

# Rural School Days: Kansas in 1920

TEACHERS PACKET



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# Rural School Days: Kansas in 1920

A living history program for fourth and fifth grades

Use these pre-visit materials for the Rural School Days program to prepare your students for a memorable trip back in time. The Kansas Historical Society is committed to helping teachers meet curriculum standards.

## Pre-visit Information for the Teacher

Rural School Days: Kansas in 1920 offers fourth and fifth grade students a unique opportunity to experience history. This four-hour program is a living history activity that takes place in the historic one-room Stach School. Students act as the pupils of the 1920s, sit at wooden desks, practice their penmanship, using pen and ink, participate in a spelling bee, and play a recess game. The teacher is dressed in 1920s clothing and conducts the program in character as a 1920s schoolteacher.

Upon completion of the pre-visit activities and participation the school program, students will be able to:

- Compare and contrast a school day in 1920 with their present school day
- Identify four subjects taught in rural schools
- Distinguish between the role of the teacher in 1920 and the present
- Explain why most one-room schools closed

Rural School Days will enhance the following state Kansas History education standard:

- Benchmark 1, Indicator 4: By the end of fourth grade, the student describes the everyday life of a Kansas settler using literature, stories, letters, diaries, and/or other primary sources.

On the morning of the program

- Bring payment for the program (\$6 per student for four-hour program, teachers and parents are free)
- Make check payable to the Kansas Historical Society
- Meet the costumed teacher in the assigned area

The costumed interpreter will lead all program activities during the day. You will be responsible for taking students on their morning restroom break. Your assistance may be requested by the costumed teacher to help with discipline. Unruly students will be removed from the Stach School. Please help us make this an enjoyable experience for everyone.

## Clothing

Students are encouraged to dress the part for their visit to Stach School. The standard outfit for boys was bibbed overalls with cotton or flannel shirts and a cap. Blue jeans or old suit pants would also be appropriate. While leather work shoes were worn by most boys, sneakers were introduced in 1917. Girls wore cotton or wool dresses that came just below the knees. White or black cotton tights were worn with leather, one-strap shoes. Stach School is heated by a coal-burning stove in the winter and cooled in the spring and summer by opening the windows. Layering clothes, wearing long underwear, or bringing jackets is strongly recommended.

## **Lunch**

Each student must bring a lunch and a drinking cup. Lunch will be eaten either on the porch of the schoolhouse or inside. Water will be provided for your group. Lunches in 1920 were often carried in simple tin pails, usually recycled lard pails or syrup cans. Lunch for the students often meant leftovers from the evening before!

## **Acting the Part**

When your students enter the Stach School, the year is 1920. Please remind them of this before coming to the program. Students will be expected to raise their hand to ask or answer a question. As in 1920, when the teacher recognizes the student, he or she will stand beside the desk, ask or answer the question, and then sit down. Students in 1920 were not permitted to talk with one another during lessons. The costumed teacher will expect silence during lessons.

## **Discipline**

Discipline was usually not a major problem at rural schools. Pupils attended school with brothers, sisters, and cousins. Parents quickly learned of any prank and disciplined children at home for any infraction. For misbehaving students, teachers often gave swats with a switch.

Remember, the year is 1920 so do not use or bring: plastic bags or aluminum foil, plastic containers, potato chips, processed meat, paper napkins, chocolate chip cookies (not common until circa 1940), soda, or Styrofoam or plastic cups.

## **Daily Lessons**

Each grade came to the recitation bench or the front seats for lessons. Others would remain at their seats and study. A typical morning in the one-room school would be as follows:

9:00 Opening Exercises All grades

9:20 Reading Grade 1

9:30 Reading Grade 2

9:40 Reading Grade 3

9:50 Civics Grades 8 & 9

10:00 Reading Grade 4

10:10 Reading Grade 6

10:20 Reading Grade 7

10:30 Recess All grades

10:45 Numbers All grades

10:55 Arithmetic Grade 1

11:05 Arithmetic Grades 2 & 3

11:15 History Grades 8 & 9

11:25 Arithmetic

11:35 Arithmetic

Noon Lunch All grades

## Classroom Activities for Teachers and Students

### I. Powerpoint

Prepare your students for their visit to the Stach School by showing this powerpoint that contains historical information on the one-room school and rural education in Kansas.

### II. Sample Lessons

Practice these lessons in your classroom to help prepare your students for their day at Stach School.

#### A. Pledge of Allegiance

The Pledge of Allegiance was written in 1892. In 1923 the term “my flag” was changed to “the flag of the United States of America” and in 1954 the phrase “under God” was added.

*I pledge allegiance to my flag and to the Republic for which it stands,  
one nation indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.*

#### B. Recitation

Memorization was a vital part of the one-room school experience. Try memorizing this poem for recitation in your own classroom.

##### Four-Leaf Clover

I know a place where the sun is like god,  
And the cherry blooms burst with snow;  
And down underneath is the loveliest nook,  
Where the four-leaf clovers grow.  
One leaf is for hope, and one if for faith,  
And one is for love, you know,  
But God put another in for luck—  
If you search, you will find where they grow.  
You must have hope and you must have faith,  
You must love and be strong, and so,  
If you work, if you wait, you will find the place,  
Where the four-leaf clovers grow.

#### C. Spelling Words

The following words were commonly used in a 1920s schoolhouse and will be used in the spelling bee during your program: arithmetic, ash bucket, belfry, blackboard, box supper, cistern, cloakroom, coal, coal house, dipper, handkerchief, hygiene, influenza, lard, lye soap, mud scraper, nib, normal school, obedience, one-room school, orthography, outhouse, phonograph, pot-bellied stove, prairie, privy, pump, pupil, recitation, silence, slate, spelling bee, squirm, student, wash basin, water pail.

#### D. Recess Game

Practice playing Follow the Leader—a favorite game in 1920.

#### E. Homemade Lunch Pails

Collect a large (3 pound) coffee can for each student.. Drill two holes near the rim on opposite sides and then paint the cans silver. Use twine to make a short handle. Cover the pail with a handkerchief, or scrap of fabric. An accurate 1920s lunch could include: a ham, bacon, cheese or egg sandwich fried chicken or ham hard-boiled eggs baked sweet potatoes cornbread or pancakes buttered bread biscuits with butter and jelly raw vegetables apples or pears or dried fruit pie, cake, or cookies (only fruit grown locally and in season)

### III. Short Story

To help your students understand the day-to-day life of a child in 1920, read the following short story. Discussion questions are included.

Going to School

Part I: Meet Leo

Leo was 10 years old. It was Sunday night and he and his sister Margaret could not wait for tomorrow to arrive. Monday was the first day of school at Stach School! How exciting! Just yesterday, Mother had taken them into town to go back-to-school shopping. He came home with a pencil, some lined paper, a slate, slate pencil, and a brand-new pair of overalls. He knew if he could just fall asleep that it would soon be Monday morning.

Leo's family, the Simecks, live near Delia, in Jackson County, Kansas. His father farms and his mother raises the family. The Simecks work very hard on their farm. Leo's father begins each day before the sun rises. While Leo's mother makes breakfast, Leo's father goes outside to begin chores — feeding the horses, milking the cows, watering the chickens. Meanwhile, in the kitchen, Mrs. Simecks busily makes biscuits in a cracked mixing bowl her mother brought over with her from Czechoslovakia on the boat. She kneads and pounds, rolls and flattens, and pats out twelve round biscuits that she bakes in the oven.

“Not so much, Leo! It will rot your teeth,” Mrs. Simecks reminds him every morning as he heaps his favorite, tomato preserves, on each side of the buttery biscuits. His mother makes tomato preserves each August with tomatoes fresh from the garden. She also makes sweet raspberry jelly from the big, black berries his father planted along the edge of the chicken house, plum jelly from the juicy plums Leo picks along the bank of Dutch Creek, and strawberry jam from the tiny wild strawberries that grow in the pasture along the crumbling rock fence.

Mother and Margaret spend a lot of time baking, cooking, preparing breakfast, dinner and supper, sewing, mending, and gardening. They also do laundry every Monday. Mother washes clothes with homemade soap that stings her chapped hands and Margaret helps out by lifting the heavy, wet clothing to the clothesline and hanging them up to dry.

While Margaret helps her mother, Leo helps his father with the farm. It is Leo's job to milk the cows twice a day. He loves going out to the pasture, cupping his hands to his mouth and yelling, “BAHSEE! HERE BOSSY, BOSSY” and watching the two milk cows amble to the barn. Leo also gathers firewood, mends fences, and looks after Joe and Bob, the two draft horses. Joe and Bob pull the hay wagon and help during harvest time hauling the wheat and corn to the barn. Leo loves combing them down after a hard day in the field.

Leo's head was spinning with thoughts of his family and the Stach School. Will the school look the same inside? Where will he sit? Are there any new students this year? Leo just couldn't fall asleep!

- Describe where Leo lives.
- What does Leo do on the farm?
- What does Margaret do on the farm?
- Compare Leo & Margaret's chores to your own chores.

## Going to School

### Part III: The first day of school

Finally! The first day of school in 1920! Leo woke up early. He pulled on his overalls and rolled up the cuffs, slipped into a long-sleeved button-up shirt, stuck a red handkerchief in his back pocket, laced up his boots (his mother won't let him get Keds even though he really wants them!), and raced downstairs to the kitchen. Since it was such a special day, Mother had fixed him and Margaret pancakes for breakfast. Mother had also made Margaret a new dress for the first day of school. It was green and white checkered and had a bow on the side. She wore a matching green bow in her long hair. Leo thought she looked nice.

"Mother," he asked, "what time should we leave for school?" He was getting nervous. Some children rode their bicycles and occasionally someone still rode a horse to school but most kids, like Leo and Margaret, walked.

"Leo, be patient. You will leave the house at 8:30 since school begins at 9:00," she replied. He had plenty of time to finish eating. Mother had packed their lunches too. She had wrapped up their ham sandwiches in wax paper, taken extra care to shine their apples, and stuck two molasses cookies for each of them into their lunch pails. Father came in to join them for breakfast and instructed them to "act properly, pay attention, and study hard." Leo nodded. He really liked school and could not wait to begin his new year.

- What do you think Leo and Margaret will do on their first day?
- What was Leo's father's advice?
- Why would he want his son to do these three things?

## **Post-Visit Activities**

Complete the following classroom activity comparing schools in 1920 and today's schools after your visit to the Stach School. If time, ask them to write about Leo's first day of school based on what they did in Stach.

### **In 1920:**

- School year lasted 7-8 months, 5 days a week
- School day went from 9 a.m. - 4 p.m. There were 2 recesses and an hour for lunch.
- There was only one teacher for all nine grades (first through ninth). Some schools only had eight grades.
- The pupils' ages ranged from 4-19.
- The school building usually had just one room.
- The school was often named after the person who donated the acre of land it was built on.
- Subjects taught were: reading, writing, orthography, arithmetic, language, penmanship, geography, physiology, agriculture, classics, history, Kansas history, civics, and hygiene.
- The average class size was 35-45 students. One-third were usually absent because of sickness, poor road conditions, or helping out on the farm.
- The pupils played games during recess. There was limited or no playground equipment.
- Pupils would walk up to three miles to school. Some rode a horse or bike; some schools had a bus.

### **At my school:**