

School in 1921

Life in the 1920s

Activities

Activity 1:	How School Used to Be
Activity 2:	A Step Back in Time
Activity 3:	Schools – Past, Present and Future

See individual activities for resources required.



Suggested Learning Intentions

Pupils will:

- learn what school life was like for pupils in 1921;
- be able to draw comparisons between school in the 1920s and today; and
- understand and empathise with life experiences of children from different eras.

Teacher Notes:

The activities focus on what school was like for children in 1921. The activities are supported by the CCEA video: 1921 – A Day in the Schoolroom where pupils and teachers are 'transported' back in time.

Through active learning strategies, pupils will have opportunities to explore similarities and differences between the 1921 school experience and now. They will use their senses to imagine the sights and sounds children would have experienced on their way to school and in the schoolroom.

By exploring features of school life past and present, pupils will reflect on what has stayed the same and what has changed and then predict the school of the future.

The activities are designed to be delivered in chronological order.

The activities can be used as stand-alone resources or as an extended piece of work. Alternatively, adapt individual activities to link with other themes/topics and ability levels.

Shared Education opportunities: the activities lend themselves to shared working; pupils from partner schools can jointly participate in the activities and share their learning. A shared trip to a museum to experience artefacts from the past would also support the theme of the lesson.



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Activity 1: How School Used to Be

You will need:

- CCEA video: 1921 – A Day in the Schoolroom – link provided below
- Writing materials

- Introduce school life in the 1920s by using a KWL grid. Ask the pupils to work in groups to complete a KWL grid (see examples of ideas below) to show what they know about school life in Northern Ireland in the 1920s.
- Ask the pupils to write what they know in column 'K'. Encourage pupils to think about the gaps in their knowledge and write what they want to know in column 'W'.
- Allow pupils to reflect on their learning throughout the activities and complete column 'L' as they progress in their learning.

KWL Grid (with examples)

K (Know)	W (Want to Know)	L (Learned)
There were no pens or white boards. Teachers used blackboards and chalk. Pupils used slates and chalk, dip pens and inkwells.	What subjects were studied? How were pupils rewarded? How were pupils punished?	Girls often studied different subjects to boys as they were being prepared for different futures.

- Explain to the pupils that they are going to watch an informative video on school life in the 1920s.
- Ask the pupils to take notes on any differences from school life today that they notice. Depending on the age and level of your pupils, you may want to give them headings such as subjects, lunchtime, discipline, and teaching and learning style, to help them gather their notes.
- Show the pupils the CCEA video: [1921 – A Day in the Schoolroom](#). (The video is divided into seven clips. You may choose to watch all or some of the clips.)
- Encourage the pupils to Think–Pair–Share and discuss their notes on the key differences between school life in the 1920s and today. Pairs can agree on two key differences, share these with the class and explain their choices.

Review:

- Give the pupils an opportunity to review and discuss each other's ideas and add any new knowledge to the 'L' column in their KWL grid.

Extension:

- Encourage the pupils to consider how school life may have differed for pupils depending on gender, location (rural or urban, for example), and family financial circumstances.

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Activity 2: A Step Back in Time

You will need:

- School in 1921 PowerPoint (Images from the Ulster Folk Museum)
 - CCEA video: 1921 – A Day in the Schoolroom – link provided below
 - Writing materials and highlighters
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- Inform the pupils that they are going to prepare for a piece of creative writing. They will be writing from the point of view of a pupil in a 1921 classroom. You may want to show them some clips from the CCEA video: [1921 – A Day in the Schoolroom](#) to remind them of key learning points from the previous activity.
 - Explain to the pupils that they are going to view a PowerPoint presentation showing images of school life in the past.
 - Prepare the pupils beforehand by ensuring they are aware of and remember their five senses of sight, smell, touch, sound and taste. This will help the pupils to be more descriptive in their writing.
 - Encourage the pupils to imagine how they would feel about school and their surroundings as they view the images, bearing in mind all of their senses.
 - Show the School in 1921 PowerPoint. Use the prompts below for each slide as you explore the images with the pupils. The pupils will be transported back in time from the walk to school, to the lessons and objects in the schoolroom and more.
 - Encourage the pupils to think about what they might feel and experience around them if they were there. Allow them time to look at and think about each slide as you comment and question. Tell them to jot down their thoughts about the smells, sounds or sights so that they have plenty of sensory ideas in preparation for writing.
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Use the following prompts, along with any of your own, to ensure they think in detail about each photo:

Slide 2 – Walking to school

Ask the pupils to think about the sounds and smells they might have experienced walking to and from school – emphasise the lack of cars and farm machinery, so they focus on birds singing, relative silence, the smells of nature. Encourage the pupils to consider what might be different if this school was in an urban area.

Slide 3 – Approaching the school building

Prompt the pupils to think about the sounds, sights and feelings as they approach the school building, for example hand bells, children playing, everyone arriving on foot.

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Activity 2: A Step Back in Time (continued)

Slide 4 –Arriving at school

Continue with these prompts as they arrive at school. Tell them to consider the weather and how it would make them feel. Ask them to consider warm, cold and wet weather: how would they have felt walking to school in different weather conditions? What sounds, smells and sights would be different on a frosty winter morning compared to a warm summer's morning? What about tastes – would they have picked berries on the way to school in the late summer? Before starting out on the walk to school would they have had warm homemade bread on a cold winter's morning? If they lived in the countryside, they may have had warm milk straight from a cow.

Slide 5 – The dividing wall

Discuss the separation of boys and girls. The wall that divides the toilets also divides the school yard.

Slide 6 – The toilets

Ask the pupils to consider what effect the weather might have on them deciding if they needed the toilet. The toilets were generally holes in a wooden surface. Ask the pupils to imagine how they would feel about using these toilets and what they might see or smell. Or how it would feel going outside on a cold frosty day.

Slide 7 – A hoop and stick

Ask the pupils to look carefully. What can they see that children would have played with? What different games might boys and girls have played then? What games would they have had in common?

Slide 8 – The schoolroom

Ask the pupils how they would feel sitting in this schoolroom. Draw the pupils' attention to the fireplace and the lack of any central heating system. Again, ask them to consider the cold or heat depending on where they might be sitting. Note that the teacher's lectern, board or desk is up at the front, always near the fire! Think about the relationships between the teacher and pupils and how that might be different now. Ask the pupils if they can see any equipment – there is an abacus at the front of the room. There were no calculators like we have in school today. Ask the pupils about the most important things pupils would have learned. Use this to discuss Reading, Writing and Arithmetic (the three Rs).

Slide 9 – Turf for the fire

Encourage the pupils to imagine the smell of turf burning on a winter's day. Ask the pupils to consider what other things they would smell in this schoolroom or in the schoolyard. Depending on the season the smells may have been manure or grass cutting. Depending on the location of the school the smells would be different, perhaps factory smoke in an urban area.

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Activity 2: A Step Back in Time (continued)

Slide 10 – A map of Ireland

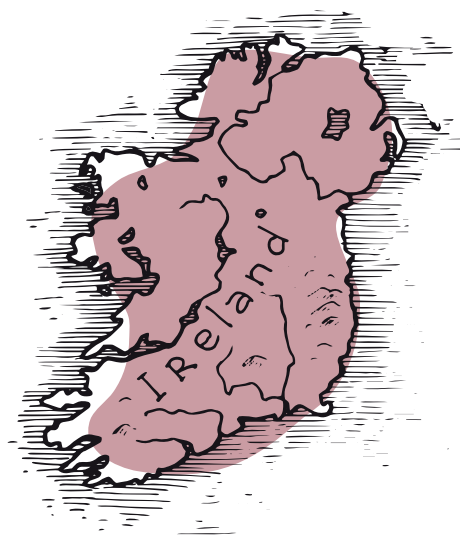
- Prompt the pupils to imagine what the teacher might be using the map of Ireland for: what might the teacher be saying about the historical developments of 1921? What subjects would pupils be studying when using the map of Ireland? Explain that for the pupils this was the only way to view or understand Ireland as there was no internet. Encourage the pupils to think about the fact that few people left the country for holidays; they often did not even leave their own county. Ask the pupils to consider how this would have impacted on the children's views of their country and wider society.
- Invite the pupils to free-write for 15 minutes about their experiences, feelings, sights and smells as a pupil in a 1921 classroom. *Free-writing involves writing continuously, in sentences, everything that pupils think, without censorship.* You could display an image from the PowerPoint to inspire pupils or use the presentation prompts at times as they write.
- Ask the pupils to write down all their ideas until the 15 minutes is up. Assure them that you will not be reading this and that they should not worry about the conventions of spelling or grammar. It is the original ideas and imaginative thoughts that they want to capture.

Review:

- Give the pupils an opportunity to review their free-writing and highlight vocabulary, imagery and descriptions they would like to use in their final writing piece.

Extension:

- Invite the pupils to imagine they grew up in Northern Ireland in the 1920s, and to write a chapter of an autobiography entitled School Days in which they describe a school day in 1921. Pupils could use the facts they have learned about school in 1921, as well as some of the descriptions and ideas they came up with during free-writing.



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Activity 3: Schools – Past, Present and Future

You will need:

- *The Fun They Had* – A Short Story by Isaac Asimov – provided in link below
 - Writing materials and sticky notes
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- Challenge the pupils to consider what school children back in 1921 may never have foreseen or predicted about school life now.
 - Divide the class into small groups. Ask the pupils to jot down, on sticky notes, the three most significant changes in school in the last 100 years. Each group should nominate one person to place their notes on the board.
 - Read out the pupils' ideas, reducing the number of sticky notes as ideas are repeated. Encourage class discussion to help pupils understand how innovations such as electricity, central heating and the internet have made school life now much more comfortable and interesting.
 - Read [*The Fun They Had*](#), a short story by Isaac Asimov. *This is a science fiction story, set in the year 2157. It tells the story of two children, Tommy and Margie, who are educated at home with the aid of a mechanical teacher. Printed material has been replaced with 'telebooks' and the children are fascinated when they find an 'old' book.*
 - Discuss the story. What do pupils think is the main message of the story? Does it change how the pupils feel about going to school?
 - Ask the pupils to consider the educational experiences in the story and to compare these to their own educational experiences. Ask the pupils to complete a table like the one below.
 - » *What are the advantages and disadvantages of the educational experiences in the story?*
 - » *Are there any similarities between the educational experiences in the story and their own educational experiences?*

Advantages	Disadvantages	Similarities

- Ask the pupils to share some of the aspects of school life and educational experiences that seem to remain important or consistent – perhaps even those aspects that the 1921 classroom and the 'school' in the story have in common, despite being centuries apart.

Reflection:

- Discuss if the three Rs, Reading, Writing and Arithmetic, will always be important and if the need for certain skills changes with time. Encourage the pupils to think about the jobs that children were prepared for in 1921, compared to the jobs available now. Ask them to consider the jobs that will always be necessary and new jobs that might emerge in the future.

Extension:

- Invite the pupils to prepare a short presentation on what they think a school day might be like 100 years from now. Encourage the pupils to be imaginative in their predictions. Give the pupils an opportunity to share their presentation with the class.

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Curriculum Links

These lesson ideas and activities could be delivered through a variety of Areas of Learning including, but not limited to, History, English and Learning for Life and Work.

Communication Skills

Talking and Listening

- Listen to and take part in discussions and presentations
- Contribute comments, ask questions and respond to others' points of view
- Communicate information, ideas, opinions, feelings and imaginings, using an expanding vocabulary
- Adapt ways of speaking to audience and situation

Reading

- Read a range of texts for information, ideas and enjoyment
- Find, select and use information from a range of sources
- Understand and explore ideas, events and features in texts

Writing

- Talk about, plan and edit work
- Communicate information, meaning, feelings, imaginings, and ideas in a clear and organised way
- Develop, express and present ideas in a variety of forms and formats, using traditional and digital resources, for different audiences and purposes
- Write with increasing accuracy and proficiency

Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities

Managing Information

- Select, classify, compare and evaluate information

Thinking, Problem-Solving and Decision-Making

- Make predictions, examine evidence
- Make connections between learning in different contexts

Being Creative

- Experiment with ideas and questions
- Make new connections between ideas/information
- Take risks for learning

Working with Others

- Listen actively and share opinions

Self-Management

- Organise and plan how to go about a task
- Seek advice when necessary

History

- Explore how history has affected their personal identity, culture and lifestyle
- Investigate the impact of significant events or ideas of the twentieth century on the world