

School Days

Kindergarten - Grade 3

A good way to introduce children to history is to let them know how school—a main focus of their lives—has changed over the years.

What You Need

Map of the United States

Crayons or colored pencils

What to Do

* Talk with your child about what school was like when you were a child. Include how schools looked physically; the equipment teachers used; what subjects you studied; what choices you faced; and your favorite teachers and activities. If possible, show family photographs of yourself or other family members participating in school activities—playing a sport, cheerleading, giving a speech, winning an award, talking with classmates, working in a science lab and so forth. Have your child notice such things as clothing and hair styles, the way the school building or classroom looked, the equipment being used. Have her compare the school's characteristics with that of her own.

* Join your child in exploring what school was like 50 or 100 years ago. Ask your librarian for help in looking this up, talk to older relatives and neighbors and use the Internet. Again, include photographs when possible.

—With your older child talk about some of the history of work in America and explain how it affects schooling. Tell her, for example, that many years ago, when America was a largely agricultural society, children were needed at home to help plant and harvest crops. Because of this, children often didn't go to school every day, or at all in the summer. In addition, the school year was more or less matched to the time of year that was less busy on farms—the late fall and winter months.

—Next explain that when America was switching from an agricultural to a manufacturing society, some children worked long days in factories, doing hard, dangerous jobs. Eventually, laws were passed to keep factories from using children to do dangerous work. Along with these child labor laws, other laws were passed that officially required children to go to school until a certain age.

* Ask your child to imagine what school will be like in the future. Your younger child may want to use blocks to build a future schoolhouse, and your older child may want to draw or write about theirs.

Let's Talk About It

Ask your child:

What has remained the same about school from the past to the present?

What has changed?

If you could be the head of a school 20 years from now, what would you keep and what would you change based on your current school?

How would you go about making these changes?