Pioneer Children

Schools on the Frontier

Are you excited about using the computers at school, checking out books at the school library or playing sports? School was much different for pioneer kids in the late 1800s.

Of course, there were no computers. Even paper and books were scarce on the frontier. There were no sports teams. Instead, school activities included chores such as chopping wood.

The Mini Page talked with an expert at the Stuhr Museum of the Prairie Pioneer in Grand Island, Neb., to learn more about pioneer schools.

One-room schools

Few places had kindergarten. Kids started first grade when they were about 5 or 6 years old. Students usually stopped going to school after the eighth grade.

On the frontier, children from ages 6 to 14 would all go to class together in the same room. By the time they graduated, they had probably heard every grade’s lectures year after year. By graduation, they’d know the subjects backward and forward.

Flurry of activity

A teacher might teach first-graders, then give them a project to work on. While the first-graders worked, the teacher would start instructing fourth-graders. At the same time, advanced pupils might be helping younger kids.

There may not have been a desk for each student, so kids sat on benches. When they had writing or art lessons, they’d move to desks. They might get up to help a younger student. They could move around at recess too.

Before class

Before school even started, students put in hours of work. They began each day by doing chores at home. Girls would help their mothers prepare breakfast and clean up. Boys might help feed the animals or chop wood.

After breakfast, they’d probably walk to school, which might be three to five miles away. In warm weather, they would usually walk barefoot.

Although they had shoes, most kids wore them only in the winter. Going barefoot was more comfortable. Back then, there were no left and right shoes. The shoes would form to the feet after time, but breaking in new shoes was painful.

Sometimes kids would get to ride a pony to school.

Once at school, students had more chores. Kids as young as third-graders might help chop the wood for the stove, pump water for the washbasin or sweep the floor.
Learning the Hard Way

Lessons
Paper was expensive, so kids did most of their lessons on chalkboards. Books cost a lot too. Schools did not provide textbooks. They might have a dictionary and a Bible. Kids had to buy their own books or use ones passed down from older kids.

Students followed a strict formula for answering questions. For example, Suzie would be sitting straight in her desk with her hand up. When the teacher called on her, she would move her legs to the aisle at the side of her seat. She’d stand up, then she’d turn to face the teacher. Only then would she answer.

School years
Girls were usually more educated than boys because boys would leave school in the spring to help with the planting and in the fall to help with the harvest.

When the boys came back, the girls would have moved ahead. Girls might graduate at age 13 or 14. Boys might be 18 when they graduated.

Many boys quit school early to earn money. Sometimes, older girls might have to quit school to help with younger siblings at home.

Teachers
After eighth grade, students could train to be a teacher. Training would take only six to 12 months.

New teachers could be as young as 15. They might be teaching students who were older and bigger. They often boarded with students’ families, sometimes even sharing a room with a student.

Ready Resources

The Mini Page provides ideas for websites, books or other resources that will help you learn more about this week’s topics.

On the Web:
- nebraskastudies.org/0500/stories/0501_0207.html
- pbs.org/wnet/frontierhouse/frontierlife/essay10.html
- nps.gov/ozar/historyculture/one-room-schools-in-the-ozarks.htm

At the library:
- “Rachel’s Journal: The Story of a Pioneer Girl” by Marissa Moss
- The “Little House” books by Laura Ingalls Wilder
- “A Pioneer Sampler: The Daily Life of a Pioneer Family in 1840” by Barbara Greenwood

Words that remind us of pioneer schools are hidden in the block below. Some words are hidden backward or diagonally. See if you can find: BENCH, BLACKBOARD, BOOKS, CHOP, CHORES, DESKS, DISCIPLINE, FRONTIER, HORSE, LUNCH, ONE, NOSE, PAIL, PAPER, PIONEER, READER, RECESS, ROOM, SCHOOL, STUDENT, TEACHER, WOOD.
Mini Spy . . .

Mini Spy and Basset Brown are ready for a day at their pioneer school. See if you can find: • word MINI
• elephant • strawberry • chicken • number 7
• ladder • kite • letter D • dragon
• letter A • tooth • snake • cooking pot
• car • frog • key • number 2
• pencil • banana • carrot • ruler

Meet Melissa Green

Melissa Green is a singer and songwriter. Her latest album is “Sing Loud!” Actress and singer Brooke Shields joins Melissa for duets on this album.

Melissa was teaching at a preschool in New York City when she began singing with the kids. She worked on her guitar skills and began writing and recording songs. She became the school’s music teacher.

Melissa grew up in Stratford, Conn., where she loved to play kickball and ride bikes. She and her older sister made movies with their family’s video camera, and she took dance classes. When she was in sixth grade, she got the role of Wendy in a local production of the musical play “Peter Pan.” She later earned other singing roles in plays.

After college, Melissa took acting classes in New York City. She now teaches music classes in Los Angeles. Besides singing and dancing, she loves to cook and bake.

Rookie Cookie’s Recipe

Spicy Peanutty Dip

You’ll need:
• 1/2 cup organic peanut butter (no sugar)
• 1/2 cup very hot water
• 2 tablespoons light soy sauce
• 1 tablespoon cider vinegar
• 3 small garlic cloves
• 2 to 3 tablespoons fresh cilantro, finely chopped
• 1 1/2 tablespoons sugar
• 1/4 teaspoon salt
• 1/4 teaspoon cayenne pepper (optional)

What to do:
1. Place peanut butter in a medium bowl, add hot water and stir constantly until well-blended.
2. Add soy sauce and vinegar and continue to stir until mixed well.
3. Add all other ingredients and stir to blend.
4. Cover and refrigerate.
5. Serve at room temperature as a dip with fresh vegetables.

You will need an adult’s help with this recipe.

Mini Jokes

Stanley: How does a scarecrow drink milk?
Seamus: Through straws!

Sol: What do scarecrows say to greet each other?
Suni: “Hay, friend!”

Steve: Why don’t scarecrows enjoy parties?
Samantha: Because they are all stuffed shirts!
A Day in School

School lunches

Students brought their own lunches to school. Usually, they’d bring whatever was left over from breakfast or supper the night before.

A favorite meal was a bacon grease sandwich. Students would take a thick slice of homemade bread and soak it in bacon grease. Or they might slather bread with homemade butter or jelly. Sometimes, they would bring a can of milk or leftover soup. If they were lucky, they might have boiled eggs or cold fried chicken.

One common lunch was leftover oatmeal. Kids would let oatmeal from the day before thicken, slice it and fry it in butter. It would taste something like a cracker.

In warm months, students would leave their lunches in the cloakroom. In the winter, they might store their lunches near the wood stove in the classroom.

Discipline

Parents backed up the teachers when a student misbehaved. A student might face punishment at school and then at home too.

When kids got into trouble, they usually had to stay after school to clean the blackboards or chop more wood. They might have to write a passage 100 times.

Girls and boys usually sat in different sections. One punishment might be to send a boy to sit with the girls or a girl to sit with the boys. This was very embarrassing to kids of that time.

Sometimes students were made to sit on a stool and wear a pointed hat called a dunce cap.

In one punishment, the child had to face the blackboard. The teacher drew a circle about four inches above the kid’s nose. The child had to stand on tiptoes with his or her nose in the circle, without moving. They might have to stand that way for 10 minutes for a first offense and 20 minutes for a second offense.

Most teachers did not give physical punishments. When they did, they could spank the child, sometimes with a paddle or a switch. Teachers might rap kids’ knuckles with a ruler or stick.

Goody Two-Shoes

Kids whose families had more money may have had special lunch pails. The bottom of these pails would hold sandwiches, with an upper part for lemonade or milk, and a cap they could use for a cup.

The kids who carried these lunch pails were called “goody two-shoes” because they were the only students who could afford to buy the pails and two new, comfortable shoes each year.

*Goody Two-Shoes is the character in a book written in the 1700s.

The school-day schedule might be put on the blackboard at the beginning of the year. In the “health inspection,” teachers would check kids’ hands and fingernails for cleanliness, to see if they’d washed behind their ears, and for an overall clean appearance and a good smell.

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Next week, The Mini Page is about the introduction of the Emancipation Proclamation.


Look through your newspaper for ads, photos and stories that show how different schools are today than they were in pioneer times.

The Mini Page Staff

Betty Debnam - Founding Editor and Editor at Large  Lisa Tarry - Managing Editor  Lucy Lien - Associate Editor  Wendy Daley - Artist
Standards Spotlight:
Schools on the Frontier

Mini Page activities meet many state and national educational standards. Each week we identify standards that relate to The Mini Page’s content and offer activities that will help your students reach them.

This week’s standard:
• Students understand that studying the past makes it possible to understand the human story across time. (Social Studies: Time, Continuity and Change)

Activities:
1. Draw a large backpack. On your drawing, paste newspaper pictures of items you take to school in your backpack.
2. Draw five things pioneer students used in their schools. Next to each item, paste a newspaper picture of something you use in school for the same purpose.
3. Find five non-electronic items in your newspaper that would have made school easier for pioneer children.
4. How did pioneer students demonstrate these values: (a) resourcefulness, (b) dedication, (c) cooperation and (d) caring?
5. Write about the strengths of pioneer schools and of modern schools.

(standards by Dr. Sherrye D. Garrett, Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi)

(Note to Editor: Above is Standards for Issue 36.)

Gus Goodsports’s Report

Supersport: Montee Ball

Height: 5-11  Weight: 212  Hometown: Wentzville, Mo.

Give the football to Ball. That’s what the Wisconsin Badgers do a lot, and they get remarkable results.

Going into this season, the senior running back has scored 51 touchdowns and needs 18 more to set the Division I college record for career TDs.

That’s well within the Badger star’s reach. Last fall, Ball tied the NCAA single-season record with 39 touchdowns and led the nation in rushing with 1,923 yards. His performance helped Wisconsin win the Big Ten title and earn its second straight Rose Bowl berth.

This is nothing new. At Timberland (Mo.) High, Ball scored 107 touchdowns and earned academic recognition as well. A sociology major at Wisconsin, his outside interests include basketball and reading.

As for traveling, trips to the end zone are what Ball seems to enjoy the most.

(Note to Editor: Above is copy block for Page 3, Issue 36, to be used in place of ad if desired.)