

History
fiction

A One-Room School

by Bobbie Kalman

The Schoolhouse

It may be difficult to believe, but there was a time when few communities had schools. Children were taught at home, at a neighbor's house, or received no education at all. When a community grew and there were a number of children in an area, the settlers gathered together and built a schoolhouse. With hard work and cooperation, a log schoolhouse could be built quickly.

The First Schools

Early schoolhouses had four walls and a roof. One or two windows allowed in just enough sunlight for students to see their work. Long, slanting shelves were attached to the two side walls. These shelves served as desks. Children sat on three-legged stools or simple benches. The teacher's desk, made of rough planks, faced the students. The fireplace barely kept the classroom warm in the winter.

Later Schools

As more families sent their children to school, a larger building was needed. The new school had two entrances—one for the girls and one for the boys. Proper desks were purchased to replace the shelves and benches. The girls sat on one side of the room, and the boys on the other. The youngest children sat at the front of the classroom, close to

GLABULARY
means
able or right.

the teacher. Behind the teacher was a blackboard. A wood stove heated the classroom.

The Teacher Rules!

To become a teacher, a man or woman had to be able to read, write, and handle rough-and-ready students. Most teachers were men. They were called schoolmasters. Female teachers had to be single. Once a woman married, she was not allowed to continue teaching in the school.

Hiring the Teacher

When a new teacher arrived in town, he or she was given food and shelter. Every family in the community paid a small amount of money for the teacher's salary and took turns boarding the teacher. The families that could not pay with money gave the teacher goods such as corn. The goods were then traded for money or other items at the general store.

VOCABULARY

To *board* is to provide a place to live and to sleep.

Teaching the Children

One teacher instructed all the children in the school. He or she taught as many as eight grades at a time. The class was divided into four groups, each with an upper and lower grade. If there were many children in a community, only the older students were allowed to attend school during the school year. A female teacher was hired to teach the younger children during the summer months.

Keeping Order in the Classroom

The teacher did more than teach the children. He or she also had to keep order in the school. With children of all ages learning different things at the same time, good behavior was important. It was the responsibility of the teacher to punish children who misbehaved.

