



# ZOOM in on america

A Monthly Publication of the USA Mission to Poland. Warsaw • Krakow • Poznan

Volume II. Issue 19.

## HIGH SCHOOL DAYS

### Classes

Many high schools require each student to earn at least a certain number of credits (e.g. 22) during the four years of study in order for him or her to be able to graduate.

Some courses are required: e.g. 4 credits of English, 2 of Science, 2 of Math etc. There's also a number of so-called elective classes which the students are not obliged to take, such as foreign languages.

Each student, assisted by a school counselor, registers for each class in a particular semester. Usually about 6 subjects are chosen each semester. A freshman (1st year) student may choose to take the following classes in his first semester: English I, Freshman Science, Math I, World Geography, Physical Education (PE), and Consumer Education.



Photograph by Barry Fitzgerald, Department of State

### Grades and Exams

High school students are graded on a scale from A through D. There is also the F grade which means "fail." A Grade Point Average is calculated for each student every semester.

Students who plan to go to college should take either the Scholastic Aptitude test (SAT) or the American College Test (ACT), which are offered several times a year. Both tests are intended to measure what the student has learned in high school and his or her potential for college-level work.

PERIOD	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
8:15 - 9:00	English I	English I	English I	English I	English I
9:05 - 9:50	World Geography	World Geography	Consumer Ed	Consumer Ed	World Geography
9:55 - 11:25	Math I	Math I	Math I	Math I	Math I
12:00 - 1:30	Freshman Science	Freshman Science	Consumer Ed	Freshman Science	Freshman Science
1:40 - 3:10	PE	PE	PE	PE	PE

### Lunch

Students may bring their own lunches to school or get something to eat at the school cafeteria. Usually there is a main course and some extras to choose from, e.g.: vegetarian lasagna + fresh fruit or vegetable, bread, milk. Some states or schools try to fight obesity in students by banning sugared sodas and sweets from school cafeterias and vending machines.



USDA Photo by: Ken Hammond

### Graduation

Graduation week, which is usually in June, brings with it a mix of feelings and emotions for those who are about to depart school. Nervousness over final exam results, elation that the pressure of studies is just about over, sadness at pending separations from close friends, and excitement about what is coming next. Students sign yearbooks, empty their lockers, and prepare for the graduation ceremony.

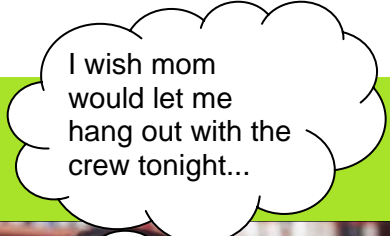


Photograph by Barry Fitzgerald, Department of State

Adapted in part from Department of State Electronic Journal "American Teenagers (July 2005) available at: <http://usinfo.state.gov/journals/itsv/0705/ijse/ijse0705.htm>

# ■ That's Phat!

"How much skrill you pay for those kicks?" - if somebody asked you that question, would you know what they meant? Well, an American high school kid would know. In high school slang "**skrill**" means money and "**kicks**" are shoes. Look below at some other American high school slang words.



crew or set - a group of friends

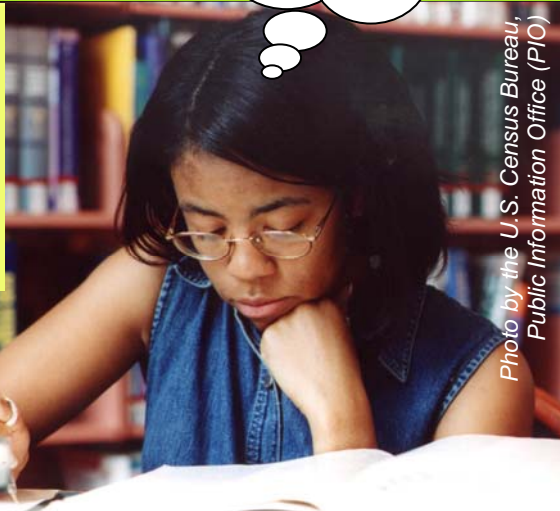
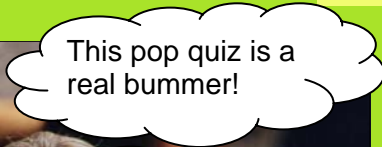


Photo by the U.S. Census Bureau, Public Information Office (PIO)



bummer - an unpleasant situation

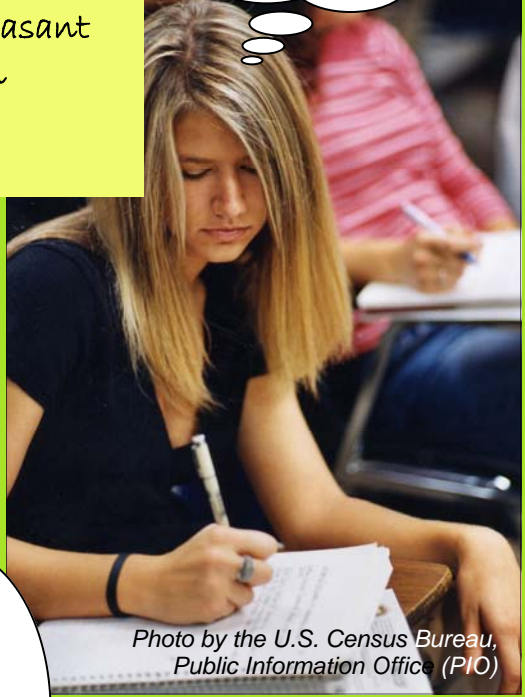


Photo by the U.S. Census Bureau, Public Information Office (PIO)



bounce - leave  
true dat - so true



(AP Photo/Tina Fineberg) ©AP/WWP



Photo by the U.S. Census Bureau, Public Information Office (PIO)

guy - a man; but:  
guys - may refer to a group of people, even all females  
grub - food

**American teenagers' slang online**

**Track That Word!**  
[www.pbs.org/speak/words/trackthatword/](http://www.pbs.org/speak/words/trackthatword/)

**Slang Dictionary**  
[www.thesource4ym.com/teenlingo/index.asp](http://www.thesource4ym.com/teenlingo/index.asp)

**Wassup with Teen Talk?**  
[www.naa.org/artpage.cfm?AID=5197&SID=1129](http://www.naa.org/artpage.cfm?AID=5197&SID=1129)

# ■ American High Schools Unlike Any Other

Zoom asked two young Americans who spent some weeks in Poland this summer about their high school experiences. Do they differ? Some words relating to American high schools are highlighted in bold.

## Ashley

Ashley, an undergraduate student of Slavic studies at the University of Chicago, lived in Krakow for 6 months – from February through July 2005.

### You didn't have a regular high school education? In what way was it unusual?

It was unusual in the sense that it wasn't an "American film" high school. I went to an **ALL-GIRLS** Catholic high school run by Irish nuns. I love my high school days now! But when I was there I thought it was hell. We had so much work and there was so much pressure put on us. We had uniforms and if your tie was crooked you'd get a **DEMERIT**. But after the **GRADUATION** I started thinking: "Wow, those were just amazing days!"

My school had 500 students, 125 in each class [*freshman, sophomore, junior and senior*] and it was such a close-knit community. It was just so much different than anything you would see on TV or what my sister is experiencing now in a public **CO-ED** high school.

### What do you appreciate the most about this school from today's point of view?

Basically everyone who graduated in my class was just so much more self-assured. Every day in every class it was drilled into us that we're girls but it doesn't mean that we cannot become a brilliant scientist or mathematician. We can all get up in front of a group of people and make a speech. I think a speech class is a requirement in all schools in the U.S. but all my sister had to do in her public high school was read a paper and put it down, whereas we had to give real speeches without notes but with gestures and **VISUAL AIDS**.

### Language tip!

In spoken language, as in the case of these interviews, you can hear informal phrases such as:

**wow!** - to express amazement

**they were like:...** = they said

**kind of** = sort of

**cheesy** = cheap, of low quality

## Mariza

Mariza, also an undergraduate student of Slavic studies, spent a few weeks in Krakow this summer to take part in the Jagiellonian University summer school of Polish language and culture.

### Have you been to Poland before?

I was in Krakow from 1993 to 1997 and in Warsaw from 2000 to 2003. During my first year in Krakow I went to a Polish school but I don't remember a lot about it. Then for a few years I went to the American International School of Krakow. I remember liking it a lot but at the same time I was annoyed because for example our **SCIENCE LAB** had only one **TEXTBOOK** and one **PETRI DISH**. I really liked the teachers, though. The students were mostly American, especially in the beginning, but later there were also Polish students and kids from other countries. Then I transferred to a school in the United States.

### Was this transition difficult?

Academically it was fine. Actually, I went into a higher grade. Technically I was supposed to go **GRADE 6** but they put me into grade 7.

The hardest thing was figuring out on my own how to relate to other Americans. I had spent so much time in Poland that I felt more Polish than American. I was 11 and I tried to make friends. I talked to people about Poland and nobody cared – that was really tough... But after a few months it was OK.

### Do you think you missed out on the American high school experience?

I think I missed out on things connected with driving! It's a big thing in America to get your driver's license at 16. I got mine at 18 – last year – and I was very excited and tried to tell people about it and they were like "Well, we got ours 2 years ago!"

But it didn't feel like I missed out on anything while I was in Poland because I really enjoyed being here. At the school in Warsaw we even tried to have a **PROM** but it didn't really come out like the American ones, which I only know through American movies. But I thought actually ours was better because we had a formal dinner and there was dancing if you wanted to, but there was also wine and just talking, whereas the American proms can look kind of cheesy.

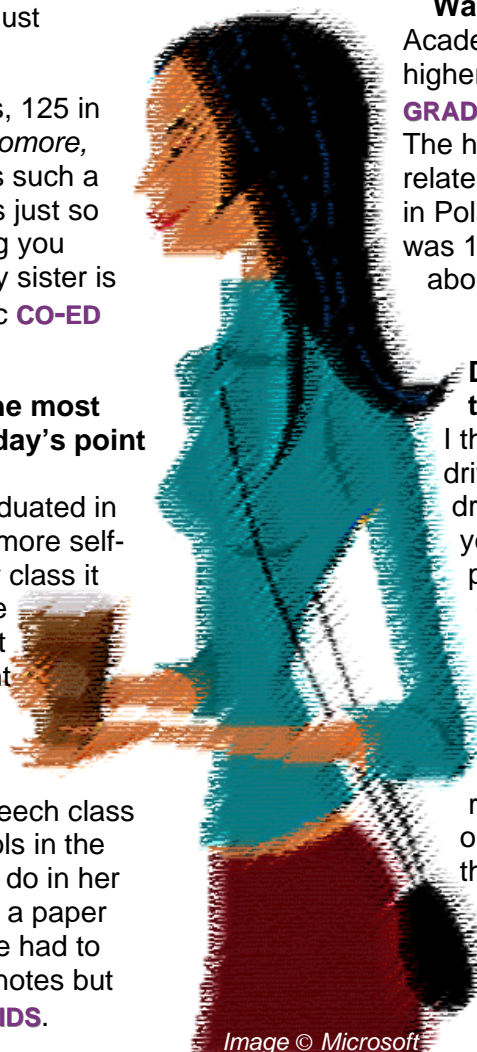


Image © Microsoft

# Activity Page

## Win a Prize!

To win a prize answer this question:

**What does PHAT (title on page 2) mean?**

Send your answer to [zoom@usinfo.pl](mailto:zoom@usinfo.pl).

Give your name and address.

The deadline is October 31.

## Good Luck!

The winners from the previous issue will soon receive their prizes by mail.

**ZOOM**  
in on america

## About ZOOM

Zoom is online at [www.usinfo.pl/zoom/](http://www.usinfo.pl/zoom/)

Subscription issues [www.usinfo.pl/zoom/subscribe.htm](http://www.usinfo.pl/zoom/subscribe.htm)

Contact us at [zoom@usinfo.pl](mailto:zoom@usinfo.pl)

### American Information Resource Centers

**Warsaw**  
Ambasada USA  
ul. Piękna 14, 00-540  
Warszawa  
[airc\\_warsaw@state.gov](mailto:airc_warsaw@state.gov)

**Krakow**  
Konsulat Generalny USA  
ul. Stolarska 9,  
31-043 Krakow  
[KrakowAIRC@state.gov](mailto:KrakowAIRC@state.gov)

Find answers to activities on this page at [www.usinfo.pl/zoom/](http://www.usinfo.pl/zoom/)

## High School Vocab

Fill each blank with one of the **PURPLE WORDS** from page 3:

- My entire family - both sets of grandparents, my parents, stepmother, two aunts, two sisters and a cousin - attended my \_\_\_\_\_ ceremony last Friday. I am the first in my family to hold a high school diploma.
- Angela was such a smart and quick learner that she skipped \_\_\_\_\_ 11 and went straight into 12.
- I thought he shouldn't have given me a \_\_\_\_\_ for forgetting my school blazer on such a hot day!
- Unfortunately for my two sons, the best high school in our neighborhood is an \_\_\_\_\_ one.
- We no longer use \_\_\_\_\_ in our science class. All experiments are computer-simulated.
- Without any \_\_\_\_\_ his presentation on Baroque art seemed dull.
- I didn't do my homework for today because all last afternoon I was working on the decorations for the senior \_\_\_\_\_.
- The local chemical plant sponsored a completely new and modern \_\_\_\_\_ for our school.
- Some schools are dropping traditional \_\_\_\_\_ in favor of e-books.
- Some people would say that \_\_\_\_\_ schools are outdated and that competition between boys and girls creates a healthy atmosphere.

## Discuss

What differences between a Polish and an American high school are you aware of:

- are you allowed to choose your subjects?
- is grade average calculated in Polish schools? What is it used for?
- do you have a lunch break? Can you buy snacks in your school?
- do you have something like a yearbook in your school?
- can you keep your belongings in a safe place such as a locker?
- do you celebrate graduation with a party such as a prom?
- do you have public speaking class? Do you think it is or would be useful?

## Glossary

- close-knit** - held tightly together
- crooked** - not straight
- to drill** - to teach thoroughly
- elation** - pride
- elective** - optional
- to figure out** - to discover
- freshman** - a student in the first-year class of a four-year school
- junior** - a student in the third-year class of a four-year school
- obesity** - extreme excess of body weight
- pending** - that is to happen soon
- to reason** - to think logically
- senior** - a student in the fourth-year class of a four-year school
- soda** - a soft (non-alcoholic) drink
- sophomore** - a student in the second-year class of a four-year school