Educator Materials.” Reproducible assessment worksheets are available in this topic’s “Student Materials” packet on the [Read Iowa History webpage](#).



Courtesy of University of Iowa Libraries and Archives, Osborn, Nancy, "Buxton Wonders Baseball Team," 1915

Buxton: A Lost Utopia

2nd Grade

Overview

This lesson plan helps students analyze historical images and documents. Students explore the town and history of Buxton, Iowa. **Buxton** existed only for about 20 years but boasted a population of African-American former sharecroppers and Swedish immigrants who enjoyed economic prosperity and racial equality in this unique Iowa town during the early 1900s.



Compelling Question

What key decisions influence whether a community thrives?



Lesson Supporting Question

How was Buxton a unique community?

The compelling question is included to show how the supporting question of this lesson plan can be used to reflect on a broader, enduring question.

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Objectives & Social Studies and Literacy Standards

Objectives

- I can analyze an image to create questions about a topic.
- I can read a graph to tell about the rise and fall of coal production in Iowa.
- I can use a plat map to describe the location of Buxton and the geographic features of the area.
- I can use images and text to create a conclusion about Monroe Mercantile and the success of Buxton.

Iowa Core Social Studies Standards

No.	Description
SS.2.3.	Determine if a source is primary or secondary and distinguish whether it is mostly fact or opinion.
SS.2.4.	Construct responses to compelling questions using reasoning, examples, and relevant details.
SS.2.6.	Use deliberative and democratic procedures to make decisions about and act on civic problems in their classrooms.
SS.2.16.	Using maps, globes, and other simple geographic models, evaluate routes for people or goods that consider environmental characteristics.
SS.2.18.	Describe how the choices people make impact local and distant environments.
SS.2.20.	Determine the influence of particular individuals and groups who have shaped significant historical change.
SS.2.24.	Describe the intended and unintended consequences of using Iowa's natural resources.

Iowa Core Literacy Standards

No.	Description
RI.2.1	RI.2.1 Ask and answer such questions as who, what, where, when, why, and how to demonstrate understanding of key details in a text.
RI.2.2	RI.2.2 Identify the main topic of a multiparagraph text as well as the focus of specific paragraphs within the text.
RI.2.5	RI.2.5 Know and use various text features (e.g., captions, bold print, subheadings, glossaries, indexes, electronic menus, icons) to locate key facts or information in a text efficiently.
RI.2.6	RI.2.6 Identify the main purpose of a text, including what the author wants to answer, explain, or describe.
RI.2.7	RI.2.7 Explain how specific images (e.g., a diagram showing how a machine works) contribute to and clarify a text.
W.2.1	W.2.1 Write opinion pieces in which they introduce the topic or book they are writing about, state an opinion, supply reasons that support the opinion, use linking words (e.g., because, and, also) to connect opinion and reasons, and provide a concluding statement or section.
W.2.3	W.2.3 Write narratives in which they recount a well-elaborated event or short sequence of events, include details to describe actions, thoughts, and feelings, use temporal words to signal event order, and provide a sense of closure.
L.2.6	L.2.6 Use words and phrases acquired through conversations, reading and being read to, and responding to texts, including using adjectives and adverbs to describe (e.g., When other kids are happy that makes me happy).
SL.2.2	SL.2.2 Recount or describe key ideas or details from a text read aloud or information presented orally or through other media.

Background Essay

Utilize this background essay to provide further context and understanding of the community of Buxton

Most early Iowa settlers lived on farms. Some, however, were merchants, lawyers, doctors, newspaper publishers, ministers or craftsmen who lived in the new towns springing up across the prairie. Not all the towns survived. Some never attracted many people and others lost population when conditions changed. The result was Iowa “ghost towns” that exist across the state.

Most early towns came into existence to serve the surrounding farm population. When a trip to town could take several hours, farmers wanted services and supplies close at hand, and towns sprang up every five to six miles apart. The coming of the railroads in the 1870s and 1880s both helped and hindered Iowa. Towns along the rail lines became trading centers where merchants could receive goods from the East and farmers could sell their cattle and hogs for shipment to eastern cities. Towns that had no railroad connection lost customers and usually became ghost towns. Sometimes the railroads even created towns due to the fact that steam engines needed coal and water. This impacted western Iowa especially as rail lines arrived before major waves of population.

Some towns were created with a special purpose. This is especially true of those based upon **coal mining**, a big industry in Iowa in the late 19th and early 20th C. The railroads again were a big factor because trains were the major buyers for Iowa coal. Many small coal mines sprang up southeastern and central Iowa. Miners and their families occupied cheap housing near-by, and the rail company sometimes operated general stores and other services for their workers. When the coal ran out in the mine, the mine closed and the miners moved away, creating another Iowa ghost town. Sometimes the houses and other buildings were loaded onto trains and moved to a nearby location where a new mine was opening up.

The town of Buxton in southeastern Iowa was **unique** in that a majority of its residents were African-American. The Consolidation Coal Company worked for the Chicago and Northwestern Railroad. Having a hard time recruiting white miners, Consolidation Coal sent agents to southern states to hire black workers. In 1873, it founded the town of Buxton and opened nearby mines. It grew quickly and, according to one source, became the largest coal town west of the Mississippi. In the 1905 census, the town boasted 2,700 blacks and 1,991 whites. The town supported black doctors, lawyers and other professionals, and an African-American YMCA with a gymnasium, an indoor swimming pool and many programs for Buxton residents. The town was proud of its baseball team, the Buxton Wonders. White residents included immigrants from Sweden and elsewhere, and they existed peacefully with the African-Americans throughout the community's history.

Buxton coal production peaked during WWI but afterward, mechanization and conversion of train engines to diesel fuel decreased the demand for coal. Several severe fires ravaged the community and the mines. By 1919, Buxton's population had declined to only 400. The last mine closed in 1927. Residents moved away but fondly remembered their Buxton days. Many blacks moved to Des Moines or Waterloo. Very little physical evidence of the town remains today.

There have been many articles and several books written about this **unique** African-American experience in rural Iowa. While it is only one of Iowa's many ghost towns, it is probably the most famous.

Vocabulary Words

- Coal Mining
- Company Store
- Unique
- Plat Map

Postcard View of Center Street in Buxton, 1908



Compelling Question

What key decisions influence whether a community thrives?



Lesson Supporting Question

How was Buxton a unique community?

Overview

To analyze the image of “Postcard View of Center Street in Buxton,” students work independently or in small groups to complete the analysis worksheet. Students also share their observations and questions during an in-class discussion.

Source Background

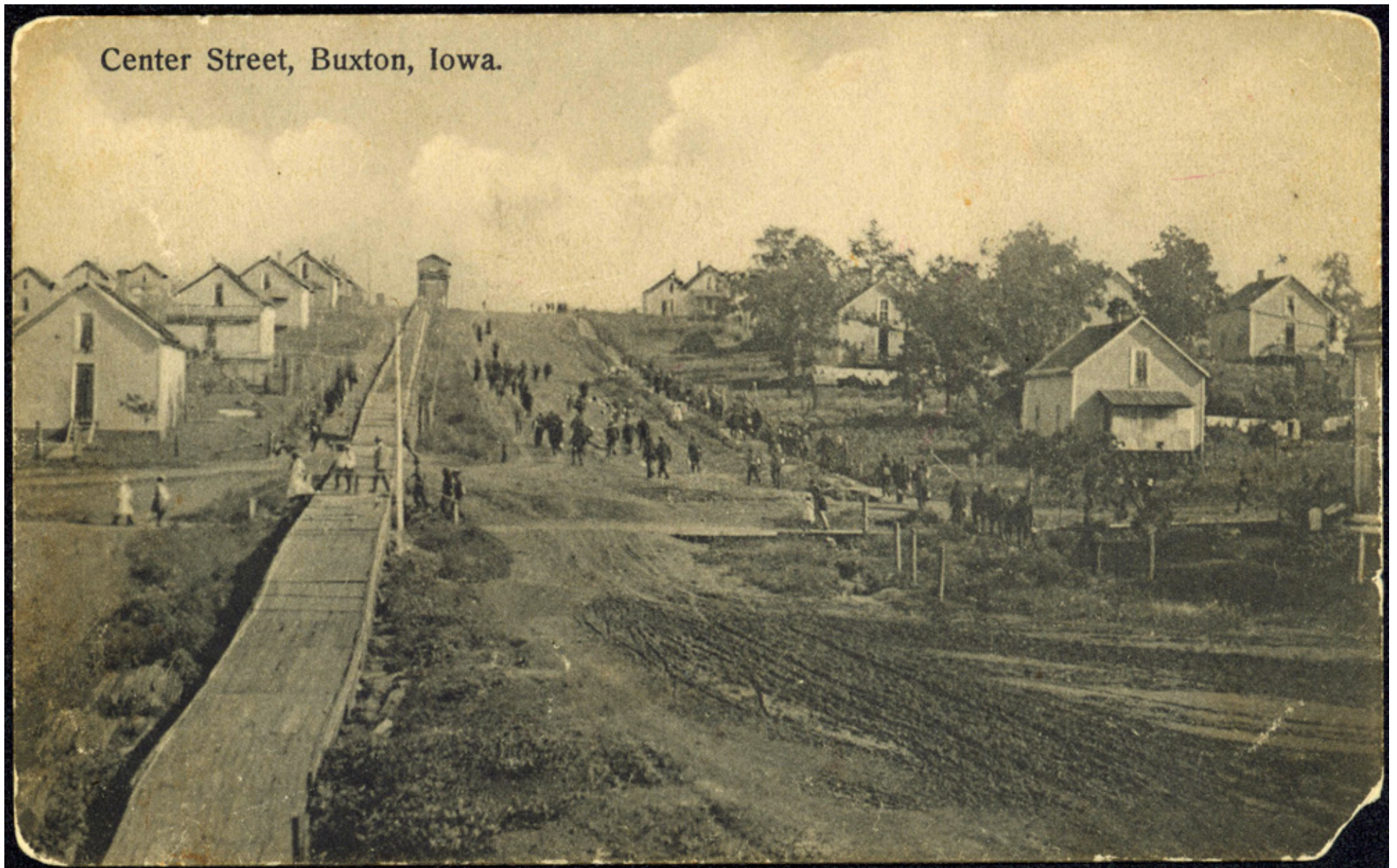
Many people are seen at a distance walking down Center Street in this photograph from Buxton, Iowa, circa 1908. Also called “coal chute hill,” coal was moved from railroad cars at the bottom of the hill to the coal conveyor and chute at the top of the hill. Wagons backed under the chute, took on a load of coal, and delivered to homes and businesses throughout the community. Its secondary use was as a sledding hill in the winter. The men seen walking up the hill are coal miners returning home from their work in the coal mines.

Instructions

- 1 Distribute and/or display the “Postcard View of Center Street in Buxton” image for students to analyze.
- 2 Distribute worksheets of “Analyze A Source.” Students will work in pairs or small groups to analyze the image to complete the worksheet. Below are some additional questions that may help facilitate the small-group activity.
- 3 After students complete their worksheets, have them reconvene for an in-class discussion. Consider having a large printed or digital version of the “Postcard View of Center Street in Buxton” image that you can use to circle the observations made by students.
- 4 Facilitate the class in discussing their observations of the image. Consider using these questions to guide the class discussion.
 - What do you notice about the structure of these buildings?
 - How are they similar? How are they different?
 - Why might these buildings be constructed in this way?
 - Why might they be organized like this?
- 5 **Summative:** List questions students have about the town of Buxton image on an anchor chart. Students will refer back to these questions after viewing and finding evidence from other sources.

Materials

- “Postcard View of Center Street in Buxton” image (may need multiple copies)
- “Analyze an Image: Postcard View of Center Street in Buxton” worksheet (either one worksheet per student or one worksheet per small group)
- Computer or document projector to show enlarged image



Courtesy of State Historical Society of Iowa, 1908

Analyze a Source: Postcard View of Center Street

This is an example worksheet that corresponds with the instructions in Part 1 to analyze the “Postcard View of Center Street in Buxton.” This version of the worksheet is for you, the educator, to fill out, add notes and utilize. A printable version of this worksheet is available for reproduction in this topic’s “Student Materials” packet.



Analyze a Source

Type of Sources (circle one)				
Source Title	Creator(s)		Date Created or Published	
Text	Image	Map	Video	Other:

1. Describe what you see in the image. Who is in the image? What are they doing?

2. Who is the photographer’s intended audience? Why do you think this photo was taken?

3. What questions does this photo lead you to ask?

Bluff Creek Township (Buxton) Map, 1919



Compelling Question

What key decisions influence whether a community thrives?



Lesson Supporting Question

How was Buxton a unique community?

Overview

Students will be asked to analyze a plat map of the Bluff Creek Township (Buxton). This lesson requires students to use the map individually or with a partner to describe the location of Buxton and its geographical features.

Source Background

This atlas and plat map book of Monroe County, Iowa in 1919 was compiled and published by Geo. A. Ogle & Co., Publishers and Engravers and funded by the federal government. This image shows a plat map of Bluff Creek Township and Buxton. It shows how the township was divided into sections and the owners of the various land parcels. Further details on the layout and outline of Buxton, Iowa are available on [image 25](#) of the digitized book held in the Iowa Digital Library.

Instructions

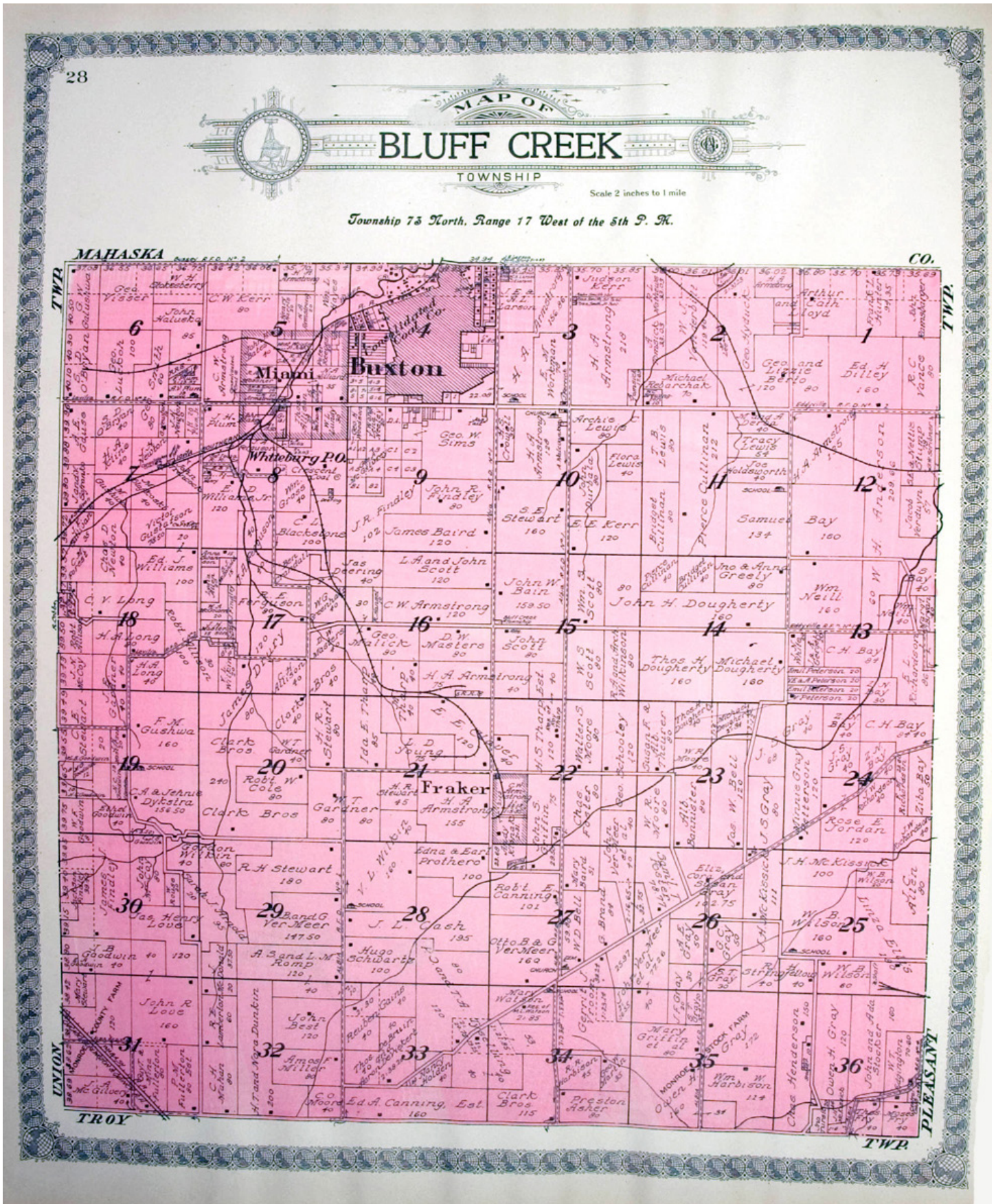
- 1 Distribute and/or display the “Bluff Creek Township (Buxton) Map, 1919.”
- 2 Give students time to analyze the plat map individually or with a partner.
- 3 Facilitate a class discussion about their observations. Consider using these discussion questions:
 - What geographic features, both natural and constructed, are near Buxton?
 - How would the geographic features have affected the transportation of goods and people into and out of Buxton?

Materials

- Bluff Creek Township Map (may need multiple copies)
- Current-Day Iowa Transportation Map

Comparative Map Activity

- 4 Before class, select a current-day transportation map of Iowa to use with your students. Consider contacting the Iowa Tourism Office for road maps of Iowa.
- 5 Display/project the current-day map for students to analyze. Use the following questions to guide students in making connections between the map of Buxton and the current map of Iowa.
 - Where is your community located?
 - Where was Buxton located? (Mark on the map Buxton’s location, five miles NE of Lovilla in Monroe County)
 - Compare what is the same between the maps. Contrast what is different between maps. Discuss why the items listed remained the same or changed.
- 6 **Summative:** Gather as a whole group. Ask students to think of location statements for Buxton (i.e. Buxton is in Bluff Creek Township, Buxton is in Iowa, etc.) while the educator records this information in something like an anchor chart or class notebook. This is a good opportunity to help students use domain-specific vocabulary such as: north, south, near/far/closer/farther, creek/river/lake, road, railroad.



Courtesy of University of Iowa Libraries and Archives, "Standard Atlas of Monroe County Iowa," Geo. A. Ogle & Co., 1919

Monroe Mercantile Company, 1911



Compelling Question

What key decisions influence whether a community thrives?



Lesson Supporting Question

How was Buxton a unique community?

Overview

To analyze these historical photographs, students identify the source, observe the photo, contextualize it and corroborate what they have learned to apply to answer questions posed by their classmates.

Source Background

Monroe Mercantile was the Consolidation Coal Company's company store. It had a wide variety of products, and is reported by some to have had fair prices and by others to have been higher priced. The original Monroe Mercantile building was destroyed by fire on February 21, 1911. By March 21, 1911, the construction of the new company store was underway, and they held the grand opening of the second building, which also housed Buxton Savings Bank, six months later. The second store was much larger than the first and was organized by department. People could buy many things there: groceries, hats, tailored clothing, carpets, musical instruments, tools and more. If a desired item was not on hand, the store could order nearly anything from automobiles to the latest fashions. The store even had a full mortuary service. Monroe Mercantile was so busy that they had to organize an ordering system in which people from a certain area of town were allowed to place their orders only on certain days of the month.

Instructions

- 1 Distribute and/or display the three photographs of the Monroe Mercantile Company for students to analyze.
- 2 First, have students analyze the three images to see what observations they can make or questions they can create. Possible discussion topics to guide students include:
 - **Monroe Mercantile Opening** (Photograph 1)
 - Look closely at the photo and describe the buildings. Describe what is happening in front of Monroe Mercantile Company.
 - **Inside Monroe Mercantile Company Store** (Photograph 2)
 - Explain to students how store clerks used to retrieve items on the shelf for customers, instead of customers grabbing their own items.
 - Based on the products in this image, infer how Monroe Mercantile impacted the community of Buxton.

Materials

- Monroe Mercantile Company Opening Photograph
- Monroe Mercantile Company Interior Photograph
- Monroe Mercantile Company Employees Photograph
- Computer or document projector to show image

Instructions continued on next page.

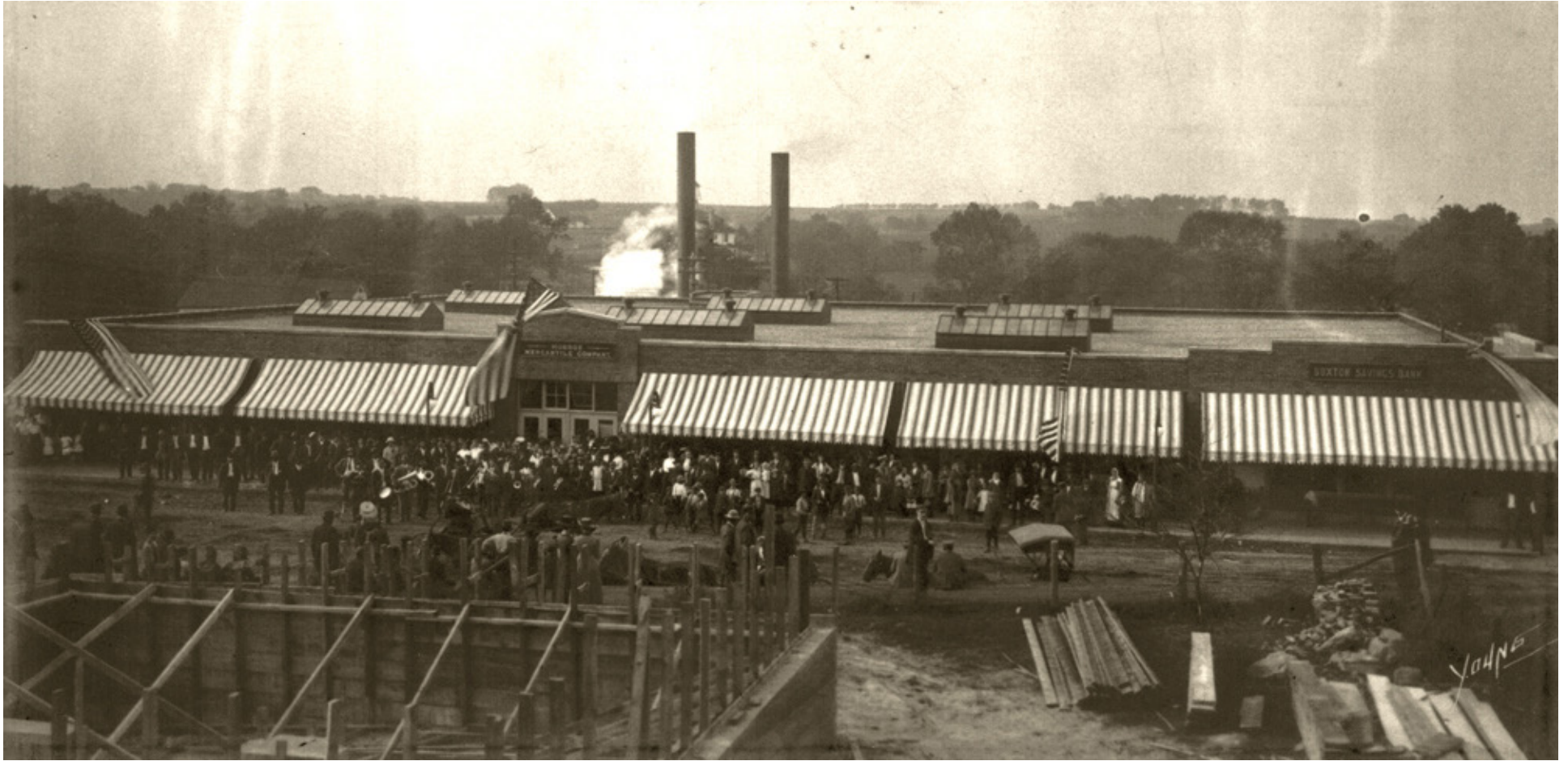
Monroe Mercantile Company, 1911 (continued)

Instructions Continued

- 3 After students have had a chance to express their observations of all three photographs, use some of the context and questions below to expand the in-class discussion.
 - People could buy many things there: groceries, hats, tailored clothing, carpets, musical instruments, tools and more. If a desired item was not on hand, the store could order nearly anything from automobiles to the latest fashions.
 - What does that tell you about the how much money the people of Buxton might have had?

During the years that Buxton existed (about 1897-1927), African-Americans were treated very badly in many parts of the United States. Provide students with a few examples of racial discrimination, segregation, Jim Crow laws and definition and effects of sharecropping. Some resources to provide examples can be found online through the Primary Source Sets, ex. [School Desegregation](#), [Reconstruction](#), [Reconstruction and Its Impact and Civil Rights: Before, During and After the World Wars](#).

- Direct students' attention to the Monroe Mercantile Company employees (Photograph 3). Explain to students how people of all races and backgrounds were treated the same in Buxton, including the same opportunity to secure well-paying jobs, attend interracial schools and attain housing in town.
 - What would the people of Buxton have experienced after the mine closed and they moved away?
- 4 **Summative:** Observe students throughout this discussion. Can they tell observations to a peer partner or to the whole class? As a further extension, can students form on-topic questions or mostly accurate conclusions about life in Buxton or life for African Americans in parts of the country where prejudice and discrimination were serious problems?



Courtesy of State Historical Society of Iowa, 1911 (1 of 3)



Courtesy of State Historical Society of Iowa, 1911 (2 of 3)



Courtesy of State Historical Society of Iowa, 1911 (3 of 3)

"As I Remember" by Minnie London, 1940



Compelling Question

What key decisions influence whether a community thrives?



Lesson Supporting Question

How was Buxton a unique community?

Overview

Students explore this historical excerpt from Buxton resident, Minnie London, and discuss the language and content of the document. A secondary activity of this part is to do a "think aloud" with the class or in small groups to compare the London excerpt and photographs from the Monroe Mercantile Company.

Source Background

This is an excerpt from the article "As I Remember" by Minnie London. London first moved to Muchakinock as a bride and then to Buxton a few years later. She writes about her life as a coal miner's wife, which included scheduling time to place orders with the company store, how people from many states moved to Buxton when it started, prominent citizens and businesses within the community and community organizations, including vibrant churches and a highly respected baseball team. London reflected on many recreational opportunities residents of Buxton enjoyed and about how the community dispersed after Buxton quickly died out.

Instructions

- 1 Display and/or distribute the excerpt from Minnie London's "As I Remember" essay.
- 2 Explain to students that sometimes people from long ago use different words than we use today. The words in [brackets] are the words that we use today in order to help us understand what the person is saying.
- 3 Either read the excerpt aloud to the class or have students read the excerpt independently.
- 4 Discuss the following question with the class: What opportunities did people in Buxton have to do for fun?
- 5 **Summative:** This activity could be done as a teacher "think aloud," whole group discussion or an individual/ small group assessment.
 - Use information from the Monroe Mercantile Company and "As I Remember" by Minnie London. Ask students the following questions:
 - In what ways was Buxton successful?
 - If Buxton had a wide variety of items to buy and opportunities of things to do for fun, what does that tell us about Buxton as a community?
 - Use the "Make a Claim" worksheet to record thinking. Ask for student input to write a claim statement and then one supporting evidence statement. Students work in small groups or independently to create two additional supporting evidence statements.

Materials

- "As I Remember" Excerpt (may need multiple copies)
- Monroe Mercantile Company Opening (Photograph 1)
- Monroe Mercantile Company Interior (Photograph 2)
- Monroe Mercantile Company Employees (Photograph 3)
- Computer or document project to show image



The Y.M.C.A was a large three story structure built diagonally across from the **company store**. It was built expressly for the colored miners, and when they seemed reluctant to take advantage of the opportunity, the Supt. indicated that he would turn it over to the white people. Our people, after reconsideration, pledged cooperation and then a very efficient secretary in the person of L.E. Johnson was engaged.

The first floor of the building contained officed and recreation rooms. The second a spacious auditorium with stage and dressing rooms. The third floor was occupied by rooms for the many secret orders. To the north of the large building was a smaller building containing a swimming pool for the younger group with their own secretary.

The Langlois sisters, better known as the French Women, displayed moving pictures every night, which afforded a very enjoyable recreation for the miners and families. Road shows as well as moving pictures were featured in the auditorium. Among them East Lynne and the Count of Monte Christo.

Among the many noted Negroes who entertained packed houses were: Hallue Q. Brown, Booker T. Washington, Blind Boone and Roscoe Conklin Simmons.

I must not forget to relate to you about the roller skating rinks and the added recreation it afforded the younger folks, and I might add some older ones too. You ought to have seen how these boys and girls did skate! The jolting jitterbug of today was a mild comparison.

Make a Claim

This is an example worksheet that corresponds with the instructions in Part 4 to compare the "As I Remember" excerpt and the Monroe Mercantile photographs. This version of the worksheet is for you, the educator, to fill out, add notes and utilize. A printable version of this worksheet is available for reproduction in this topic's "Student Materials" packet.



Make a Claim

Was Buxton successful, according to Minnie London? Cite evidence from sources.

Claim _____

Supporting Evidence from _____ (Source).

Supporting Evidence from _____ (Source).

Supporting Evidence from _____ (Source).

Lesson Supporting Question Assessment



Compelling Question

What key decisions influence whether a community thrives?



Lesson Supporting Question

How was Buxton a unique community?

Assessment Instructions

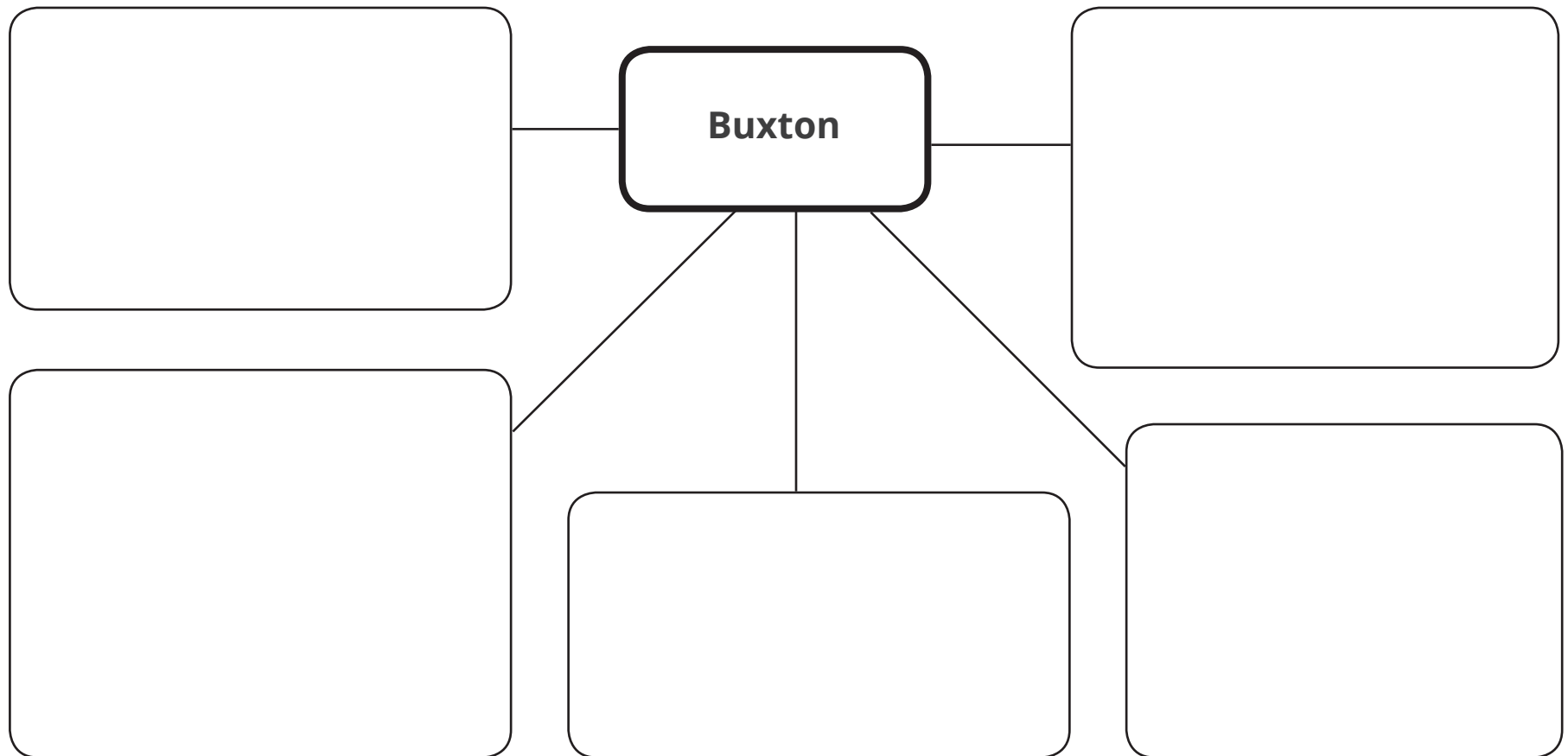
- 1 Start by first revisiting the questions generated during the analysis of “Postcard View of Center Street in Buxton, 1908.” Refer to the anchor chart completed earlier. See if students can now answer any of the questions they generated after they analyzed the other sources in this lesson plan.
- 2 Have students watch the following videos: [Part 1](#) and [Part 2](#) (14 minutes each) of “Searching for Buxton.” After completing the videos, again, see if students can answer any of the previous questions from the anchor chart. Ask students what is the connection between all the sources as it relates to the supporting question?
- 3 There are two lesson supporting question assessment worksheet options. The first is a web-like worksheet and the other is a journal entry worksheet. Distribute a copy of one of the two assessment worksheets to each student.
 - **Worksheet:** Students use words and pictures to tell about the people and buildings of Buxton using the worksheet.
 - **Journal Entry:** Students use words and pictures to tell about the people and buildings of Buxton using the journal entry worksheet. They need to address the question: How was Buxton a unique community?

Assessment Scoring Options

Proficient	Shows understanding of the people and buildings of Buxton and includes ideas about equal opportunities and economic prosperity
Developing	Mixture of some accurate and some inaccurate ideas
Beginning	Unable to write/draw any ideas in the given time and/or ideas are very inaccurate

This is an example worksheet that corresponds with the instructions in the Lesson Supporting Question Assessment. This version of the worksheet is for you, the educator, to fill out, add notes and utilize. A printable version of this worksheet is available for reproduction in this topic's "Student Materials" packet.

Assessment: How was Buxton a unique community?



Lesson Supporting Question Assessment

This is an example journal entry worksheet that corresponds with the instructions in the Lesson Supporting Question Assessment. This version of the journal entry is for you, the educator, to fill out, add notes and utilize. A printable version of this journal entry is available for reproduction in this topic's "Student Materials" packet.

Assessment: Journal Entry

How was Buxton a unique community?



Coal Mining



Plat Map



**Company
Store**



Unique

Plat Map

A map drawn to scale showing the divisions of a piece of land.

Unique

Being one of a kind; unlike anything else.

Coal Mining

The act of people working to dig out coal from deep underground. Coal was burned to provide heat and power for furnaces in buildings and steam engines found in places like locomotives.

Company Store

A store selling a wide variety of products such as food, clothing, tools and other supplies that the employees of a company need for daily life. The store was owned and operated by the company.

Additional Buxton Resources for Educators

[Buxton: A Lost Utopia Source Set](#)

This digital source set offers a number of other Buxton-related primary sources, source-dependent questions and links to the additional resources listed below.

[Images of America: Lost Buxton by Rachelle Chase](#)

This recent publication is loaded with rich images and meaningful quotes from dozens of Buxton citizens. The author synthesizes many sources to concisely tell the story of Buxton with meaningful details.

[Buxton: Work and Racial Equality in a Coal Mining Community by Dorothy Schwieder](#)

Professor, researcher and author Dorothy Schwieder provides details and explanations of many causes and effects of the formation and decline of Buxton.

[CRI News Package: Home from Buxton, Iowa](#)

This two-minute video tours a house from Buxton that was moved to Oskaloosa around the 1920s, and then was moved again to the Nelson Pioneer Farm during October 2008.

[“Searching for Buxton” Documentary \(Part One and Part Two\)](#)

A young African-American goes searching for his family's past in a long-disappeared Iowa coal mining town and discovers that much of the prosperity and goodwill his relatives enjoyed nearly a century ago is elusive today. Narrated by Simon Estes.

[“Editor’s Observations” from the Iowa State Bystander](#)

This October 29, 1909, newspaper article by John Lay Thompson, editor of the Iowa State Bystander, describes the success of African-Americans in Buxton, Iowa. During an era of Jim Crow laws in the South, those who were recruited from Virginia to come and work for Consolidation Coal Company experienced a far different reality in Buxton than they had in Virginia. In his editor's column, Thompson writes about the demographics, businesses, prominent citizens and services located in Buxton, Iowa, in or around 1909.

[“The Buxton Souvenir Number” from the Iowa State Bystander](#)

This additional resource includes eight newspaper pages of photos and articles about Buxton that were published in the Iowa State Bystander on December 6, 1907.

[C. & N.W. Ry. Depot in Buxton, Iowa](#)

A photo of a train depot for Chicago and Northwestern Railway in Buxton, Iowa, in 1905.

[Additional Buxton Photographs from the State Historical Society of Iowa](#)