

Daily Life in Colonial America: Simulations

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Intended Grade Level(s): 2-12

Lesson Overview: Students will simulate daily activities common during the colonial America era. Through the process, they will learn the history of daily life in the colonies and will gain comparative perspective between lives of the colonists and their own lives. Teachers may deliver subsections of this lesson in a rotating learning center format or as whole class simulations.

Objectives:

- Students will identify common chores and other daily activities during the American colonial era.
- Students will differentiate between daily activities today and those of the colonial era.

Procedure

Anticipatory Set: As students enter the classroom, have them respond to the following question: “What types of chores and other activities did children in colonial America do on a daily basis?”

Reading Prompt: Read the book *Sarah Morton’s Day: A Day in the Life of a Pilgrim Girl* by Kate Waters aloud to the class. After the story, work as a class to complete a Venn diagram comparing and contrasting “Daily Life” of colonial children and children today. Next, have students postulate reasons for the differences (e.g., technological change, trade partnerships, cultural differences).

Explain that students will have the opportunity to experience several colonial American activities. As they experience the activities, they should ponder how their lives would have been different if they had been born in the 1600s as opposed to the 21st century.

Activities

Teachers may organize these activities in a variety of ways and may choose to use one, some, or all of the activities. One method is to designate one location for each activity and have students rotate, in groups of approximately three to four students, between activity centers. This would work well on a day designated as “Colonial American Day.” For younger children, parent volunteers may chaperone each learning center to assist and guarantee student safety. Teachers may choose to require students keep a travel log for each activity they complete. To “pass” the activity, each child would need to provide a 3-sentence description of the activity experienced in the center.

Another model may involve having students work as an entire class completing a single activity. Teachers could organize their colonial American unit to include a different

activity each day. Students could keep daily journals about their travels through colonial America, describing their impressions each day of the journey.

Candle Making

This method of candle making allows students to create one candle at a time.

During colonial times, many candles were made at once.

Needed Materials: 8 metal cans (e.g., soup cans), cold water, string, 4 pencils, 1 pair of scissors, melted paraffin wax (keep the wax as cool as possible without allowing it to harden), newspaper

Procedures: Cover the table with newspaper so any dripped wax can be easily disposed. Fill four metal cans with cold water and four with melted wax. Have students cut off an approximately one-foot length of string and tie one end of the string to the center of the pencil so that the length of string hanging down is about the height of the can. First, they will dip the tips of their fingers in the wax and run their fingers along the string. This will give the string some weight and shape. Next, they will dip their string into the wax. After waiting a few seconds, they will remove the string by lifting the pencil and will dip the string into the cold water. This will cool and harden the wax. Students will then alternately dip the growing candle in the wax and water until it is as thick as the student prefers.

Making Butter

Rural colonists tended to make their own butter, but those in towns had less land for cattle so sometimes purchases butter from household microbusinesses. Most butter was produced using a butter churn. It took about three hours to produce one pound of butter.

Needed Materials: heavy whipping cream at room temperature (take it out about 1 hour before use), salt, cup, small spatula, jar with a tight-fitting lid, strainer, small bowl, popsicle sticks

Procedures: Fill the jar half-way with cream and tightly attach the lid. Shake the jar until the whey (liquid) and curd (solid) separate. Pour the whey into a cup. Students may drink this liquid—it's buttermilk. Pour the curd into a strainer and let it drain until all liquid is gone. Rinse the curd and place it in a bowl. Stir in salt to taste. Students may scoop a small piece of butter onto their popsicle sticks to taste their creation.

Cooking: Shrewsbury Cakes

Shrewsbury cakes first appeared in cookbooks during the 16th century. By American standards, the “cake” would be considered a cookie and is similar to shortbread with the added ingredient of an egg.

**Have students wash their hands and review kitchen safety rules before engaging in this exercise

Teacher Resource: For more information, see

http://www.theoldecookerybook.com/~theopden/wiki/index.php/Shrewsbury_cake_recipes

Needed Materials: mixing bowl, oven, bar pan, wooden spoon, pot holder, measuring cups and spoons, 1/2 c butter (softened), 1/2 c sugar, 1 egg, 1/2 c flour, 1/2 t nutmeg, spatula

Procedures: Preheat the oven to 350° and grease the bar pan. Mix all ingredients until batter becomes smooth and place the batter into the pan. Bake cookies ten minutes or until they appear brown. Cut the cake into squares before it hardens in the pan.

Cornhusk Dolls

Native Americans originally made cornhusk dolls and taught colonial Americans the craft. The dolls usually appeared in the fall after husking time.

Needed Materials: dried cornhusks placed in a large tub of water, scissors, string or rubber bands

Procedures: Have students follow instructions for making a cornhusk doll found at <http://www.teachersfirst.com/summer/cornhusk.htm>. Students may substitute rubber bands for string if desired.

Colonial Williamsburg Computer Simulations

Colonial Williamsburg offers a rich collection of resources for teachers and learners.

Needed Materials: computer with internet connection, computer projector

Procedures: Have students experience tools and events of colonial Americans by playing “Tool Trouble” (<http://www.history.org/kids/games/toolTrouble.cfm>), “18th Century Paper Doll Game”

(<http://www.history.org/kids/games/dollGame.cfm>), “Brickmaker Build-Up”

(<http://www.history.org/kids/games/brickmaker.cfm>), “Heads Up for the Colonists” (<http://www.history.org/kids/games/headsUp.cfm>), and “Pardon or Pillory” (<http://www.history.org/kids/games/pardonOrPillory.cfm>).

Clothes Washing

Students will simulate clothes washing in this exercise using a method still common around the world today.

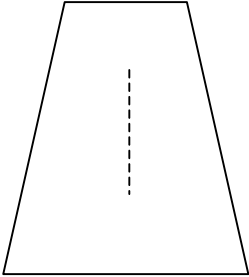
Needed Materials: Rags, water, soap (see

<http://www.alcasoft.com/soapfact/history.html> and *Cooking Up U.S. History* by Suzanne Barchers and Patricia Marden), two large tubs, a washing board, a wringing wheel (if possible), a location for drying towels

Procedures: Have students place “dirty” rags into a large tub of water. Using soap and the washing board, have them scrub the rags and then place them into a tub of rinsing water. After rinsing, have students wring the rags with the wringing wheel (if available) and hang them to dry. The next group of students can take the “clean” rags and re-wash them.

Sewing a Pocket

During colonial times, pockets were not sewn into clothes. Instead, they were worn as a separate piece of clothing inside other clothing layers. The pocket included a ribbon that could be tied around the waist to hold it into place.



Needed Materials: pieces of felt (each should be approximately 8” X 10”)—two pieces per student, a spool of thread, a pincushion, about ten needles (in case some become broken), scissors (one per participant), ribbon (optional)

Procedures: Have each student take two pieces of felt and a pair of scissors. They will cut both pieces together so the pieces are in a pocket shape (rounded corners and a smaller top than bottom—see diagram). Next, they will fold one of the pieces of felt in half “hamburger style” and cut a slit that will become the pocket opening. Students will cut one long piece of thread and thread it into a needle. Finally, they will sew both pieces of the felt together, leaving no openings except the slit in the center of the front pocket. If desired, students may cut a waist-length piece of ribbon and sew it onto their pockets so they can wear them around their waists.

Quill Writing

Until the invention of the steel nib in the 19th century, quills were the primary tools used for writing in the American colonies. The best quills were commonly made from goose, swan, or turkey feathers taken from the primary flight feathers of living birds. Feathers from the left wing were favored for right-handed writers.

Teacher Resource: For more information about quill pens and ink, review the “Educational Focus” on Colleen Wilson’s lesson on “Signing George Washington’s Birthday Card” available at http://www.sar.org/history/KeyHoles/ColleenOWilson_SonsOfTheAmericanRevolutionActivityIdeas.pdf.

Needed Materials: blank sheets of white paper, approximately twenty feathers (use tail features suitable for use as quills), hand wipes, four bottles of ink, newspaper, calligraphy lettering chart (see http://www.calligraphydesign.com/calligraphy_alphabet_styles/alphabet/4/IT_02.jpg)

Note: Before students participate in this lesson, prepare the pens by dipping them in hot water to soften the tip. Cut the tip at a slant and add a slit to the middle. Cover the workspace with newspaper so the ink does not stain the table.

Procedures: Students will dip their quills into the ink, shake off excess ink, and practice writing their names on the provided paper. Encourage them to write lightly (this provides a nicer end product and contributes to the life of the feather). Students must keep their papers on newspaper to limit the mess and they should clean their hands with hand wipes following the activity.

Children's Games

“Colonial children didn't have much free time, but when they did, there were lots of ways to have fun. They played such games as tag, marbles, hopscotch, leapfrog, hide-and-peek, blindman's buff, hoop races, and quoits.” (Education World—http://www.education-world.com/a_lesson/lesson166.shtml). Games teach about the colonial era while engaging kinesthetic learners and providing nice segues for transition times (e.g., just before lunch, end of the school day).

Teacher Resource: For more information, see

- <http://www.noahwebsterhouse.org/games.html>
- <http://noahwebsterhouse.org/amusements.html>

Procedures: Have students play the game “Deer and Hunter.” “The players, or ‘hunters,’ stand in a circle holding hands. The ‘deer’ weaves in and out of the circle, under the hands of the players. When the deer taps one of the hunters, the hunter must follow the deer and imitate its movements exactly. If the hunter catches the deer before it has gone around the circle once, the deer goes into the middle of the circle. If the hunter doesn't catch the deer or doesn't imitate its movements exactly, the hunter goes into the middle of the circle. The game continues until the players on the outside of the circle can't encircle the players inside the circle.” (Education World—http://www.education-world.com/a_lesson/lesson166.shtml)

Review

Have students congregate together and discuss their experiences during the simulation exercises. Draw a T-chart on the board and have students brainstorm the lives of children “Then” and “Now.”

Assessment/Homework

Have students read the book *Samuel Eaton's Day: A Day in the Life of a Pilgrim Boy* by Kate Water and list all the ways their lives are similar to and different from Samuel's life. They will then create two stories they will display side-by-side in a foldable. Both stories will tell about the child author's own life. In the story on the right, the child will write a non-fiction story about his/her own life—telling about only one day. On the left, the child will re-write his/her own daily story as if s/he were born in the 1600s.