mystery science

Grades K-5
Mini-Lesson: “Who invented school?”

VIDEO TRANSCRIPT

VIDEO 1

Hi. It's Danni! When you think of school, what comes to mind? Do you think of classrooms or desks, maybe a playground? What about cats? That's what these kids in Germany picture when they think of school. That's because their kindergarten is built like a giant white cat. Yeah. Check this out. See how its mouth is the door? Kids can even slide down its long tail. So cool! Someone named Marco is curious about school. Let's give Marco a call now.

[Video Call]

- Hi, Danni!

- Hi, Marco!

- I have a question for you. Who invented school?

- Ooh, that's a great question.

And it's kind of a hard one to answer because school means different things to different people. Some kids have school in a classroom while other kids do school at home. Some kids even have school in the forest each day, like these kids in Denmark. As long as you're there to spend time each day learning, it's school. But where did the idea of school come from anyway? Someone had to think it up, right? Before humans actually got the idea to gather groups of kids together each day to learn, schools didn't exist. Now before you think the earliest kids had it

easy and that they just hung out with their friends all day, it's important to remember it was really hard to be a kid back then. There were no stores where you could buy things that you need, and no buildings to live in. And there were animals. Wild animals that could attack at any time. Kids needed to learn to hunt and fish and build safe shelters so they could survive, but there were no schools to teach them. So for thousands of years, someone in their community would just teach everything they needed to know one-on-one. And it worked, which makes me think. If that way of teaching worked, why do we need to invent schools in the first place? I mean, couldn't grown-ups just keep teaching kids at home? Before we go on, I'm curious. What do you think? Why was school invented?

VIDEO 2

I'm not sure how you answered, but you may have guessed that school was invented because some of the grown-ups didn't know how to teach their kids certain things. Yeah. That makes sense. I mean, grown-ups are smart, but they don't know everything. What if most of the grown-ups in community were horrible at fishing, but your friend's mom could catch a million fish with her eyes closed? It would make sense to have your friend's mom teach fishing to the rest of the community. Right? So that's what people started doing. Instead of teaching kids one by one, they begin to have experts in fishing, or hunting, or shelter building teach groups of kids what they needed to learn. And that worked really well. So well that people began to build actual places. You could go to just for learning. Like the ancient Egyptians. This is ancient Egyptian writing. Looks kind of confusing, doesn't it? Well, writing in Egypt was really hard to learn. So hard that barely anyone in Egypt knew how to do it. But if you were a boy, from a really rich family, you might be lucky enough to go to a scribe school to learn how to write. Scribe schools were some the first schools to meet in an actual building. Kids who went to these special writing

schools would spend hours each day copying symbols into clay tablets or paper made from leaves, but the Egyptians weren't the only ones to invent school. In ancient China, boys whose parents were relatives or friends of the Emperor went to special city schools to learn math, poetry, and even how to respect their grandparents. Oh, and they spend part of each day learning how to use bow and arrows. Over time, schools began popping up everywhere. Like in ancient Greece where boys start at school at age seven and learn things like math, reading, writing, and even wrestling. And school was hardly ever free. So a lot of kids couldn't afford to go. Now, schools have changed a lot since back then, and that's a good thing because, well, did you notice anything unfair about these ancient schools? Yeah. Only boys. Only rich people. Shouldn't everyone be allowed to go to school? Over time, a lot of people began to think so, including Catherine Beacher. She thought that girls should be allowed to go to school and that they should be teachers too. So she started special schools where girls could learn to teach. And she wasn't the only one. This is Horace Man. He thought that every kid should be able to go to school no matter how rich or poor you were, and he helped make laws to make this possible. But even though people like Horace Man and Catherine Beecher tried hard to make things more fair. They weren't totally successful. For example, for a long time, there were a lot of places in America where black students were not allowed to go to the same school that white students went to. It wasn't until a brave six-year-old named Ruby walked up the steps of William France Elementary School. That began to change. When the laws in America changed, Ruby was the first black girl to go to an all-white school in the south, even though a lot of people didn't want that to happen. People like these help make our schools a lot better. But they didn't actually invent the idea all by themselves. A lot of people invented schools, like the earliest humans who taught groups of kids how to five, and the ancient Egyptians and Chinese who built some of the first school buildings, and even kids like Ruby Bridges who helped make school

more fair for everyone. We still have a lot of work to do to make school. The best it can be, but the good thing is the idea of school is still growing and being invented every day, which makes me think. If it was up to you, how would you make school better? That's all for this week's question. Thanks, Marco, for asking it!