

Not your typical playground.
Duckwater sits on miles of
open land.



PHOTO: C. J. HUSTON

Tales from a One-Room Schoolhouse

Yes, they're still around! And this 15-student school couldn't be more modern. **By Megan Kaesshaefer**

Close your eyes. Imagine a class of 15 students. (Nice, isn't it?) Now imagine they span a range of kindergarten through eighth grade. (Bear with us...) Now imagine you teach these students in a one-room schoolhouse. In rural Nevada. The closest town is 70 miles away. For most of us, this scenario would be quite the challenge. For Lyn Huston, it's reality. Huston teaches at the Duckwater School in Duckwater, Nevada. Her school is set on a plot of land between alfalfa farms, an Indian reservation, and a 20,500-acre wilderness area. At *Instructor*, we've encountered teachers with some unique challenges, but this one piqued our interest. We reached out to Lyn to hear more of her story.

dentist, and that's pretty much it. Nye County School District is comprised of 6,000 students over 18,000 square miles. The closest school is 140 miles away. I've been at the Duckwater School for 10 years, and my first teaching job was at another one-room school on the reservation, so I'm used to this kind of environment.

» You're in a rural setting. Just how rural are we talking?

Ely, the closest town, consists of two stoplights, one supermarket, a hardware store, a doctor, a

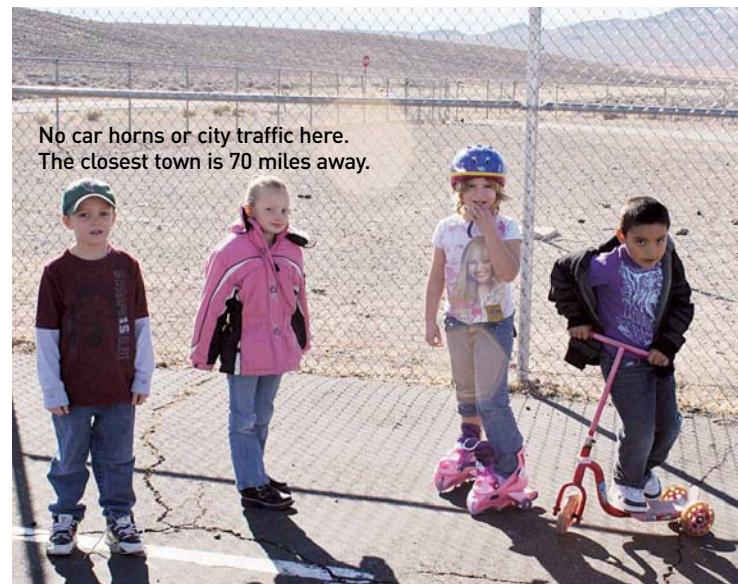
» Many of us would consider teaching in such a rural area to be a challenge.

How do you feel about being so remote?

I think every teacher has a challenge no matter where they are or who they teach. It's just that our challenges are different. My setting can be a challenge in terms of getting information, for example, or taking a field trip. Sometimes I think my students do not have as wide a set of experiences as kids who live in a city might have. But on the other hand, I don't have to worry about the violence or politics that occur in some city schools. I look at teachers who have 40 kids, and I think



Students (K-8) share one classroom, one teacher, and one common learning goal.



No car horns or city traffic here. The closest town is 70 miles away.

One-Room Schoolhouse

they're the ones in the trenches.

»» How does technology help in your environment?

Technology is a huge part of our learning experience. We have a document camera, projectors, and a brand-new SMART Board. We have a few students who take violin lessons through a virtual studio in Iowa called Violinnovation. There isn't a local instructor, so we use Skype for these lessons, and I project them onto a six-by-six-foot screen.

We also make video clips of first and second graders conducting read-alouds. They run a finger under the words while we film. In kindergarten, we make videos to practice writing the letters in the alphabet. My older kids make podcasts all the time. And they're all super readers. We use the Internet for research, online quizzes to prepare for tests, Google Maps, and virtual field trips.

»» What is it like teaching to such a large grade range?

I typically don't teach whole-group lessons, although I have done what I call "peel-off lessons," usually for math. First I teach an introductory lesson and have the older students help the younger ones stay engaged. Then, as the younger students absorb the material, I excuse them to do seatwork. I continue the lesson to include more complex operations for my older students.

Other times, I teach across two or three grade levels. For example, my kindergartners and first graders are

together for science and social studies. My sixth, seventh, and eighth graders are together for all of the subjects, and I rotate them through textbooks on a yearly basis. I have the flexibility to group older students with younger ones if necessary. Since I have a classroom aide, between the two of us, the division of labor and grades helps us address multiple groups per subject.

»» Can you tell me about your teaching aide?

Randi came to our school seven years ago as a custodian when she was 21 years old. She did a fantastic job, and was very helpful with the students, so I begged the district to approve a combined full-time position. She still doubles as our custodian for two hours a day. We don't have a lot of employment opportunities out here.

»» What's it like teaching with only one other adult?

Beyond the school hours, we are very good friends. We live about a mile apart. If I don't have any eggs, I'll send one of my kids over to borrow two of hers.

At school, it's just the two of us. We don't have time to ourselves, but we also don't have to deal with the politics of a big school and colleagues that we don't necessarily get along with. Our attitude is that we're all we have. We do have resources, and the district is wonderful in terms of the technology, and computers, and video conferencing.

»» Have you ever taken a sick day or a personal day?

I don't remember ever taking a sick day. I do have a funny story about sickness in school, though. Once we had a student turn up with the chicken pox. There were only nine kids in school that year, and before the end of the week, they had all caught the chicken pox. The parents kept their kids home the first day, but the next day I called and said, "You know, they all have it. And I've already had 'em. If they feel well enough to come to school, send 'em and we'll all just be scratchy together."

»» How do you manage students with behavioral issues?

In a lot of ways, I feel like a mom or grandma to all of them, so I handle behavioral issues much like I would with my own children. Obviously, we begin with positive reinforcement and make a big deal of how much we like it when someone does the right thing. Rarely, we do time-outs, and the students know that when someone is in a time-out they don't have any interaction with them until they're off time-out. Like any other teacher, I involve parents when it becomes apparent that what I'm doing isn't working. My favorite saying is that you have to find out what a child's currency is...what is the thing they like the most to have or to do? Then you can use that as a tool to manipulate behavior.

»» Your mother, grandmother, and aunts were one-room-schoolhouse teachers. What is it about the nature of your job that has made it a family tradition?

We all grew up in rural farming areas and so we weren't afraid of working long hours to complete a job, and I think we were all raised by great parents who made sure we knew and exhibited the value of a work ethic. I think also that women in my mom's and grandma's generations only had a few career choices, so it was probably natural to have migrated toward it, and one-room schools were typical in the rural areas in which they lived. For myself, I think that it was an adventure.

PHOTO: DANIE CIAMPAGLIA

Advice From Lyn



Here are some of the rules Huston swears by.

■ EXPECT THE BEST

It's not mean or damaging to a child's psyche to require him or her to act appropriately, memorize things, work hard, give his

or her best effort, and be responsible for learning and materials. If I didn't care about my students, I would let them do whatever they wanted. It's because I do care that I require these things of them.

■ BUILD INDEPENDENCE

Life is not always a group project. Sometimes you have to do things by yourself and take accountability for it. There is nothing so rewarding as being able to revel in your individual

sense of accomplishment. And not just for students—this applies to teachers, too!

■ EMBRACE TEXTBOOKS

Textbooks are not evil. The companies that publish them pay smart people a lot of money to write them according to state standards, and they usually put that information in the front of the teacher's manual so you can prove it!

■ BE ECLECTIC Take the parts of something that

work well for you and your students and put it in your toolbox. Get rid of the stuff that clutters up your teaching and wastes kids' time.

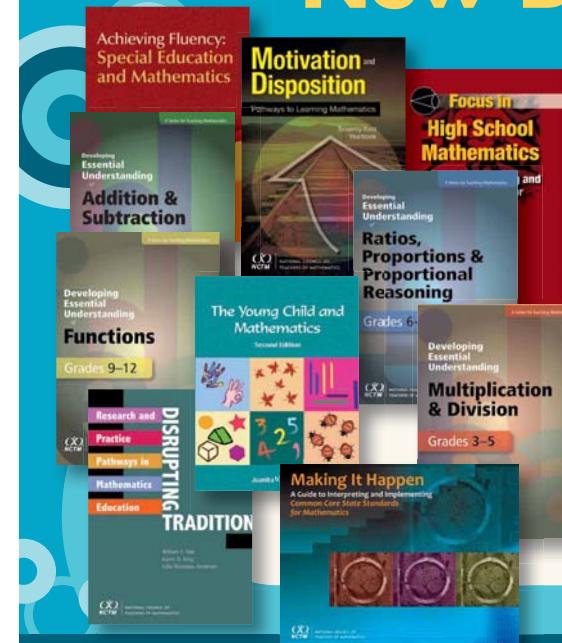
■ BE REAL When you're happy, do a happy dance. When you're disappointed, say so, say why, and say what you want that will change your disappointment. When you're tired or not feeling well, give your students that information so they can empathize and help you out. □

Meet the Class

Want to know more about life in a one-room schoolhouse? Watch Scholastic Kid Reporter Grace McManus interview Lyn and her students in their schoolhouse via Skype at www.scholastic.com/kidpress



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