

The 16-part "Dreams of a Barefoot Boy" originally appeared in the 2017 Kansas Newspapers in Education. Have fun reading stories, answering questions, and completing activities while learning about Dwight Eisenhower's childhood.



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"Dreams of a Barefoot Boy"

Chapter 8: SCHOOL DAYS



"Because no man is really a man who has lost out of himself all of the boy, I want to speak first of the dreams of a barefoot boy...Because today that dream of mine of 45 years or more ago has been realized beyond the wildest stretches of my own imagination, I come here, first, to thank you, to say the proudest thing I can claim is that I am from Abilene."

Dwight D. Eisenhower June 22, 1945

Dwight Eisenhower entered first grade at Lincoln School in the fall of 1896 anxious about leaving the security of home but eager to learn. The school was located next door (where the Visitors Center is located today), which meant there was no excuse for being late, or any chance that he could "skip" school without being caught.

For most students growing up in those years, an elementary school education was considered sufficient for a successful future of work. Dwight noted that of the 200 children that entered first grade with him, only 67 entered high school eight years later, and only 31 graduated. Rather than preparing students for careers that required college degrees, the purpose of education was to learn the basics and "to produce citizens who could inform themselves on civic problems." It was Dwight's parents who insisted that the Eisenhower boys complete high school and then find a way to attend college.

Dwight's favorite subject was spelling--he enjoyed the competitiveness of a spelling bee, and he understood the difference a single letter could make in the meaning of a word (his best example was principle and principal). His second favorite subject was arithmetic. Dwight's schoolbooks included Appleton's

School Readers, which covered spelling, grammar, punctuation, reading and writing. Stories in these readers taught a moral lesson along with the skills presented.

In Dwight's day, the teacher used a switch or a ruler as quick punishment for misbehaving. Students quickly learned that they needed to be prepared with their lessons and pay attention if they didn't want to feel the sting of either object on their palms or knuckles. Dwight started high school in the old city hall, but during his freshman year the new high school was built, offering many more opportunities for students. Freshmen took elementary Latin, English, algebra and physical geography. As a young boy, Dwight enjoyed reading stories about ancient history and famous military men, so it is no surprise that history became one of his favorite subjects in high school, along with geometry. When he graduated in 1909, Dwight was described as the "best historian and mathematician" in his class, and was predicted to become a history professor at Yale.

Dwight was an intelligent boy and, looking back, admitted that he didn't always apply himself to his lessons as much as he should have. Even so, the combination of instruction at home and at the

Abilene schools helped prepare him for the future. As President, Eisenhower promoted education at all levels. Remembering his school days in Abilene, he stated, "The true purpose of education is to prepare young men and women for effective citizenship in a free form of government."

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Using a dictionary, look up the words "principle" and "principal." How are the two words different, even though they sound the same?
2. What were Dwight's favorite subjects in high school?
3. How did Dwight's teachers punish students who misbehaved?
4. What was the purpose of education when Dwight was in grade school?

ACTIVITIES:

1. Research Appleton's School Readers to see what lessons were taught when Dwight was going to school. How does it compare with your textbooks today?
2. Why do you think President Eisenhower believed education should prepare students for "effective citizenship?"