**It’s Off to School We Go**

**Grade levels:** 3-5

**Standards:**

Pennsylvania Academic Standards for History

8.2.3.B, 8.2.4.B, 8.3.3.B, 8.3.4.B

**Materials:**

“Class Book” of the One-Room Schoolhouse of the Lebanon County Historical Society – 1 per student – provided for use at the Historical Society upon arrival in the School Room

**Schoolhouse Lesson Plan**

Essential Question: What was a typical day like in a one-room

school of 1890?

Activating Strategies:

1. Talk with your deskmate about how this classroom is different from your classroom at your school. Be ready to share with the group.

2 .Say the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag

Teaching Strategies:

1 .Each student should be given a “Class Book” to use for the session, a slate, a piece of chalk, and eraser. (No writing should be done in the booklet.)

2. The first story, “Perseverance”, can be completed as a whole group, even though in a true one-room schoolhouse, only one grade level would have been given this assignment. Specific short paragraphs can be assigned to small groups to recite at the recitation bench after the story has been read by the group. Time will not allow for all students to recite, however.

3. Read the poem “Try, Try, Again”. Explain that students in 1890 would have had to memorize this poem and recite it for the teacher. You can choose to have students try to memorize a stanza or just read and discuss it.

4. Next are the spelling lists. Choose a list most appropriate for your students and you may only want to assign one column of the list for students to practice. They can write the words three times each on their slates to learn them. Use these words at the end of the class in the “Spelling Bee”. Note: Time may only allow for memorization of the proverb or the spelling list, depending on the field trip program you chose.

5. Arithmetic – Students can read the poem about “Time” which would have been memorized to learn the concept or skip this activity and choose some problems on p. 14 to complete. Note the wording and the content of the word problems. Students can write on their slates and some can work on the chalkboard in the room.

6. The “Spelling Bee” is the last activity. Students stand in a line in the front of the room and the teacher stands in the back of the room. Using the words they studied earlier, start with the first student and give them a word to spell. If they spell it incorrectly, the next person tries to spell it. If that person spells it correctly, the other student is out of the bee and sits down. Continue until you have one person left and they receive the “Head Mark” and would stand at the head of the line in the next bee.

7. School would now be over. “Class Books”, slates, chalk would be collected and students would help clean up the room.

\*Note: Depending on the field trip program you chose, your group may not have enough time for all of the above activities. Use your discretion as to which activities would be most appropriate for your group.

Summarizing Strategies:

Discuss with students the differences between schools today and those of 1890. Have students complete the response sheets and collect them.

Bibliography

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**School of the PAST and** School of the PRESENT

**Response Sheet**

**1. After attending a one-room school of the 1890’s, list things that are the same as school today and things that are different.**

**SAME DIFFERENT**

**2. Would you rather go to school in a one-room school or the school you attend today? Why? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

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**3. What do you think school will be like 100 years from now?**

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**Teacher Background:**

Equipment in the One-room Schoolhouse

The desks were usually made of oak and were either one or two-seaters bolted to the floor. Sometimes desks had a lid that lifted and a hole, normally at the right front side for an ink well. The desks ranged in size, as did the students. The smallest desks were in the front of the classroom where the smallest children sat. The desks gradually got bigger towards the back of the room to accommodate the older and bigger children. The teacher's desk sat at the front of the classroom.

Along the wall near the teacher's desk was the recitation bench, a plain wood bench that served as seats for the students reciting their lessons. Often at the front of the class were pictures of Abraham Lincoln and George Washington, a blackboard with the alphabet above it, a United States flag and a clock. If students were thirsty (or antsy), they would go to the back of the room for a drink out of the large earthen container called the water cooler. Sometimes, students would bring their own cups to get a drink out of the container. In poorer school districts, the entire class used a community dipper to get a drink out of the container. This community dipper spread germs, which meant that many of the children were sick at the same time. Sometimes, when a particularly bad illness was passed around, the school would close until most students were healthy again. By the 1920's, the communal dipper was deemed unsanitary and no longer used.

Slates and slate pencils were very handy in one-room schools. Children were able to do their work on slates and show the teacher, then correct the mistakes without using any paper. Paper was expensive. Either children did not have any or tried not to use the little they had. The slate boards made it easy to teach a lesson, erase the work and move on to another lesson without any waste. By the 1930s, slate boards had largely been replaced by paper and pencils. Slate pencils were still produced and used in the early 1900s but were replaced by chalk by the 1930s.

One of the more well-known pieces of equipment in the one-room school was the pot-bellied stove. The pot-bellied stove which was normally placed in the middle of the classroom was either loved or hated by the students. Usually students sitting near the stove in winter roasted while those far from the stove froze. Most schools were not well insulated, so cold air would leak into the building. Schools started replacing the ill-suited potbelly stove as early as 1900 with a better heating system.

**Children’s Clothing**

Many of the students in the early 1900s had little money for clothes. Sometimes, their mothers made what they wore to school. Other times, children wore hand-me-down clothes that were loose fitting or a little too big. The clothes they wore were generally very simple.

In the early 1900s, the girls wore long dresses, sometimes with an apron to cover the dress. Under this, they wore bloomers and long stockings held in place by garters. In warmer weather, many girls went barefoot because their families could not afford to buy shoes. In winter, the girls wore gathered skirts, long-sleeved blouses and dark, ankle high lace-up shoes. Many layers of clothing were worn to keep out the cold on the long walk to school.

The boys wore plain, long-sleeved shirts and pants or bib overalls. If the pants were too large, suspenders were used to keep them up. Also, knickerbockers were popular during the early 1900s. These were pants that were cut just below the knee. The boys wore dark wool socks with their dark, ankle high lace-up shoes. The boys went barefoot in warmer weather and bundled up in many layers of clothing in colder weather, just as the girls did.

**Duties at Home**

The children’s duties at home depended on the ages of the children and the kind of farm they lived on. The older children had more and harder duties than the younger children. Each child had particular chores that they were expected to do, and do well, before they went to school and when they got home from school. They had to get up very early in the morning in order to get their chores done and get to school on time. Some of the chores the children had to do were collect eggs, milk the cows, feed the animals, clean stalls, put straw down as bedding in the stalls once they were clean, cut firewood in winter and carry it in the house or if it was already cut, just bring it in. These children had a lot of responsibilities on the farm. If they did their job poorly, everyone would suffer.

During the spring and fall months, many of the older boys were not able to attend school because they were needed on the farm. In the spring, they helped till the fields and plant crops (corn, beans, hay, wheat, etc.). In the fall, they were expected to help with the harvest. Sometimes they would be required to help during the summer, too. There were three cuttings of hay during the summer, about a month apart. The hay had to be cut, allowed to dry for a few days, and then baled. Most of the time baling consisted of throwing the hay into a large hayrack with sides to keep it from falling off and then throwing it into the haymow. A haymow was the second story of a barn that was above the animals’ stalls. The hay was stored there to make it easy to throw into the stalls to feed the animals. Because there was so much work to be done on the farm in the spring, summer and fall, the older boys who helped on the farm normally were only able to attend winter classes at the one-room schoolhouse.

**A Typical Day at the Schoolhouse**

During each academic year, a teacher provided education for students in grades one through eight in the large, central classroom. Enrollment varied from year to year, but commonly totaled twenty or more. In addition to taking reading, writing and arithmetic, students received instruction in geography, physiology, grammar, U. S. history and drawing.

In the winter, the teacher, and sometimes the older children, would arrive at the schoolhouse much earlier than the others to start the fire and prepare for the school day. The teacher would greet the children as they came. The day would begin at about 9 a.m. The teacher would ring the large bell in the bell tower to announce the beginning of the day and to hurry along any students still trudging to school. The class would stand by their seats, recite the Pledge of Allegiance, and then would either sing a song or listen to a moral story from the Bible read by the teacher. On cold winter days, the teacher may allow the students to sing and march because their feet would be tingly and itchy from being nearly frozen and then warming quickly.

Once these activities were done, the morning lessons would begin. The day normally started with a reading lesson. Lesson plans were difficult for teachers of the 1900’s due to the different ages and abilities of the children. Each age group of children read different stories or poems at different times and were required to do different activities appropriate for their age group. The oldest children in the schoolroom went first. They were required to read aloud to the teacher at the recitation bench, while the other age groups worked quietly at their desks. The next oldest age group read a poem and memorized a stanza or two, then came to the recitation bench and recited it from memory to the teacher. The youngest group would read a different story and memorize a paragraph (more than one or two sentences) to recite from memory when called to the recitation bench. Each group was assigned their tasks at the end of general exercises and had ten minutes to complete them. Because of this, some groups had more time than others. The assignments were arranged so that the easiest assignment went to the group with the least time, and the hardest assignment went to the group with the most time.

Following the reading lesson would be a writing or spelling lesson, depending on the day. During the writing lesson, the children learned good penmanship, a very important skill. People believed it was very important for children to have good penmanship skills because poor handwriting made a bad impression on those who read what the children had written. Many times, children used pen and ink from an inkwell to learn proper handwriting before moving on to handwriting with a fountain pen (patented in 1884 and available in the 1900s). Pen and ink, however, set the foundation for good penmanship.

Every child was given a list of spelling words taken from the McGuffey Eclectic Speller appropriate for the class rank. The McGuffey Readers, originally written by William H. McGuffey in 1836, and the McGuffey Spellers were very popular until the 1920s. The children worked at memorizing the spelling of these words and then demonstrated their learning at the end of the day with a spelling bee.

After this, there was a short break. During the break, the children had a chance to use the privy, or outhouse, and get something to drink or just move around.

After the break the children would begin their arithmetic lesson. One math problem for each age group was written on the blackboard for each child to copy on his/her slate board and complete. Each group was then called up to the recitation bench to show the teacher their work. The problems were made to fit the age and ability of the children and would most likely include a story problem related to the farm. Many textbooks included arithmetic lessons that involved farm problems because the children would most likely come across them at some point in their lives and would need to know how to do them. Also, children understood farm life, so it was easier for them to understand a problem if it applied to farm life. The children would do their work on slates. The teacher would check the younger children’s work and would have the older children recite drills.

Once the arithmetic lesson was over, it was time for lunch. If the weather was nice, the children could eat and play outdoors. If not, they would have to eat and play indoors.

After lunch and recess, the children would be back at work. The afternoon lessons generally consisted of history, geography, civics, language and maybe some nature study on nice days. The teacher would decide which lessons would be appropriate.

At the end of the day, students would have a spelling bee. The students would line up in the front of the room with the teacher near the back. The teacher called out the words from the spelling list that the students studied earlier in the day. If a student got a word wrong, the next student in line must spell it correctly. If the next student got the word correct, this student “turns down” the previous student who misspelled the word. (“Turn down” was a phrase used during spelling bees in the early 1900s to indicate that a student had spelled a word incorrectly and was out of the bee.) The student who spelled the word correctly moved one place closer to the head of the line. The student at the head of the line when the bee was over was the winner and got “head mark.” This student started at the end of the line in the next spelling bee. Getting “head mark” in the one-room school was something for a student to be very proud of because that student was the best speller in the school, at least until the next spelling bee.

The day would end around 4 p.m.. The students would file out of the school and walk the mile or two home. The teacher, and possibly a few older children or someone who had gotten into trouble during the day, would stay behind and clean the building in preparation for the next day.

**A Typical Day at the Schoolhouse was taken from writings by Rebecca A. Edwards, NIU, in 2004. Her information was taken from Aids to Teachers and School Directors of The One-Teacher School written by the Illinois State Superintendent of Schools in 1927.**

**Expectations in the Classroom**

Children in one-room schools were expected to behave and be productive. They were to be silent while they worked unless they were reciting lessons. They would read a story or poem and memorize part or all of it and recite it to the teacher during recitation. The idea was that the only way a student learned was through memorization, so this was stressed in the one-room schoolhouse. The students memorized much of their work, not only stories and poems, but the multiplication tables, geography and many other lessons. The students were also expected to work on their lessons and nothing else. They would be punished if they were caught doing anything but their work. Also, they were taught to be respectful to the teacher and to other students. The older students had particular duties. Some had to bring in wood for the fire, and some even had to start the fire in the morning. Others had to get the water and bring it in, clean the floors, chalkboard and erasers. Sometimes they were even given the duty of helping the younger students with their studies. If they did not do their duties properly, the whole class would suffer.

**Punishments**

When students got out of line (were not doing their work, were distracting the class, passing notes, whispering, being disrespectful, etc.), a teacher would punish them as she saw fit. Some teachers preferred the “hickory stick” and gave the disobedient scholar a swift spanking. Sometimes the teacher used a ruler to rap the child on the knuckles or spank them. Other times the teacher made the child stand in the corner facing the wall, hold a heavy book, or stand on one leg for as long as she felt was necessary.

Many parents did not complain that their children were punished. They were angry with the child for misbehaving, not at the teacher for punishing. These parents were often embarrassed

that their child had misbehaved and some punished the child further once he/she got home. Such parents saw no problem with the teacher keeping order in the classroom however she/he saw fit.

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