

# Time Traveler's Lens: The 1950s, Mona Lisa Smile, and Real Stories

Hi Aria! Get ready for an exciting journey back in time! We're going to explore the fascinating era of the 1950s, a time of big changes and unique perspectives, especially for women. We'll use a cool movie, your detective research skills, and a real-life conversation to bring this period to life. This isn't about memorizing dates; it's about understanding people, making connections, and getting creative!

## Part 1: Movie Time - 'Mona Lisa Smile' (Approx. 2.5 hours)

Grab your popcorn! You'll be watching 'Mona Lisa Smile' (2003). This movie is set in 1953 at Wellesley College, an all-women's school.

1. **Before you watch:** Think about what you already know or imagine about the 1950s. What were schools like? What were young women expected to do with their lives? Jot down a few ideas.
2. **While you watch:** Pay attention to:
  - The expectations placed on the female students by their families, the college, and society.
  - How Katherine Watson (Julia Roberts' character) challenges these expectations.
  - The choices the different students make.
  - What daily life, fashion, and social activities look like.
  - Take notes on anything that surprises you, makes you think, or that you have questions about. What feels very different from today? What feels similar?
3. **After you watch:** Write down your immediate thoughts. What was the main message you took from the film? Which character did you connect with most, and why?

## Part 2: History Detective - Uncovering the 1950s (Approx. 3-4 hours)

Now that you've seen a fictional portrayal, let's dig into the real history! Your mission is to become an expert on what was happening in America during the 1950s.

1. **Brainstorm Key Areas:** Think about what made the 1950s unique. Some ideas to get you started:
  - Major world events (e.g., Cold War, Korean War)
  - Social changes (e.g., Civil Rights Movement beginnings, suburban growth)
  - Popular culture (music, TV shows, movies, fashion)
  - Technology and inventions
  - The roles of men and women in society
  - Education trends
2. **Research:** Use the internet (with adult supervision for appropriate sites like history websites, museum sites, educational resources), library books, or documentaries to find information. Try to find at least 3-5 interesting facts for each area you explore.
3. **Focus Question:** As you research, keep this question in mind: How does the historical reality of the 1950s compare to what was shown in 'Mona Lisa Smile'? Were there things the movie got right? Were there things it might have simplified or left out?
4. **Organize Your Findings:** You could create a mind map, a timeline, or a digital presentation of your key findings. Make it visual and fun!

## Part 3: Connecting with the Past - The Interview (Approx. 2-3 hours for prep & interview)

This is a super special part! You'll get to talk to someone who actually lived during the 1950s or early 1960s. This could be a grandparent, an older family friend, or a community member.

1. **Identify an Interviewee:** Talk with your parent/guardian to find someone who would be willing to share their memories.
2. **Prepare Your Questions:** Based on the movie and your research, what do you really want to know from someone who was there? Think about:
  - Their childhood or teenage years in the 50s.
  - What school was like.
  - What were their dreams and ambitions?
  - What were the expectations for young people, especially young women?
  - What did they do for fun? What music did they listen to?
  - What major historical events do they remember, and how did it affect them?
  - How do they think things have changed for young women today compared to when they were young?
  - Always ask if it's okay to record the interview (audio is fine) so you can focus on listening.
  - *Draft at least 10-15 thoughtful, open-ended questions (questions that require more than a 'yes' or 'no' answer).*
3. **Practice:** Briefly practice asking your questions so you feel comfortable.
4. **Conduct the Interview:**
  - Be polite, respectful, and a good listener!
  - Start by thanking them for their time.
  - Let the conversation flow naturally, but try to ask your key questions.
  - Take brief notes, even if you're recording.
  - Thank them again at the end.
5. **After the Interview:** Write a summary of the most interesting things you learned. What surprised you? How did their personal story add to your understanding of the 1950s?

## Part 4: Creative Showcase - Your 1950s Reflection (Approx. 3-5 hours)

Now it's time to bring everything together – the movie, your research, and the interview – in a creative way! Show what you've learned and how your perspective might have changed.

**Choose ONE of the following project ideas (or propose your own with approval!):**

- **'Then vs. Now' Digital Presentation:** Create a slideshow (like PowerPoint or Google Slides) comparing and contrasting the lives, opportunities, and expectations of young women in the 1950s (using insights from the movie, research, and interview) with those of young women today.
- **A 'Lost' Diary Entry or Letter:** Write a series of diary entries or a letter from the perspective of a fictional young woman living in the 1950s. Incorporate details from your research and the movie. Perhaps she's a student at a college like Wellesley, or maybe she has a different path. What are her hopes, fears, and daily experiences?
- **Dialogue Across Time:** Write a script for a conversation between a teenager from the 1950s (informed by your research and interview) and a teenager from today (you!). What would they discuss? What would they find surprising about each other's lives?
- **Short 'Documentary' Video:** If you enjoy video editing, create a short (3-5 minute) video where you present your findings. You could be the 'host,' incorporate (appropriate) images from the 1950s, and even include snippets of your interview audio (with permission!).

- **Artwork with Artist's Statement:** Create a piece of art (painting, collage, sculpture, digital art) that symbolizes your understanding of women's roles or societal change related to the 1950s. Write a detailed artist's statement explaining your piece and its connection to what you learned.

**Make sure your project:**

- Clearly shows you've thought about 'Mona Lisa Smile'.
- Includes facts and details from your historical research.
- Reflects on insights gained from your interview.
- Is thoughtful, creative, and well-presented.

## **Part 5: Wrap-up Discussion (Approx. 30 mins - 1 hour)**

Once your project is complete, have a discussion with your parent/guardian about your learning journey.

- What was the most surprising thing you learned during this whole project?
- How did interviewing someone change your perspective compared to just watching the movie or reading about the era?
- Do you think movies are a good way to learn about history? What are the pros and cons?
- How have things changed for women since the 1950s? What challenges might still exist?

Congratulations, Aria! You've dived deep into another era and brought history to life. Awesome job!