



1882 PROFILE

Middle Class

Thirteen-year-old Ora McFadden and his two sisters lost their parents and a middle-class lifestyle when yellow fever swept through Memphis, Tennessee. The three children now live in the Catholic Orphan Asylum.

Life at Home

- At night Ora often dreams about the house he lived in before he and his sisters, Iris and Rose, came to the orphanage four years ago.
- He had a bedroom of his own just up the stairs from the kitchen, where good smells originated.
- He had a dog and friends, a mother who tucked him in at night and a father who loved to tell stories.
- Then, the yellow fever epidemic hit Memphis, and everything changed.
- A New Orleans steamboat deckhand was the first person to die of yellow fever during the outbreak of 1878.
- He was followed by Mrs. Kate Bionda, who operated a snack shop patronized by river men, and then James McConnell, a policeman.
- More than 20,000 citizens—half the city—then staged a hysterical exodus.
- The *Public Ledger* observed, “At no time within the history of our city has there been such a sudden or effective panic among the people of Memphis. Our community is in a state of great alarm, and all who can leave are doing so.”



Ora dreams of his home before the fever arrived.



Ora's grandmother dies trying to save her son-in-law from the fever.



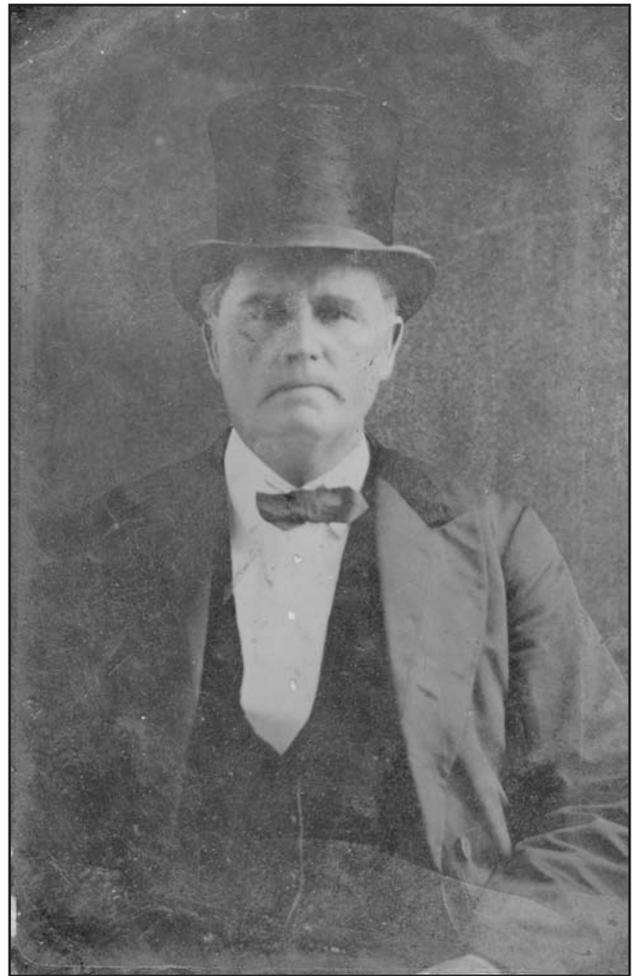
Rose becomes an orphan in a city full of homeless children.

- When the yellow fever outbreak began, Ora's father, a bank clerk, sent the family north, while he stayed behind in Memphis to provide necessary travel funds to fleeing residents.
- The family took the Louisville & Nashville train north 100 miles to the country home of Ora's aging grandmother; railroad cars had to be added to accommodate all the extra passengers leaving Memphis.
- It was a frightening time, and the three children clung tightly to their mother for most of the trip; no one felt the need to appear brave.
- *The Daily Appeal* said, "The ordinary courtesies of life were ignored; politeness gave way to selfishness and the desire for personal safety broke through the social amenities."
- To further assist the citizens of Memphis, Ora's father joined the Citizen's Relief Committee, which had two white members and one black member from each of the city's 10 wards.
- Space was set aside in the hospital for indigents, while schools were converted to hospitals.
- Of the 40,000 original residents of Memphis, only 7,000 whites and 13,000 blacks stayed in the city.
- Most who remained in the city's four square miles were either volunteers, the sick, or those who felt they were immune.
- It was generally believed that African-Americans had a higher resistance to yellow fever than did whites.
- Once the epidemic began, the Howard Association employed 3,000 nurses to care for the sick, two-thirds of whom were black or white males from Memphis.
- In addition, 500 nurses came from outside the city to help—volunteers from Catholic, Protestant and Hebrew groups—along with many who were employed by fraternal organizations such as the Odd Fellows and the Masons.
- Hundreds of nurses died caring for patients.
- During the first week of September, the city government and Board of Health ceased to function.
- That same week, Ora's father became ill with yellow fever.
- He was immediately given the "Creole treatment," consisting of small doses of castor oil or calomel to keep the bowels open, sponge baths to reduce fever, adequate covering in the event of chills, and absolute rest of mind and body.
- When Ora's mother learned that her husband was sick, she and the children's grandmother returned to Memphis.
- During the next two weeks, they all caught yellow fever and died within days of each other.
- Suddenly, Ora, Iris and Rose were orphans in a city full of wandering, homeless children.
- More than 4,000 people in Memphis died.
- For \$2 a day, black grave diggers labored day and night, but still could not keep up with the mountain of coffins.

- When Ora and his sisters returned to Memphis, as instructed by the authorities, they were placed in a Catholic Orphan Asylum, where they have remained for four years, but they have never forgotten how nice their mother smelled when she tucked them in at night.

Life at School and the Orphanage

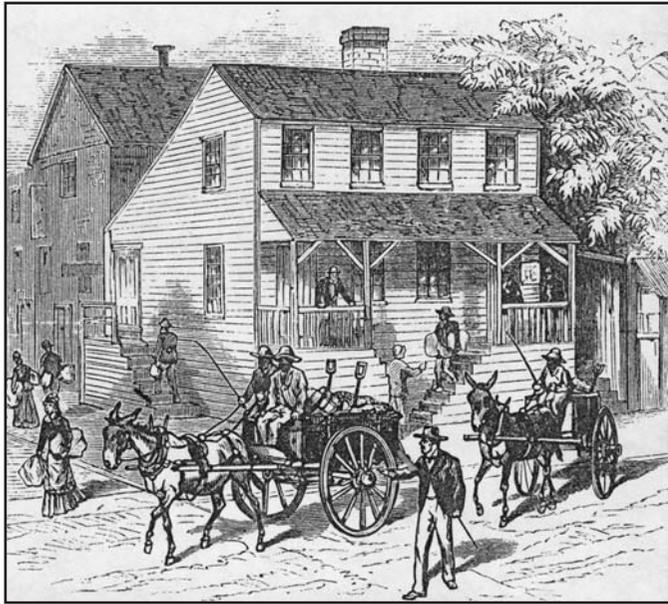
- Every evening while lying in his bed in the orphan asylum, Ora pulls out the ferrotype pictures taken when the family was still together.
- He remembers the pictures were taken on a Saturday afternoon; father's barber had proudly set up a photography studio, complete with desks, chairs and props.
- They were some of the photographer's first customers; father and mother even got dressed for the occasion, although the children did not.
- Pictures were taken of Ora at age eight, and his sisters, along with his father, mother and grandmother.
- It was a great afternoon of fun; he was unsure if he could remain standing completely still for 30 seconds so the photograph would not be spoiled, but he did.
- The photos of his mother and sister Iris were lost when the children were taken to the orphanage.
- He still likes to look at the pictures, even when they make him sad; he is determined he will always remember what his mother, father and grandmother looked like before they died.
- The orphan asylum is filled with children who lost their parents four years ago.



Ora's father stays behind to help his customers.



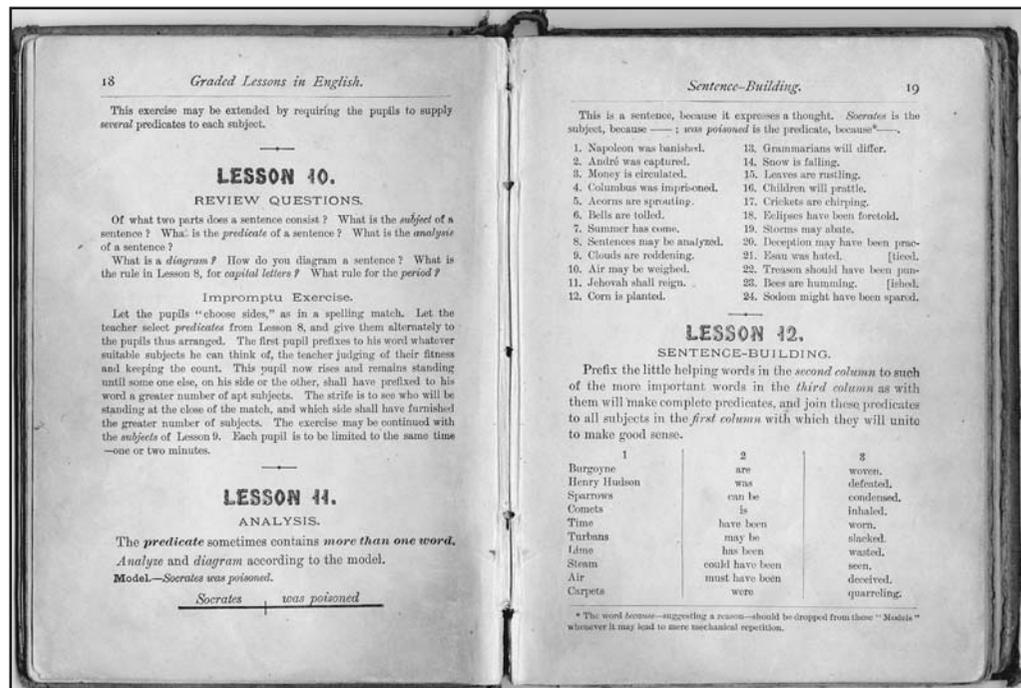
The nuns nurse the children during the fever.



Funeral carts roll from house to house.

- As the oldest child, he felt it was his job to lead the children into the asylum for the first time, though he was frightened beyond words.
- Everyone was very nice, but the house was extremely chaotic then.
- Too many children had come too quickly, and few Sisters remained to care for them; now it is better and everyone knows what is expected.
- Many children came to the orphanage after living on the streets for months, begging for food from house to house before being invited to the asylum.
- Until the hard winter came in January, many of the street children did not want to stay at the orphan asylum because so many nuns had died during the fever.
- Currently, 125 children live in the asylum, 47 of whom are boys.
- Everyone in Memphis thought God would make the Sisters safe; now, four years later, many of the nuns are like Ora, arriving since the fever.
- He hopes the fever never comes back.

- Many of the nuns believe that if they can control the influences that make up a child's life and thoughts, he won't ever be a truant or disrespectful, or run with a gang.
- His English lessons are taught from *Graded Lessons in English*; his younger sisters use the McGuffey Reader, which has many delightful pictures.
- First published in 1836, the McGuffey Readers are now the basic schoolbook in 37 states, with more than two million copies sold each year.
- Little Rose loves to repeat the alphabet as she learned it from the first reader—from A is for axe, B is for box, cat, dog—all the way to Y is for yoke and Z is for zoo.



“How Yap Got the Slipper,” *The Knoxville Tennessee Chronicle*, March 22, 1882:

Molly was so happy playing with her doll baby that she had no time to notice Yap.

That little dog was jealous. He barked yap! yap! very loudly, and now sat looking at Molly out of the corners of his eyes, wondering what mischief he could get into, and so worry her into playing with him. Suddenly he trotted off, his mind quite made up as to what to do.

“Molly, Molly,” called mamma.

“Mamma, don’t call so loud,” whispered Molly. “My little doll baby is sleeping.”

“Molly,” called mamma again, “make haste and see what Yap is after. I am sure he is in my room.”

“Oh, what a bad doggie,” sighed Molly, with her face in a pucker, but she put her baby down, and went to see after the dog.

There he was on the staircase, with mamma’s slipper in his mouth. When he saw Molly he dropped the slipper, and ran past her, looking very much as if he was laughing.

Molly shook her finger at him, and laughing, too, picked up the slipper and carried it to mamma.

But Yap was too smart to be cheated out of his fun in that way. So he ran into the yard and

began to bark furiously at Puss. Mrs. Puss cared little for his barking, and soon he stopped. Then Molly looked out of the window and said, “Yap and Puss look as if they were talking to each other, mamma.” And so they were.

“Oh, you beautiful darling,” said Molly, taking her baby against her, and hugging it tight; “Come and let us take a walk.” Then she sat down to put on the doll’s best clothes, and while she was very busy and almost ready for the walk, she thought she heard a sound, tip tip, on the staircase, and ran to see what was the matter.

“Mamma,” she screamed, “come here—oh, do come!” and mamma hurried out to see Pussy bringing the slipper down to Yap, who was waiting at the foot of the stairs.

How they laughed when Pussy dropped the slipper under Yap’s nose, and he trotted off in a grand way!

Molly ran after him, and found him ready to bury it with some other treasures at the end of the yard.

“Mamma,” said Molly, when she returned to the house with the second slipper, “do you think dogs and cats can talk? I do.”

And Molly thinks so to this day.

- The books are filled with pictures of boys with hoops, kites and skates; the girls happily play with dolls, sleds and jumping ropes.
- The children are also instructed in the French language.
- Girls are taught to sew, wash, iron and cook; sewing is taken in to support the institution and encourage the industrial education of the children.
- About half of the girls are in the sewing department, half in the mending department.
- Boys are trained in breadmaking, farm work and blacksmithing.
- Ora has found great joy in the bakery, but knows his destiny is to work on the docks where he can make enough money to buy back his childhood home.
- The asylum’s chapel, fitted with seats of natural wood and decorated with walnut moldings, is capable of accommodating 250 people.
- The nuns insist that everyone attend chapel regularly; the boys are lectured on temperance and told to pledge that they will never use alcohol or tobacco.
- The cost of housing the children is generally \$5 a month.

