

Please note that these speakers represent *some* of the types of schools found in the UK and the US. There are, of course, all kinds of schools: public and private mixed (coed), public and private single-sex; private schools with and without uniforms, strict schools and not so strict schools, private parochial (connected to a church) schools and private schools without any affiliations; altogether, an enormous variety, compared to many other countries. It is interesting to note that some public US schools have reintroduced uniforms, because of gang-based fights over clothing; when everyone wears the same clothes, there are fewer fights. It also puts less pressure on students from low-income families to wear the latest (expensive) fashions.

Have students discuss whether they think the speakers think that school is/was the best time of their life and what they themselves think. Why do adults sometimes refer to school days as the best time of their lives? Perhaps because those were carefree times when one didn't have to worry about making money and supporting a family? Or, because all roads were still open, everything was still possible. Today, students perhaps don't feel that way, as there is already pressure to perform well in school, as it will decide much of what happens in their future.

4. Your school

Students decide on the structure of a new school, making decisions on school uniforms, single-sex or mixed, boarding or day school, streamed or mixed ability, compulsory subjects, fees. Some schools in the US and the UK separate students according to ability; this is called streaming. Groups can present their ideal school and the whole class can decide on which school is the winner.

5. Ivy League or Oxbridge?

Students learn more about why Harvard and Yale, Cambridge and Oxford are considered exclusive. Myth or reality?

a) Words: have students guess the meanings or explain them yourself. When the students know the meanings, have them predict (from these words) what the text may be about.

elite	the best of the best
competitive	having to be more successful or better than others
entrance exam	test taken in order to get into a school, for example
essay	a piece of (personal) writing on a specific subject
to educate	to teach or train someone, usually at a school or college
research:	in-depth study of a subject to find out new things
grant:	money received to go to school (or to do research)
resources:	money, skills and facilities

(b and c) Have students guess the answers before they read. After finishing the reading, they can verify their guess and make corrections if necessary.

b) In order to get in to these elite schools, students have to have good grades, pass the entrance exam (or receive a high score on a standardised test in the US); in the US, they also have to be 'good citizens', meaning that they participate in lots of extracurricular activities, including student government and other activities for the common good of the school. They also have to write a personal, original essay.

c) What makes these schools unique? Some of the best students attend them, because the entrance requirements are difficult to pass. The educational standard is high, because the schools have a long tradition of teaching and hire only the best professors and lecturers. Because of the high standards in admission as well as education, the atmosphere can be stimulating and exciting here, making it an ideal learning environment. Of course, one might also meet important and interesting people who can help in one's further life. Finally, money is not always a factor, as students in the UK can receive grants to attend university. In both countries, schools are making a large effort to admit students from all social and racial communities, so large scholarships, grants and financial aid are given to deserving students, who otherwise could not afford to attend expensive schools.

6. Graduation and now what?

Students discuss options after graduation: college/university; military/volunteer service; gap year; trade schools; apprenticeships; work.

Make sure they are familiar with the vocabulary in the quotations:

- gap year: popular in the UK; time off between school and further studies; usually spent traveling at the military's expense:
- when signing up for a longer term with the armed forces, it is possible for qualified soldiers to have the armed forces pay for their further education.
- a carpenter's apprentice: a carpenter is someone who works with wood professionally and an apprentice is someone who is learning the craft from a master.



Lesson 2: Learning for Life: School in the USA and England



1. Warm-up: What do you know about English and American schools?

Can you explain these words?

public school:

university:

private school:

school you have to pay for

grade:

high school:

report card:

elementary school:

graduation:

A levels:

coed(ucational):

diploma:

extracurricular activities:

college:

2. Charts of the English and American educational systems.

Look at the school systems of the USA and England. Compare them with your own school. How are they different? Or are they similar? If so, what are the similarities?



Alicia, 15

"I am at a Catholic school for girls and it's all right most of the time. We don't have to wear uniforms although we have to stick to a blue skirt and a white top. Even though I miss having boys in the class at times, I appreciate that in an all-girl class you don't have to worry as much about getting laughed at. Before I came here, I was at a mixed primary school. I was really shy and hardly dared open my mouth in class. Now, I find that competing with just girls is easier than when there are boys just waiting to make fun of you when you say something stupid. We meet boys after school, of course. For example, we have a debating society and we meet teams from mixed schools all the time. We also have lots of different sports and we participate in both single-sex and mixed sports events. And for our dances, we always invite boys from other schools. It'd be pretty boring otherwise, wouldn't it?"

William, 20

"I went to a really 'good' private school – but I am still not sure whether these were the best years of my life! Sports facilities were fantastic, educational resources were top-notch, teaching staff highly qualified – we had everything we could wish for: cricket pitches, a rowing club, libraries, state-of-the-art computers. Socially, though, it wasn't that great. I am not sure it was such a good preparation for life, growing up with boys only. I did make some useful social contacts, of course; the old boys' network is still alive and well. Still, I think I learned more about people in my first weeks at university than in all those years of public school, wearing a jacket and tie. Will I send my own children to private school? Yes, for the academic quality, if I can afford it. But it's going to be a mixed school!"

Alfredo, 17

"I'm going to an inner-city school in Miami. It's pretty mixed, you know, Hispanics, Blacks, Haitians, Anglos, and sometimes things get pretty rough. There are gangs trying to control the kids, but I don't want to be part of that. Sometimes there will be fights over something stupid like wearing the 'right' clothes. Makes me wish we had uniforms but we don't. I have a job after school and have to help support my family, so I just told the gang members that and they've left me alone so far. I am in a work-study program, so I go to school half-days and then I am learning to become an electrician. I like learning by doing; just learning from books doesn't do it for me. Some people think I am missing part of school life by working, but I can still go to the football games at night and to the dances on weekends. The only things I can't do is participate in clubs or play any sports, but those opportunities aren't that great at our school anyway, so I am happy with my choices."

4. Your school

Whether you think school is a necessary evil or a great place to be, school as an institution seems to be here to stay for now. But what if you had more of a say in designing your school? Form groups and discuss what your ideal school school look like. Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of these points:

- school uniforms
- fee-paying or state funded?
- single-sex or coed?
- boarding or day school?
- mainstreamed or tracked?
- compulsory subjects? If so, which ones?

5. Ivy League or Oxbridge?

You may have heard of famous Harvard and Yale Universities in the US and Cambridge and Oxford in the UK. Why are they considered exclusive? Are they really better than other universities? Read and learn about these schools.

a) Make sure you understand these words before you read.

• elite _____
• competitive _____
• entrance exam _____
• essay _____

• to educate _____
• research _____
• grant _____
• resources _____

b) What do students have to do to get into schools like the Ivies and Oxbridge?

c) What are some of the factors that make these schools unique?

More than in other countries, the USA and Britain are known for their elite universities. In Britain, it's Oxford and Cambridge (sometimes called 'Oxbridge' and these universities are actually made up of many different colleges) and in the USA, it's the Ivy League (Harvard, Yale, Princeton, Cornell, Columbia, Penn(sylvania), Dartmouth and Brown). What makes these universities special? The first reason is that it is very difficult to get in to one of these schools; they have competitive admissions. That means that you have to have good grades and pass an entrance exam (or get high scores on a standard test in the USA). In the USA, you also have to be a 'good citizen', and write an interesting personal essay. Only about ten percent of all students applying to these schools are accepted. Secondly, these schools are older than many others, which in this case means that they have a long tradition of educating students. They also have a tradition of hiring the best professors and lecturers. For example, many Nobel Prize winners teach at these universities and the schools have more money for research than others. You might also think that these schools are more expensive than others. In Britain, students can get grants to help pay for the cost of education, so it costs almost the same to go to Cambridge or Oxford as to go to any other university. In the USA, the Ivies are expensive, but there are other schools that are just as expensive. Today, universities in both countries want to attract students from all social classes and races, so financial help is available to good students who otherwise could not afford to attend elite schools. Today, these schools are less exclusive than in the past. In addition, there are many other good universities now. A stimulating and interesting time at university might be more important than the name of the school you attend. However, one could argue that there are more interesting and intelligent people at these schools than at others, because it is so difficult to get in and because of their long traditions of good teaching and research.

6. Graduation and now what?

We posed the question to a group of recent graduates. Before looking at their answers, try to answer the question for yourself: what are your plans after graduation? Compare your answer to your classmates' and the ones below.

James, 18: *'I need to take some time off from studying, so a gap year is definitely the option for me. As soon as I've made enough money for the ticket, I'm off to Australia!'*

Lisa, 17: *'We're six brothers and sisters, so my parents can't afford to send me to an expensive school. I'm going to join the army and then go to college at the military's expense.'*

Jonathan, 18: *'I've passed the exam and been accepted, so I'm off to university. Can't wait to study something I'm actually interested in.'*

Cathryn, 18: *'I'm going to be a carpenter's apprentice. I've always loved wood-working and this is a great opportunity for me to make it my job, too.'*

Neil, 18: *'I feel like I've been in school forever, so I'm going to work for a while. Not sure what comes after that—but I'll probably end up going back to school at some point.'*

Teacher's Notes

1. Warm-up: What do you know about British and American schools?

This lesson is recommended for students at the higher intermediate level (EF Level 5; Council of Europe B2).

Have students try to define words like *public school*, *private school*, *high school*, *elementary school*, *A levels*, *diploma*, *college*, *university* with what they already know.

Public school: school funded by tax money (in the USA). In the UK, a public school is a *private* school (yes, this is confusing).

Private school: funded by parents paying for the instruction (called *tuition* in the UK). In the US, tuition is the *fee* paid for instruction.

Elementary school: first years of school (see charts)

High school: last years of school in the USA; secondary schools are sometimes called 'high school' in the UK.

A(dvanced) levels: exams taken at the end of *college* or school 6th form in England and Wales.

Prep(aratory) school: private school from the age of 6-13 in the UK and the last years of high school in the US.

Diploma: awarded at the end of high school in the US

College: general term referring to an institution of higher learning in the UK. There are vocational colleges, e.g., for hair-dressing or secretarial skills or to teach academic A levels. Can also refer to universities or parts of universities, e.g., King's College, Cambridge. In the US, the words college and university are almost synonymous now.*

University: higher education, leading to a Bachelor's, Master's or Doctor's degree.

Grade: evaluation for course. In the US, most schools use an A, B, C, D, F system, with A being the best grade and F (fail) being the worst grade)

Report card: summary of student's grades/performance; in the US, the grades are typically A, B, C, D, F (A being the best) and in the UK, the performance is also described in words rather than just in letter or number grades.

Graduation: the end of high school, as well as college in the US; only from university in the UK.

Coed(ucational): mixed school for boys *and* girls (as opposed to single-sex schools)

Extracurricular activities: activities after school, such as sports, clubs (language clubs, drama club, debate club, service clubs), yearbook team. In the US, a great deal of importance is given to making the student a well-rounded citizen, by participating in such activities.

*Originally, a college in the US referred to a 4-year institution granting a Bachelor's degree upon graduation. A university most commonly awarded 'advanced' degrees, such as Master's and Doctor's degrees, in addition to Bachelor's degrees (after the first four years). In recent years, the distinction has become more blurred, with some colleges expanding their programs and offering advanced degrees. However, some of those schools have retained their names, because that's how they have become known. So, you may come across a 'college' that is really a university in that it awards advanced degrees in addition to being a 4-year college.

2. Charts of the UK and US educational systems

You can ask students to compare the two systems with each other and then with their own systems, or just with their own. Divide the class in half and have one group compare the US with their own system and the other group compare their own school with the UK. Have the groups report on their findings.

Focus questions:

1. At what age does school start?
2. What is the earlier age at which students can leave school?
3. What is college in the UK? What is college in the US?

3. Text(s) about school – best years of your life?

Students read different excerpts from students in different school systems (private, Catholic, inner city public). Students read, fill in the charts and discuss.

School type	Single sex?	Uniforms?	Strict discipline?	Attitude of speaker
Private	Yes	yes	yes	critical but positive
Catholic	yes	yes	yes	positive
Public	yes	yes	yes	positive

School type	Extracurricular activities
Private	sports, clubs
Catholic	debating society, sports, dances
Public	sports, clubs, dances