

## SCHOOL & PLAY

### Introduction

Thank you for using the DAR Museum's School & Play Portable Education Program!

Following is a brief introduction to the concept of this program and some related historical information. Each of the five lesson plans also has an introduction, meant as background information for the teacher. You may complete the lessons in any order.

Lessons:

- Game & Toys
- Music & Dancing
- Stories & Books
- Writing
- Arithmetic & Spelling

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Children of 18<sup>th</sup> century America had to learn, and enjoyed toys and games, just as children do today. This program introduces students to the ways children learned in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and the ways they enjoyed themselves through games, toys, stories, and music.

### School

Schools were not required and certainly not standardized in the 1700s. Education depended on gender, social class, and geographic location. The northern colonies emphasized religious Christian education, while education in the southern colonies was (relatively) more secular. The wealthy might hire private tutors to teach their children, while those lucky enough to live in Boston in the early 1700s might attend one of its two free grammar schools, as Benjamin Franklin did. (Most schools were not free.)



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Many children who were not in the upper class did not go to school at all, or for just a short time, and started apprenticeships around age 14. An apprentice learned a trade or craft, and all the skills needed for it. If the trade required reading, the apprentice learned to read; if it did not, he or she might never learn how to read. The apprenticeships usually lasted four to seven years, or until the apprentice was 21.

Few books were published specifically for children, and those that were tended to have a heavy-handed religious and moral bent. *Pilgrim's Progress* at least had a plot and adventures, unlike most of the other books children were encouraged to read, such as the *New-England Primer*.

Subjects addressed in schools might include:

- Writing
- Reading
- Spelling
- Grammar
- Arithmetic

Upper-class children also learned:

- **Languages:** Greek, Latin, French (Usually only boys learned Greek and Latin, while girls could learn French)
- **Geography**
- **Dancing** (more common in the south, and important for both gentlemen and gentlewomen)
- **Musical instruments** (especially guitar and piano for young ladies; flutes were more masculine instruments)
- **Drawing** (for girls)



Some primary source quotes from the journal of Philip Vickers Fithian, a man employed as a tutor to a wealthy Virginia family's children:

*A list of what subject each child is learning:*

Monday Novemr 1st [1773]

We began School – The School consists of eight – Two of Mr Carters Sons – One Nephew – And five Daughters – The eldest Son is reading Salust; Gramatical Exercises, and latin Grammar – The second Son is reading english Grammar Reading English: Writing and Cyphering in Subtraction – The Nephew is Reading and Writing as above; and Cyphering in Reduction – The eldest daughter is Reading the Spectator; Writing; & beginning to Cypher – The second is reading next out of the Spelling-Book, and begining to write – The next is reading in the Spelling-Book – The fourth is Spelling in the beginning of the Spelling-Book – And the last is beginning her letters –

*A description of the school day:*

Wednesday 15. [December 1775]

...I rise which now in the winter is commonly by Seven, or a little after, By the time I am drest the Children commonly enter the School-Room, which is under the Room I sleep in; I hear them round one lesson, when the Bell rings for eight o-Clock (for Mr Carter has a large good Bell of upwards of 60 Lb. which may be heard some miles, & this is always rung at meal Times;) the Children then go out; and at half after eight the Bell rings for Breakfast, we then repair to the Dining-Room; after Breakfast, which is generally about half after nine, we go into School, and sit til twelve, when the Bell rings, & they go out for noon; the dinner-Bell rings commonly about half after two, often at three, but never before two. – After dinner is over, which in common, when we have no Company, is about half after three we go into School, & sit til the Bell rings at five, when they separate til the next morning...

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*One student's views on learning Greek:*

Teusday [sic] 11<sup>th</sup> [January 1774]

... This morning I put Ben to construe some Greek, he has yet no Testament, I gave him therefore Esops Fables in Greek, and Latin. I also took out of the Library, and gave him to read Gordon, upon Geography. Ben seem'd scared with his Greek Lesson, he swore, & wished for Homer that he might kick Him, as he had been told Homer invented Greek.

## **Play**

Children have always loved to play! In the 18<sup>th</sup> century they had many games and toys at their disposal. Some are still enjoyed today, while others have faded from use. We know about toys and games from archaeological findings (for example, clay marbles) and from surviving books that describe the rules. Children also enjoyed songs, storytelling, music, and dancing, while the latter two were also part of an upper-class child's curriculum.

## **Works Referenced:**

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