

0. One-Room School Houses - Story Preface

1. Why Study Horace Mann?

2. Early Years in Education

3. Mann Studies Europe for Teaching Ideas

4. Horace Mann's Life and Accomplishments

5. Last Speech of Horace Mann

6. How Horace Mann Changed Education

7. Mann's Six-Point Plan

8. Horace Mann Quotes about Life

9. Images of Horace Mann and Places He Visited

10. One-Room School Houses

The school that Horace Mann attended, as a child, was not unlike many other schools of that time. These 19th-century places were usually constructed by local farmers, and others, to accommodate all the children no matter the grade level.

A main room, in such a school, was about 24 feet by 36 feet. Some had a smaller room for storage while a few had a separate room in which the teacher lived. If the school did not have a teacher-living area, local families would host the teacher.

Schools usually had a cupola, or tower, from which the teacher would ring the bell to alert the students to the time. This was particularly important since very few people had wrist watches.

Most schools were painted white, but some were painted red. This led to songs like "[The Little Red School House](#)."

Until 1920, or so, many students were educated in schools that only had one main room. The reasons for this were three-fold:

- There may not have been enough students to fill a larger school.
- Teachers were often difficult to find (and local families found it difficult to pay them).
- It was easier to heat and maintain a smaller building.

One-room school houses meant that all grade levels, and children of all ages, were taught together with the older students usually sitting in back. Those older students also had additional responsibilities, such as bringing-in the water from the well and keeping the fire going during winter months.

Getting to school wasn't always easy. Schools in less-populated areas required students to sometimes walk miles in all types of weather. Some rode family horses.

My father attended such a school, in the Dakotas, where several students rode to school on the same horse. When the winter snows were bad, they just let the horse's reins loose. It would walk back the miles to the family barn, as my father and his sisters huddled together on the horse's back.

The school day, at that time, usually started at 9 AM and ended at 4 PM so the students could travel to/from school during daylight hours. Lunch was an hour-long while recess was 15 minutes.

Teachers, who did not live in the school, arrived early to start the wood-burning stove and to get the lessons ready for the many grade levels and subjects. In the 1920s, when transportation became easier, larger schools were built as students could come from longer distances.

The schools were constructed of wood, usually built by local farmers. Flat sections of lumber in front of the class were painted black so that the teacher could write lessons using chalk or soft limestone and erased with sheep skin. Sometimes students had small slate tablets with which to practice their lessons.

They also could have used hornbooks—named for the horn of a cow, ox or sheep—which were covered and shaped like a paddle about half-the-size of a regular sheet of 8 x 11 inch paper. These hornbooks had a handle and a hole—where a piece of leather or rope could be attached—so that the child could carry it.

The childrens' lessons were written on paper and usually carried notes on the alphabet and religious phrases.

Classes were on the basics of the "Three Rs"—reading, writing and arithmetic—plus spelling and geography. Some one-room schools still stand. Here is [a list of examples](#).

Here is a site where you can [see some hornbooks and even make your own](#).

This website explains some of the [lessons that were taught in one-room schools](#) (and outlines their still-relevant values).

Besides Horace Mann, many other notable people attended one-room schools. They include Presidents Abraham Lincoln and Herbert Hoover and writers Joyce Carol Oates and Laura Ingalls Wilder.

[See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:](#)

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/One-Room-School-Houses-Horace-Mann-Father-of-Public-Education0>

[See Learning Tasks for this story online at:](#)

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/One-Room-School-Houses-Horace-Mann-Father-of-Public-Education0>

Questions 2 Ponder

Compare Mann's ideals to this New York model

In 1805, the New York Public School Society advocated for schools run on the "Lancasterian" model. One teacher would instruct hundreds of students in a single room. The lessons would be given to older students who would explain and help younger ones with the material. Discipline was strict. How would you compare this to Mann's ideas?