

GARDEN OF CHILDREN

Even before the pandemic, our educational system was struggling. People are frustrated and looking for something better. Parents often don't know their options and worry whether their children can compete in an ever-changing job market.

What if the answers we seek can be found in what America once had? Maybe the way forward means looking back?

This documentary series will explore all early childhood education with examples from today's classrooms ... all presented with rich cinematic visuals. We weave the history of education in America and with a modern exploration of key aspect for a wide audience of parents, educators and other stakeholders.

The "garden of children" finds its roots with Friedrich Froebel, inventor of Kindergarten. Nearly 200 years ago, Froebel's Kindergarten profoundly impacted how we saw children. It also ignited the women's movement, sparked modern art and architecture, and much more. The thread of this story connects American icons like Frank Lloyd Wright, Helen Keller, Milton Bradley, and Richard Feynman.

For over two decades, our series producers have assembled a vast archive of research, over 100 interviews, and a diverse network of experts. Garden of Children is a rich visual blend of the historic and the futuristic, where we've been and where we're headed.

GardenOfChildren.org





THEMES

The series examines how our view of educating children changed, the commercial forces on education, and how kindergarten functioned as social indoctrination into American culture. Today's parents need insight into one of the biggest decisions they make in child-rearing: how, when, where their kids begin their education.

Childhood is a time for exploring, with risk factors that shape future success and failure. How we address these early years speaks volumes about our culture.

The story of kindergarten follows the changing role of women in our culture, and how we rely on education to solve today's changing demands for labor. In an age of artificial intelligence the jobs of tomorrow require an entirely new set of skills: ironically the same ones that Froebel envisioned when he created Kindergarten in the 1830s.

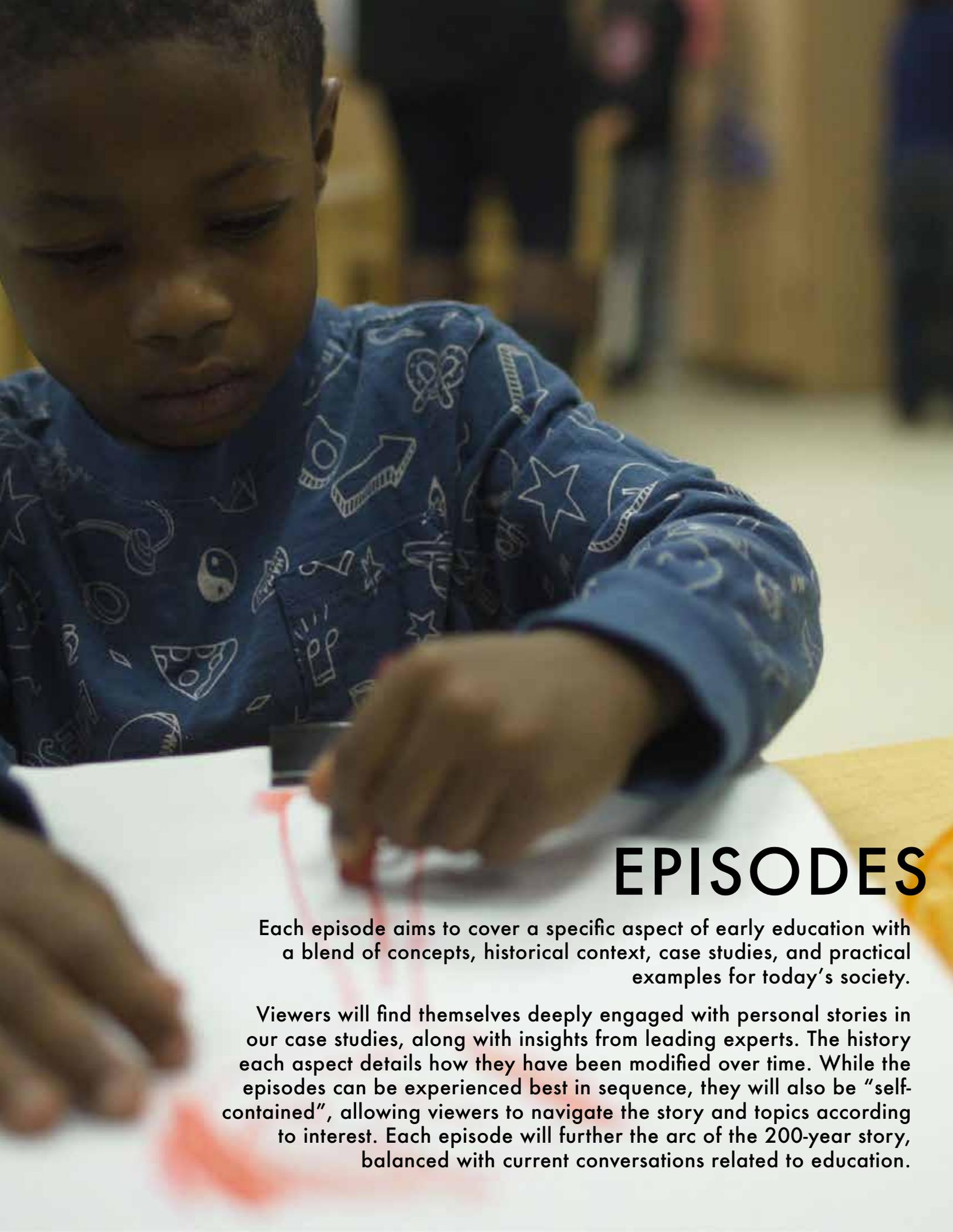


AUDIENCE

Garden of Children will have broad appeal both nationally, and internationally. Our universal love for children as parents (and grandparents) will drive a deep interest in our series for those looking to understand education and learn how to navigate their options for educating their own children. Parents from around the world will find this important topic inspirational and insightful.

Educators in any educational style/method are hungry to for ways to improve their craft. This series provides a forgotten history of education for teachers and administrators, from private or parochial to public or specialty schools in any demographic or grade level.

There is a wide range of specialty groups that will also enjoy this series including; artists, designers, architects, makers, historians, musicians and more as the subjects we cover touch on all of these and more.



EPISODES

Each episode aims to cover a specific aspect of early education with a blend of concepts, historical context, case studies, and practical examples for today's society.

Viewers will find themselves deeply engaged with personal stories in our case studies, along with insights from leading experts. The history each aspect details how they have been modified over time. While the episodes can be experienced best in sequence, they will also be "self-contained", allowing viewers to navigate the story and topics according to interest. Each episode will further the arc of the 200-year story, balanced with current conversations related to education.



Episode ONE: "Child-Centered"

We start with Froebel's insistence that education be "child-centered," not the "factory model" that it became. We explore the origin and benefits of a child-centered methodology and how this was lost when the Industrial Revolution changed educational goals.

Episode TWO: "Play-Based"

"Play" was the engine of Froebel's original kindergarten. It's the key to unlocking innovative thinking, not only in education, but in today's most cutting edge companies. This episode explores the benefits of a "play-based" approach, and how it fits with the classrooms of today.



Episode THREE: "Creative Beings"

Froebel's Kindergarten was designed to educate creative beings and provide young children a visual language before they learned to read and write. This episode explores how creative thinking touches every aspect of life from the workplace to design education and architecture. It will unpack the rich history of famous American designers such as Frank Lloyd Wright, Charles Eames, and Buckminster Fuller, as well as the German Bauhaus, and how the Kindergarten influenced their design thinking.

Episode FOUR: "Nature"

Connecting with nature was an integral part of the first kindergarten. It was a vital part of understanding how we fit into our world. It was also valued as a way to better understand patterns and rhythms that are still the benchmark of good art, design and innovation. We explore nature's role in the origin of kindergarten and how it's resurfacing today as a cutting-edge pedagogy.

Episode FIVE: "The Role of the Teacher"

The job of teaching has changed dramatically over the last century, especially how teachers are trained, managed, and compensated. This episode contrasts Froebel training in 19th century schools with the changing landscape of the teaching kindergarten today.

Episode SIX: "Assessment"

The controversy over the rise and role of assessment in education, how it's taken over the management of schools, and its growing use in early childhood are discussed by experts, teachers, and parents. Are we measuring what we value, or simply valuing what we measure?

Episode SEVEN: "Education Today"

As public school kindergarten became more like first grade, alternative approaches to early childhood education rose up. Most are echoes of Froebelian ideas: HighScope, Montessori, Waldorf, Constructivism, Vygotsky, and Reggio Emilia. The homeschool movement and charter schools highlight the business of schooling, the changing political landscape, and the myth of choice.

Episode EIGHT: "The Bigger Picture"

The jobs of the future are changing at a rapid pace. Artificial intelligence is replacing the jobs that our current "factory model" of education was designed for. This episode explores what skills are needed, how education needs to change, and how the original Kindergarten method contains many of the ideas and innovations we are looking for to prepare our children for today.

THE TEAM



Scott Bultman

Scott graduated from the University of Michigan in 1988 with a degree in Film/Video Studies, but the unexpected death of his father diverted him from film-making into the family toy manufacturing business for the next two decades. A chance 1996 meeting with representatives from the Frank Lloyd Wright Trust, introduced Scott to the story of Froebel Kindergarten. Following the twists and turns of the story led Scott to amass a large archive of historical research and artifacts, and a diverse network of experts on the subject.



Jay Irwin

Working in film production for over 15 years, Jay made his way through the camera and electric departments to become a DP for-hire on numerous projects around the world. Jay brings a wealth of visual problem-solving and communication strategy to this documentary. With John Pottenger, Jay co-created Match Frame Creative in 2013, producing video for up-and-coming and Fortune 500 companies (Steelcase, Amway, Pfizer, Meijer).



John Pottenger

John's own business, Coastline Studios, has created over 600 documentary-style short films in the special events industry. Documenting events for high-net-worth individuals requires technical excellence under pressure, and John has earned a reputation for getting it right every time. He is the co-director and post-production supervisor for our project.

FUTURE EPISODES

Kindergarten As Women's Movement

From Emma Willard, Caroline Severance, and Alice B. Stockham, activists used kindergarten as a rallying point for women, making it one of the first successful women's movements and tying the kindergarten to suffrage and temperance activities.

Designing the Future

Froebel is known today in design schools, not elementary schools. This episode focuses on the design legacy of Froebel Kindergarten at Miami University, the Lifelong Kindergarten at the MIT Media Lab, Shape Grammars and the MIT School of Architecture, and High Point University.

Kindergarten and the Maker Movement

Walter Gropius predicted that automation would alter the labor landscape and suggested we educate our children to become artisans and craftsman. Today, artificial intelligence is reducing the role of professionals. This episode explores how Froebel anticipated it all.

Music and Movement

Kindergarten's impact on the creation and business of music is featured in this episode. It includes the origin of the song Happy Birthday by the Hill Sisters, Kindermusik, eurythmics, etc.

The Social Reformers

This episode explores kindergarten as childcare in settlement houses, and the efforts to promote social welfare and an educated democracy. The Ellis Island kindergartens and Hull House are featured.

The Kindergarten Missionaries

Stories are related about Annie Howe and the Glory Kindergarten in Kobe, Japan, Hawaii and the Women's Board of Missions for the Pacific Islands, YMCA/YWCA activities, American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, etc.

The Dawn of Special Needs Education

The Kindergarten was one of the first educational methods that could be applied without alteration to children of all abilities. This episode looks at the Perkins School for the Blind, Helen Keller, Anne Sullivan, and others who built a more inclusive education system.

Froebel and the Forty-Eighters

Famous German ex-pats Carl Schurz, Julius Fröbel, Adolph Douai, W.N. Hailmann, Ernst Steiger, and others fled Germany during the revolution of 1848, helping bring Kindergarten connections to the USA, and shaping our culture.

Kindergarten Products

The products invented specifically for the kindergarten are described: the sand table, paper cutter, Color Cubes, grid tables, and other design toys.

Preserving the Past

The artifacts of Froebel Kindergarten are featured, including the collections of Norman Brosterman, the Froebel Museum in Bad Blankenburg, the Carondelet Historical Society, the UK Froebel Trust archive, and more.

The Century of the Child

Swedish reformer and social theorist Ellen Key published *The Century of the Child* in 1900. She predicted that the 20th century would span progressive thinking on the rights, development, and well-being of children. This episode shows how the exact opposite occurred.