Herbert Hoover National Historic Site is a national park, one of about 400 in the United States. Yellowstone, Grand Canyon, and the Statue of Liberty are all national parks. The historic buildings, museum exhibits, and other things you see during your visit are reminders about things President Hoover learned growing up or things he accomplished as an adult. Herbert Hoover knew many of these buildings as a child in West Branch.
Birthplace Cottage

The Birthplace Cottage may be entered through the front door only. You may have to split the class into smaller groups and take turns viewing the inside. The interior and the summer kitchen are viewable from the back porch, as is the Gravesite on the hill overlooking the cottage.

The Hoover family lived in a two-room house.

Explain: Herbert Hoover was born in this little house in 1874. He lived here until he was about four years old, sharing it with his mother and father (Jesse and Hulda), older brother (Theodore), younger sister (Mary).

Historic photograph (attached): This is what the Hoover children looked like while growing up in West Branch.

Life in the 1800s was different from our lives today.

Explain: They had no running water, electricity, or automobiles when they lived here.

Compare and contrast: There are many “clues” inside and outside the home that can help us imagine and draw conclusions to what life was like for the Hoovers.

Observe: Look at the objects displayed in the Hoovers’ house and in their yard. Try to figure out how the family slept, ate, washed, worked, and played in this house such a long time ago.

Questions:

1. Where did the Hoovers get their water? (Water pump.)
2. Where did they use the toilet? (The Hoovers used the privy or outhouse in the backyard.)
3. Where did they get their food? (The Hoovers grew vegetables in their garden. They could store extra food by canning it or keeping it in their root cellar under the house.)
4. How did they do their laundry? (They used a washtub and washboard then hung their clothes to dry on the clothesline.)
5. What was the summer kitchen for? (The Hoovers moved the stove there in the summer so the inside of the house wouldn’t get too hot. In the winter, they moved it back into the house for heat.)
6. How did they heat their home? (With firewood and a wood-burning stove. In the winter the Hoovers moved the stove from the summer kitchen into the house.)

Discuss: What did you learn about Herbert Hoover’s childhood just by looking at the objects on display? How did the Hoovers sleep, eat, wash, work, and play? What did the Hoovers do inside the house and what did they do outside?

The Hoovers small home had everything the family needed.

Explain: They lived here while the family earned money for things they wanted.

Discuss: What things did the Hoovers want that they earned and saved money for? (A larger home; college educations)

The Hoovers, even the kids, cooperated with each other to live in the small house.

Examples: The parents and children shared a bedroom. Everyone in the family helped get daily chores done, starting at a very young age.

Discuss: What kind of chores do you do at home to help your family?
**Blacksmith Shop**

Use these activities if the blacksmith is not there to demonstrate.

Herbert’s father Jesse Hoover owned a blacksmith shop. He was also a farrier.

**Define:** A blacksmith is a person who turns iron into useful things by heating the metal and using tools, like a hammer and anvil, to change its shape. A farrier takes care of horses’ hooves. This includes trimming and cleaning the hooves as well as attaching the horseshoes.

A blacksmith did hard physical work, but also used creativity and problem-solving.

**Historic document (attached):** What does this newspaper advertisement tell us about Jesse Hoover and his business? Who were his customers?

**Search:** Look for tools that Jesse Hoover could have used for his blacksmith work, and tools that could have been for his farrier work. Can you find the horse-tail whisk (used to distract horses while they were being shoed)?

**Explain:** Jesse Hoover’s customers considered him to be a fair and honest businessman.

**Schoolhouse**

There is not much room to stand in the schoolhouse. You may have to split the class into smaller groups and take turns viewing the inside.

The Hoovers and other families in the town of West Branch thought going to school was important.

**Define:** A one-room schoolhouse is a school where one teacher taught children of different grades and ages.

**Explain:** This one-room schoolhouse was built in 1853. It is one of the first buildings built in West Branch.

This schoolhouse looks very different from your school or classroom, but the subjects and lessons you learn are similar.

**Compare and contrast:** Look at objects in the schoolhouse and compare to things you use in class. For example, the students used slates instead of marker boards or notebooks.

**Observe:** Using other clues in the schoolhouse, can you figure out which subjects the pupils learned?

**Explain:** School was much more than just learning reading, writing, and arithmetic – Herbert and his classmates also learned how to be a good person and a good citizen.

**List:** Which lessons taught Herbert Hoover how to be a good person or citizen?

- Honesty is the best policy.
- Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.
- If at first you don’t succeed, try, try again.

**Discuss:** Many schools still teach these same lessons. Do you learn similar lessons (sometimes called Character Counts, PARRT, or Guidance)?
To enter the meetinghouse as the Quakers did, boys through the door on the right and girls through the door on the left. You are welcome to sit on the benches. Watch your step. There are low steps up to some of the benches.

The Hoovers belonged to the Religious Society of Friends, also known as Quakers.

Explain: Called the Friends Meetinghouse, this building was the Quakers’ place of worship.

Quaker beliefs and values influenced Herbert Hoover’s actions when he was an adult.

Explain: Men and women sat separately inside the meetinghouse. We often see the separation of two people, in this case the men and women, as limiting the freedom of another group. However, the Quakers believed this gave women a chance to participate equally, at a time before women had the same rights as men.

Define: **Equality** means treating all people the same.

Explain: The Quaker belief in the equality of all people was important to Herbert Hoover. As a humanitarian, he thought all people deserved help equally.

Explain: Quakers emphasized the idea of individual worship. They sat in silence until someone felt inspired to stand up and speak. The Hoover family worshiped here like this twice a week. As a child Herbert Hoover would have to sit quietly. These meetings could last hours.

Activity: Sit in complete silence for up to one minute. No talking or fidgeting.

Discuss: Were you able to do it? Was it difficult or easy? For how long could you sit quietly?

Quote: Herbert Hoover said of the silent meetings he attended as a child, “It was strong training in patience.”

Discuss: Are there examples of when Herbert Hoover needed patience (such as when he was president)? What about the other things he learned as a child (at the meetinghouse, from his parents, or in school)? Did they help him too?
**Gravesite**

From the graves of President and Mrs. Hoover, you can see the small house where Herbert Hoover was born.

*Explain:* After he died in 1964, thousands of people watched as he was buried here.

*Herbert Hoover was buried here to remind us about his simple beginnings and his lifetime of achievements.*

*Quote:* Herbert Hoover once said, “In no other land could a boy from a country village, without inheritance or influential friends, look forward with unbounded hope.

**Statue of Isis**

The people of Belgium gave Herbert Hoover the statue as a gift of thanks for his humanitarian work in that country during World War One.

*Define:* A humanitarian is someone who works to make other people’s lives better.

*Map (attached):* Belgium is a small country in Europe. The capital of Belgium, Brussels, is almost four thousand miles from Washington, D.C.

*Explain:* The bronze statue is of Isis, the ancient Egyptian goddess of life. Isis wears a veil that symbolizes the mysteries of life. Her right hand carries a torch of life with three flames that represent the past, present, and future. In her left hand is the key of life.

*Discuss:* Herbert Hoover decided to place this statue here in this park. Where is Isis facing? (From this spot, the statue faces the Birthplace Cottage). Why do you think he wanted the statue here?

*Define:* Inheritance means wealth left to someone by their parents. Influential means having power over others. Unbounded means having no limit.

*Discuss:* What do you think Herbert Hoover meant by that? What things does his gravesite remind you about his life?
Herbert Hoover (center) at age 8. On the left is younger sister Mary and on the right is older brother Theodore.
REMEMBER

That having bought my goods early, I can sell you at reasonable prices at

Plow, Harrow, Cultivator, Sulky Plow, Reaper, Stalk Cutter, Corn Planter.

Wagon, Pump, Lightning Rod, Sewing Machine, Oil Stove, in fact anything in my line from a Sewing Machine needle to a Steam Engine.

Respectfully, J. C. HOOVER.

SIDEWALK ORDER.
March 24th, 1880

KANSAS FREEDMEN RELIEF ASSOCIATION
A world map showing the United States of America and Belgium.

Map courtesy of Marmelad.