

## Enterprising Teachers in Early Oklahoma

About this lesson

Grade Level: Upper  
Elementary/Middle School

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Time: One class period

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**Rationale** We often think of entrepreneurs only as those involved in business ventures such as restaurants, flower shops or factories. But in the early days of Oklahoma, some enterprising teachers became educational entrepreneurs. Like other entrepreneurs, they saw a need and found a way to provide their services. Children all over the new territory, which would eventually become the new state of Oklahoma, needed education, so teachers began to open subscription schools. Subscription schools were schools taught by teachers who organized and ran schools for children in a specific area. Parents paid a small fee, not more than \$1.00 a month, for their children to attend these schools, and the school year lasted only about three months.

**Background** Before statehood in Oklahoma, there were no public schools. Schools in the land held by the Five Civilized Tribes were run and taught by missionaries, many of whom had come with the tribes on the Trail of Tears. When land runs and lotteries opened up the territory to non-Native Americans, the early day settlers had no schools for their children to attend. Even before the end of the first year of settlement, families who came to the new territory wanted to provide education for their children. Some of these families lived in towns, while others lived on farms. Many of the parents had only rudimentary education themselves, but they wanted their children to have the advantages of reading, writing, and arithmetic.

Enterprising teachers responded to this demand for education by organizing, operating and teaching schools. They became educational entrepreneurs.

### **Standards**

#### Oklahoma History

PASS 1. The student will demonstrate process skills in social studies

PASS 4. The student will evaluate the major political and economic events prior to statehood.

#### Economics

PASS 7. The student will explain the role of entrepreneurs, risks, and profits in a market economy.

#### Social Studies Grade 5

PASS 5.1 The student will demonstrate an understanding of the unique features which contributed to the settlement of the state of Oklahoma, i.e. entrepreneurs.

#### Social Studies Grade 4

PASS 5.1 The student will develop basic economic decision-making skills.

## Student Objectives

As a result of this lesson student will be able to:

- Define and give examples of entrepreneurs
- Compare and contrast subscription schools in 1907 with schools today.
- Define economic resources, land, labor, tools, and describe how teachers then and now use them.
- Speculate what schools might be like in the future.

## Materials

Attachment 1

Attachment 2

Attachment 3

## Vocabulary

Entrepreneur

Subscription schools

McGuffey's Reader

Economic Resources (Land, labor, capital and entrepreneurship)

## Procedure

1. Discuss with students: What is the purpose of schools? What do teachers do? What would your family do if you moved to some place where there were no schools?  
*(Students may suggest home schooling, correspondence and internet learning)*
2. Have students read the first person account of Miss Musgrove.
3. Tell students the definition of "entrepreneur" (*A person who organizes, operates and assumes the risk for a business.*) Ask students: "Do you think Miss Musgrove was an entrepreneur? Why or why not?" "Do you know any entrepreneurs?" (*Doctor, Painter, Insurance Agent, etc.*) "Have you ever been an entrepreneur?" (*Cutting grass for neighbor, babysitting, etc.*)
4. Discuss the things that were different in Miss Musgrove's subscription school from school today. Why were they different? What things were similar? *Use the Venn diagram in Attachment 2*
5. What resources did she need to open and run her school? (*LAND= land where the school was, wood for a fire, logs for a school house; LABOR=Her labor in recruiting students, bringing them to school, making a fire, gathering fuel, cleaning up the school, etc.; CAPITAL=her education, schoolhouse, pencils, slate to write on, etc.*) *Use the graphic organizer, Attachment 3.*

## Debriefing/Closure

- Have students brainstorm what their ideal 21<sup>st</sup> century school would be like for their children and write a paper from the perspective of the teacher or student in their future school.

- Ask students what economic resources they would need today if they organized a school.

### **Math Extension**

If you would like to have students compute how much the \$1.00 per month for school would cost today, go to the Minneapolis Federal Reserve Bank's inflation calculator. (Using the formula given, it would be \$21.90 today.) Students could also discuss how much it would cost to go to school for 9 months today (\$197.10). Remind them that students only went to school three months, usually before planting and after harvesting, and that children worked in the fields in the warmer weather. Note that the children in the account were going in December! Also, remind them that books and supplies were not provided.

### **Geography Extension**

Have students find Okemah on an Oklahoma map. Centennial Oklahoma maps are available at the state tourism office.

### **Extension**

- Search the archives of *The Oklahoman* for additional information on subscription schools. Sample articles include:
  - “Norman School to Celebrate Its 100<sup>th</sup> Year,” by Andy Reiger, September 13, 1993, page 81
  - “Air Thick with Memories as Goldsby School Shuts Doors—for Good,” by Ferdie Deering, May 5, 1959, page 26
  - “One Room School House Gives Experts History Lessons,” by Lillie-Beth Brinkman, March 3, 1997, page 1
  - “Rural School’s Rich Memories to be Dusted Off at Reunion,” by Roy B. Stewart, July 1, 1959, page 56
- Have students research history of public and private schools in Oklahoma using the archives
- Have students research the history of their school and/or school district

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Attachment 1

**A Personal Story**

On a December morning in 1903, Miss Jean Musgrove started a school at the log school house a few miles southeast of Okemah near the Rock Creek Cemetery.

Two students were present that first day. On her way to school Miss Musgrove stopped off at a farm house and asked if any children who lived there would like to go to school. The mother of the home said she had two who had never gone to school and that she was anxious for them to start. She fixed their dinners and hurriedly got them ready.

Then the 11 year old girl and the 8 year old boy went off to their first day of school. The girl carried a McGuffey's First Reader, and the boy carried a lined ABC book.

They went down a dirt path through the woods, and after walking about 2 miles, came to the one-room log schoolhouse. Miss Musgrove gathered some deadwood and dry brush and started a fire in the stove.

Then she told the anxious and hesitant children what school would be like, and explained about the lessons and knowledge to be had in books. There would be a period called recess, some learning time, a noon hour, more learning time, then another recess, and finally the long day would end.

Miss Musgrove said she expected a number of other pupils as soon as people learned that a school had been opened. She was right. Within a few days others were coming. They were all sizes and ages from small children to almost grown boys and girls. Subjects taught were reading, writing, spelling, and arithmetic. McGuffey's Readers and spelling books were used.

The school was not graded. A pupil's advancement was measured by the reader he or she studied. To be in the fourth or fifth reader was considered rather well-educated.

Tuition was paid by the parents - a certain amount per month for each child, usually a dollar. Sometimes families who did not have money would pay in farm produce or wood.

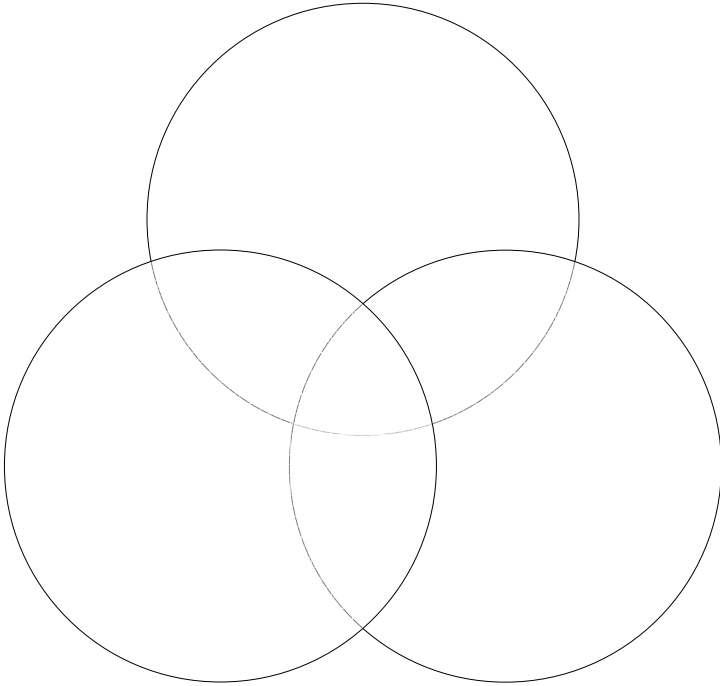
The term that year was only three months long, but by that time some had learned to read, write, spell, and even do some numbers.

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Paraphrased from a first hand account in OUR STORY, A History of Oklahoma Schools as told by the Members and Friends of the Oklahoma Education Association, 1990.

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**Attachment 2**



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**Attachment 3**

**Resource (Needs) List**

<b>Land (Place)</b>	<b>Labor (Human)</b>	<b>Capital (Tools)</b>