

# Life in a One-Room Arkansas Schoolhouse

Learning from local and statewide historic places

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Courtesy: Arkansas History Commission

*Kindergarteners at the Blackboard, Lake Dick School District, Jefferson County, 1938*

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**A Division of the Department of Arkansas Heritage**

## Teaching the *Life in a One-Room Schoolhouse* Lesson

### **GRADE LEVELS**

4-7

### **FOR THE TEACHER**

It's the first day of summer school, July of 1920. You are the seventeen-year old teacher. You enter your one-room schoolhouse and look out over your new class of students. Their ages range from 5 to 19. You are responsible for teaching all subjects to all of these ages. What a difference from school today!

One-room schoolhouses are a unique part of Arkansas's history. Students today have a vastly different school experience from students in past.

By studying life in a one-room schoolhouse, students will learn how life has changed, for better and for worse, in the last century.

### **OBJECTIVES**

- ✓ Students will use primary and secondary sources to learn what a typical school day was like for children in the early 1900s.
- ✓ Students will learn about school consolidation in Arkansas.
- ✓ Students will learn about African-American education in Arkansas.
- ✓ Students will contrast and compare school life today to school life in the past.
- ✓ Students will learn the importance of preserving Arkansas's one-room schoolhouses.

### **ARKANSAS CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS**

#### **Arkansas History, Grades K-4**

TCC.1.4: Students will learn that the history of Arkansas's schools is a continuing story.

TCC.2.2: Students will discuss the changes in school life over time, and realize that change is inevitable.

SSPS.1.1: Students will distinguish between primary and secondary sources.

SSPS.1.2: Students will use a chart and photographs to interpret information.

For high-quality transparencies of the schoolhouse photographs, go to [www.ArkansasPreservation.org](http://www.ArkansasPreservation.org), select the *Education* page, open the PDF file of this lesson plan, and print onto transparency paper.

#### **Arkansas History, Grades 5-8**

TCC.2.1: Students will explore how technology has changed in Arkansas schools in the last century.

TCC.2.3: Students will use reading, listening and writing to demonstrate how school life has changed.

PPE.1.1: Students will use primary and secondary sources to understand their connection to schools in the past (by using the comparison chart).

SSPS.1.1 Students will identify primary and secondary sources.

SSPS.1.2: Students will analyze oral history and photographs to understand school life in Arkansas's past.

#### **Social Studies, K-4**

TCC.1.6: Students will use vocabulary related to time and chronology.

TCC.2.1: Students will discuss and record changes in school life in the last century

SSPS.1.3: Students will interpret information from photographs and construct a chart.

SSPS.1.6: Students will compare, contrast and classify changes in school life.

SSPS.2.2: Students will identify and use primary and secondary sources, including oral history, essays and photographs.

#### **Social Studies, 5-8**

TCC.2.4: Students will use thinking, reading, listening and writing to demonstrate changes in school life.

PPE.1.4: Students will examine primary and secondary sources.

PAG.1.3: Students will learn about equity issues based on race.

SSPS.2.1: Students will use the social science tools of primary and secondary sources and a chart.

Thank you to the Thomas Harding family for permission to reprint some of the beautiful photographs from:

One-Room Schoolhouses of Arkansas as Seen through a Pinhole by Thomas Harding, University of Arkansas Press, 1993.

## PROCEDURE

1. Explain primary and secondary sources to the students (see *Vocabulary List*, page 24). Tell them that they are going to use primary and secondary sources to learn about Arkansas's historic schoolhouses.
2. Explore the photographs on pages 18-21 and the cover photo, by passing around copies or making transparencies. Tell students that historic buildings themselves are primary sources. The photos of students that were taken in the past are also primary sources. However, modern photos of historic buildings are secondary sources. Modern photos are secondary sources because the buildings have changed and aged since they were built. All of the included building photos are modern.

Ask the students to gather as much information as they can about the schools and students just from looking at the photos. See: *What Can You Learn from Historic Photos?*, page 22, for examples of things students can learn from looking at the photos.

3. Read aloud or have the students read *Letters From a Former Student and Teacher*, pages 4-5, and *Interview with a Former Student*, pages 6-7. These are primary sources that tell us about life in a one-room schoolhouse from people who lived the experience.
4. Have students read *Daily Life in a One-Room Schoolhouse*, pages 8-10. This is a secondary source, which was written in 2002 but is based on a historical essay.
5. Have students fill in *Comparison Chart: School Life Today and in the Past*, pages 11-12. Students can fill it in individually. Or you can copy the chart onto transparencies or poster board and fill it in as a class.
6. Read and discuss the essay *African-American Education in Arkansas*, page 13.
7. Read or have students read *Changes in Arkansas Education, 1920-1940*, page 14. Ask students, "What effect do you think school consolidation had on Arkansas's one-room schoolhouses?"
8. Read the poem *Abandoned Schoolhouse*, page 23, and show students the photo on that page. Ask students, "Why it is important that we preserve Arkansas's remaining one-room schools? What would we lose if all of our one-room schools were demolished? How does looking at the photo make you feel?"

## EXTENSIONS



### Host a One-Room Schoolhouse Day!

Ask the students to dress in costume: dresses for the girls and overalls for the boys. Shoes in the classroom are optional!

Use the enclosed instruction sheets to play marbles, make slates and have an old-fashioned spelling bee.

Have students bring their lunch in a paper sack or bucket. Serve biscuits and molasses as a snack.

Work a lesson from a McGuffey's Reader, a textbook that was widely used across the country in the early 1900s. You can download pages from McGuffey's Readers from the following website:

[www.pitt.edu](http://www.pitt.edu)

Select *Libraries*, then click on *Pitt Digital Library*. Click on *Our Digital Projects*, then select *19th Century Schoolbooks*. Click on *Full Text Collection*, then *Browse Books* at the top of the screen, then scroll down to McGuffey.



Have students interview elderly relatives or community members about their school days (see the AHPP lesson plan *Preserving the Past Through Oral History* for more information).



Ask students what they would like children in the future to know about school life today. Discuss photographs students could take to document their school experience. Take the photos, and compile them into an album for your school library.



Have students imagine what a classroom will be like in 100 years, and draw pictures of it.



Read *These Happy, Golden Years*, by Laura Ingalls Wilder. In this book, Laura takes the teacher's exam at age 15, accepts a job teaching at a school miles from her home, boards with an unpleasant family, rides a horse-drawn sleigh home for weekend visits, and teaches her pupils of all ages.



Make graphs using the numbers in *Changes in Arkansas Education, 1920-1940*, page 14.



Visit the AHPP website to find out what historic properties are in your area:  
[www.arkansaspreservation.org](http://www.arkansaspreservation.org)

Go to the *History and Architecture* page, then click on *National Register of Historic Places* to search the database by county, town or property name.

Enter the word "school" in the *description* box to get a list of schools on the National Register.

## Letters from a Former Student and Teacher of One-Room Schoolhouses

### Primary Sources

These two letters were written to the author of the book, One-Room Schoolhouses of Arkansas as Seen Through a Pinhole, by Thomas Harding, 1993.

By Mrs. Reppie Smith of Sapulpa, Oklahoma:

Memories of my education in a one-room schoolhouse are very many and dear to me. And I do remember most everything. I started at age six in 1914 and finished the eighth-grade in 1922. First through eighth grades were taught to about thirty or more students.

The school was Liberty in a little town called Woolsey now. When I was growing up it was called Pitkin. There were two stores, the Pitkin post office, and Liberty School.

The first graders started to learn their ABCs and numbers from a large chart. Later we received our first book: *The Primer*. From there we were learning words and some arithmetic.

Reading, writing, arithmetic, history, spelling, grammar, geography, and penmanship were taught. Of course, the names of some of these subjects have been changed. Spelling and ciphering contests were usually held after the last recess on Fridays.

I don't remember us ever taking school work home to study at night. Coal oil lamps didn't give out much light to study by.

If our teachers had problems teaching that many children in a one-room space with all our different lessons, we didn't know anything about them. If we weren't reciting, we were busy getting our next lesson.

Our heating system was a wood burning stove. Later it was replaced with an upright heater. It was located at the back of the room in the corner.

If I remember right, it was the teacher's job to start the fire when they arrived at the schoolhouse much earlier than time for the children. Older boys brought in wood through the day and they kept the fire going. Our air conditioner was open windows. There were lots of windows and you sure could tell this come winter time.

The water we had to drink came from a hand-dug well. The well was on school property. Water was drawn up by bucket, rope, and pulley. Everyone had their own drinking cups. Some were tin and some were the folding kind. If you had a folding cup, you felt rich. The bucket of water was set on a shelf at the back. Older children kept the water ready for the rest of us.

We had a cloak room for coats, hats, and scarves. A shelf in this little room held our lunches (lard or syrup buckets).

Now, about our rest room. It sat out back. It was nice and roomy. It was much nicer than I had at home. It had three seats you could rest on.

Repairs to the building, wood supply, chalk, and such were paid for by the school district.

My Dad, A.M. Goff, was on the school board for several years. The wood-frame building blew down after I finished school. A concrete block one now stands in about the same place. It is used for church and community meetings (I think).

*Mabel Goree Bell of Springdale, Arkansas, began her teaching career at the Skylight School in Washington County. She began teaching on her twentieth birthday, October 6, 1925.*

Following are excerpts from Ms. Bell's letter:

I boarded with Mr. and Mrs. J.C. Glidewell. Mrs. Glidewell ran the country store. The first day of school Mr. Glidewell walked with me to the school to show me a short cut through the fields and under the fences.

The University of Arkansas had not taught me to cope in a one-room school. One must learn that for oneself.

Skylight was a typical one-room school with a most notable exception. There were no school desks.

The school and church shared the same building. The children sat on the church benches and wrote on their laps. The pupils from Primer through ninth grade took short turns on the recitation bench. Sometimes the older girls helped teach the younger ones. There were several children in some families and the children were interested in hearing the others recite.

There was no electricity, no in-door plumbing, no running water, no school nurse, no playground equipment, no library, no hot lunches, no music teacher, no air-conditioning, no telephone, no school buses, no physical education instructor, no copy machine, no Venetian blinds, etc. Also, there were no "snow days."

The children learned the basics. At the end of the six-month term, three of the girls took the Washington County Teacher's Examination and passed.

In 1930, a petition was signed by the patrons asking that Skylight be consolidated with Mount Pleasant Morrow, District 44.

There was a program at the end of school. The church let us use their organ. Some of the girls could play. So, we had songs, plays and recreation.

I am thankful...to have had my teaching experience in a one-room school. I taught more than 30 years and Skylight was my first love. The children and parents were good, kind, gentle people and I have many happy memories.

Now there is school no more on Skylight Mountain.



Hollywood School, Clark County. Photo taken in 1937

## Interview with a former One-Room Schoolhouse Student

### Primary Source

Mr. Walter Rudolph Henderson was born in 1923. He began attending a one-room schoolhouse in Blackton, Arkansas, at the age of six. When he was in third grade, he switched to a school in Clarendon. Blackton is now a “ghost town,” a community that has been deserted. But at the time Mr. Henderson lived there, it was a thriving little town with a doctor’s office, a schoolhouse, a filling station and several grocery stores.

“Rudy” Henderson was interviewed for this lesson plan on December 17, 2002.

**Did you enjoy growing up in a small community in Arkansas?** Oh, yes. There were so many more values. Your children were a lot safer because everyone looked after your child. If my family’s friends saw me doing something [wrong], Momma and Daddy’d know about it before I got home! It made you more aware of what’s right and wrong.

**What chores did you do before and after school?** Well, cut the wood, get the ashes out of the fireplace and stove, get mother’s kindling to where she could start the cookstove in the morning while we were getting ready for school. Most of the homes didn’t have running water in them. You had to pump the water for the animals and for the house. When mother did laundry, she’d heat the water outside. A washing machine was her with an old tub!

**How did you get to and from school, and how far was it?** Well, we walked on good days. When it was bad, Daddy’d take us and we’d ride double with him on the horse. It was two and a half miles. The school was kind of isolated from the little community. Going to and from school we passed a cemetery. We had a shortcut. Until the spring got things growing we’d take that shortcut. After it got growing, we couldn’t take the shortcut because of the snakes! The shortcut was through the woods.

**How long did it take you to walk to school?** Depends. Depends on how long you played! It’d take 15-20 minutes if it was cold and you walked briskly!

**What did you eat for breakfast, and what did you bring for lunch at school?** Most of the time for lunch we’d bring a baked sweet potato or something that wouldn’t perish. We’d bring sandwiches. A lot of peanut butter, homemade. For breakfast we’d eat biscuits and gravy, sausage and eggs. We’d never heard of toast. You could buy two loaves of bread for a nickel. But you didn’t have the nickel! These were depression years.

**What did your school look like?** Our desks were double desks. If you were a first-grader, a fourth-grader and a first-grader sat at the same desk and the fourth-grader helped you. At the same time, [the fourth-grader was] learning because they were reviewing what they learned in first grade. Repetition is the way you learn. The fifth-graders helped the second-graders, the sixth-graders helped the third-graders.

There was a long hall with a divider and on the other side of that was the seventh through twelfth grades. There was one teacher on each side. There were 14 students on my side.

There were windows on both sides. At the back of the room where you went in there were two coat closets. In the middle was the teacher’s desk. On both sides there were wood stoves. No electricity.

**Was your one-room school quiet despite all of the different grades?** Yes. You didn’t get out of your seat without permission. That teacher was there doing nothing but watching you, because the kids were helping each other. What happens in classrooms so much now, is when the teacher is working with one kid one-on-one, all the others get to talking because they are not busy.

**What was it like to recite?** When you started reading, you would read with your partner. The little girl that was my partner was Alice Jennings. She was in the fourth grade. She was my tutor. I would read to her, and she’d correct me. Then we’d have to stand up in front of the school room and read. Then when we got a little older and started learning multiplication tables, we’d have to stand up to recite them.

**Was there any pattern as to which students got paired up together?** They’d try to pick one of the smartest, best students [in the higher grade] and pair them up with the slowest student [in the lower grade].

**Do you think the older kids enjoyed helping the younger kids?** Oh, yes. Sure! I’ll never forget Alice Jennings. She’s gone now, but we stayed friends all of our lives.

**How did you take tests?** The teacher put the questions on the blackboard. We wrote the answers in our tablets. Most of the time we traded papers with somebody behind you or beside you and we graded each other's papers.

**What did you do at recess?** We'd play! We'd play mumblepeg, hop-scotch. We had a ball and a bat. We'd take an old wagon wheel and we'd roll it. We made rubber guns out of wood and rubber from an old automobile tire. You'd stretch that rubber [and shoot it] and you could bring a pretty good blister!

**Did you take homework home?** Yes. The teacher would put it on the board, and your partner would copy it down and give it to you. Because sometimes it would take you too long to copy it off. We did have a blackboard. If you were good, you got to take the erasers outside and beat the dust off them.

**Did you ever have spelling bees?** Yes. The first grade would spell against the second grade. The third grade and fourth grade would spell against each other. You'd do it all in the classroom. Of course, the little ones went out quick. The teacher would put a long word on the board and we'd have contests to see how many words you could make out of that word.

**Did you ever have recitals where the families would come at night?** At Christmas time, we'd have little poems we would learn and songs we would sing. The whole community would come out.

**Did teachers ever have to contact the parents if a student got in trouble?** You had a brother or sister usually in a higher grade, and they would take a note home. When you were in trouble at school, you were in double trouble at home.

**What happened if you got sick at school?** You stayed at school until it was time to go home. There was no buses or automobiles. We're talking about the twenties! There was a bed in the cloakroom where you could lie down. Most of the time, you were just sick! Most of the time, you wouldn't go to school if you were sick.

**What did you like most about going to a one-room schoolhouse?** What I liked most was everyone was buddies. You paired off with your buddies. I had three, four buddies. We're still friends today.

**What would you change about schools today?** I would put more emphasis on the parents to send better behaved children to school. I was in a department store in Clarendon and I saw a momma come in with her kids. The kids were pulling clothes off the racks, they were only two and three years old. The mother said, "Just wait till you start to school." If children wait till they get to school to get discipline, the school is in trouble. You cannot learn without orderly conduct and a quiet classroom. If it's chaotic, you can't learn.

Today, students have teacher's aides instead of other students to help them. They have to learn so much more now than we had to learn, that they miss out on the basics of learning. That's reading, writing and math. If you can't add and subtract, multiply and divide, you've got troubles. If you can't read and understand what you're reading, you're in trouble.

**Why is it important to preserve the one-room schoolhouses that are still standing in Arkansas?** Because it's part of our heritage and history. You can't visualize something unless you can see it. I can sit here and tell you about Korea and the things I saw there. But you can't visualize it unless you've been there. If you don't preserve them, these younger children will have no idea about a one-room school.

Older people have so much to teach us, and so many interesting stories to share!

Sit down with your grandparents or an elderly neighbor and ask them questions.  
Write down their answers, or tape record / videotape the interview.

When YOU get old, you will treasure having their stories to share with your children!

## Daily Life in a One-Room Schoolhouse <sup>1</sup>

### Secondary Source

It is February of 1920, and you are twelve years old. You live in a small community in rural Arkansas. Your family has a farm, and there are other small farms around yours. You wake up at 5:30 in the morning to get ready for your school day. It is so cold in the **loft** where you sleep! The nails in the roof have frost on them. Shivering, you get out bed and stretch. You are glad it's a weekday, because that means you don't have to take a bath. You only take a bath once a week, on Saturday night, so you will be clean for church on Sunday. Winter baths are no fun, because you have to heat the water on the stove and pour it into a small washtub which is barely big enough for you to sit in. In the summer, all you have to do to bathe is jump in the creek!

You hurriedly get dressed. Since it's winter, you put on socks and shoes, too. Your mother tells you to take good care of your shoes, since it is the only pair you have. You will be glad when spring comes and you can run barefoot for seven months straight! You help your little brother put his overalls on, and you help your little sister into her dress and stockings.

You race outside into the frosty air and bring in wood so your mother can build up the fire and cook breakfast. While she is cooking, you help feed the **livestock**, milk the cows, gather eggs from the henhouse, and bring in water from the well. After a breakfast of eggs and home-cured bacon, you grab your lunch pail and set off for school with your brother and sister. The school is about two miles from your house, and the only way to get there is on foot. You have heard of a **horseless carriage** called a Model T, but you have never seen one. Your father needs to keep the horse and wagon for chores at home. A few of your friends have their own horses to ride to school. You wish you had your own horse!

As you walk to school, you are sad to think that you only have five weeks of school left. You like school much better than farming. In March, everyone will quit going to school to help with spring planting. You and your brothers and sisters will work in the fields with your parents until late June. You will return to school in July for the summer session. In late September, you will leave school again for fall harvest. During harvest time, all the students exchange their books for cotton sacks and head to the fields to bring in the crop. Your school year consists of summer session, fall break, winter session, and spring break.

The walk to school is pretty. Walking down the dirt road, swinging your pail, you pass through wintry forests and beside neighboring farms. The rising sun feels warm on your face. You hear the creek bubbling beside the road. It has rained a lot, so the stream is nice and full. A few birds chirp to keep you company. You and your siblings walk quietly past the pasture with Farmer Meacham's bull. The bull has been known to charge at the fence, and he is a *big* bull who scares your little sister! You also have to watch out for snakes and wild dogs. In the summer, mosquitoes and ticks are a bother on the walk to school.

After walking for forty-five minutes, you reach the school. Your school sits in a beautiful little **glen** beside the spring-fed creek. There are no other buildings in sight—just trees and farmland. Your school is made of wooden boards that have been painted white. There is a row of windows on either side to let in the light. The school has only one room, with a door in the front.

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<sup>1</sup> This essay was inspired by an article from the Summer, 1968 issue of *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly*, "Reminiscences of a Hill Country School Teacher" by Roy Virgil Simpson. Although this essay is narrated from the perspective of a rural white student in 1919, daily school life would have been much the same for a rural African-American student in the same year.



You greet your friends in the schoolyard. All of your classmates are white. The **colored** students in your area attend a separate school. The colored school was built by a rich white man named Mr. Rosenwald. He built schools all across Arkansas for colored children. You think it would be fun to play games with the kids at the Rosenwald school, but you never get the opportunity.

You step inside the school. You put your lunch pail on a shelf, checking that the pail lid is on tight. If the lid isn't on good, you might get ants in your food! Then you place your books on your bench. Your school also serves as a church. So instead of sitting at a desk, all the students sit on wooden benches and write on their laps. After warming your hands over the **pot-bellied stove**, you go back outside to bring in more firewood so your teacher can keep the fire going all day. Then you and the other students sit at your benches.

Your teacher, Mr. Simpson, sits at his desk in the front of the room. His desk is on a raised platform so he can see the entire room. Mr. Simpson is a young man, nineteen years old. Mr. Simpson does not have any family in the area, so he takes turns **boarding** with the student's families. Right now, Mr. Simpson lives with your friend Addy's family. In a few weeks, he will move in with Benjamin and his family. Mr. Simpson may come to live with you and your family next month! You think it will be fun to have your teacher live with you for awhile.

It is 8:00, and time for school to start. There are 25 students in your class. The youngest is five. The oldest is 19. After saying the Pledge of Allegiance, you start the day by working on reading, writing and grammar. While you work at your bench, other age groups go to Mr. Simpson's desk and **recite** for him. Your school doesn't have very many books, so you share a book with the students on either side of you. The room is dim because the only light you have is what comes through the windows. Finally, it is time for your age group to recite and spell for the teacher. You spell so well that you think you have a good chance at winning the spelling bee on Friday! Everyone looks forward to the weekly spelling bee.

Then it's 10:00 and time for recess. You and your friends race outside to play for thirty minutes. It is also time for a bathroom break. The girls have an **outhouse**. The boys don't have an outhouse. They just pick a spot in the woods to relieve themselves! Winter recess is fun. You play games such as Red Rover, Hide and Seek, London Bridge, Tag, Leap Frog and marbles. Summer recess is fun, too. In summer, the girls splash their feet in the creek and hunt for crawdads. Sometimes the boys pick a hidden spot in the creek, take off their clothes, and jump all the way in!

After recess, you and the older students study American History, Arkansas History, and Geography. You parents bought you a notebook of blank paper for you to write in. Some students can't afford to buy paper, so they still use old-fashioned **slates**.

Two of your friends get in trouble for whispering and laughing out loud during class. Mr. Simpson tells Frank to put on the **dunce cap** and sit in the corner. Audie has to go to the large blackboard and write, "I will not disturb my classmates" fifty times. Yesterday you had to memorize a poem as punishment for getting into a fuss with a classmate during recess. Your mother sure was mad when she found out!

At noon, it is time for lunch. Only a few students live close enough to school to go home for lunch. Those students are lucky, because they get a hot lunch. The rest of you take your pails down and eat at your seats. Some things the students bring for lunch are: sausage biscuits, cheese sandwiches, biscuits with molasses, ham sandwiches, fried rabbit and squirrel, fried potatoes, hominy, cornbread, cake and cookies. Mr. Simpson brings in water from the creek for everyone to

drink. Some communities can't drink from their creeks because the water makes them sick. Our creek water is good, though.

After lunch, you study arithmetic. You like math. Mr. Simpson has been teaching you how to add and subtract and multiply in your head, without writing any numbers down. Afternoon recess is at 2:00, and everyone rushes outside into the cool air to play. Because the day is nice and sunny, Mr. Simpson decides to come outside with us. He takes us into the woods and tells us the names of some herbs and plants that grow there. At 2:30, everyone comes back inside, with cheeks red from the cold.

You sit back down at your bench. The rest of the day you study agriculture and hygiene. In hygiene class, you learn about how to keep yourself clean and healthy. Mr. Simpson says that getting bitten by mosquitoes can give you **malaria**. You aren't sure if you believe that. You've always heard that eating watermelon is what causes malaria. The teacher also says that all the students should get vaccines for smallpox. He says that **smallpox** can make you very sick. Some of the students' parents don't believe in vaccinations. They think that healing should be left up to God, but you plan to get the vaccine. You also learn how to treat lice. You have to put **sulphur** and grease over your body for nine days to kill lice. Yuck!

During agriculture class, you think about the end-of-term presentation you and the other students will put on for your parents in a few weeks. It will be at night. Everyone will wear their Sunday best, and the school will be decorated with garlands and lanterns. The students will recite for their parents, showing off what they learned during the school term. You are excited about the historical piece you will memorize and share with the audience.

Finally, it is 4:00 and time to go home. You grab your lunch pail, round up your siblings, and head home. You don't carry any books with you, because there aren't enough books for everyone to take home. As you walk home, you think about what you have heard about **school consolidation**. If schools consolidated, the one-room schoolhouses would be replaced with bigger schools. Students from much larger areas would all attend the same school. You hope school consolidation doesn't happen, because you would miss your pretty little school, nice teacher, and small class size.

When you get home, it is almost dark. You grab a cold biscuit for a snack and start on your afternoon chores. You chop wood for tomorrow's fire and bring it inside. You gather some nuts from the woods, feed the dogs, mend a pair of overalls, watch your brothers and sisters, and help cook dinner. After a dinner of quail, potatoes, and homemade apple preserves, you take a lantern and climb up into your loft to dress for bed. You fall asleep as soon as your head hits the pillow. In a few hours, it will be time for another school day to start!

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## Comparison Chart: School Life Today and in the Past

	School Life in the Early 1900s	School Life Today
Chores Before School		
Breakfast		
Transportation to School		
School Building		
School Furniture		
School Subjects		
School Lunch		
Recess		
School Technology		

	<b>School Life in the Early 1900s</b>	<b>School Life Today</b>
<b>Teacher</b> (Teacher's living arrangements)		
<b>Health / Diseases / Cleanliness</b>		
<b>Extracurricular Activities</b>		
<b>Length of School Year</b>		
<b>School Location / School Surroundings</b>		
<b>Class Size / Ethnicity / Ages</b>		
<b>Punishment for breaking class rules</b>		
<b>School Bathrooms</b>		
<b>After School Chores</b>		
<b>Dinner</b>		

## African-American Education in Arkansas <sup>2</sup>

### Secondary Source

During slavery, some African-Americans did receive education. Some slave owners taught their slaves to read and write, and taught them crafts such as blacksmithing or furniture-making. These slave owners believed that educated slaves were more valuable and would sell for a higher price. The children of some slave owners thought it was fun to “play school” with young slaves and teach them to read and write. However, the vast majority of slaves did not receive any formal education.

The first African-American school in Arkansas was established in Little Rock in 1863 by Wallace Andrews, a former slave. This school became part of the Little Rock public school system when it was formed in 1868. Mr. Andrews’ daughter, Charlotte Stephens, became the first black school teacher in the Little Rock school system. She taught school for seventy years, from age 15 to age 85!

In 1865, the Freedman’s Bureau of the federal government started schools for African-Americans in Arkansas. Because of limited funding, the Freedman’s Bureau could only support fifty-one schools statewide. The American Missionary Society sent twelve teachers to Arkansas in 1863 to teach black students in Baptist and Methodist churches.

African-American education in the early 1900s was greatly helped by some **philanthropists** such as Anna Jeanes, John Slater, and Julius Rosenwald. Julius Rosenwald was a white man who made his fortune with the Sears and Roebuck Company. Mr. Rosenwald believed that America could not become a great nation if African-American people were left behind. He was inspired by Booker T. Washington’s biography. The Rosenwald School Building Program funded African-American schools across the South. The Rosenwald Program built 338 schools in Arkansas, which were solely for the use of black students.

In the early 1900s, it was illegal for black and white students to go to the same schools. The United States Supreme court ruled in the 1896 *Plessy vs. Ferguson* case that blacks and whites should go to the separate schools, and that the schools should be equal. “Separate but Equal” became the law of the land. However, black and white schools in Arkansas were not equal. In 1914, Arkansas government spent \$8.15 for every white student and \$3.74 for every black student. Whites went to school for an average of 94 days, while blacks went to school for an average of 70 days.

On May 17, 1954, the United States Supreme Court ruled in the *Brown vs. Board of Education* case that black and white schools should **integrate (desegregate)**. Integration in Little Rock was to begin with Central High School in 1957. On the first day of school, Arkansas’s governor, Orval Faubus, sent the National Guard to Central High to keep the African-American students out. With the eyes of the world watching, United States President Dwight Eisenhower had to send army soldiers to Little Rock to enforce integration.

Today black and white students attend the same schools, and students of all races receive the same amount of government funding. However, some Arkansas communities still struggle with keeping schools racially integrated.

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<sup>2</sup> Xavier Wynn [The Development of African American Schools in Arkansas, 1863-1963](#) Thesis, University of Mississippi, 1995.

## Changes in Arkansas Education, 1920-1940 <sup>3</sup>

### Secondary Source

During the years 1920 to 1940, Arkansas's public schools experienced many changes. Until the year 1920, most Arkansas children attended small, one-room schools with one teacher. The reason there were so many one-room schools is because most students had to walk to school. There had to be enough schools within walking distance of all Arkansas school children.

Many **education reformers** felt that Arkansas children were not receiving a good enough education in these one-room schools. Most students only went to school for six months, which was the shortest number of school days in the country. Only 68% of school age children regularly attended school. Most students dropped out of school by age fourteen or fifteen. Less than 25% of teachers had attended all four years of high school.

Many people believed that **school consolidation** was the answer for improving Arkansas's schools. Under school consolidation, one-room schoolhouses would be replaced with larger schools. These larger schools would hold many more students from a larger area. In 1927, the State Board of Education decided that Arkansas's 2,495 one-room schools should be reduced to 473. The number of schools with five or more teachers was to increase from 412 to 577.

School consolidation would not have been possible without the school bus. In 1926, 3,136 students rode the bus to school. By 1932, 52,654 students rode the bus to school.

During the **Great Depression**, many Arkansans lost their jobs or farms and were very poor. Arkansas did not have much money to spend on schools. The United States government came up with some plans to give people jobs. The U.S. government started an organization called the **Works Progress Administration** (WPA). The WPA hired men to build buildings. The WPA built 423 schools across Arkansas. The WPA was one of several government organizations that built schools in Arkansas. The Depression also caused the government to start the free school lunch program for children whose families did not have enough food.

Because of school consolidation and education reform, most of Arkansas's one-room schoolhouses were abandoned by the 1940s. It is important that we preserve the ones that remain. One-room schools tell us stories about how people lived in the past. If we lost these buildings, we would lose part of Arkansas's history.

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<sup>3</sup> "All Thoughtful Citizens: The Arkansas School Reform Movement, 1921-1930" by Ben Johnson III. *Arkansas Historical Quarterly*, Summer 1987.

"Public Schools in the Ozarks, 1920-1940" by William Baker. A publication of the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program.

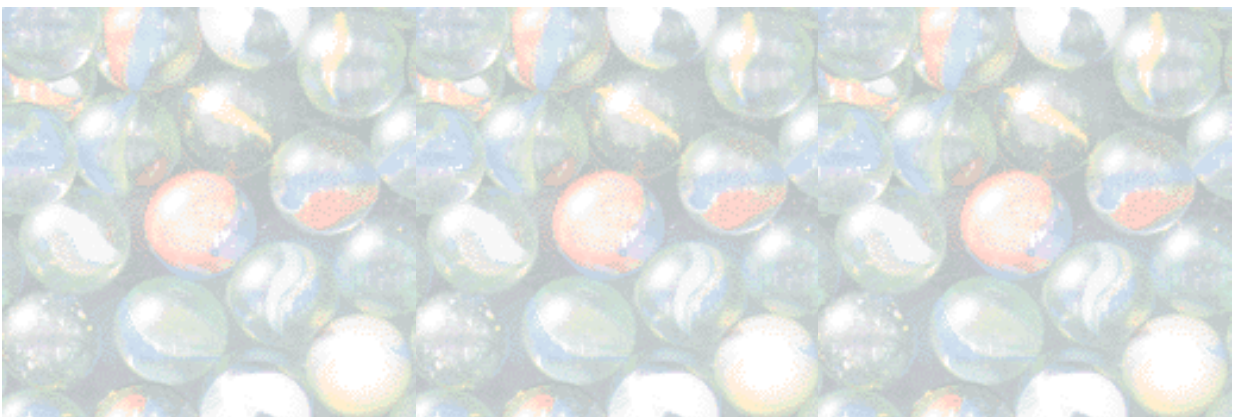
## Marbles Game <sup>4</sup>

### **What you Need:**

Two or more players  
Flat, smooth area of ground about 10 feet across  
Yard stick or tape measure  
Chalk  
A large shooter marble for each player  
4-6 smaller marbles, about ½ inch in diameter

### **How to Play:**

1. Using the chalk, draw a circle that is 7 feet across in the center of the playing area.
2. Each player places an equal number of target marbles in the center of the circle. You can decide on the number of marbles. The more marbles played by each player, the longer the game will last.
3. Decide who will shoot first. Shooting a marble is like flipping a coin. Hold your shooter marble in your curled index finger, and tuck your thumb behind the marble. Flick the marble as hard as possible (Practice shooting your marble until it feels comfortable).
4. Most players kneel on the ground to shoot. You must “knuckle down” when you shoot. At least one knuckle of your shooting hand must be touching the ground until you have shot the marble. Lay your curled-up hand on the ground just outside of the circle with your knuckles down and thumb on top. Flick your shooter marble with your thumb toward the target marbles.
5. If you knock any target marbles out of the circle, set them beside you and shoot again. Knuckle down wherever your shooter marble stopped. If you did not knock any marbles out of the circle, pick up your shooter marble, and the next player shoots.
6. Continue to take turns shooting until all of the target marbles are cleared from the center ring. The player who knocked the most marbles out of the ring is the winner.



<sup>4</sup> Kerry Graves, Going to School In Pioneer Times (Mankato, MN: Blue Earth Books, 2002)

## Old-Fashioned Spelling Bee

*Teacher's Note:* For the spelling list, you can use your grade's spelling book. You might want to borrow spellers from higher grades so you will have plenty of words to last throughout the bee.

1. The students line up in front of the teacher.
2. The teacher states the first word on the spelling list to the first student in line. The teacher should speak the word slowly and clearly. If the student doesn't understand the word, he can ask the teacher to define the word or use it in a sentence.
3. The student pronounces the word. Then the student spells the word, and pronounces the word again after spelling it.

For example, "Blackboard, b-l-a-c-k-b-o-a-r-d, Blackboard"

4. When students misspell a word, they return to their seat.
5. Once the competition is down to two students, the elimination process changes. When one of the remaining students misspells a word, the other student gets a chance to spell that word. If he succeeds, he must spell the next word on the list correctly to win. If both students misspell the word, another word is given. To win, a student must spell *two* more words than the second place student.
6. Give the winner a small prize, such as "first in line," a piece of candy, or even a silver dollar.

For a fun description of a community-wide spelling bee, which Pa Ingalls wins, read aloud the "Literaries" chapter of Little Town on the Prairie by Laura Ingalls Wilder.

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Do you have some exceptional spellers? Check out the website for the annual Scripps Howard National Spelling Bee, which is sponsored by local newspapers: [www.spellingbee.com](http://www.spellingbee.com)

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Winning Words from the Scripps Howard National Spelling Bee, 1925-1930:

1925	Frank Neuhauser, <i>Louisville Courier-Journal</i> , Louisville, Kentucky	Gladiolus
1926	Pauline Bell, <i>Louisville Courier-Journal</i> , Louisville, Kentucky	Abrogate
1927	Dean Lucas, <i>Akron Beacon Journal</i> , Akron, Ohio	Luxuriance
1928	Betty Robinson, <i>South Bend News-Tribune</i> , South Bend, Indiana	Albumen
1929	Virginia Hogan, <i>The Omaha World-Herald</i> , Omaha, Nebraska	Asceticism
1930	Helen Jensen, <i>Des Moines Register &amp; Tribune</i> , Des Moines, Iowa	Fracas



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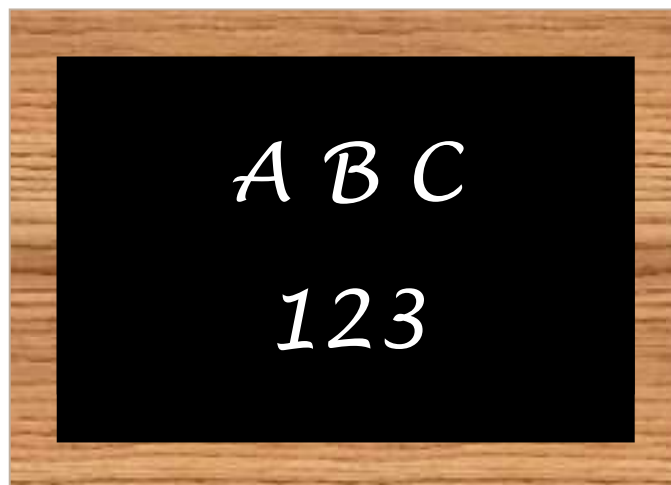
## Make a Writing Slate <sup>5</sup>

### Materials

Thin piece of plywood or craft wood, cut 8 inches by 12 inches  
Sandpaper  
Cloth Rag  
Masking Tape, 1-inch wide  
Newspapers  
Blackboard-finish spray paint  
Chalk  
Felt Eraser

### What to Do

1. Use the sandpaper to sand all the edges of the wooden board. Lightly sand the top and bottom of the board. Watch out for splinters!
2. Wipe all surfaces of the board with the rag to remove any sawdust.
3. Place strips of masking tape in a border along the outside edges of the board. Keep the tape as straight as possible. The tape should not fold over the edge of the board.
4. Spread out two to three layers of newspaper on a firm surface. Place the board with the tape-side up in the center of the paper.
5. Following the directions on the paint can, lightly spray the surface of the wood. Allow it to completely dry, then add a second coat. If paint appears thin in spots, spray additional coats.
6. Remove the masking tape from your slate.
7. Write on your slate with the chalk, and erase with the felt eraser.



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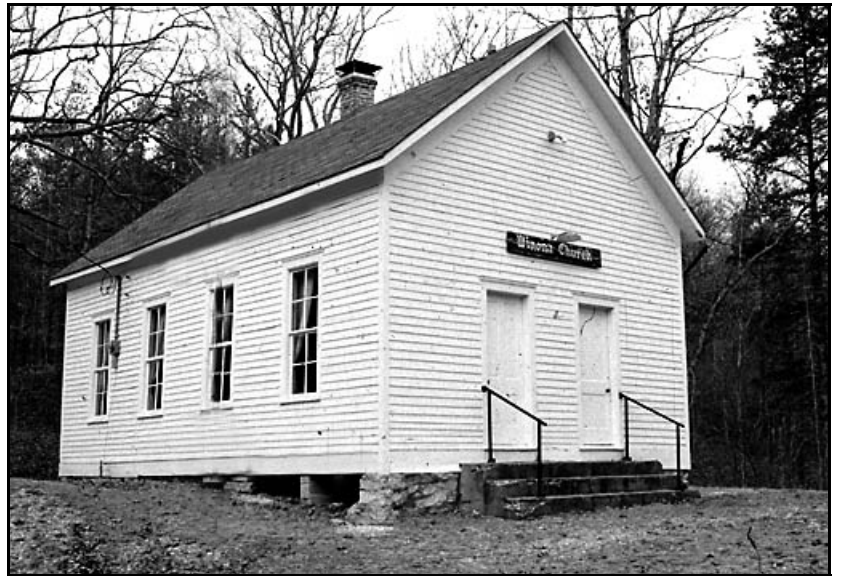
<sup>5</sup> Kerry Graves, Going to School In Pioneer Times (Mankato, MN: Blue Earth Books, 2002)

## Photographs of One-Room Schoolhouses



Courtesy: Thomas Harding Family

Independence School, Built 1914  
Arkansas County Plantation Agricultural Museum



Winona Church/School, Winona Springs  
Built 1886



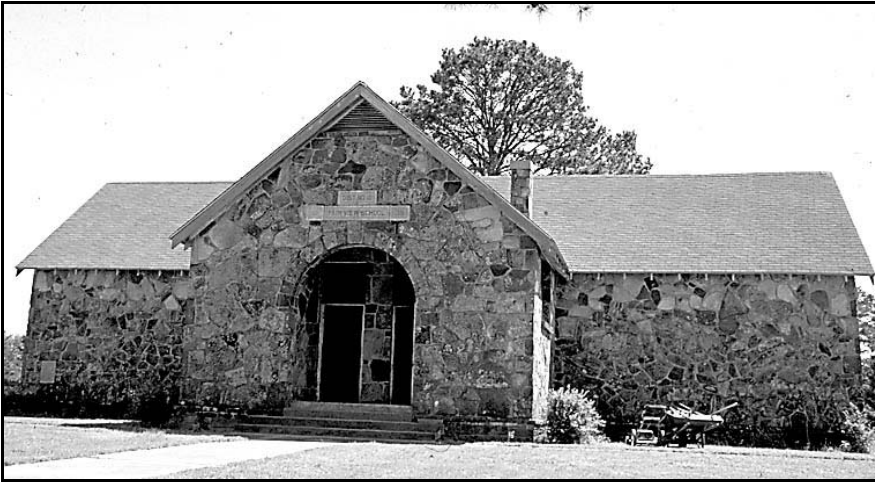
Courtesy: Thomas Harding Family

Hulsey Bend School, Oil Trough, Independence County  
Built 1900



Courtesy: Thomas Harding Family

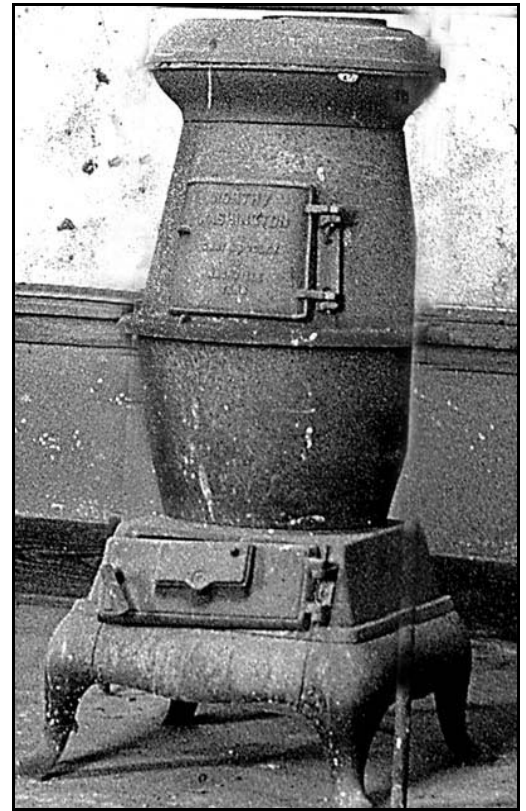
## African-American Schools



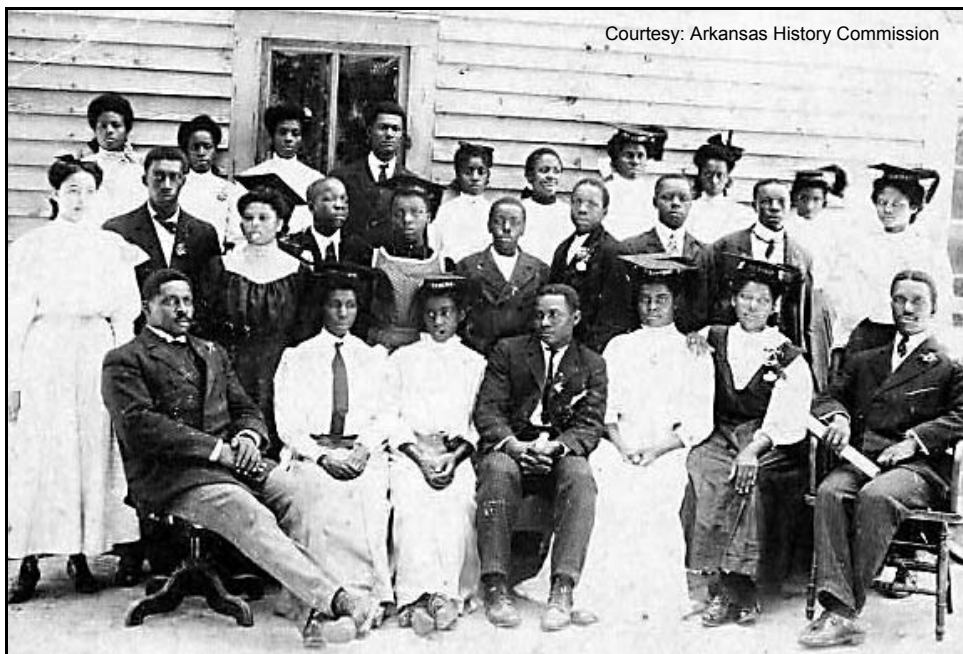
Fair View School, Russellville. This school was built by the WPA in 1938.



Courtesy: Arkansas History Commission



Maple Valley School, Muddy Fork,  
Howard County



Courtesy: Arkansas History Commission

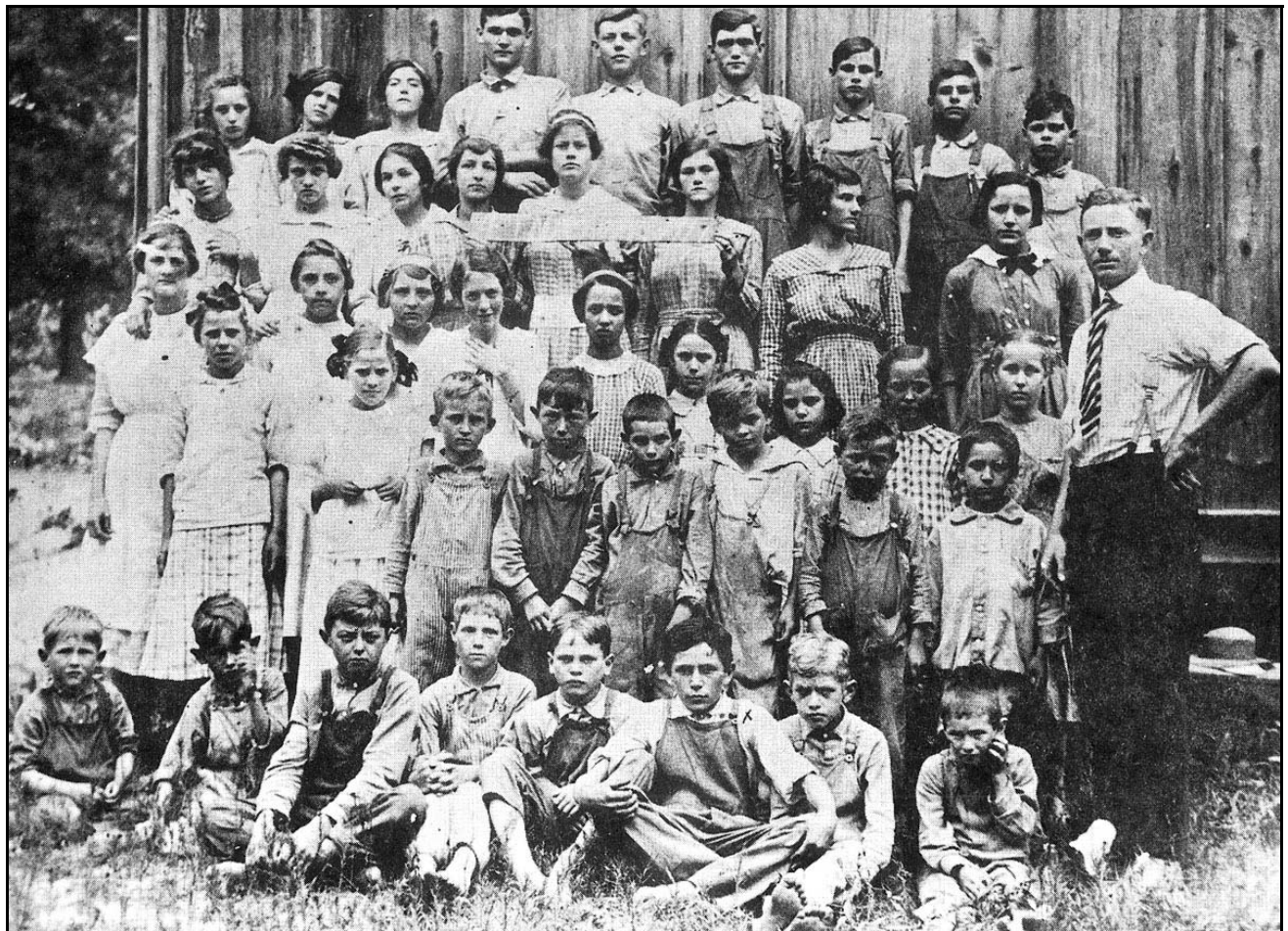
Unidentified students, teachers and graduates, probably in Southwest Arkansas.  
Photo taken around 1890.



## One-Room School Photographs



Interior of the Buford School, Bull Shoals, Marion County, Built in 1889



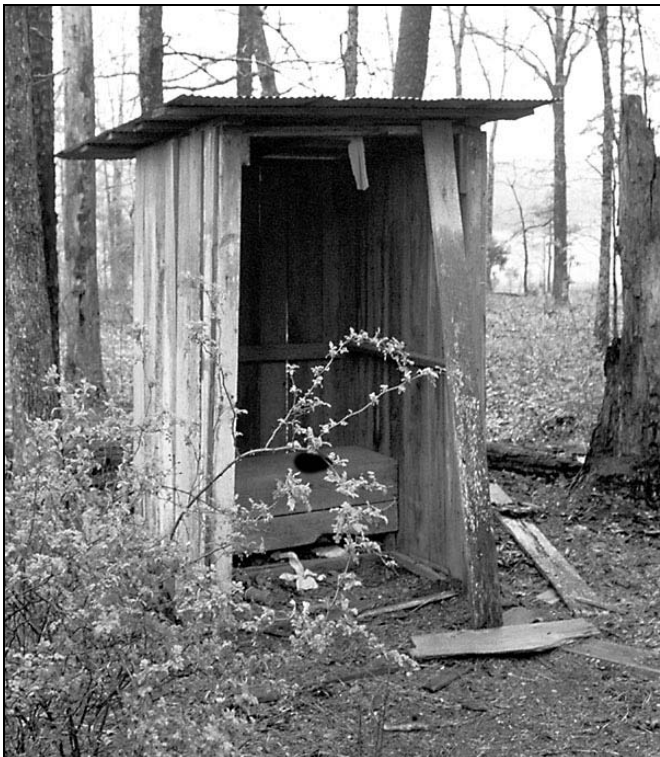
Aetna Rural School, Sharp County. Photo taken in 1917.





Courtesy: Arkansas History Commission

*Students Recite*, Lake Dick School District, Jefferson County, 1938

















Outhouse for the Noricks Chapel School,  
Noricks Chapel, Stone County, Built 1907





Courtesy: Arkansas History Commission

School near Batesville, Independence County

## What Can you Learn from Historic Photos?

-  Schools had students of a wide age-range, approximately ages 5-18.
-  Boys wore overalls and girls wore dresses.
-  Many students went barefoot.
-  Schools were heated by stoves.
-  Schools had lots of windows (windows were needed to let in light, since there was no electricity).
-  Schools were made of stone, logs or cut wood.
-  Some schools had two doors (one door for students of each sex to enter and exit).
-  Schools are small and appear from the outside to have just one room.
-  One school has a bell on top (to ring when it was time for class to start at the beginning of the day, after lunch and after recess).
-  The schools don't appear to have electricity (no electrical lines, no electrical devices in the interior photo).
-  Students sat in wooden desks and wrote on a blackboard.
-  Schools were segregated by race.
-  Schools appear to be in rural settings with trees or fields close by.
-  At least one school had an outhouse instead of an indoor bathroom with running water.

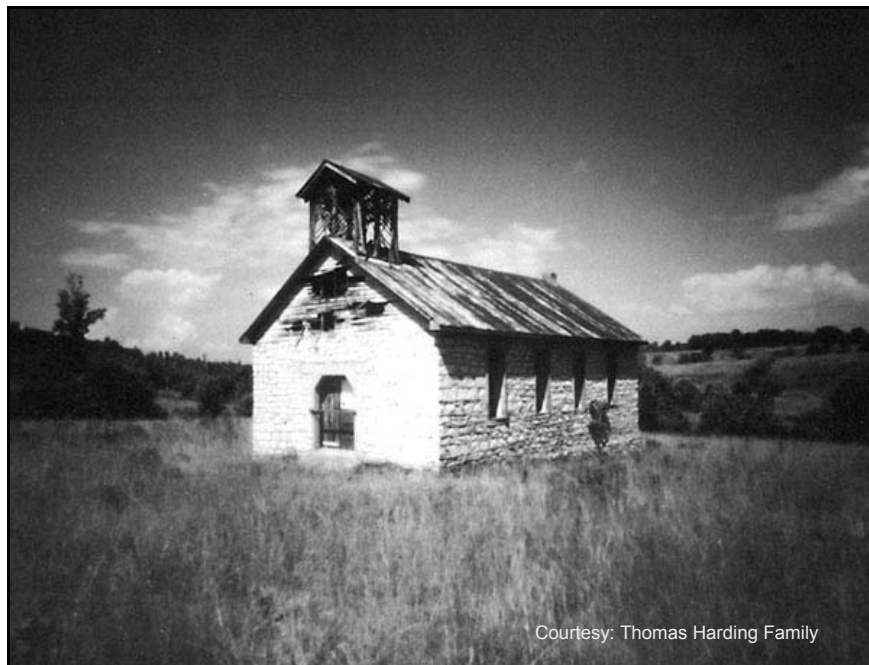
### Questions:

-  What is missing from the Buford School interior photo that you have in your classroom? (electric lights, intercom, computers, bookshelves, bulletin boards with laminated posters, overhead projector, overhead screen, etc.)
-  What rooms does your school have that these schools do not? (gymnasium, band room, chorus room, cafeteria, auditorium, office, nurse's office, library, computer lab, teacher's lounge, bathrooms)

## Abandoned Schoolhouse <sup>6</sup>

The country schoolhouse where I learned to put  
A phrase together, and to rhyme two words  
Now shelters hay for cows; The loft is but  
A sweet asylum for the winter birds.  
The bell is gone which once rang high and clear  
Across the frosty mornings; in its place  
A hoot owl spells the time of day, for fear  
The children have forgotten...and by grace  
Of time's consolidation, they do forget.  
An orange bus that bumps crosscountrywise  
Takes them like clockwork to and fro—and yet  
This old schoolhouse stands solid, with its sides  
Bulging with straw, as if one who would be  
A part of greatness, must know humility.

-- Edsel Ford



Big Creek School, Fulton County, Built 1910

<sup>6</sup> This poem is taken from *Raspberries Run Deep* (page 10) by Edsel Ford, published in 1975 by the Ozark Arts and Fair Association, Rt. 1, Hindsville, AR.

## Vocabulary List

**Board:** To live with a family and eat meals with them in exchange for work (such as teaching).

**Colored:** A term used for African-American people in the 1800s and early to mid 1900s.

**Dunce Cap:** A tall, conical hat worn, as punishment, by students who misbehaved.

**Education reformer:** Someone who works to make schools better, improve teacher training, and to improve the education of children.

**Glen:** A valley between mountains or hills.

**Great Depression:** The Great Depression was the period from 1929 to the early 1940s, when people around the world were poor due to the bad economy.

**Horseless carriage:** A term used in the early 1900s for a car.

**Integrate (Desegregate):** To bring people of different races together.

**Loft:** An attic room, usually above the main living space of the house.

**Livestock:** Animals raised on a farm for food and work, such as horses and cows.

**Malaria:** A deadly disease caused by the bite of an infected mosquito. Malaria causes severe chills, fever and delirium.

**Outhouse:** An outdoor toilet that usually consists of a deep hole in the ground and a seat, which are inside of a small structure for privacy.

**Philanthropist:** Someone who gives away their money to help others.

**Primary Source:** Objects that were created in the past, or documents written by people who actually participated in events of the past. Primary sources include diaries, letters, oral history interviews, maps, photographs, reports, court documents, clothing and tools.

**Pot-bellied stove:** A short, rounded stove that burns wood or coal.

**Recite:** To read out loud.

**School consolidation:** Combining several schools into one school.

**Secondary Source:** Written accounts of the past that are based on primary or secondary sources. For example, if someone studied accounts of the Revolutionary War and then wrote a book about the Revolutionary War, that book would be a secondary source. The author himself did not participate in the war.

**Slate:** A piece of painted wood that can be written on with chalk.

**Smallpox:** A disease that causes blisters to form on the skin. It is similar to chicken pox, but more deadly.

**Sulphur:** A mineral that can be mixed with other materials and used for healing purposes.

**Works Progress Administration (WPA):** An organization formed by the U.S. Government during the Great Depression to provide people with jobs. The WPA built thousands of buildings around the country.