

Education in the 1800's

by Josie Brady

One Room Schoolhouses

As you can tell from the title, back in the 1800's there weren't elementary, middle, or high schools. There were just one room schoolhouses. You may think the different age groups just went to school at different times, but unfortunately, that wasn't the case. All of the children, no matter what age, race, or gender, went to the same schoolhouse at the same time.

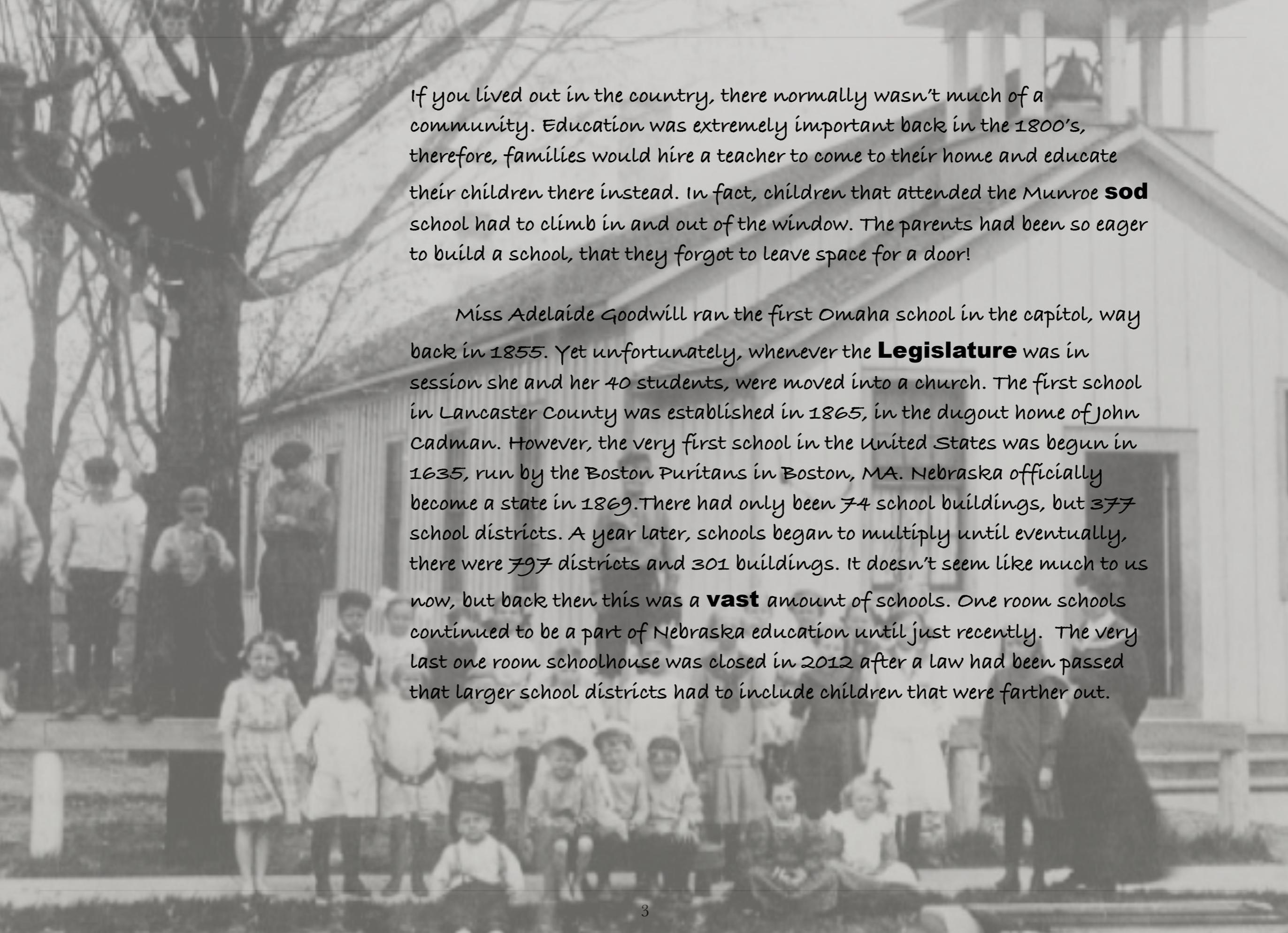
The older children had to help the younger students quite often, because just imagine the **chaos!** One teacher. Tons of students. One schoolhouse. How could the teacher possibly do it all on her own? I can guarantee you, the teachers were quite stressed!



Education In The 1800's Word Search



Test your smarts in this word search! :)

A faded black and white photograph of a school building with a group of children standing in front of it. The children are arranged in several rows, some standing on a porch or steps, others on the ground. The building has a gabled roof and a bell tower on the right side. The overall tone is historical and nostalgic.

If you lived out in the country, there normally wasn't much of a community. Education was extremely important back in the 1800's, therefore, families would hire a teacher to come to their home and educate their children there instead. In fact, children that attended the Munroe **sod** school had to climb in and out of the window. The parents had been so eager to build a school, that they forgot to leave space for a door!

Miss Adelaide Goodwill ran the first Omaha school in the capitol, way back in 1855. Yet unfortunately, whenever the **Legislature** was in session she and her 40 students, were moved into a church. The first school in Lancaster County was established in 1865, in the dugout home of John Cadman. However, the very first school in the United States was begun in 1635, run by the Boston Puritans in Boston, MA. Nebraska officially became a state in 1869. There had only been 74 school buildings, but 377 school districts. A year later, schools began to multiply until eventually, there were 797 districts and 301 buildings. It doesn't seem like much to us now, but back then this was a **vast** amount of schools. One room schools continued to be a part of Nebraska education until just recently. The very last one room schoolhouse was closed in 2012 after a law had been passed that larger school districts had to include children that were farther out.

See what you know about 1880's schooling here!

Question 1 of 3

In what year was the first school in Omaha built?

- A.** 1867
- B.** 1855
- C.** 1923
- D.** 1850



Check Answer



Features Of The Schoolhouses

In the 1800's the homesteaders did not have schools as nice as we have today. They had dirt floors, and rough plank desks or benches. The building was quite small, and the ceiling, walls, and roof were all made with sod, straw, and mud. Straw was obviously more limp and didn't last very long. Mud was better than straw and more stable, but not the wisest choice when you're in a state that has ample amounts of rainfall. Sod was the most used resource in Nebraska for building schools. The prairie grasses had long root systems, so the sod bricks held together pretty well. Yes, it would still melt away in the rain, but not as quickly as mud would, and it was the most stable of all.

The schools were heated with fireplaces in the mid 1800's but were later heated with wood stoves which became more common. The wood stove was placed in the center of the room and was supposed to heat the whole room at once, but sources say you had to sit really close to the stove to keep warm.

1800's schoolhouse chalk boards were just a **slab** of board or slate painted black. Rocks were used to write on the boards, but they created scratches and indents in the boards so many teachers decided it was best to switch to a new invention called "chalk".

Today we have red, green, blue, pink, yellow and many other colors of chalk. Back then all they had was white chalk, made from limestone.

(Surprisingly, most of the chalk you use today is 60 to 100 million years old! This soft **sedimentary** rock forms underwater, way at the bottom of the ocean where small round **calcite** plates eventually turn into limestone.)

Schoolhouse Pictures



SECTION 3

Teachers

In 1918, half of all teachers were between the ages of 16 and 20, 38% were 21 to 25 years old. There were several tasks that all had to be done by one teacher: helping the first graders recite a poem, taking care of a sick child, reading a book with the 8th graders, and much more, all at the same time. Early prairie teachers were paid 10 or 15 dollars each month. The children had the same teacher every year, so the teacher had no trouble having to remember any new names and the kids were more used to their teacher. The schools only went up to 8th grade, and 8th grade work was more difficult than today's college level!

Whenever one's hands needed to be washed or they needed to have a drink, there would be a bucket hanging on a hook of the schoolhouse door. Sometimes it sat on the ground or teacher's desk so it would be accessible during any moment of the day. The child or adult would take this bucket and head down to the stream to gather fresh water, depending on how many miles the stream was from the building. If it was too far away, the teacher would leave to gather the water for the safety of the children. z

The one room schoolhouse teachers had many expectations. These included things such as filling lamps, cleaning out chimneys, gathering a **scuttle** of coal, and making pens for the students the exact length the pupils needed. The teachers also had to follow multiple regulations and rules. They weren't allowed to be married or have any relationship or they would be fired. If they smoked, drank liquor, or visited anywhere where these things would take place they would also be fired. However, if a teacher taught for more than 5 years, her pay increased by 25 cents, which was a decent improvement back then.

Dunce Cap

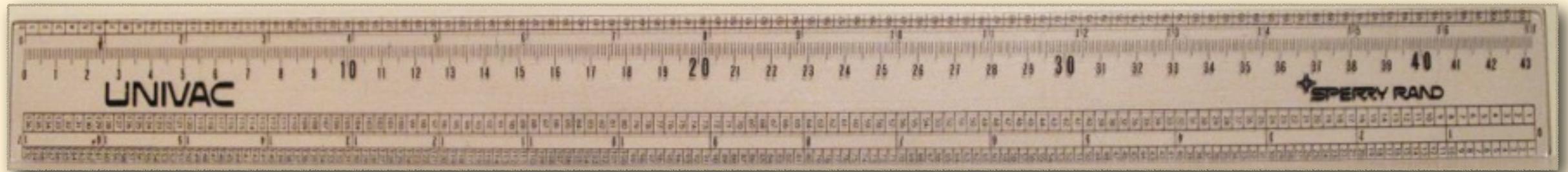
Teachers back in the prairie days used multiple forms of punishments. You may have heard of something called the "Dunce Cap". This was a method teachers used to shame their students when they had misbehaved in the 1800's. It was an odd looking cone shaped cap normally made out of paper, that was marked with a "D" or the word "Dunce". Back then, Dunce was another word for "idiot". The child would be forced to go into the corner of the room or in the front of the class in a chair, while wearing this cap. The man behind this odd punishment, was John Duns Scotus. As you can tell, the name of this hat came from this strange man's middle name. He was teased often, as were his followers, who had earned the name, "The Dunceman". They were constantly frowned upon. It is thought that the Dunce cap may have started out as something to flaunt and be proud of, but later turned out to be something of which to be ashamed, most likely because of the association with the Dunceman. Schools have now outlawed Dunce Caps, thank goodness! It was thought to be too humiliating and quite a deranged punishment.



Dunce Cap



Do something as simple as looking out the window, and you get the Dunce Cap!



Other Punishments

Other strange punishments took place in these one room schoolhouses. If a child were to misbehave they would have to outstretch their arms and the teacher would place a heavy book in their arms. The student would have to hold it in that uncomfortable position for about an hour and a half! The children were also smacked on the head or knuckles with a ferule, which was 15 to 18 inches long and wasn't even used for measuring, but just to whack them. Sometimes troublesome boys would even be banished to the girls' cloakroom! (This punishment is very peculiar, but it was unbearable back then.) Sometimes, a teacher would draw a big circle on a chalkboard and have a troublesome child come up and place his nose in it for 30 minutes to an hour. If a pupil littered or spat, they would have to clean the whole floor, too. A child who misbehaved would have to write the phrase "I will not..." and fill in the blank with what they had done, and repeat this phrase 100 times. In the 1800's the worst punishment a child would ever receive was: if a boy was naughty the teacher would make him go and sit by a girl! (This probably doesn't sound that bad now, but back then "cooties" were a big deal to children.)

Review 1.1

Which of these was an actual form of punishment in the 1800's schoolhouse?

- A.** Fair Rule
- B.** Ferret Rule
- C.** Baseball Cap
- D.** Dunce Cap

Check Answer

Curriculum

Reading was a big subject although the only types of books they read were fables and the Bible. They rarely had silent reading and mostly read out loud so the teacher could correct any misspelled words or punctuation errors, and when children read an essay in front of the class the teacher would correct them on the spot. There was no excuse for losing your place in a book because you were supposed to keep your eyes on the text the whole time a child or teacher was reading and whenever you read you were required to stand up in front of the class.

Every Friday, the younger grades had Spelling Bees. The students had to split up into two groups, with the teacher in the middle, and then a coin was tossed or straw was drawn to determine which team went first. The teacher gave the word in a sentence, and repeated it twice. If the student realized they had made a mistake before the teacher began to move on, they would politely ask to retry and then were allowed to go again. If they got it wrong, they had to sit down and the first person in the other team was to go next with the same word. The idea of the game was to determine who won according to how many were left standing.

*“On Top of
Old Smokey”
By: “Disney
Children’s
Favorites” The
Walt Disney
Company*



The following songs are what the pioneer children sang:

“She’ll be Coming Round the Mountain”

“Annie Laurie”

“Whistle, Mary, Whistle”

“Columbia, the Gem of the Ocean”

“School Days”

*“Polly Wolly
Doodle”
By: “Disney
Children’s
Favorites” The
Walt Disney
Company*



Just like today, recess was a favorite time for students in the one room schoolhouse. Many schools had a flat surface outside the schoolhouse for the students to play games. The pioneer children had multiple games to play.

Although many have not stayed with us today, there are a few that had stood the test of time like chess. Other popular games included "Cats Cradle", which is a string game in which you use about 6 feet of chord or string and loop it around certain fingers to create a design in the middle. They also played a game called "Cup and Ball". This game required a cup and ball, hence the name. The ball was connected to a cup with a piece of string and would start out by hanging limply to the side of the cup and the child would thrust the ball around until it swung back into the cup. They also played "Draughts" which meant checkers, hopscotch, dominos, yo-yo, jump rope, and pick-up sticks.

Fun and Books on the Prairie



Top half of an actual book cover used for education on the prairie in the 1800's. (date above)

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Eighth Grade Graduation

As mentioned earlier, most schoolhouses only went up to 8th grade. However, their education was much more difficult than even high school education nowadays. Back then, very few people went to college so they would be starting their adult lives much sooner. In order to graduate from 8th grade, students had to pass a final exam.

Below is a snippet of a typical 8th grade test from 1895:

GRAMMAR

(Time, one hour)

1. Give the nine rules for the use of Capital Letters.
2. Name the parts of speech and define those that have no modifications.
3. Define: Verse, Stanza and Paragraph.
4. What are the principal parts of a verb? Give the Principal Parts of do, lie, lay, and run.
5. Define Case. Illustrate each case.
6. What is Punctuation? Give rules for principal marks of punctuation.
- 7-10. Write a composition of about 150 words and show there in that you understand the practical use of the rules of grammar.

ARITHMETIC

(Time, 1 1/2 hours)

1. Name and define the Fundamental Rules of Arithmetic.
2. A wagon box is 2 ft. deep, 10 feet long, and 3 ft. wide. How many bushels of wheat will it hold?
3. If a load of wheat weighs 3,942 pounds, what is it worth at 50 cts. per bu., deducting 1050 lbs. for tare?
4. District No. 33 has a valuation of \$35,000. What is the necessary levy to carry on a school seven months at \$50 per month, and have \$104 for incidentals?
5. Find cost of 6,720 lbs. coal at \$6.00 per ton.
6. Find the interest of \$512.60 for 8 months and 18 days at 7 per cent.
7. What is the cost of 40 boards 12 inches wide and 16 ft. long at \$20 per in.?
8. Find bank discount on \$300 for 90 days (no grace) at 10 per cent.
9. What is the cost of a square farm at \$15 per acre, the distance around which is 640 rods?
10. Write a Bank Check, a Promissory Note, and a Receipt.

U.S. HISTORY

(Time, 45 minutes)

1. Give the epochs into which U.S. History is divided.
2. Give an account of the discovery of America by Columbus.
3. Relate the causes and results of the Revolutionary War.
4. Show the territorial growth of the United States.
5. Tell what you can of the history of Kansas.
6. Describe three of the most prominent battles of the Rebellion.

ORTHOGRAPHY

(Time, 1 1/2 hours)

1. What is meant by the following: Alphabet, Phonetic, Orthography, Etymology, Syllabication?
2. What are elementary sounds? How classified?
3. What are the following, and give examples of each: Trigraph, Subvocals, Diphthong, Cognate, Linguals?
4. Give two uses of silent letters in spelling. Illustrate each.
5. Define the following prefixes and use in connection with a word: Bi, Dis, Mis, Pre, Semi, Post, Non, Inter, Mono, Super
6. Mark diacritically and divided into syllables the following, and name the sign that indicates the sound: Card, ball, mercy, sir, odd, cell, rise, blood, fare, last.
7. Use the following correctly in sentences: Cite, site, sight, fane, fain, feign, vane, vein, raze, raise, rays. Write 10 words frequently mispronounced and indicate pronunciation by use of diacritical marks and by syllabication.

Review 1.2

What was the max. amount of time a subject took on an 1800's test?

- A.** 30 minutes
- B.** 2 hours
- C.** 1 1/2 hours
- D.** 1 hour

Check Answer

The Schoolchildren's Blizzard

January 12th, 1888. The very day a powerful blizzard swept across Nebraska. 125 years ago. With a whopping 30 to 40 degrees below 0, it is said that the temperature fell about 100 degrees in only 24 hours as the storm came with no warning! Surprisingly, there wasn't a great amount of snow but blinding wind speeds created white outs, tearing frozen eyelids open. This fierce storm lasted 12 to 18 hours straight, as 230 perished at their very doors. It has been ranked Nebraska's most severe storm. If you go to visit Nebraska's capital, you'll see a mosaic on the wall of this terrifying storm from over 120 years ago. This blizzard is sometimes referred to as "The Schoolchildren's Blizzard." It affected children of the area greatly as well as parents, teachers, and one brave woman named Minnie Freeman who lived in Ord, Nebraska. She led her students through the storm with twine to a shelter after the blistering wind tore the roof off the schoolhouse. It's been said that Freeman saved nearly 16 lives that day, which was quite a lot considering most died right at their doorstep as soon as they took a step out into the below 0 temperature and ear nipping winds. Most of the children were kept in the schoolhouse for a full 2 days, (including their youngest student who was 5 years old,) waiting for rescuers to arrive as their arms grew limp and sore from ringing bells day and night to let the rescuers know where they were and that they were okay.

Lois May Roce unfortunately didn't have the luck Minnie Freeman had. She lost most of her students before they even stepped outside the classroom. Her stove was no match for the blistering cold. She tried to take her remaining three students at the ages of 9, 9, and 6, to a farmhouse 200 yards away, but they lost each other and the children had perished, leaving the teacher crawling blindly through the dangerous storm because of her horribly frost bitten feet. She had made it to the farmhouse, panting, her feet fully frost bitten, and numb. She later had to have them amputated.

Minnie was interviewed by multiple reporters, and here is a sample of what she told them:

Minnie Freeman



Minnie Freeman, the hero of multiple children's lives.





Above is an example of another blizzard in Nebraska in 1949.

David Laskin wrote the following quote about the storm: "For years afterward, at gatherings of any size in Dakota or Nebraska, there would always be people walking on wooden legs or holding fingerless hands behind their backs or hiding missing ears under hats — victims of the blizzard."

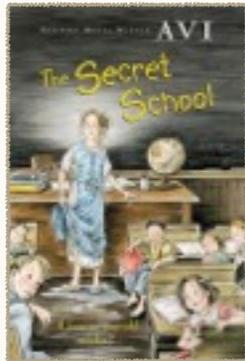
A 7 year old boy also wrote this sentence after the harsh storm: "With the suddenness of a clap of thunder, the sheer front of the blizzard crashed against the schoolhouse like a tidal wave, shaking the wooden frame building and almost lifting it from its foundation."

Just think that where you are standing right now is where very memorable moments in history and grueling work took place long ago, and some not so long ago. It's hard to believe that all you have read above REALLY happened. Just think how lucky you are to not have to go through the rough life and work that even the children went through. So the next time you think that your teacher is being unfair, just be glad that you weren't sitting in that class in the 1800's.

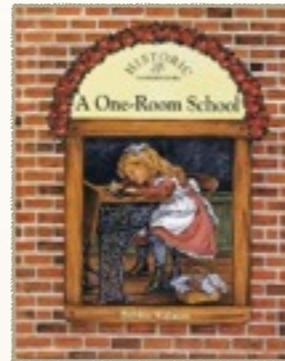
Recommended Books

Want to learn more about life in the 1800's? Below is a list of recommended books to help you not only learn about the 1800's education, but much more!

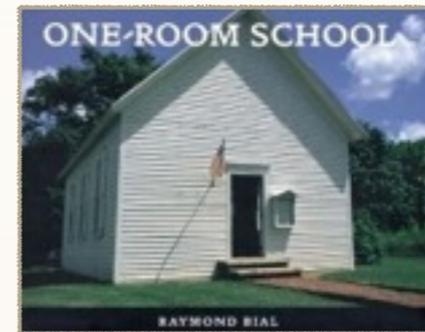
The Secret School by Avi



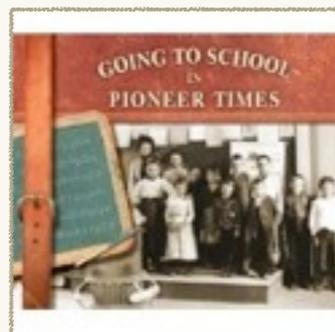
A One-Room School
by Bobbie Kalman



One Room School
by Raymond Bial



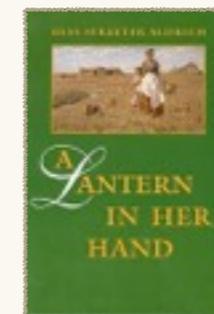
Going to School in Pioneer Times
by Kerry A. Graves



My Face to the Wind
By Jim Murphy



A Lantern in Her Hand
by Bess Streeter Aldrich



Recommended Websites

Below is a list of
recommended websites if
you are interested in
learning more:

<http://oneroomschoolhousecenter.weebly.com/memories.html>

<http://www.oneroomschoolhouses.ca/index.html>

<http://www.buchanancountyhistory.com/oneroomschool.php>

<http://www.oneroomschoolhouses.ca/>

<http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/schoolhouse/008003-2200-e.html>

<http://www.northwesthistoryexpress.com/timeline/education1800.php>

http://www.americaslibrary.gov/es/ny/es_ny_school_1.html

http://nashuaschoolhouse.com/Country_School_Life.html

Citations

Page 2 Background Photo:

https://www.cmich.edu/library/clarke/researchresources/michigan_material_statewide/One_Room_Schools/Pages/default.aspx

Page 7:

<http://kizaz.com/2013/04/20/10-reasons-life-in-19th-century-was-better/> http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ruler_4scales.jpg

Page 3 Photo: <http://www.socialsecuritydeathindex-search.com/ssdi/2009/10/page/2/>

Page 9 Photo: <http://www.sugardoodle.net/Pioneers/A%20Pioneer%20Trek.shtml>

Page 1 Photo: <http://lightspeed.ralstonschools.org/access/web?id=497bd17b-52fd-11e3-8c94-002590c599dc>

Page 5 Photo: <http://explorepahistory.com/displayimage.php?imgId=1-2-19C3>

Page 8: <http://www.cogenweb.com/yuma/photos/pioneer/Shaw.htm>

Page 16: http://dnr.ne.gov/floodplain/docs/Blizzard_Investigation.html

Page 15: <http://www.omaha.com/article/20130112/NEWS/701129906>

Page 12: <http://lightspeed.ralstonschools.org/access/web?id=692991b8-5c46-11e3-8c94-002590c599dc>

Page 5: <http://locustgroveschoolhouse.org/articles/one-room-schoolhouse-day-your-school>

I would like to dedicate this book to my High Ability Learner teacher, Mrs. Brookhouser, for helping me with this book and my best friend Nicole for distracting me from working and keeping the making of this book fun! :)

ACCESSIBLE

Adjective

Easy to approach, speak, enter, or use.

Related Glossary Terms

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Index

Find Term

Chapter 1 - Teachers

CALCITE

Noun

Makes up rocks such as chalk, marble, or limestone.

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Chapter 1 - Features of Schoolhouse

CHAOS

noun

complete disorder and confusion.

“When the tornado hit, there was much chaos.”

synonyms:

disorder, disarray, disorganization, confusion, mayhem, bedlam, pandemonium, havoc, turmoil, tumult, commotion, disruption, upheaval, uproar, maelstrom;

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Chapter 1 - One Room Schoolhouses

DISTRICTS

Noun

A division of territory, as of a country, state, or county marked off for administrative, electoral or other purposes.

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DUNCE

Noun

A dumb-witted, stupid, or ignorant person.

Related Glossary Terms

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HOMESTEADERS

Noun

One who acquires land and a house for free, by improving the original homestead.

Related Glossary Terms

Drag related terms here

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LEGISLATURE

Noun

An elected group of people who can make laws for a state or country.

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Drag related terms here

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Find Term

Chapter 1 - One Room Schoolhouses

MOSAIC

Noun

A picture or decoration usually made of small colored pieces of glass.

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Chapter 1 - The Schoolchildren's Blizzard

PUNISHMENTS

Noun

A penalty inflicted for offense or fault.

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Find Term

SCUTTLE

Noun

A deep bucket for carrying coal.

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Drag related terms here

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Chapter 1 - Teachers

SEDIMENTARY

Adjective

Having the characteristics of a mineral.

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Chapter 1 - Features of Schoolhouse

SHEER

adjective

nothing other than; unmitigated (used for emphasis).

"she giggled with sheer delight"

synonyms:

utter, complete, absolute, total, pure, downright, out-and-out, arrant, thorough, thoroughgoing, patent, veritable, unmitigated, plain

Related Glossary Terms

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Chapter 1 - The Schoolchildren's Blizzard

SLAB

Noun

A broad, flat, somewhat thick piece of stone, wood, or other solid material.

Related Glossary Terms

Drag related terms here

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Find Term

Chapter 1 - Features of Schoolhouse

SOD

Noun

A section cut or torn from the surface of grassland, containing the matted roots of grass.

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Chapter 1 - One Room Schoolhouses

VAST

Adjective

Of very great area or extent; immense: the vast reaches of outer space.

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Drag related terms here

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