



Children of Early Appalachia

Children in Church

Lesson Plan

Objectives:

- Students will identify the roles the church played in Appalachian childhood
- Students will locate churches in their town on maps to determine that churches were often located in central location within communities
- Students will examine church buildings to determine that they were built to look like important buildings

Materials: local map, pencils, note pad, cameras or camera phones (optional), sketch book, illustrations of early Appalachia churches

Reading:

The earliest religion practiced in Appalachia was Presbyterianism. Eventually, Southern Baptists became the largest denomination and Methodists were the second largest religious group. Most churches in the rural mountains were in the open country. Before 1930, churches were one-room frame buildings that were often unpainted. Early pioneers often used the largest local residence in the community to serve as a church until a log church could be built. There were four essential things every pioneer family brought into the wilderness: an axe, a frying pan, a rifle, and the Bible.

Sunday school was the most frequent religious activity in mountain churches. Children would look forward to Sunday church. In addition to the accepted spiritual reasons for attending church, it meant many other things as well. Church outings promised social fun, learning in Sunday school, meeting others, and getting dressed up.

Church also played a role for courting. Dates for teenagers were complicated for those living in early Appalachia. They could date only if they had a chaperone. A boy walked miles to meet his date at her home. There were no buses and hardly anyone had a car to drive. Boys and girls had no money to spend on dates. This meant doing simple things like taking walks, having a picnic, or sharing a soda. At church, the community gathered regularly. Adults could easily watch children and teenagers while they played and mingled. Boys and girls could mix and meet. After church, families stayed on to socialize. Children and teenagers held play parties, singing and praying for hours. Boys were allowed to walk girls home after church.

Church was also a source of education. Songs and hymns were learned. Reading from the Bible at home and church was a fine way to practice reading. At home, other books were scarce and the Bible provided lessons and stories. The Bible and religion also gave families security. Children were taught how to behave and pay attention in church. They participated in a formal Sunday school where lessons were taught in the same one-room church.

The preachers did not necessarily live in the small communities they served. Many traveled around and preached in several neighboring communities.

Plan:

1. Find a new church building in your town. When was it built? Then try and find an old one. When was it built? Compare their architecture. How do they look the same? How do they look different?
2. Compare a church structure to a store building in your town. How do the buildings look the same and different? Are they made of the same materials? Which one has the most windows? Which one has the nicest grounds? Which one has the most signs? Do they all have parking lots?
3. Take pictures and note about some churches in your town. Look for the following information:
 - a. Dimensions
 - b. Count the number of doors and windows
 - c. Note fancy features like sculptures, stained glass windows, bell towers, gardens and signs.
 - d. Note the materials, such as wood, stone, brick and vinyl.
 - e. Carefully look at the front entry.
4. Read through the information you and other students collected. What conclusions can you come to about the importance of churches in communities in the past and the present? Where are they generally located in the community? What are their appearances generally like? Why?

Reference: *Life and Religion in Southern Appalachia* by Weatherford and Brewer, Friendship Press, 1962.