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NEW ORLEANS**

# **Those Were the Days, My Friend** Comparing Prices and Percentages from WWII

A Lesson Plan from  
The Department of Education of  
The National D-Day Museum

“America’s World War II Museum”

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# Those Were the Days, My Friend

## Comparing Prices and Percentages from WWII

*Those were the days, my friend.* A loaf of bread cost 5 cents, a new car \$750. But what was a dollar really worth? This cross-curricular activity, in which students calculate and discuss price changes over time, combines history, economics, and math. They will find some interesting surprises here.

**OBJECTIVE:** Students will compare prices between 1944 and the present by using a percentage formula and determine the relevant buying power of the dollar over time.

**BENCHMARKS:** **Grades 7-8:** E-1A-M9; H-1A-M1; H-1A-M2; H-1B-M11; N-4-M; N-5-M; N-7-M  
**Grades 9-12:** E-1A-H8; H-1A-H1; H-1A-H2; H-1B-H13; N-2-H; N-5-H; N-7-H

### **DIRECTIONS:**

1. Pass out the *Then and Now* price chart to students. Discuss as a class what to fill in for *Cost today* of the listed items.
2. Using the correct formula, calculate the percentage of increase of each item and fill in the blanks.
3. Discuss why they think some items have risen in price percentage more than others.
4. Ask students to guess what the average annual salary was in 1944 and what it is today. Write the answers on the board: 1944--\$2,500; 1998--\$35,000.
5. Comparing the price chart numbers, did the dollar go farther in 1944 or does it go farther today? Example: \$2,500 a year could buy you 50,000 loaves of bread in 1944 (at 5 cents a loaf), but \$35,000 only buys you 23,333 loaves of bread in 1998 (at \$1.50 a loaf). Have students make a list of which items were more affordable then and which items are more affordable now. (*Here's a clue: first calculate the percentage of increase in the annual salaries between 1944 and 1998.*) Is it different for different types of goods (food, entertainment, durable goods, etc.)? Why?

**ASSESSMENT:** Components for assessment include the worksheet and the class discussion.

**ENRICHMENT:** Have students research the costs of these items in different years (1920, 1960, and 1980) and compare them to today's prices.

## *Then and Now* Price Chart

**Directions: fill in the approximate/average prices for these items today. Calculate the percentage of change from then to now and fill in the blanks.**

Formula: (cost today – cost in 1944) ÷ by cost in 1944 = X (multiply by 100 to get percentage)

<b>ITEM</b>	<b>Cost in 1944</b>	<b>Cost today</b>	<b>Percentage of change</b>
Loaf of bread	5 cents	_____	_____ % (+ or -)
Red beans (1lb.)	5 cents	_____	_____ %
Coffee (1lb.)	25 cents	_____	_____ %
Milk (1qt.)	15 cents	_____	_____ %
Candy bar	10 cents	_____	_____ %
Soda	5 cents	_____	_____ %
Movie ticket	25 cents	_____	_____ %
Newspaper	10 cents	_____	_____ %
Haircut	50 cents	_____	_____ %
Pay phone call	5 cents	_____	_____ %
Postage stamp	3 cents	_____	_____ %
Streetcar ride	7 cents	_____	_____ %
Camera	3 dollars	_____	_____ %
Sport coat	15 dollars	_____	_____ %
New car	750 dollars	_____	_____ %
House	6,000 dollars	_____	_____ %