

**T**he feature article in this issue of *English Teaching Forum* takes an in-depth look at one-room schools in the United States. This lesson plan complements that article, focusing on an abbreviated text, “The Little Red Schoolhouse,” that you can share with your students. Activities in this lesson will help your students explore that text and also examine features of their own school. You can select the activities most appropriate for your students, completing as many or as few as you wish to do.

### Background Information

In the United States in the 19th century, one-room schools were common on the frontier. The country was expanding westward. The government encouraged adventurous people to settle new territories by offering them land ownership if they worked a plot of land for a number of years (usually 5). This offered poor immigrants hope for a better life for their children, even though clearing and cultivating the land could be back-breaking work.

One-room schools were another source of hope for the settlers. Their children could learn skills their parents didn’t have, thus increasing possibilities for their future success in the United States. To establish these schools, community members pooled their resources to build a school and hire a teacher. The community then took responsibility for maintaining the school and slowly updating the building and the teaching materials.

In the text on the following page, a former schoolboy tells his fond memories of studying in a one-room schoolhouse. He is optimistic about his future and sees himself as being a productive citizen in his community on the new frontier. It should be noted that the three R’s—readin’, [w]ritin’, and [a]rithmetic refers to colloquial speech of the time in which certain sounds were not pronounced in spoken language.

### Prereading: Preview (5 minutes)

Before reading the text to the students, try to get them to speculate about what life in and around a one-room school might have been like.

1. What do you think a one-room school would look like (inside and outside)?
2. What kind of teacher worked in this type of school?
3. What kind of students studied in a one-room school?

### Reading: Aloud to the students (5 minutes)

Choose from one of two possible methods:

1. Pre-teach or review terms you think the students might not know and then provide students with a copy of the text to read.
2. Have students listen while you read the text and get the gist (general meaning).

# THE LITTLE RED SCHOOLHOUSE

**W**HILE GROWING UP IN KENTUCKY AND Indiana, I went to several one-room schools because my family moved around in search of *fertile* land and a town with a good church and *honest* people.

Each schoolhouse looked pretty much the same inside and outside. We sat on backless *benches* and worked at tables placed along the walls of the room, while the teacher's desk sat at a little higher level at the front of the room. We heated the schoolhouse with a *stove* in the center of the room. We put whatever wood we could find into the fire to stay warm. The outside of the small wooden building was painted red, so everybody called it "the little red schoolhouse." A bell hung above the *porch*, and the teacher rang that bell to tell the students it was time to come inside and get to work.

Instruction in school was mainly what we called the three R's—readin', [w]ritin', and [a]rithmetic. Because the teacher couldn't help all of us at the same time, sometimes the teacher had the younger students go to the front of the room, while the older students worked on assignments at their desks. All of the kids in my family made it through the eight-grade system. We worked together, taught one another, and this helped all of us *graduate*. There weren't enough books for all of us at school. We made up for this through *rote* memorization and reciting what we learned. I am still able to *recite* parts of some famous speeches we memorized. The teacher also had us act out plays and compete in *spelling bees*.

We called our teacher a schoolmarm. Besides teaching us, she took care of us like a nurse, gave advice like a *counselor*, and made us sit and stand straight like a *drill sergeant*. I really don't know how my teacher managed a large group of students, aged 5 to 20. Students didn't come to class everyday because most of us worked in the fields on our families' farms. When the teacher had trouble with loud and active boys, she always shook her head and said, "boys will be boys."

Getting an education is important. Our town just built a new church and *elected* a *sheriff*. And people say the railroad will build a train station here soon. I know that I can be more than a farmer. Honesty and hard work will bring you a long way in this land of opportunity. Our greatest president, Abraham Lincoln, studied in a one-room schoolhouse just like me.

**Cultural note:** Abraham Lincoln was president during the American Civil War (1861-65). He served as inspiration for many because he was a very educated man who largely taught himself. He became a lawyer and the president. He was also an honest person with a gift for speaking well in public and telling amusing stories in private.



This "little red schoolhouse" surrounded by snow and ice is now part of a city park in Browns Valley, Minnesota.

## GLOSSARY

**fertile** *adj.* bearing or producing crops or vegetation abundantly; fruitful

**honest** *adj.* truthful, sincere; showing integrity

**bench** *n.* a long seat where two or more people can sit in a row

**stove** *n.* a device for cooking food or heating a room

**porch** *n.* an area attached to the outside of a house or building where people sit; veranda

**graduate** *v.* to successfully complete one's studies at a school/college/university

**recite** *v.* to say aloud, word for word, something which you previously memorized, usually for an audience

**spelling bee** *n.* a contest in which students have to spell words correctly

**counselor** *n.* a person who gives advice to people in order to find solutions to problems

**drill sergeant** *n.* a military official who trains new soldiers

**elect** *v.* to select a person for a position/job by voting

**sheriff** *n.* the head or chief law enforcement official in a community

## Group Discussion (15 minutes)

Divide the students into groups of three and have them discuss the following questions related to the text, and then be prepared to have one member of each group lead part of the follow-up classroom discussion. You can either write the questions on the board or dictate the questions and have students write them down.

1. Who is the narrator of the story? Why is education so important to him or her?
2. What were some of the difficulties that a teacher faced in a one-room school?
3. How did the students study in class? Does your class do similar activities?
3. When did the narrator study in such schools? Do you know anything about the United States during this time period?
3. What does the narrator think was most important about this experience?
4. What kind of person was the narrator? Do you think he or she will be a successful professional someday?

## Reviewing New Vocabulary (10 minutes)

List each word from the glossary on the board and divide the class into groups of three or four. Instruct students to do each of the three tasks in turn. After each person has done one task, he or she will try another one and rotate until each person in the group has done each kind of task one time.

1. **Forming a question in context:** The role of this group member is to form a question for the group and then lead a discussion in the group on that particular topic. Example: *When will you graduate from university? What will be your profession when you graduate? Why?* Stress that students should use the words to form good discussion questions.
2. **20 Questions:** One member of the group will choose one glossary term without telling it to other group members. Then the others must guess what that term is by asking Yes or No questions. Example: *Is it a person? No. Is it a thing? Yes. Can you cook in it? No. Can you sit on it? Yes. Is it a bench? Yes.*
3. **Explain and Guess:** One student chooses one word from the list on the board. Then the student describes that word without using the word (or any part of it) until the other students are able to guess the word from the context the student has described. Example: *In this contest, a student is given a word and has to state every letter in the word in order to be successful.*

## Additional Vocabulary Practice

1. Every year, students in the United States compete in a national \_\_\_\_\_, a contest in which participants must spell difficult words.
2. The farmer bought the land because of the \_\_\_\_\_ earth.
3. An \_\_\_\_\_ person tells the truth and expects others to do the same.
4. The population of a country \_\_\_\_\_ a leader in a democratic process.
5. The soldiers knew that at 5:00 a.m. the \_\_\_\_\_ would be ready to make them exercise.

6. When someone commits a crime, it is the job of the \_\_\_\_\_ to catch him.
7. On summer evenings, my family sits on the \_\_\_\_\_ and watches the sunset.
8. In the park, the two lovers were sitting on a \_\_\_\_\_ and talking about their future together.
9. When I come home from school, something tasty is cooking on the \_\_\_\_\_.
10. When the student needed advice about how to apply for university, she asked a \_\_\_\_\_ at school.
11. Someday I will \_\_\_\_\_ from a university and find a good job.
12. I am still able to \_\_\_\_\_ poems that I learned years ago.

### Exploring Your Surroundings *(20 minutes)*

Divide the class into three groups and explain that each group will explore a different part of the school environment, answering questions like those listed below. A student in each group should record the group's answers to the questions.

<b><i>In the Classroom</i></b>	<b><i>Employees in the school and how they do their jobs</i></b>	<b><i>Appearance of the school inside and outside</i></b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What are some of the objects in your classroom [make a list] and what are they used for?</li> <li>2. How are the desks arranged and why?</li> <li>3. What are some of the tools that your teacher uses in order to teach?</li> <li>4. What are some of the methods that your teacher uses?</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Who is the head of the school and what does that person do?</li> <li>2. Who is responsible for cleaning the school?</li> <li>3. Who are the administrators of your school and what do they do?</li> <li>4. How many teachers work at your school? What does each one teach? What other things do teachers do?</li> <li>5. Can you eat or live at your school? If so, who are some of the people who work there and what do they do?</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. How many rooms are in the school? What is each room used for?</li> <li>2. What things are on the walls of your school and what is their purpose?</li> <li>3. What can be found in the area outside your school? What is the area used for?</li> <li>4. Is there a place for the whole school to meet? If yes, where is it and what is there?</li> <li>5. Where does the school keep supplies? Is there a place for students to keep their belongings?</li> </ol>

### Find Someone Who... *(10 minutes of student interaction and 5 minutes of class discussion)*

Depending on your class size, supply a student or group of students with several variations of the tasks listed below.

- Find someone who knows somebody who lives in the United States.
- Find someone who has made a speech.

- Find someone who can recite a famous poem.
- Find someone who likes Shakespeare.
- Find someone who likes to study grammar.
- Find someone who wants to be a teacher.
- Find someone who has lived in more than one place.
- Find someone who has a big family.

It is important that individuals or groups have different tasks in order to encourage a variety of information exchange. Once students identify someone who fits one of the above descriptions, have students ask that person questions, for example:

- *Do you like \_\_\_?*
- *Do you have \_\_\_?*
- *Can you \_\_\_?*
- *Did you want \_\_\_?*
- *Have you \_\_\_?*

During follow-up class discussion, get the students to talk about their personal experiences related to the given topics.

### **Comparative Constructions: Concentration** (10 minutes)

This activity is designed to review comparative and superlative forms. For example: *good/better/best*, *bad/worse/worst*, *smart/smarter/smartest*, etc.

#### **Preparation**

Take several index cards (or small pieces of paper) and write adjective/comparative/superlative words, each on a separate card. Continue until you have several matching groups of three word cards.

#### **The Activity**

Arrange the cards face down in three columns—Adjective, Comparative form, Superlative form. Students take turns choosing a piece of paper from each column, trying to match the word with the appropriate form from the next column. If a student selects three matching cards, e.g., *good/better/best*, he or she keeps the cards. If a student does not get a match, he or she places the pieces of paper back in the columns. (Students should watch closely and try to remember which cards are where.) Students take turns until all of the matches are made.

### **Practice: Using Comparative and Superlative Forms in Context**

(5 minutes)

Model the construction with the following example: My first school was *good*. My present school is *better than* my first one. The new school I'll attend next year will be the *best*. Then have the students create their own examples about their past, present, and future schools.

Other examples of comparisons students can discuss are listed below.

- My teacher is \_\_\_\_\_ *than* my last one.
- Schools in my country are \_\_\_\_\_ *than* those in the United States.
- The food at my school is \_\_\_\_\_ *than* the food at home.
- The students in my class study \_\_\_\_\_ *than* those across the hall.
- The homework for English class is [more] \_\_\_\_\_ *than* for history class.

### Group Discussion (15 minutes)

*“What the best and wisest parent wants for his own child, that must the community want for all of its children. Any other ideal for our schools is narrow and unlovely; acted upon, it destroys our democracy.”*

—John Dewey, *The School and Society*, 1899

Write the above quote on the blackboard. Ask students to explain its meaning. Then discuss the following questions with your class. If you have a large number of students, you can divide them into small groups for discussion.

1. What kind of education do your parents want you to have?
2. Do you have the same dreams and expectations for yourself as your parents have for you?
3. In what ways is the community a part of the education system where you live?
4. How is education related to economics in your country?
5. What are some of the most prestigious professions in your country? What kind of education is necessary for someone to be successful in those professions?

### Who, What, Where, When, How? Reviewing Material by Forming Questions (20 minutes)

Divide the class into groups and ask each group to make a chart with 5 columns. Each column represents a different question word. Set a time limit (5–10 minutes) for the groups to devise as many questions as they can about the text on One-Room Schools or about their own school. Then, as a class, share the questions that were formed and have different groups take turns answering the questions.

### ROLE-PLAY: Spelling Bee (20 minutes)

This is a simulated version of an activity that determines the student with the best ability to spell words in English. Depending on the class size, you can appoint more than one moderator of the competition.

#### Preparation

Make a list of words that relate to schools; for example: *curriculum, attendance, subject, text, pencil, blackboard, desk, paper, corridor, cafeteria, graduate*. (Or you can use vocabulary words from one of your lessons.) Give the list of words only to the moderator(s).

## Individual Steps

Students will come to the front of the room one at a time. The moderator will tell each student a word; for example, *principal*. The moderator will tell the contestant if the word is a noun, adjective, or verb. Then the moderator will give the word in context; for example: “In the United States, a *principal* is the manager of a school.” The student acting as the contestant must then spell the word out loud in front of the class. (It might be a good idea to set a time limit of no more than one minute per student in order to keep the activity moving.)

## Group Procedure

The competition is divided into rounds. During the first round, all of the students are asked to spell one word. In the second round, all of the students who spelled a word correctly participate. The competition continues—eliminating students if they fail to spell their word correctly—until there is one final winner.

*Cultural note:* Spelling bees still exist in the United States. A national champion is crowned every year for certain age groups.

## NOTE

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The activities below are primarily for students to complete as homework outside the classroom. However, once your students have completed these assignments, they can share them during class time through oral presentations or group discussions.

### Interview: Learning More About Schools

*(Homework assignment and 5-minute presentations)*

Tell your students they are going to interview someone to learn about a school that is different from theirs; tell them they will ask questions and write down the information they learn. Suggest to students that they interview someone such as:

- their parents, or some other relative who went to school long ago.
- somebody who has studied in the United States or some other foreign country.
- a sibling or some other student who goes to a different school (perhaps a private school or a religious school).

After they have completed the interviews, have your students bring their interview notes to class. They can take turns presenting their findings to the class. You can also create groups of students who have interviewed people with similar experiences (e.g., students who interviewed their parents) and have each group work together to make a list of similarities and differences they found (comparing the interviewee’s school with their own) and then report back to the class.

### Research on Schools: Education in My Country—Past and Present

*(Homework assignment and 5-minute individual presentations or panel discussion format)*

Assign students research topics that interest them. Their goal is to learn more about the system of education in their country. When possible, students

should compare and contrast past and present. Possible research topics are listed below.

- An educational reform that took place
- Foreign language instruction
- History of public education
- The role of parents in education
- The grading/testing system in school
- The administration of a school system
- Punishment of students
- How students get into university
- How education meets the needs of the country
- Public vs. private education

After they complete their research, students should write a report about their topic and present their report to the class.

### Listening Task

Have students take notes as they listen to other students' presentations. Tell them to be prepared to explain what the speaker has said and to give their own opinion on the topic.

### Optional Activity

For homework, you can have students write their own interpretations of a topic that was presented.

## **Panel Discussion: An alternate method for reporting on research topics from the homework assignment "Education in My Country—Past and Present" (30 minutes)**

A panel is a group of experts. Each expert specializes in a specific area related to the general topic for discussion. A panel usually consists of four or five people. One person is the *moderator*. The moderator introduces the experts, their topics, and says a few words about each panel member. The moderator will also keep track of time so that each panel member has the same amount of time for his or her presentation. After each panel member has made a presentation, the moderator opens the floor for questions from the audience. These questions can be addressed either to an individual panel member or to the panel in general.

Describe to students what is involved in a panel discussion. Then ask for volunteers and select four or five students to act as a panel to report on their research topics. Ask for a volunteer to act as moderator to introduce the panel. The rest of the class will be the audience listening to the panel; ask those students to each write a question to ask the panel during the follow-up discussion.

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