

## *Were there schools in Williamsburg?*

There were no free public schools in all of Virginia. Some parents taught their children to read and write at home. The Bible often served as reader, workbook, and storybook all in one.

But what if your parents didn't know how to read? Some grown-ups in Williamsburg couldn't read or write; they signed legal papers with an X instead of their names. Still, many wanted their children to be educated. For a small fee, a schoolmaster or schoolmistress could be hired to teach a group of children of various ages how to read and *cipher* (do arithmetic). In town, these classes were often held in the house where the teacher lived. Outside town, lessons might be held in a structure in an abandoned tobacco field, so they came to be called *old field schools*.



*A dillar, a dollar,  
A ten o'clock scholar,  
What makes you come so soon.  
You used to come at ten o'clock,  
And now you come at noon.*

If you were gentry, school came to you. Children of the rich had private tutors who lived with them. Sometimes there was a separate wing or even a separate building set aside for a schoolroom. Sisters and brothers of various ages went there together. The hours were long — from early morning to six o'clock, with a recess for breakfast and another one an hour or two long before dinner.

