



Worthington

Democratic Ideals: Schools and Libraries

Historical Context and Overview

In early American history, education was viewed as the highest ideal of democracy. Thomas Jefferson believed that education and civic virtue must go hand in hand in a successful republic. By teaching citizens of their right to self-government, education serves as the guardian of democracy.

Worthington's early settlers were from New England where the tradition of public education and learning had a long heritage. Founded in 1635, Boston Latin School is the oldest public school in United States and was attended by several men who signed the Declaration of Independence. Founded as Thomas Hooker's Latin school in 1638, Hartford Public High School, in Hartford, Connecticut, is the second-oldest public school in the United States.

When James Kilbourn and other Worthington founders came from Connecticut to Worthington, they brought their New England ideals and cultural institutions with them. Schools and libraries were among the first institutions established in Worthington, reflecting the settlers' commitment to public education and lifelong learning as democratic ideals. Their commitment to public education was also in keeping with the democratic ideals of the Northwest Ordinance, which encouraged public education in Ohio.

The first schools and libraries in Worthington were subscription-based. Families provided cash, bartered, or provided labor for children to attend school. A \$2 membership fee, a significant sum in those days, was assessed to anyone who wanted to belong to the first library.

The legacy of schools and libraries continued throughout Worthington's history, as schools, academies, and colleges emerged as key economic forces. Worthington became a leader in medical training with the Ohio Reformed Medical College. The Worthington Female Seminary was established by the Methodists as a school for daughters of ministers. The seminary building later became the Central Ohio Normal School, a training institution for teachers.

Standards Alignment

Ohio's New Learning Standards: Social Studies

Grade 3

Content Statement 3. Local communities change over time.

Content Statement 10. Individuals make the community a better place by solving problems in a way that promotes the common good.

Grade 4

Content Statement 5. The Northwest Ordinance established a process for the creation of new states and specified democratic ideals to be incorporated in the states of the Northwest Territory.

Content Statement 18. Laws can protect rights, provide benefits and assign responsibilities.

Grade 8

Content Statement 17. Americans began to develop a common national identity among its diverse regional and cultural populations based on democratic ideals.

Learning

- Explain the relationship between education and democracy.
- Describe how Worthington’s early settlers demonstrated their commitment to education and learning.
- Discuss the ways in which the democratic values of New England and the Northwest Ordinance were reflected in Worthington.
- Identify the areas of education in which Worthington was a leader throughout its history.

Discussion Questions

1. How do we know that Worthington’s founders valued education and learning?
2. What were the earliest schools in Worthington like? What was the curriculum of Worthington Academy?
3. How were early schools and libraries in Worthington different than schools today?
4. How much did it cost to belong to the first library in Worthington? How do we know this was a significant sum of money? Why would Worthington’s settlers be willing to pay this large sum?
5. How did the establishment of schools and libraries in Worthington reflect early settlers’ commitment to democratic ideals and their New England heritage? How was this consistent with the Northwest Ordinance?
6. Why was education considered important to good government?
7. In what ways was Worthington a leader in medical, religious, and teacher education and training?
8. How have the core values of Worthington remained the same throughout its history?

Extension Activities

- Have students write a story or journal entry from the perspective of a student going to school in the early 1800s. What was the school building like? How were classes organized? What would they have learned about and how? Have students create a Venn diagram showing how schools today are different from the one in their story or journal.
- Have students prepare a persuasive speech explaining why school should or should not be required. Students should consider the relationship between education and good government and citizenship. Once students have prepared their speeches, they can compare their speeches with each other and prepare for a class debate on the topic.

Additional Resources

- School Days: A History of Public Education:
<http://backstoryradio.org/shows/back-to-school-a-history-of-public-education/>
- A History of Schools in Worthington:
http://www.worthingtonhistory.org/Resources/Links/Worthington_Schools/worthington_schools.html