I. Lesson Summary

Summary
“Strawberry” Schools were known in the years 1928 – 1954. Since many families could not afford to hire extra people to harvest the strawberries, children would help. Instead of having a summer vacation, children went to school during the summer and took the winter months off to help their parents with the harvest. The plants would start bearing fruit towards the end of December and continue through the end of March. Some of the actual “Strawberry Schools” that have located are: Cork Elementary, Plant City, FL; Trapnell Elementary, Plant City, FL; Springhead Elementary, Plant City, FL; Medulla Elementary, Lakeland, FL; and Winston Elementary, Lakeland, FL

Objectives
Students will:
1.) work in groups of 2-3 to research information on the history of strawberry schools;
2.) find where each individual strawberry school was located and place the appropriate symbol on the Florida map;
3.) create a strawberry school calendar in which the months of harvest are correctly marked;
4.) create a journal written from the viewpoint of a strawberry girl or boy in which four entries are made;
5.) read the novel “Strawberry Girl” by Lois Lenski as a part of the reading curriculum and to reinforce the lesson;
6.) pick strawberries on an actual strawberry farm field trip during the month of April.

US History Event or Era
This unit covers Florida History, specifically Polk and Hillsborough Counties, from the years 1928-1954, and the settlement of those counties.

Grade Level
This unit can be implemented into the upper elementary or the middle school classroom.

Materials
For research: computer lab (for internet research) and encyclopedias.
For map activity: a map of Florida, which is included in lesson and some sort of sticker or symbol for marking strawberry school locations on the map.
For calendar activity: each student needs 13 pieces of white construction paper (8x10 or 12x14, your choice), a ruler, a black marker, and coloring utensils of choice.
For journal activity: 2 pieces of construction paper (any light color) and 4 sheets of notebook paper per student.
For reading activity: 1 copy of “Strawberry Girl” per student if using as a part of your reading curriculum or 1 copy for the teacher to use as a read a loud to students.

Lesson Time
Depending on how much time you have, this lesson could be completed from start to finish in 1-2 days. The entire unit could be done in sections and completed over a time period that fits your schedule.
II. Lesson Procedures

Research Procedures

1.) Pair students up into research buddies. They will work with their partners on the computers.
2.) Make an overhead transparency of the photograph included in the “Activities” section of people picking strawberries in Kathleen, Florida, or make enough copies for each pair of students to share.
3.) Ask questions to lead to greater insight into the picture, such as: “What do you see in this picture?” “What are the people in this picture doing?” “Is everyone in this picture the same age? How do you know?” “If the strawberry harvest season runs from December through April, what did these children do about school?”
4.) Explain that in this lesson, the students will learn about “strawberry schools.” Have students bring a research folder or notebook with them to the computer lab.
5.) After logging on in the computer, have students go to www.google.com or whichever search engine you prefer.
6.) Have students enter the key words they think will bring them up to websites. I like to bring in inquiry based teaching at this point. Instead of telling students exactly where to go, be the facilitator by asking students what words are needed to bring up helpful websites about strawberry schools. The websites I found most helpful are: www.schools.polk.net/winston; www.strawberry.ifas.ufl.edu/history.htm; and www.sdhc.K12.fl.us. You will need to guide students to the appropriate school websites from there. Another option would be for students to read “Schools on Harvest Schedule,” a (Lakeland) Ledger article written by Cinnamon Bair, included in the “Activities” section.
7.) After the students have located the websites have students write down important information that they would like to share with the class about the history of strawberry schools.
8.) Once all students have successfully explored the websites go back to class and have each pair of students share some important or interesting facts, information, or pictures they found.
9.) Each student’s research should count for participation points towards their final grade for the project. I have provided a rubric (located in the “Assessments” section) that can be used for the entire lesson. This can be changed at your discretion.

Map Activity Procedures

1.) Using a map of Florida showing cities and natural features (one source is Florida: Harcourt Brace Social Studies 4th-grade textbook), students will locate the city/county where a strawberry school was located (three in Plant City, two in Lakeland). Students will then mark these locations on their own blank outline map of Florida. You can find a blank outline map of Florida in the “Activities” section.
2.) Have students either create a symbol for marking the area of the school or provide a sticker that you’d like for them to use.
3.) I have provided a sample map that you can copy for each individual student or you may choose to mark the areas on a large Florida map in the classroom. Doing both is also an option. If using individual maps for each student, I like to have them identify the major bodies of water and the major cities of today. This helps to give them a point of reference.
4.) If using the rubric, each student will receive points for correctly identifying the areas of strawberry schools.

Calendar Activity Procedures

1.) Each student should have 13 pieces of white construction paper that is stapled together on the sides to look like a book. I usually have this already done for the students to save time.
2.) Have students turn the “book” horizontally so that the book opens going in an upward direction, like a calendar.
3.) Students should go through and label the months of the year on each page.
4.) After labeling the months, students will create the days of the week at the top of each page and make the calendar grids for each month using a ruler and a black marker.
5.) Pick a year between 1928 and 1954. Go to www.calendarhome.com and put in the year you’ve chosen and a calendar should come up with the correct days that correspond with the months.

6.) When your students have finished drawing their grids, go back and number the days of the months together so you will have a true dated calendar from the year you chose.

7.) Using crayons, colored pencils, markers, and any other art supplies you’d like, students may decorate the front of their calendars as well as the months of the year. Students need to remember that strawberry-harvesting season was mainly January through March so their pictures should correspond accordingly.

8.) After the artwork is done, students write at least 10 specific events on the calendar grids during strawberry season. For example, perhaps on February 26, 1928 I may write, “Go to town w/ Pa to sell strawberries” or “help Ma make strawberry jam”. You may want to brainstorm as a class and write down some ideas or key words to get their brains thinking like a 1920’s or 1930’s child.

9.) If using the rubric to grade, students will get points for correctly marking each month and for writing at least 10 events on their calendar.

**Journal Activity Procedures**

1.) Each student will need 2 pieces of lightly colored construction paper and 4 pieces of notebook paper.

2.) Have students make a journal with 1 piece of construction paper in the front and one in the back with the notebook paper in between. Staple together on the sides.

3.) Students will write 4 journal entries that are between 2-4 paragraphs long. They will write from the point of view of a "strawberry girl or boy". Remind them to date their journals using the years 1928-1954. They will also need to write between the months of January and March, the main strawberry harvesting season.

4.) If using the rubric, students will receive points for 4 complete journal entries.
III. Activities

**Picture E-10-1**: Agricultural laborers in a strawberry field: Kathleen, Florida (1910-1929)

What do you see in this picture?

What are the people in this picture doing?

Is everyone in this picture the same age? How do you know?

If the strawberry harvest season runs from December through April, what did these children do about school?
For children attending schools in Northwest Polk and Eastern Hillsborough counties in the first half of the 20th century, this time of year (March) was their summertime. No teachers. No school. No studying. But their December to April school break was anything but a vacation. Instead, students attending the area's storied strawberry schools spent their three-month breaks helping their families and their neighbors with the annual strawberry harvest. It's all part of the area's strawberry culture and heritage being celebrated this week during the Florida Strawberry Festival in Plant City.

The children of strawberry farmers were responsible for much of the fieldwork that was done in the early 20th century. They were expected to help with every aspect of the farm, including planting, irrigating, pest and weed control, and harvesting. "Strawberry farming was a full-time, year-round job," historian Ray Albritton wrote from experience in the Polk County Historical Quarterly's December issue. "There was always something that had to be done in a strawberry patch."

Children were used for a number of odd jobs -- not all of them limited to planting and hoeing. "Every spring we could depend on flocks of robins to celebrate in the strawberry patch as they dined and sang sweet songs," Maude Maits wrote in the quarterly's June 1983 issue. "A robin watcher had to stay in the field all day and shoo birds -walk and shoo, walk and shoo. The robins always managed to be on the side away from the desperate watcher."

But the biggest task, which usually started right around Christmas, was the berry harvest. "The work really started when the berries ripened; and it was, to a great extent, children's work," Albritton wrote. "It took a limber back to bend over and pick the rows of strawberries."

The children were expected to be in the fields at daybreak. Once there, they were assigned a row and given a seemingly endless supply of quart-sized baskets to fill. Each ripe strawberry had to be carefully picked to leave the leafy cap intact. Eating the berries was a no-no.

The children's efforts weren't limited to their own farms. Families often hired out their children, who could make a few cents for every quart of berries they picked. The money made was then turned over to the parents to help support the family. The children, of course, found all kinds of ways to increase their productivity -- or at least make it look like they did. Skilled berry packers tried to fill quarts with as few berries as possible. "We learned to place the berries lightly in the baskets with the greatest of ease -- baskets which seem to have no bottom -- in order to get maximum benefit from our efforts," Maits wrote. "Packing berries wasn't so hard after one learned the knack of putting the best berries on top in snug-fitting rows."

Children remained a major source of the strawberry workforce until the 1950s, when a changing industry and education reforms brought an end to the strawberry school schedule. The last of Polk County's strawberry schools changed to a traditional fall-to-spring school calendar in 1953.
IV. Assessment

Strawberry School Unit Rubric

1. Research (25 Points)
   a) The student shows obvious notes taken from websites corresponding with strawberry schools and information imperative to the subject.
   b) The student’s notes are neatly written and understood.
   c) The student’s notes are complete.

   __________/25

   Comments:

2. Map Activity (25 Points)
   a) The student has correctly identified the cities and locations in which all five strawberry schools were located.
   b) The student’s map is correctly and neatly labeled with bodies of water and major cities of today.
   c) An effort was made on the student’s part to make the map neat and easy to understand.

   __________/25

   Comments:

3. Calendar Activity (25 Points)
   a) The student has correctly identified the strawberry harvesting months.
   b) The student has written at least 10 specific events on their calendar from the point of view of a strawberry girl or boy.
   c) The student has completed the calendar neatly.

   __________/25

   Comments:

4. Journal Activity (25 Points)
   a) The student has written 4 journal entries from the point of view of a strawberry boy or girl.
   b) The student has included dates from 1928 – 1954.
   c) The student has neatly written 2 – 4 paragraphs for each journal entry.

   __________/25

   Comments:

   Total Project Points: __________/100
*Another option to use as an alternative assessment is one in which students write a paragraph telling about what they have learned about strawberry schools. In the paragraph they must identify:
   a) the years in which strawberry schools existed;
   b) the cities and counties in which they existed;
   c) how a school got labeled a “strawberry school”;
   d) the months in which students were out of school to help with strawberry harvesting;
   e) what a strawberry girl or boy would be expected to help out with on a strawberry farm;
   f) at least 2 facts about strawberry schools that they learned.

**Whole Class Activities That Integrate Curriculum**

**“Strawberry Girl” by Lois Lenski**

You could choose between reading this novel as part of your reading curriculum or simply use it as a read aloud to students as you are working on your strawberry school unit. This is an excellent book that actually has a picture map of old Florida at the beginning as well as a forward in which Ms. Lenski explains much of the history of Florida. She gathered information personally from Crackers themselves and consulted with people who knew them. Her hard work won her the Newbery Medal in 1946 for “Strawberry Girl”. This book will certainly enhance the study of Florida History in classrooms everywhere. You can find a short biography of Lois Lenski at www.purplehousepress.com/sig/lenskibio.htm

**Strawberry Picking**

Allow students to get a first hand experience at the strawberry fields by allowing them to pick their own during strawberry season. Here are a few places I found in the area:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Favorite Farms</th>
<th>Goodson Farms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10070 McIntosh Road</td>
<td>14603 McGrady Road</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dover, FL 33527</td>
<td>Balm, FL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(813) 986-3949</td>
<td>(813) 634-2164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid-March – May 7th</td>
<td>March – April</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Shady Acres Farm       |                        |
| 3420 Gallagher Road    |                        |
| Dover, FL              |                        |
| (813) 659-0222         |                        |
| Mid-April – May        |                        |

These places, and others in the Central Florida area, can be found at [http://www.pickyourown.org/FL.htm](http://www.pickyourown.org/FL.htm)

**Make Strawberry Shortcake**

All students and teachers love to eat! What a better way to integrate food into our curriculum than to make strawberry shortcake. Since most classrooms are without ovens, I usually take the shortcut to shortcake and buy the already made small, round cakes (6-8 per package). For a class of 24, I'll get about 3 pints of strawberries and 2 cartons of Cool Whip or Whip Cream. It works best if you have everything set up in an assembly line production and allow students to come make theirs a few at a time. Of course, if you would like to make your own shortcakes, there is an excellent recipe in the “American Classics” cookbook that is put out by the editors of Cook’s Illustrated Magazine.

**Grow Your Own Strawberries**

If you live in the right conditions, growing your own strawberries is an excellent class project that integrates Science perfectly. The website I found most helpful is [http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/VH029](http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/VH029). This website is put out by
the University of Florida and will give you information on soil requirements, setting plants, planting dates, irrigation, harvesting and storing plants, and much more.

V. Resources

www.schools.polk.net/winston

www.strawberry.ifas.ufl.edu/history.htm

www.sdhc.k12.fl.us

www.calendarhome.com

www.purplehousepress.com/sig/lenskibio.htm

www.pickyourown.org/FL.htm

http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/VH029

www.flaus.com/tools/maps.php

http://fpc.dos.state.fl.us/prints/pr00081.jpg - Photograph of strawberry harvest in Florida State Archives