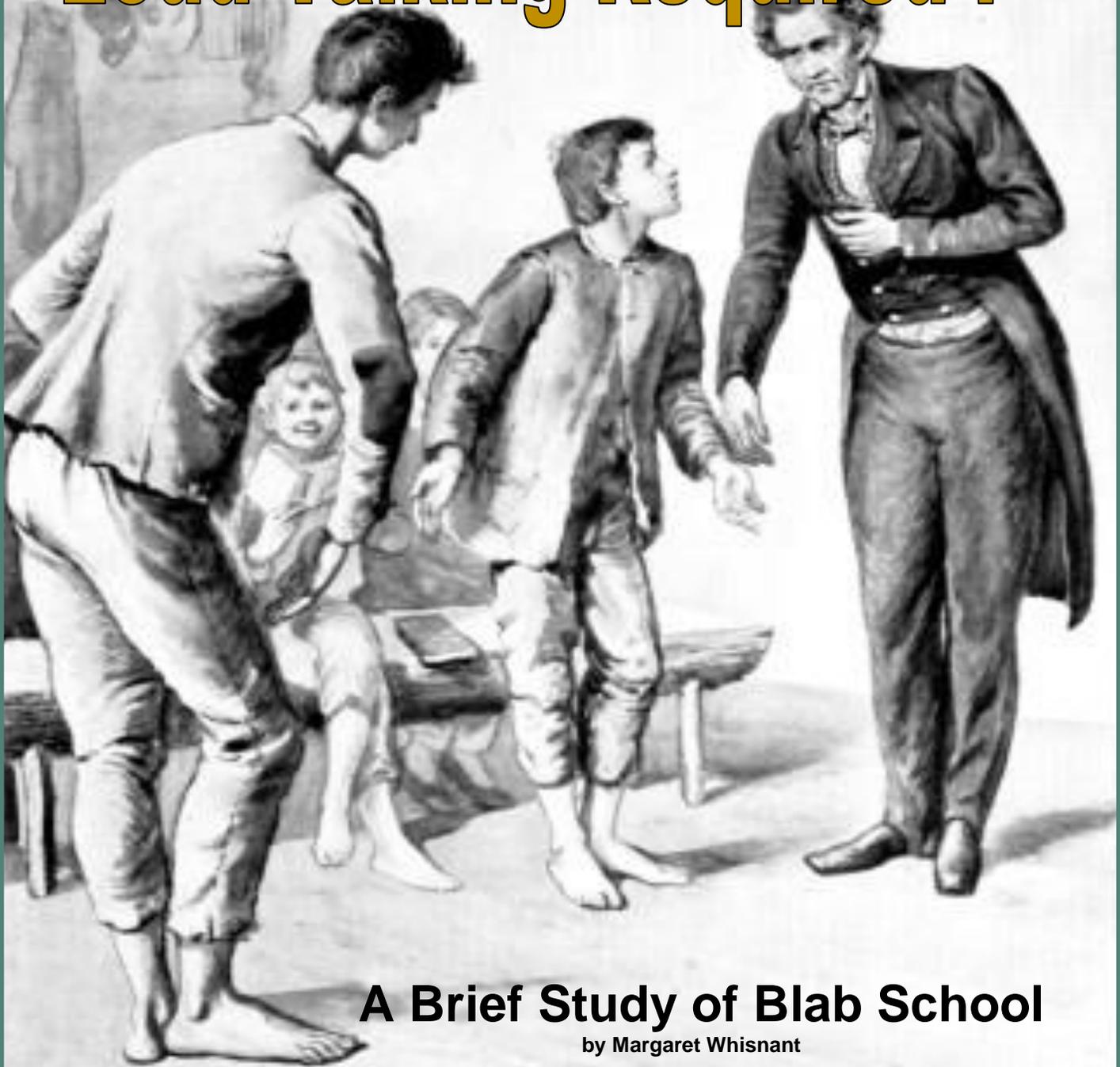


Back-to-School

# Informational Text

## Loud Talking Required !



## A Brief Study of Blab School

by Margaret Whisnant

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Cover Image: Young Abraham Lincoln at Blab School—Public Domain

# Loud Talking Required!

A Brief Study of Blab School  
by Margaret Whisnant



If you were living along the American frontier during the 1800s, sitting quietly in class would probably have gotten you into a heap of trouble! That's the way it was in blab school. Things were certainly different in those 19<sup>th</sup> century classrooms.

To begin with, pioneer children didn't have to go to school if they didn't want to. Those who wished to be educated could walk, ride a horse, or catch a buggy each morning to a local one-room log cabin with a dirt floor. Inside, students of all ages sat on long wooden benches. They practiced writing and arithmetic on slates. Typically, only the teacher had books, and those were few.

In these primitive surroundings, youngsters learned reading, writing, and arithmetic. They did it by reciting their lessons over and over until they had them memorized. They swayed back and forth, calling out their spelling words or chanting a poem—the louder the better. People passing by could hear the racket, and they began calling these noisy study sessions “blab school.”

The teacher made them do it!

The instructor, sometimes no more than a teenager who could read, would stand in front of the room and reel out a lesson in short segments. The pupils listened and repeated the teacher's words in unison, again and again, slowly memorizing the information. Then it was time for the scholars to read or recite on their own. Loudness counted!

The teacher picked up a switch or paddle and walked around the room, stopping to listen to individual students. Those who confidently shouted the loudest were considered the brightest and most scholarly. They received great praise. For the timid, or those not talking loud enough to suit the teacher—*Whack!!*

To accommodate the different age groups, older students often taught the younger pupils, and it was not unusual for several blab sessions to be in full swing at once. In many schools, students were required to stand before the teacher every morning, one at a time, and yell out their homework. After several years in attendance, youngsters had heard every lesson taught to every age group dozens and dozens and times. On the 19<sup>th</sup> century frontier, people thought this was the most beneficial way teach and learn.

Today, such methods seem ridiculous. Still, blab schools provided the only formal education for countless pioneer children, some of whom went on to do great things.

Abraham Lincoln, for example, attended two blab schools, one for about 6 months when he was ten and another for about 3 months when he was fourteen. People heard him shouting out his lessons as he walked to and from school. Historians note that he continued to read everything aloud as an adult. Some say that he *could not* read silently, but he was one of the most gifted orators of his time. Apparently, less than a year in blab school left its mark on America's 16<sup>th</sup> president.



The days of loud studying at blab schools are long gone. Modern students who like to talk in class might wish they were still around, but talking and memorizing, talking and memorizing, talking and memorizing all day long would soon get wearisome. Imagine being forced to listen to classmates shouting at full volume hour after hour, day after day, week after week. And, don't forget that a switch-carrying instructor was also part of the deal.

Thank your teacher for the variety of fun things you get to do in class. Don't forget to mention that the no-talking rules posted on the classroom wall are totally awesome. Then go practice your right to sit quietly for a while.

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# Questions

Refer to the text to answer the following questions. Write your answers in the spaces provided.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. Blab schools were a type of primary school that existed on the American western frontier during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. When was the 19<sup>th</sup> century?
- (A) between 1601 and 1700
  - (B) between 1701 and 1800
  - (C) between 1801 and 1900
  - (D) between 1901 and 2000

- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Today, students prove their academic achievement by making good grades. In blab school
- (A) the students who recited the loudest were thought to be the smartest.
  - (B) the students who could memorize faster were the top students.
  - (C) achievement was measured by a student’s age.
  - (D) students weren’t graded.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. The main teaching and learning technique in blab school was
- (A) listening and writing.
  - (B) reciting and memorizing.
  - (C) older students teaching the younger students.
  - (D) requiring students to recite homework.

4. Explain how blab schools got their name.

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- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. It wasn’t until 1918 that every state had passed a law making school attendance mandatory. Which of the following quotes from the article has a connection to this fact?
- (A) *Things were certainly different in those 19<sup>th</sup> century classrooms.*
  - (B) *To begin with, pioneer children didn’t have to go to school if they didn’t want to.*
  - (C) *Those who wished to be educated could walk, ride a horse, or catch a buggy each morning to a local one-room log cabin. . .*
  - (D) *Typically, only the teacher had books, and those were few.*

- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. An observant reader can infer that teenagers who could read often served as blab school teachers because
- (A) they would work for no pay.
  - (B) the job of teaching was considered undesirable.
  - (C) there were more schools than qualified teachers.
  - (D) most adults who could read had to work on the farm or in the home.

7. Classify each of the following statements from the article as a provable **Fact** or the author's **Opinion**. (6.5, 7.5, 8.5)

\_\_\_\_\_ *Abraham Lincoln, for example, attended two blab schools. . .*

\_\_\_\_\_ *They swayed back and forth, yelling out their spelling words or repeating a poem—the louder the better.*

\_\_\_\_\_ *To accommodate the different age groups, older students often taught the younger pupils. . .*

\_\_\_\_\_ *Apparently, less than a year in blab school left its mark on America's 16<sup>th</sup> president.*

- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. Which of the following *best* states the article's main idea?  
(A) Blab schools were quite different from modern schools.  
(B) Famous people, such as Abraham Lincoln, went to blab school.  
(C) Memorizing is not the best way to learn.  
(D) Today's students should show more appreciation for their schools.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. The *best* alternative title for this article is  
(A) Interesting Facts about Abraham Lincoln.  
(B) Why Schools Change.  
(C) Learning in Blab School.  
(D) The Life of a Frontier Student
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. The author describes blab schools as having *primitive* surroundings. Why is *primitive* a good choice of words?  
(A) Students learned a lot in blab schools in spite of their shortcomings.  
(B) Blab schools were a simple, early form of education that grew into modern schools.  
(C) Blab schools weren't built to last.  
(D) The adults who lived on the American frontier were uneducated and poor
- \_\_\_\_\_ 11. The author wrote that Abraham Lincoln was *one of the most gifted orators of his time*. What is an *orator*?  
(A) a much admired leader  
(B) a person with an exceptional memory  
(C) a story teller  
(D) a person who makes speeches
- \_\_\_\_\_ 12. Today, educators agree that reciting and memorizing is not the most effective way to learn new material. Which of the following is a good example of a possible exception to this idea?  
(A) learning the lyrics or melody of a song  
(B) reading a novel  
(C) working a difficult math problem  
(D) designing a science experiment

**Writing Challenge:**

On the left are notes about conditions that existed in blab schools. On the right are short facts about their modern equivalents. Fill in the missing information and then use your notes to write a composition about **Blab School VS My School**. Write an ending paragraph that sums up your thoughts about the differences. (6.4, 7.4, 8.4)

Blab School	My School
log cabin, dirt floor, one room—all ages together	
	multiple, trained adult teachers for different grade levels and subjects
very few books, slates for writing and figuring, no paper	
subjects: reading, writing, and arithmetic.	
	listening still necessary a variety of methods and activities used for teaching, such as. . .
Loud talking was praiseworthy and desirable.	

# Answer Keys

## (With CCSS ELA Alignment)

1. C (RI. 6.1, 7.1, 8.1)
2. A (RI. 6.1, 7.1, 8.1 RI. 6.3, 7.3, 8.3)
3. B (RI. 6.1, 7.1, 8.1)
4. Teachers required students to recite their lessons. Those who talked the loudest were thought to be the smartest, so the noise level inside the school was high, People started calling them blab schools because of the racket the students made.  
(RI. 6.1, 7.1, 8.1)
5. B (RI. 6.1, 7.1, 8.1 RI. 6.3, 7.3, 8.3)
6. D (RI. 6.1, 7.1, 8.1)
7. Fact  
Fact  
Fact  
Opinion
8. A (RI. 6.2, 7.2, 8.2)
9. C (RI. 6.2, 7.2, 8.2)
10. B (RI. 6.4, 7.4, 8.4)
11. D (RI. 6.4, 7.4, 8.4)
12. A (RI. 6.1, 7.1, 8.1)

Writing Challenge: Meets various ELA writing standards

## Credits

### E-Bibliography

[Learning Like Abe](#)  
[Blab Schools: Wikipedia](#)  
[Roots Web: Ancestry.com](#)  
[Merriam-Webster Dictionary](#)

### Clipart

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