

Student Handout 1-Objects of the One-Room Schoolhouse



Courtesy of the Wilson Collection

Quills and ink pots-Penmanship was very important in school. Students had to practice writing neatly, and they were graded on their writing. But students did not always have pens with which to write. Instead, they used feathers and dipped the pointy end of the feather into a pot of ink. The feathers are called “quills” when used as pens. They usually came from birds such as geese and the end of the feather had to be carved to be made pointy. The ink for the ink pots was also made. Depending on what was available, ink could be made from the tannic acid found in galls of oak trees and light oil, or ink power and water. These inkpots look like they are made from glass. But inkpots can be made from other materials too. Sometimes inkpots were even built into school desks. See if you can find the ink wells in this image?

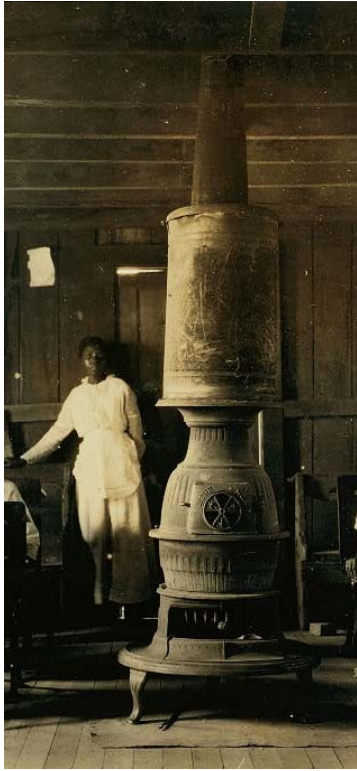


Courtesy of the Library of Congress

May Clayton Stover's Memories of the Inkwell:

“...Our desks sloped and there was a groove along the top of each side to keep pencils from rolling off. In the center between the grooves was an inkwell -- a hole containing a small glass jar that held probably a tablespoon of ink. It had a sliding metal lid flush with the top of the desk. Before we had penmanship the teacher had one of the older boys check the inkwells and fill them from a large bottle of ink kept in her desk. I had two braids of long blond hair and often had the ends of the braids colored (much to my mother's disgust) by being stuck in the inkwell by the mischievous boy who sat right behind me.”...

[Excerpt taken from Stover, May Clayton. “By-Gone School Days” in *Buffalo Tales*, Buffalo County Historical Society (Vol. 5, No. 6): 1982. Online at http://bchs.kearney.net/BTales_198206.htm]



The Pot-Bellied Stove: This stove was used to heat the classroom. It used coal, wood, or sometimes even corncobs to fuel its heat. Pot-bellied stoves gave off a lot of heat nearby, but they were not great at spreading the heat around the room. Students who sat near the stove would probably have been toasty-warm, while students far away may not have been warm enough. Today schoolrooms are heated more evenly, but the heating source cannot be seen in the classroom. Classrooms can be heated by oil, natural gas, electric, solar heat, or other means.

Here you can see the pot-bellied stove in the classroom setting.



Images Courtesy of the Library of Congress



Courtesy of the Library of Congress

The Outhouse: Students did not have restrooms in the one-room schoolhouse. They had to walk outside to an outhouse to use the bathroom. The outhouse was a small outdoors “building” with a toilet in it. The toilet was usually a wood seat with a hole in it built over a pit in the ground. In the summertime, outhouses can be buggy and smelly places. In the winter time, outhouses have little protection from the cold.

The picture above is an example of two toilets in an outhouse, or a double-outhouse. Here is an example of two single outhouses on a hillside:



Courtesy of the Library of
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Dunce hat or fool's cap: This pointy hat usually had a "D" or "Dunce" on it, and was put on children who misbehaved. Children were given a stool and asked to sit in the corner of the classroom wearing the hat. The hat was embarrassing to wear. The wearer might feel a sense of shame since people saw the hat as meaning the person was slow-to-learn. Where did this tradition come from? It can be traced back to a scholar whose name was John Duns Scotus from the 13th century. He believed that hats shaped like cones were good for your mind, funneling knowledge into your brain. Images of wizard characters often show them wearing pointy hats. Scotus' other scholarly beliefs were later challenged for being too detailed and his followers, the "Dunsmen" or "Dunses", were laughed at. This is how the term "dunce" came to mean slow-witted or fool.



Courtesy of the Library of Congress

The Lunch Pail: There was no cafeteria--no plastic lunch trays with pizza or chicken nuggets and cartons of milk with straws at the one-room schoolhouse. Students would carry their lunch to school. The shapes and materials of lunch boxes have changed over the years. In the picture above, a student has brought his lunch in a picnic basket. Often students brought their lunches in pails. Below a student eats his lunch on the schoolhouse lawn from his lunch pail. In his lunch pail, he finds a meal of cold potatoes, corn meal, and mush.



Courtesy of the Library of Congress



Permission Pending

The Slate Board: Before paper and pencil, there was slate board and slate pencils. Each student used to own a slate board, and they would carry it back and forth to school. Students used it to practice their alphabet and handwriting. Did you notice the alphabet inscribed in the wood edge of the board? To use the board, students would press a slate pencil against it. The slate pencil was simply a piece of slate rock. Students did not have a way to take long class notes and study them like you do today. Instead, memorizing lessons and repeating them aloud was how students would learn. The slate rock used as a pencil was later replaced for a piece of chalk (which was easier to use). Today we use paper and lead pencils.

May Clayton Stover Remembers the Slate Board:

"...Everyone had a slate, some had a double slate, two slates laced together. They were highly prized as we could work the next day's arithmetic lesson, fold the slate over the lesson and it could not be erased. Then along comes a triple slate -- really something! We had to use slate pencils which broke easily if they were dropped. They were noisy things, squeaked when using them and the teacher would shout, "Don't hold your slate pencil so straight." We all took a piece of cloth from home for a "slate rag" to dampen and clean our slate. Some of the boys would spit on their slate and wipe it off with their shirt sleeve."

[Excerpt taken from Stover, May Clayton. "By-Gone School Days" in *Buffalo Tales*, Buffalo County Historical Society (Vol. 5, No. 6): 1982. Online at http://bchs.kearney.net/BTales_198206.htm]