

Fort Davis

National Historic Site

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



Curriculum Materials Grades 2-5

Post School at Fort Davis



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Teacher Notes: Post School at Fort Davis

Topic: Post School at Fort Davis

Objectives and Standards: Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS)

<http://www.tea.state.tx.us/teks/>

Grade 2

Social Studies
113.4:2,3,17a,18,19

Grade 3

Social Studies
113.5:16,17,18

Grade 4

Social Studies
113.6:1,22,23,24

Grade 5

Social Studies
113.7:23,25,26,27

Language Arts

110.4: 10,13,15,17

Language Arts

110.5: 10,13,15,17

Language Arts

110.6:10,13,15,17,23

Language Arts

110.7: 10,13,15,17,23

Materials Needed:

Copies of handout *Fort Davis—Post Schooling* (2 pages)

Copies of student worksheets (3)

- Comparing and Contrasting (Venn Diagram)
- Fact or Opinion
- Time Traveler

Pencils / Crayons / Markers

Paper or white construction paper

Lesson Activities:

1. Engage students by asking them to describe or tell one thing that they like about their school. After several students have received a chance to share their thoughts, proceed to tell the class that you will be comparing and contrasting their school to the school at the army post of Fort Davis.
2. Depending on the level of students, either read the teacher background handout to them or let them read it quietly.
3. After reading handout, invite students to discuss some of the things from the reading and write these comments on the chalk board. Some examples of things students might say are “Students went to school until noon and then returned in the afternoon for two more hours of schooling.”
4. *Comparing and Contrasting:* Have students create a Venn Diagram that compares their school to what they have learned about the Post School at Fort Davis.

Other Activities and Projects: Here are several other activities that can be done in conjunction with this lesson.

- **Fact or Opinion:** Have students write down at least three factual statements and three opinionated statements about the Fort Davis Post School. Then have them share with a partner their statements. Encourage students to guess which statements are facts and which are opinions.
- **Time Travelers:** Ask students to pretend that they are time travelers and have gone back in time to visit the Fort Davis school. Have each student write a letter to their family and friends who are—say, in another state—about their experiences at the Post School.
- **Post School Spelling Bee:** Historically, teachers commonly used spelling bees to evaluate students' progress on the subject of spelling, and also as a teaching tool. Allow your students to place themselves in the shoes of a Fort Davis Post School student by allowing them to take part in a “Turn Down Spelling Bee.” Have the students line up side by side in the classroom. Set your timer to 15 minutes or assign someone to be the time keeper. Then call out a word for the first person in line to spell. If that person spells it incorrectly then he/she must go to the end of the line. That same word will be given to the next person in line until someone spells it correctly. The winner will be the person who is at the beginning of the line when the time is up.

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Student Activity: Post School at Fort Davis –
Historical Readings

FORT DAVIS—Post Schooling

If you were a child living at Fort Davis before 1878, you might not have gone to school. You might have been schooled at home by a parent, or by a teacher or governess who lived with your family. Or you might have been sent back East to attend a boarding school or to live with relatives and go to school. Poorer classes of people did not send their children to school.

In 1878, the U.S. Army issued an order to establish schools at all army posts. Old army records show that by early 1879, a school was in operation at Fort Davis. There was no school building as such, but the fort had a structure—the post chapel—that was large enough to accommodate a school.



The post chapel at Fort Davis was a one-room school house.

The school at Fort Davis was under the direction of the commanding officer, but he usually left the post chaplain in charge. School for children was held during the day, and school for soldiers operated in the evening. The chaplain could appoint an enlisted man as a teacher or "overseer." This enlisted man was paid an extra 35 cents a day to teach, but his duties as a teacher were not allowed to interfere with his military duties. One teacher taught all levels.

Children of enlisted men had to attend school, but attendance of officer's children was optional—depending on what their parents decided. If officers decided not to send their children to the post school, they were required to keep the children from playing or making noise near the post chapel while school was in session. Children of the civilians living at or near the fort could also attend the post school, but their parents were

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A 19th Century Classroom — Picture used with permission of the Denver Public Library

expected to make a small payment to the fort in exchange for their child's schooling.

Like today, the school week back then ran Monday through Friday, except during the summer. The school day began at 9:30 a.m., and often a bugle call sounded 15 minutes before the school hour to remind students that classes were about to begin. The students, or pupils, as they were called back then, went to school until noon and then again for two hours in the afternoon—from about 1:30-3:30. Sometimes school was dismissed if the teacher was sick or if the building was needed for meetings or trials (since this same building sometimes served as the fort's courtroom).

School attendance varied, depending on how many soldiers and officers were stationed at the fort. From 1880 to 1890, the average number of pupils attending the post school at Fort Davis was 20. The children were divided into classes according to intelligence and progress in school. Younger students only took reading and spelling, while the older students studied reading, writing, spelling, arithmetic, geography, history, and sometimes algebra. Although pencils and writing tablets were available at the time, pupils practiced their writing skills and did their math problems on slates using slate pencils. This was done to keep down costs—since paper and lead pencils were more expensive.




Fort Davis children in the 1880s

As a student at the post school in the early 1880s, you would have had to learn about the 38 states of the United States and about such things as the presidential election of 1884—when no one knew who became president for weeks after the election. You would also have participated in frequent spelling bees. Commonly used was the traditional spelling bee. Less frequent were the "fun" spelling bees,

like the "Dumb Speller" in which the vowels in a word were NOT spoken; instead, gestures were substituted for each vowel in a word.

In the evening, enlisted men could choose to attend classes in geography, arithmetic and "schooling for the soldier." If an enlisted man did not know how to read and write, these subjects were taught first. Many soldiers had never gone to school before joining the army. Some enlisted men saw education as a way to obtain promotions in the army, since higher ranks usually required the ability to read and write.

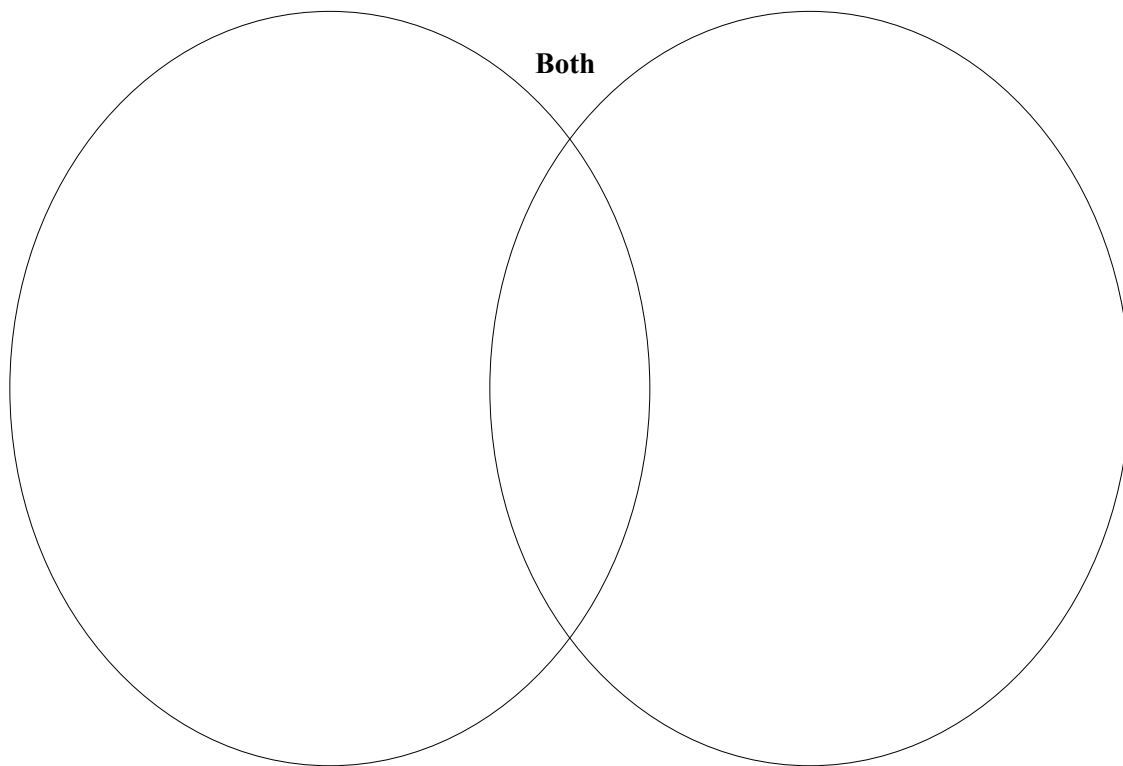
Name : _____ Date: _____

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Curriculum Materials Grades 2-5		Student Activity: Post School at Fort Davis – Comparing and Contrasting

Comparing and Contrasting

My School


**Fort Davis
Post School**



How is your school different from the Post School at Fort Davis (on the right)? How are they alike? If you could change anything about your school, what would it be and how would you do it? Write your responses on the back of this page or on another sheet of paper.



Name : _____ Date: _____

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Curriculum Materials Grades 2-5	Student Activity: Post School at Fort Davis – Fact and Opinion	

Directions: Write at least three factual statements and three opinionated statements about the Post School at Fort Davis.

Fact or Opinion

Fact	Opinion
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.

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Student Activity: Post School at Fort Davis –
Time Traveler



TIME TRAVELER

_____ Date

Dear _____,

Sincerely,
