

A Disturbance in the Classroom

By Edith King in 1932

It was a hot, hot day on the prairies that late August afternoon. . .

The children stirred restlessly in their desks in the little rural schoolhouse. Indoors and outdoors the smothering heat was penetrating everywhere—stifling, holding all life both large and small in its silent grip. Only the dry "crick, crick" of the crickets in the brown grass, the whirr of the grasshoppers against the dusty window panes, and the faint "push" of a fitful breeze brought any change to the solid monotony of that day.

For many months the dry land had been without rain. Grasshoppers were everywhere - millions of them, on the land, in the ditches, and even in the little schoolhouse.

At the blackboard the young teacher determinedly was writing an exercise for the class. From behind her came a sudden but definite flip, flip, flip of an inkwell. She turned.

"Will the person who is flipping that inkwell please stop. Get on with your work." She went on with her writing.

Again came the disturbing noise. Somewhat annoyed and with an edge on her voice she repeated, "Please stop that noise at once." Silence reigned supreme.

Then—flip, flip, flip. There it was again! This was too much. Her eyes flashed around the room, her anger a match for the heat of the day.

Solemn young faces, strained and tense, faced her, their eyes a dancing secret. The air was charged with excitement.

"We'll get to the bottom of this!" she said as she marched down the aisles with great indignation.

Yet once more came the persistent, the insistent flip, flip, flip, even as she walked. Could anyone be that bold?

Suddenly, right beneath her at the side of her hand came a strong flip, flip. She sucked in her breath sharply. Ha! The culprit at last!

The culprit? Yes, there he was, his head down in the inkwell, legs high, kicking fitfully in despair - a poor tired grasshopper bidding his final farewell. The teacher convulsed with laughter. The children, sensing relief from all the tensions of the moment, the day, the life, joined merrily in.

Suddenly, the air was clear again. The magic sunshine of the children's laughter filled every heart and with a smile, they all resumed their work.

Source: Edward History Book Committee. *Harvests of Time*. Altona. Friesen Printers, 2003 pp 169

Life in the Rural School

There is so much in this little story that sets the scene for life in a rural school. Note that it was August – schools were a summertime operation in the early days.

Consider the students. They are by all evidence a pretty well behaved lot. Their faces are "solemn and tense" as their teacher seeks out the perpetrator. There could be a lot at stake – they might miss their recess if this isn't resolved.

Then there is the situation itself. A persistent noise-

making diversion is just the kind of subversive thing some kid might have done.

What about the teacher? She is likely a young woman just out of high school, inexperienced, but very aware of the need to keep order in the classroom. She is, after all, out here on the lonely prairie. There is no principal or other staff for support. It is just her and these students.

I love the ending. The teacher laughs. The students laugh with her. Everything goes back to normal. I think it was probably a pretty nice "normal."



▲ Copley School – lucky was the lad or lass who got to ride a pony to school.

▼ Students from Butterfield School – The class may have been small in number, but the teacher had eight grades to keep busy.

