This is a real “slice” of education in America today. We present it, not because it represents what we believe should constitute a desirable environment for learning; rather, we invite you to read it and ask yourself how many such schools exist, how many boys and girls in our country are today “learning” in a similar environment. We believe many of our readers could match it with like situations. As long as such environments for learning exist, the task of providing better schools is far from finished. To give reality to the concepts of desirable settings for learning expressed in the following articles is an even greater challenge in the light of the situation described.

**Time:**
Eight thirty to eleven o’clock on a sunny morning in May

**Place:**
The upper grade room of a two-room rural school

The chill of a late frost pervades the room. I keep my coat on. The large stove at the front of the room is cold. The room is too dark for the children to read comfortably. It is clean and orderly but bare of books except for the usual textbooks and encyclopedias provided by the school, and the sixty-five recreatory books which the teacher has selected and brought from his teachers college library.

Lunchboxes line the shelves of the cloakroom. The outside toilets are reached by crossing a front yard barren of grass and flowers and rough with stones and exposed roots. Washing facilities consist of a pail and a basin on the cloakroom shelf. Water is carried from the well of a neighboring farm.

**Characters:**
Nineteen girls and boys are playing in the rough, bare yard. In bad weather they play in their room. Below the building is a “coal hole.” There is no playroom. The teacher is preparing for his morning’s work. He is an earnest man of twenty-six. He is active in organizations designed for the youth of his community. He came to this school six weeks ago. Last semester he had work in constructing the curriculum for elementary children. As time for school to begin approaches he tells me I will not approve of his program. He would like to follow the philosophy he learned at the teachers college, but he is required to follow his textbooks.

**The Morning Program:**
The children sing “The Marine Hymn,” “Don’t Fence Me In,” and the round, “Are You Sleeping?” The songs are chosen by the children.

**The Fourth Grade Reading Class**
The children spend twenty minutes discussing the difference between the
chimpanzee and the monkey. Their discussion is based on a story in a required set of readers. Lacking a clear understanding of these differences, I cannot evaluate the statements made during the discussion. The children do no oral reading to support their statements. The relationship between the teacher and the pupils seems to be wholesome and friendly. He does not press them any farther into the realm of the ridiculous than the nature of the required reading makes necessary.

The Fifth Grade Reading Class

The children spend twenty minutes discussing, "Chicago, a Great City." Their conversation is based on a story found in another series of required readers. The pictures of skyscrapers and of far-away Lake Michigan seem to be hazy. I interrupt and the children gather around me while we look at a map and examine some pictures not in the reader, but in a geography whose use is supposed to be reserved for a different period known as the social studies class. I have fun as I see expressions of understanding and appreciation creep into the children's faces.

The Fourth and Fifth Grade Social Studies Class

The children are studying the industries of the South. The topic for the day is rice. The children have tried to prepare reports. Paul reads from his paper the language of the encyclopedia he has used. Evelyn reads from her paper an account she copied from a geography. The children talk about the amount of carbohydrates and water in rice. The purpose seems to be to emphasize the fact that there is very little waste in a pound of rice.

The Sixth and Seventh Grade Social Studies Class

The girls and boys are studying the Constitution. They have been assigned the task of memorizing the preamble. I am told they will be tested on their ability to recite the lines. Several meet this requirement with docility and, I feel, ignorance of the meaning of the words. The question set to guide the thinking as they study is: "What provisions do you find in the Constitution to take care of the Four Freedoms?"

Escape:

Weary of hearing honest children mouth words which mean nothing to them, I look about the room for something which may have sprung from the hearts of these serious-faced, courteous, appreciative, docile children. Hanging below the blackboard in a dark corner is a chart on which childish hands have written or printed fifty signs of spring. Because the sentences suggest possibilities for building a rich and vital curriculum for this school, I copy several of the "signs."

Farmers are plowing and planting
Lambs are born in April
Taking off our heavy clothes
We are leaving our cattle out
We are cutting our hair
The cattle and animals are shedding
We are having fresh cows
School will soon be out
More people are going home for lunch
Getting little chickens
We aren't wearing our shoes
And these barefoot children who cut their hair in the spring are required to read about chimpanzees and monkeys and about skyscrapers and elevated trains!

Can it be that some teachers have left the teaching profession because they could not remain in it and retain their self-respect?

Is it possible that those who set course of study requirements should bear some of the responsibility for the present crisis in education?

Modern Settings for Learning

LAURA ZIRBES

In this comprehensive treatment of the kind of learning environment necessary for today's children, Laura Zirbes, professor of education at Ohio State University, Columbus, touches upon many aspects—the physical setting in which children live, the resources for group endeavor, desirable motivation to learning. She looks at learnings in several fields—reading, arithmetic, social studies, science, art—in relation to the kind of setting in which they develop most desirably.

SCHOOLS OF TOMORROW will soon be dotting the map all over the land. Many of them will aspire to "the new look," incorporating some of the innumerable advances in design and construction which have been predicted and publicized in recent years.

Developments in scientific illumination and ventilation, heating, insulation, and acoustics will be represented in the planning of new schools and in the improvement of old ones. Advances in structural engineering make it possible to project buildings which utilize new products and facilitate new arrangements, although costs and scarcities still deter the actual process of building.

A Functional Setting for Learning

Functionalism has challenged not only traditionalism in architecture and industrial design. It is just as important to consider educational functions, resources, and activities in planning a modern classroom as it is to conceive the kitchen of a home as part of the design for carrying on the functions of modern family living. The psychology of color is no less important for schoolrooms than it is for factories and business offices. Modern educational equipment and built-in facilities for the use and orderly storage of books, records, materials, and aids are as essential to effective work, order, and organization in schools as they are in military or industrial establishments.

The educational values which characterize a democratic American community school of the middle of this Twentieth Century call for quite another setting than those which were accepted and transplanted here from Central Europe in the Nineteenth Cen-