

# Grammar School Taught Us to Sew, Sing and Speak

IT MAY BE ELEMENTARY, but no one went to elementary school in the 1930s. We all trudged in our rubber galoshes to grammar school.

That wasn't such a bad idea when you think about it, since they actually taught a class called grammar. I think it's been eliminated, since both my college-educated sons inform me that "me and him are going to the movies," "the reason is because..." and "we ain't got nothing to do."

In my day, we went through first-person singular all the way to third-person plural. Copulative verbs were hard work, not dirty words, and we felt bad—not badly—when we felt bad.

Music classes saw us all seated in a room where the teacher batted away on a piano over which hung an enormous mirror. Through this portal, she could see who was and was not singing. Punishment consisted of solo renditions of La Paloma, so the room rang with a lot of O-shaped notes.

The same teacher who slaved with our three R's was also supposed to teach art and physical education. Since all my grammar school teachers wore corsets, not much was done in the exercise department.

Once a day, we watched the teacher struggle with a long stick with a hook on one end. It was used to open windows from the top so we could do our breathing exercises.

The only exercise was the teacher moving the stick, and I think the only push-ups were the windows.

We learned to cook and sew. Cooking involved having to consume lots of cinnamon toast, applesauce and hot cocoa for an entire term. Sewing started out with making an apron to wear to make the cinnamon toast, applesauce and hot cocoa.

I understand that home economics is taught in high school, but we had our share of the economical part back in grammar school.

When we made cinnamon toast, applesauce and hot cocoa, we also “learned” to do the dishes. We were handed a little metal basket with a handle. Into it went a piece of Kirkman’s soap. The idea was to swish the basket back and forth in the tin dishpan until we made suds.

Kirkman’s soap was great for drawing out my infected toe, but making suds, never!

But our sewing progressed. On graduation day, 50 newly permed heads emerged out of 50 French-seamed, hand-rolled, identical sacks of slightly soiled white dotted swiss.

One thing was in their favor: They matched our complexions to a T.

—June Y., Sarasota, Florida