The *Thomas L. Ryan Diaries* Collection in the Digital Media Repository (DMR) includes four volumes that recount the life of early Muncie, Indiana teenager Thomas Ryan from 1886 to 1890. Ryan was born in 1872. He wrote in his diaries every day. He recorded the weather, events at school and around town, activities with friends, trips to the library and the books that he read. Ryan chronicles his chores, projects, and family life—even the courtships of his sisters.

Using excerpts from the diary, students today can learn about how life in Muncie over a hundred years ago was different—and the same—for young people:

- With what kind of toys did Thomas and his brother play?
- How did teachers punish Thomas for misbehavior and even incorrect answers?
- What kind of candy was popular with the children of Muncie?
- What sports and other recreational activities were practiced?
- What books did Thomas read?
- What chores performed by Thomas are not practiced today? For example, Thomas mentions “saving a coal fire” warming the house and collecting wood.
- What kind of transportation was available in Muncie?
- Even changes in common language can be studied: For example, Thomas uses the term “dandy,” and instead of “taking a test” as is common today, Thomas writes that he was “examined in spelling” at school. After falling on the ice, Thomas says it “hurt like fury.” And he “monkeyed with a clock.”
- Students can learn about different practices of the time like doctors’ house calls.
- Students can research items mentioned in the diary: “Mrs. Secrist and Mama opened the picture box and took the picture out.” And “…we had macarons and egg kisses.” “I got Millie a pair of toe slippers.”

Teachers can save digital images of selected pages of the diaries for the students to use in the lesson, assign students or groups of students a given time period of pages to read online, or even retype selected excerpts to use with the lesson.

As an enrichment writing exercise, teachers could ask students to create a diary for a month. Or students could rewrite selected diary entries using the current language and modern activities.

Teachers could use a street map of Muncie from the time of Thomas Ryan’s life. Detailed Sanborn Fire Insurance maps (corresponding lesson guide is available); city directories that include addresses, photographs, advertisements, and occupations of residents; and souvenir booklets that include drawings and information about buildings (like the Opera House or new Courthouse) are all also available on the Digital Media Repository. Incorporating these resources into the lesson can provide students with a vivid glimpse into Muncie history.
January 4, 1886: I had to stay in this afternoon and write four big, long paragraphs in U.S. History just because I was incorrect.

January 6, 1886: I got to laughing in school today and having a little fun, and I had to stay in with some other boys and write my history lesson. Mrs. Brotherton was over to call on Mama, and I was till dark getting my wood and coal...

January 13, 1886: I was at the Patterson Rink to watch the boys of my class play polo, and it is very exciting. ...I practiced a good deal on the typewriter.

January 17, 1886: I had to go and get Dr. Bowles to come and see Walter as he has turned up sick and I had to go up town twice and get medicine for him.

January 25, 1886: I went to school this morning, and Mildred and I went to the noon train to meet Suzie and were very glad to see her home again. Papa and Walter and I put the carriage together and Walter and I took a note to Vol Gilbert this afternoon and she gave us each 10 cents. Walter spent five cents for candy and five cents for a lead pencil.

January 26, 1886: Walter and I got out with our sled this morning and had a dandy time. And at noon we caught on C.P. Franklin’s wagon and rode way up past Mrs. Buckles’...I was examined in arithmetic today and I don’t think I will get very high. Walter and I got to go to the Opera House tonight to see a show called “Around the Campfire.” It was pretty nice and was a kind of a soldier’s life.

January 27, 1886: There was a fire today just as school was about to close and the large tile factory of Mr. Smith burned. ...I was down near the depot and could see the flames of the fire very plain...

February 3, 1886: I had to stay in after school in the afternoon and it was because I just had a little fun with Arthur Huffer. I went to the Courthouse after school and it was crowded with spectators.

February 12, 1886: I got a Valentine to send to any girl at Indianapolis and it was pretty.

For more information about using historic maps and other resources in the DMR, please contact the Ball State University Libraries’ GIS Research and Map Collection at 765-285-1097.