

# Fort Davis

National Historic Site

National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior



Curriculum Materials Grades 2-5

## Children at Fort Davis



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Teacher Notes: Children at Fort Davis

**Topic:** Children at Fort Davis

### Objectives and Standards:

Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5
<b>Social Studies</b> 113.4 - 3,6,17,18,19	<b>Social Studies</b> 113.5 - 2,16,17,18	<b>Social Studies</b> 113.6 - 22,23,24	<b>Social Studies</b> 113.7 - 25,26,27
<b>Language Arts</b> 110.4 - 1,6,7,9,10, 12,13,17,18	<b>Language Arts</b> 110.5 - 1,6,7,19, 12,13,17,18	<b>Language Arts</b> 110.6 - 4,5,6,10,11, 12,13,14,15,22,23,25	<b>Language Arts</b> 110.7 - 4,5,6,10,11, 12,13,14,15,22,23,25

### Materials Needed:

- Copies of *Children at Fort Davis* (3 pages) for students
- Copies of student *Children at Fort Davis Worksheet* (3 pages, including Reprint of July 4, 1890 Grand Fourth of July Celebration at Ft. Davis, Tex)
- Copies of student worksheets *Photographs Tell Stories* (3 pages)
- Copies of *Childhood Stories* (6) for students
- Copies of student worksheet for *Childhood Stories*
- Optional: Some of the games mentioned that children played then and now
- Optional: Have students bring to class some family photographs
- Optional: Books *Child of the Fighting Tenth* by Forrestine Cooper Hooker, ed. Steve Wilson  
*Daughter of the Regiment: Memoirs of a Childhood in the Frontier Army, 1878-1898* by Mary Leefe Laurence  
*The American Girls Handy Book* by Lina and Adelia Beard  
*The American Boys Handy Book* by Daniel Carter Beard  
*Games from Long Ago* and by Bobbie Kalman  
*Old Time Toys* by Bobbie Kalman

### Lesson Activities:

Independently, students can read *Children at Fort Davis* and any or all of the six *Childhood Stories*, then participate in teacher-directed discussion. Suggested questions to ask:

1. Do you think the things you have to occupy your free time today really make you happier or healthier than the Fort Davis children. Why or why not?
2. After reading the selection, what things have not changed for children since then?
3. Have you ever been to camp or some place where no one had their electronic games and music? Compare that experience with the way that life was for children at the fort?
4. What are some things children have today that Fort Davis children in the 1800s did not?
5. Is there anything children at the fort had that you do not have?
6. Do you think modern toys and “things” available to children today make childhood better? Explain.

### Activities and Projects:

#### \* Photographs

The photograph of the group of children in front of an officer’s house at Fort Davis on *Photographs Tell Stories*, page 1, was taken when Bertha Barnitz Peele, age 17, and her parents (her father was a

retired army officer) visited Fort Davis in 1888. They came to attend the wedding of Marie Otis, daughter of post commander Colonel Elmer Otis, to Second Lieutenant DeRosey Cabell. In the photo, Bertha is the tall girl standing next to the black servant at the back of the porch; she is wearing a black hat and is facing away from the camera. Most of the children in the photo were probably children of army officers.

An extension of this activity is for students to bring photos and try to answer the same questions about their photos. Family photos would be especially good.

#### **\* Donkey Party**

When Post Surgeon John V. Lauderdale served at Fort Davis, he and his wife Josephine gave a “Donkey Party” in April 1889 at their home for some children of the fort and nearby town. Their daughter Marjorie was 2 ½ years old. Draw a large tail-less donkey on poster paper and have students create their own paper “tails.” Then let students take turns being blindfolded and pinning their “tails” on the donkey.

Follow with a discussion comparing and contrasting children’s games of the past with modern games. Older students may want to research the origin of this game and others.

#### **\* Childhood Stories**

This lesson includes six true stories relating to children who lived at frontier army posts in the 1800s. These stories were written by individuals who were children at army posts on the frontier. Have students read one or more of the childhood stories. Ask what conclusions about children at army forts they can draw, based on these stories? Do they sound like the children themselves are very different from children today?

Have the class work in small groups and have each group choose one story to rewrite and perform as a skit. Remind students that these are true stories of children who lived at a fort and that sometimes children at army forts like Fort Davis did write and put on plays for fun. Have each group read the story and together pick a narrator to explain the parts such as the setting and any necessary descriptions. Remind them that the narrator’s and each character’s lines need to be written out. When writing the lines for characters, students must create the lines themselves imagining what the characters would have said. Each group should practice several times before presenting its skit to the class. If putting on a skit is too time-consuming, have students practice retelling the story with lots of excitement and expression, pretending to be the child in the story.

Another way to use these stories is for students to draw pictures.

Also, a group might divide one story into scenes and then illustrate the various scenes.

Students can also be asked to think about childhood stories in their own families. Do they know any stories about their parents or grandparents when they were children—especially ones that reflect how things might have been different because of the times? As a homework assignment, students can be asked to interview an older relative – a parent, grandparent, aunt or uncle and to write down one story they learned.

Another assignment would be to have students keep a diary for a week. At the end of the week have them write or tell about one event or story from their diary.

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Student Activity: Children at Fort Davis – Historical Reading

## CHILDREN AT FORT DAVIS



Henry Smither and his father, who was a 10<sup>th</sup> Cavalry army officer stationed at Fort Davis in the 1880s

After living in an eastern city, children must have felt like they had escaped into another world when they arrived at a frontier military post. Can you imagine the spirit of adventure they probably felt when packing to come—with the excitement of riding wagons across unknown lands to reach their new homes in the West?

Living at a frontier post like Fort Davis gave children freedom and opportunities for adventure rarely experienced by other children at that

time. They hunted, fished, rode horses, and explored. Boys liked playing soldiers and Indians, and girls enjoyed having tea parties with their dolls. Sometimes a Mexican circus came to Fort Davis to entertain fort residents. On holidays like July 4<sup>th</sup> and New Year's Day, children had fun with fire crackers and outdoor games.

In 1887 at Fort Davis, some soldiers caught a black bear in the mountains and kept it in a cage at the fort for a while for everyone to enjoy. Hitching a donkey or pony to a cart and giving rides to your friends could take up an entire afternoon. It was great fun to have sack races or to race while pushing old barrel hoops with sticks; these tested kids' speed and coordination. Many of the games



Playing with hoops at Fort Davis

children played at Fort Davis over 100 years ago like tag, yoyo, jacks, marbles, hide and seek, kite flying, and jump rope are still played today.

There were many indoor activities as well. Girls played with dolls, learned to sew and make doll clothes, knit and do needlework, cook and bake, and make butter. Other pastimes included reading and playing musical instruments. If the family had a piano, both girls and boys learned to play. When Colonel Benjamin Grierson came to Fort Davis as the post commander in 1882, he purchased a new piano especially for his 15-year-old son Harry.

Many indoor games like chess, checkers, and dominoes were played in the parlor—what we call the living room. One parlor game that boys especially liked was bagatelle. Similar to pinball, it had a spring-loaded plunger to shoot a small ball through a maze of small nails or “pins” to try hitting a bell and scoring. Children enjoyed looking through the family stereoscope, which was a 3-D viewer for looking at photos something like today’s “Viewmaster” with round cards of photos.



1871 Bagatelle game

In 1889, children at Fort Davis had a “Donkey Party” and played what we call “pin the tail on the donkey.” Can you think of any games you play that might be called “parlor” games?

There was not a school for children at Fort Davis until the late 1870s. Before that, children of enlisted men did household chores, helped take care of younger brothers and sisters, and played. Young children of officers learned to read and write at home while older children often went back East to boarding schools or to live with relatives in order to receive an education. Forrestine “Birdie” Cooper, who was a teenager when her father was stationed at Fort Davis from 1882 to 1885, graduated from a girl’s finishing school (a school that taught young ladies manners and academics) in Pennsylvania in 1884.



Jumping rope at Fort Davis

At Fort Davis, children felt safe with soldiers guarding the fort day and night. They never went outside the fort without an escort. Army children learned to observe the rules of the garrison: not to walk on the parade ground, to respect the rights of others, and to not bother the soldiers when they were working. Because of the class system in the army, children of officers were not supposed to play with children of enlisted men, but they sometimes did.

At times, the children of officers got to go with their dads on scouting missions or inspections to other forts. There were also times when officers took their families on picnics or overnight camping trips. One time, Colonel Grierson even took some band members along on an overnight family outing, and that evening the musicians played for the family.

Most army children had pets—and not just dogs, cats, or fish like we have today. They had ponies, donkeys, horses, rabbits, snakes, and chickens. Birdie Cooper once kept some baby mice as pets. When Colonel Benjamin Grierson and his family lived at Fort Davis in the 1880s, they had dogs named Carlo, Fannie, Dick, Don, and Bessie.

Life at Fort Davis was often fun and exciting for children. Do you think you would like to have lived at the fort when the soldiers were there?



Photo from Fort Davis archives

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

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Student Activity: Children at Fort Davis – Worksheet

### Children at Fort Davis Worksheet

DIRECTIONS: After reading *Children at Fort Davis*, choose from the activities below.

1. Choose one of these viewpoints and write one or two paragraphs trying to convince someone else of your opinion. Give specific reasons.
  - a. Kids today have it better than kids at Fort Davis in the 1800s.
  - or*
  - b. Kids at Fort Davis had more fun than kids today.
  
2. Choose one of these viewpoints and write one or two paragraphs.
  - a. Why would you like to have lived at Fort Davis in the 1800s?
  - or*
  - b. Why you would not like to have lived there?



Sack races at Fort Davis

3. Find classmates who like to draw and work as a team. Choose paragraphs from the reading to illustrate and color. Each person can do more than one. Cut the paper you use into squares. You will need either 6 or 8 pictures. Glue illustrations onto a large colored paper background so it looks like a quilt.

4. As a class, play “Pin the Tail on the Donkey” just like some Fort Davis children played. When Post Surgeon John V. Lauderdale served at Fort Davis, he and his wife gave a “Donkey Party” in April 1889 at their home for some children of the fort and nearby town. Their daughter Marjorie was 2 ½ years old. The teacher or a student can draw a large tail-less donkey on poster paper. Students then can create their own paper “tails” and then take turns being blindfolded and pinning their “tails” on the donkey. Follow the game with a discussion comparing and contrasting children’s games of the past with modern games. Older students may want to research the origin of this game and others.



Children at Fort Davis in 1888

5. Look at the reprint of the July 4, 1890 Grand Fourth of July Celebration at Fort Davis (on next page). Find out what kind of games, events, or races the children and adults—including soldiers—played. Try some of them. What were the prizes? Compare and contrast our holiday celebrations today.



REPRINT OF  
JULY 4, 1890 PROGRAM

# GRAND FOURTH OF JULY CELEBRATION!

AT FT. DAVIS, TEX.

\* Lemonade, Coffee and Sandwiches Free. \*

—10 A. M.—

## BASE BALL MATCH,

Old Nine Vs. Twenty-Third Infantry.  
\$9.00 Prize.

LUNCH AT 12 M. AT THE PUMP HOUSE.

—COMMENCING AT 1 P. M.—

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <p>No. 1. Race for Boys, 10 yrs. and under, 60 yds. First Prize \$1, Second Prize 50cts., Third Prize 25cts.</p> <p>2. Race for Boys, 12 yrs. and under, 60 yds. First Prize \$1, Second Prize 50cts., Third Prize 25cts.</p> <p>3. Race for Boys, 15 yrs. and under, First Prize \$1, Second Prize 50cts., Third Prize 25cts.</p> <p>4. Potato race for girls, 12 Potatoes 1 yard apart. First Prize \$1, Second Prize 50cts., Third Prize 25cts.</p> <p>5. 100 yd. Dash, Open to All. First Prize \$2, Second Prize \$1.</p> <p>6. Three Leg Race, 60 yards. Open to All. First Prize \$2, Second Prize \$1.</p> <p>7. Throwing Base Ball. Three yards Run to Scratch. Prize \$1.</p> <p>8. High Jump. June Century for Rules. First Prize \$2.</p> <p>9. Running Broad Jump. June Century for Rules. First Prize \$1.</p> <p>10. Hurdle Race, 300 yards. Nine 2½ foot Hurdles. First Prize \$5 Second Prize \$1.</p> <p>11. Sack Race, 40 yds. Open to All. First Prize \$1, Second 50cts., Third Prize 25cts.</p> | <p>12. Wheel Barrow Race. Open to All. 40 yards. First Prize \$5, Second Prize \$2.</p> <p>13. Burro Slow Race. Open to All. Once Around Parade Ground. First Prize \$5, Second Prize \$2.</p> <p>14. Tug of War. Soldiers against Civilians. Twelve men to a side on bare ground. Prize \$12.</p> <p>15. Putting 12 pound shot. June Century for rules. Prize \$3.</p> <p>16. Putting 14 pound hammer. June Century for rules. Prize \$3.</p> <p>17. Long Foot Race, Once Around Parade Ground, Open to All. First Prize \$10, Second Prize \$2.50, Third Prize \$1.</p> <p>18. Catching Greased Pig. Prize "The Pig."</p> <p>19. Fast Burro Race, Once around the Parade Ground. First Prize \$5, Second Prize \$2.</p> <p>20. Pony Race, 14 hand high and under. 400 yards straight away. Mr. Dan Knight's Fast Horse ruled out. First Prize \$25, Second Prize \$5.</p> |
|---|---|

JUDGES WITH FULL POWER OF HORSE AND BURRO RACES—LIEUT. C. R. EDWARDS and Mr. H. M. PATTERSON.

JUDGES OF ALL FOOT RACES—LIEUT. J. L. T. PARTELLO and Mr. S. A. THOMPSON.

JUDGES OF PUTTING SHOT, HAMMER, THROWING BASE BALL AND ALL JUMPING—LIEUT. W. H. C. BOWEN and Mr. G. W. GLEIM.

JUDGE OF TUG OF WAR—COL. COCHRAN.

By Order of Committee.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

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Student Activity: Children at Fort Davis –  
Photographs Tell Stories Worksheets

## Photographs Tell Stories

We use photographs to document times and lives in history. Think about how your family has used photographs in your life. Do you keep photos in a special place? Do you send them to relatives? Do they “document” your growth?

### DIRECTIONS:

Look at this photograph of children taken at Fort Davis in 1888. Answer the questions on a separate sheet of paper.



1. What do you think a historian might use this photograph for, or learn from it?
2. Who do you think was taking the photo?
3. Look at the clothes of these children. Compare and contrast them to children's clothes today.
4. Predict what you think will happen one minute and then one hour after the photo was taken.
5. Make up a conversation that two of the children might be having. Write it with correct punctuation.
6. Write a caption for the photograph.
7. Make three columns on your paper. Put Noun, Verbs, Adjectives at the top. Looking at the photo, write all the words you think of that fit under those headings.

## Photographs Tell Stories

This is a photograph of Thomas Hall Forsyth, his wife Mary Elizabeth, their children, and a niece. Tom was Commissary Sergeant at Fort Davis from 1885 to 1891. The Forsyth family was so big that some people at Fort Davis referred to them as “the Tribe.”

What do you notice in the photograph about clothes from that time period? Look closely at the child on the floor in front of his father. That child is Tom’s son named George. In those days, little boys sometimes wore dresses. Using this photo, answer the same questions from the previous page.



Some of the faces seem to be looking at the photographer and some do not.

What do you suppose each person is thinking? How do you think each feels about having the photograph made?

Why do you think they are not smiling?

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Student Activity: Children at Fort Davis –Childhood Stories

### The Intruder— Childhood Story #1 By Forrestine Cooper Hooker

We (father and I) were always playing pranks on one another, and always swapping jokes. One pleasant December day, my mother and I decided to take a short walk while my father was superintending the men at the stables. A fine box of candies had arrived for me at camp, but as I already had a partially eaten box, I refused to start eating the new one, though my father eyed it hungrily. I had hidden the new box in my “dresser” under a shelf for towels and covered with curtains.

The walk was extended, but when we returned, my father was not in the [parlor], and we supposed he was down at the troop. I went into my little room to put away wrap and hood, when I saw Midget, our tiny black dog, half under the flounce of curtain [dust ruffle] that hid the supports of my crude bed. Midget’s tail protruded and that tail was wagging hysterically.

I stooped, lifted the flounce, and understood the situation at once, calling to my mother, “There’s a man hiding under my bed!” She cried out in alarm, but I grabbed a broom and began poling viciously, as I said, “Get out of there, you scoundrel. Get out at once.” My mother hovered in the door opening, while I poked at the man.



Photo credit: Fort Concho NHL and Child of the Fighting Tenth by Forrestine Cooper Hooker, ed. Steve Wilson

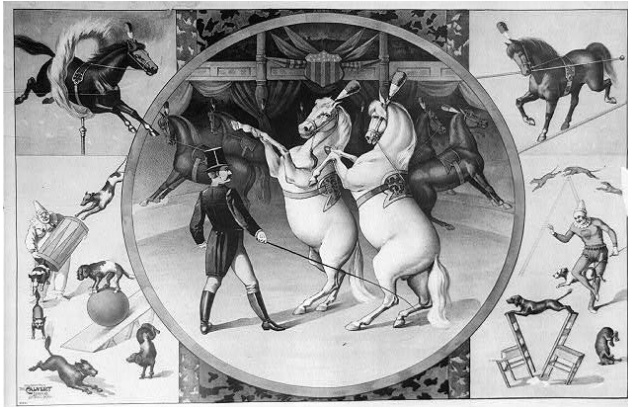
“Hold on, Buck,” my father pleaded. “I’ll come out. I only took one little piece from the box.”

Midget came out, too, licking his chops, as my father meekly handed me my new box of candy and was sentenced to eat the candy in the old box while Mama and I would eat every piece in the new box. And that sentence was fully carried out.

Source: *Child of the Fighting Tenth* by Forrestine Cooper Hooker, ed. Steve Wilson (Oxford Univ. Press, 2003) pp. 202-203

The Cooper family lived at army forts like Fort Davis and Fort Concho. The dad, Charles, was an officer. Forrestine “Birdie” Cooper, who wrote many stories like this one about her life as an army child on the frontier, is shown at bottom left of the photo. Her younger brother and sister were Harry and Florence. “Birdie” got her nickname when, as a young girl, she spread molasses on herself and decorated herself with chicken feathers!

## The Circus Comes to the Fort— Childhood Story #2 By Mary Leefe Laurence



19th Century Circus Photos from Library of Congress

By way of amusement, there came to the fort a circus which was allowed to pitch its tents outside the enlisted men's barracks, and from there, on one of the upper balconies, the officers and their families had a place from which to view the goings-on. It gave us a grand view of the performance.

This was preceded by a parade led by the local band of mainly Mexicans. They marched the whole way out, about a mile I think, and then into the fort, playing the national anthem of Mexico. No one who has not heard a Mexican band play this can appreciate its full beauty....

[The circus] had an immediate reflection in the establishment of a circus of our own, with all the attributes except lions, tigers, and elephants. We performed all sorts of stunts on a trapeze with bad falls and risky bareback riding of horses, of which there were plenty available. This culminated in all sorts of fights, in which I never hesitated to "sic" my brothers on and join in to help out when the other boys were too many for them.



19th Century Circus Photos from Library of Congress

*Daughter of the Regiment* p.74



19th Century Circus Photos from Library of Congress

Mary Leefe, the author of many stories like this one, was a child at many frontier army forts when her father was an officer. She was born in Louisiana in 1872 and was one of four children. The Texas forts her family lived at were Fort Ringgold, Fort Duncan, and Fort Clark, but they also lived at forts in Kansas, Colorado, Alabama, Oklahoma, New York, and Michigan.

**A Photographer Starts a Fire—  
Childhood Story #3  
By Mary Leefe Laurence**

The day the traveling photographer came to the fort was a red-letter day. Word went like wildfire through the post. Soon there were enough men, women, and children to keep him busy for days. When he came we dressed in our best and ready. He set up his tent at a point assigned to him and his waiting subjects formed in a line. I do not remember if our elders in the Leefe family were all photographed but we children were, with Grandma.

Pickney's lap acting as the throne and her hands as instruments for assuring perfect stillness. Kate made a beautiful picture with her curls and fawnlike eyes. I, in my rabbit skin coat, and not much bigger than a rabbit, was photographed successfully along with the younger of my two brothers.

When it came to Dick's turn he simply would not behave. He kicked and yelled and bawled to be let down. Finally the photographer, to hold his attention, lit a bunch of newspapers and held these in one hand while he took off the camera cap with the other. The stratagem worked until the flame burned his hand and he dropped the blazing paper to the ground. It promptly set fire to the dry grass inside the tent and a wild scramble to get out ensued. The blaze was extinguished before much damage was done and the picture, a tintype, when developed turned out perfectly.

*Daughter of the Regiment* pp. 30-31

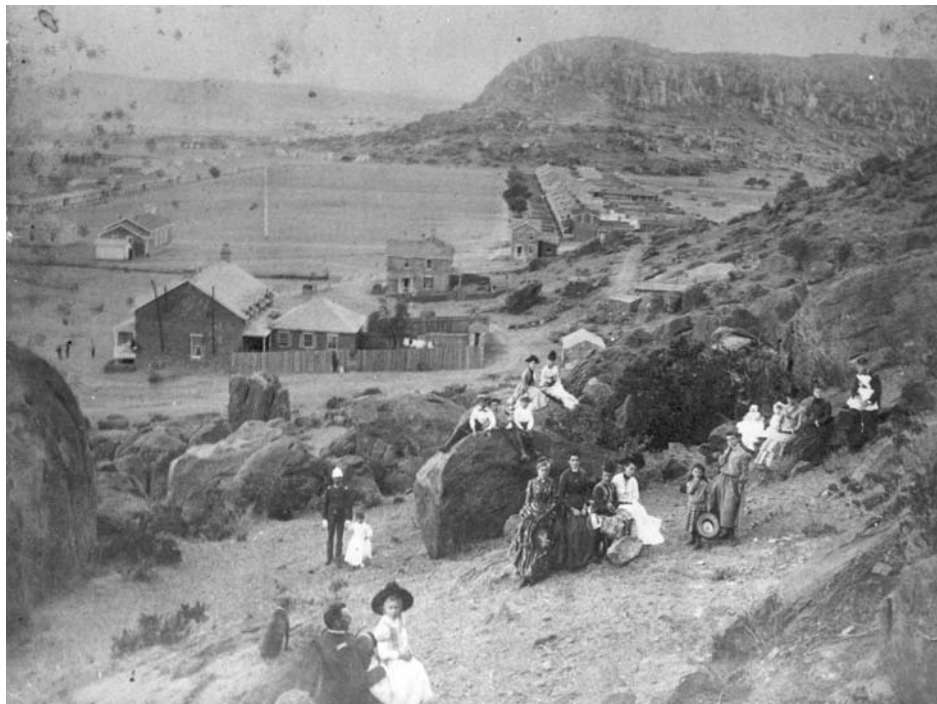


Photo courtesy of Fort Davis National Historic Site

**Birdie's Pet Mice—  
Childhood Story #4  
By Forrestine Cooper Hooker**

Birdie Cooper adopted some baby mice at the post once, but her mother was afraid of mice and would allow them to remain at the quarters only if they were kept outside. Fearing the mice would get cold, Birdie put them in the fingers of her mother's glove one night, intending to remove them the next morning.

Birdie overslept, however, and was awakened by Mrs. Cooper's voice as that lady tried to slip on her gloves for a morning horseback ride: "What on earth is the matter with this glove?"

With a wild yell, "Oh you're killing my mice," Birdie started toward her.

Mrs. Cooper began to scream and tried to pull the glove from her hand. She fled from the room, but the mice did not pursue her. Birdie turned the fingers and five little dead mice fell into her lap.

It almost broke her heart, but her father suggested that they have a military funeral and bury them in the back yard to console her. They carried out the ceremony with every detail possible, though her father did not fire his pistol three times over the grave, as she recommended.



*Photo credit: Fort Concho NHL and Child of the Fighting Tenth by Forrestine Cooper Hooker, ed. Steve Wilson. Forrestine Cooper's nickname was "Birdie." As a child, she lived at various army forts with her family. Her father was an army officer.*

Source: *Child of the Fighting Tenth* by Forrestine Cooper Hooker, ed. Steve Wilson (Oxford Univ. Press, 2003) pp. 115-117.



**Wearing a Hoop Skirt—  
Childhood Story #5  
By Forrestine Cooper Hooker**

On the morning of the wedding I was dressed and instructed how to manage the hoop skirt when I sat down. But I paid little attention.

When I sat down in the front room where the ceremony was being conducted by Chaplain Badger, that hoop skirt flapped up into my face. Every time I tried to pull it down, it bulged at the sides. I had only two hands; the hoop skirt required three.

I whispered to my mother, “What shall I do with it?” She motioned me to keep quiet. Every head except my own was bent and all eyes were closed. I slipped quietly away.

Upstairs I found a pair of scissors and, taking off the skirt, I snipped every tape so that it could not be put on me again that day. Realizing that new tapes could be sewed onto the wires, I decided to destroy these also.

I tossed them out the side window as I dared not carry them downstairs where the wedding party could see me. A few minutes later I was out in the back yard and busy with a hatchet at the woodpile. I wrecked the hoop so badly that there was no possibility of future use.

Then, like a punctured toy balloon, I went back to enjoy the wedding. Never again did I wear a hoop skirt.



Photo shows Forrestine “Birdie” Cooper wearing her hoop skirt. Credit: Photo used with permission of author, *Child of the Fighting Tenth* by Forrestine Cooper Hooker, Ed. Steve Wilson (Oxford Univ. Press, 2003)

**The Christmas Doll with Three Eyebrows—  
Childhood Story #6  
By Forrestine Cooper Hooker**

Christmas of 1873 approached. So many officers were away on scouting duty that preparations for trees in various houses were abandoned. It was then that General Merritt and his wife, who had no children of their own, decided to have a Christmas tree in their home for all the children of the garrison....

A week before the Christmas entertainment, I came in from a ride at an unexpected moment. Mrs. Gasman was in our front room with my mother. In the younger woman's lap was an enormous doll with china head, legs, and arms. Mrs. Gasman was making a dress of white swiss with ruffles edged in narrow pink ribbon.

I rushed to her side, demanding: "Are you dressing that doll for me?" "No," she replied. It is for Bessie Constable."

I glared at the doll, trying to see some defect in it, and when Mrs. Gasman continued, "Don't you think it is a beautiful doll?"

I retorted scornfully, "No. It has three eyebrows."

"But that black mark is its eyebrow, like yours, and the pink line is where it opens its eyes. The other black line is for the eyelashes," she explained.

"I don't like dolls with three eyebrows, but maybe Bessie Constable won't mind it," I said.

I left the room hating Bessie Constable. I did not see the doll again until Christmas Eve when I discovered it hanging in a conspicuous place on the big tree in the Merritt's front room. I looked at it and glared at Bessie Constable, who had no idea how I disliked her.

Finally the doll was lifted down by General Merritt, who was dressed as Santa Claus, and he slowly read, "For Birdie Cooper." My surprise caused a big laugh, for everyone knew about the three eyebrows.



Children at Fort Davis, 1880s Credit: National Park Service, Fort Davis NHS

Too happy even to speak, I held the doll in my arms. Then Mrs. Gasman spoke: “Do you like it?”

I replied that it was a wonderful doll, the prettiest doll in the whole world.

“But it has three eyebrows,” she went on without a smile.

“I don’t care how many eyebrows it has. Dolls ought to have three eyebrows!”

Other gifts were handed to me, among them a beautiful silk scarf that Mrs. Merritt had brought from Paris and which later was worn as my best sash, but none pleased me so much as the china doll.”

Source: *Child of the Fighting Tenth* by Forrestine Cooper Hooker, ed. Steve Wilson (Oxford Univ. Press, 2003) pp. 110-112

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Curriculum Materials Grades 2-5

Student Activity: Children at Fort Davis –Childhood Stories  
Worksheets and Activities

### Childhood Stories

**DIRECTIONS:** Read one or more of the childhood stories and choose from the questions and activities below.

1. What conclusions about children at army forts can you make based on these stories? Do the children themselves seem very different from you?
2. Get together with other students, choose one of these stories, rewrite it as a play, and act out for an audience of your classmates. There will need to be a narrator to introduce it and explain parts that might not be spoken. Be creative. Have fun. Show lots of emotion. You could even be melodramatic!
3. Work in small groups to rewrite one story as a skit. Remember, these are true stories of children who lived at a fort. Sometimes children at army forts like Fort Davis did write and perform plays for fun. Read the story and together decide on narrator to explain the parts such as the setting, and any necessary descriptions. The narrator's lines need to be written out, as do each character's lines. When writing the lines for characters, you have to create the lines themselves in most cases, imagining what characters would have said. Each group should practice several times before presenting to the class.



Harry Grierson was the child of an army officer at Fort Davis.  
Credit NPS, Fort Davis NHS

4. If putting on a skit is too lengthy, have students practice retelling the story with lots of excitement and expression, pretending to be the child in the story.
5. Choose one of the stories and illustrate it with drawings. The teacher may allow you to work in groups, with different student illustrating various scenes.
6. Choose one of the stories and illustrate it like a comic strip with frames and bubble dialogue.
7. Think about your own childhood stories in your family. Do you know any stories about your parents or grandparents when they were children, especially ones that reflect how things might have been different. Go home talk with other family members about family stories that have been passed down through generations.
8. Keep a diary for a week. Choose ONE event from your week and turn it into a story.