

## **Life in Colonial New England Activity**

### **Make Your Own Fabric Doll**

#### **Introduction**

Growing up in early New England was not easy. The pilgrims landed in Plymouth in 1620 and found themselves in a new, harsh, and foreign land. They faced cold, long, dark winters and a land with unfamiliar resources. In order to survive, the early settlers had to adapt, work together, and learn about their new surroundings. Salem was founded in 1626 by Roger Conant. Upon their arrival, this new group of immigrants set about the hard work of establishing a permanent settlement, a task which required the help and participation of every member of the family.

#### **Objectives:**

- Enhance students' understanding of the challenges faced by the early New England settlers.
- Support students' understanding of the daily life of the inhabitants of New England.
- Encourage awareness of the differences between life in the colonial period and their own lives today.

#### **Materials:**

- One piece of fabric cut no smaller than 1' x 1'
- Three pieces of string, twine, or lace, cut into approximately 5' strips

#### **Warmup:**

- Before beginning the activity, ask students to try answering the following questions about life in early America:
  - What kind of chores would a child be assigned in colonial America?
  - How was the life of a boy different from the life of a girl?
  - How many siblings do you think a child would have during this time period?

#### **Directions:**

- As a class, read the Children's Life in the Seventeenth Century information sheet.
- Begin the craft by having each student lay the fabric square flat on a table or even surface.
- Pinch a sizable chunk from the center of the cloth between the thumb and forefinger, this will be the dolls' head.
- Under the dolls' head, separate the two edges of cloth.
- Tie these separated parts just under the doll's head—these will be doll's arms.
- Just under the arms, tie another piece of string—this creates the doll's waist.

#### **Exit Ticket**

- Ask the students to name some of the toys they have at home.
- Ask the class:
  - How do these dolls differ from the toys on this list?
  - Do you think a doll made by a colonial child would look like the ones made in class? Why or why not?
  - Based on the reading, at your age, what do you think your life would be like?

## Children's Life in the Seventeenth Century

Family was extremely important in early American life. A typical family consisted of anywhere between 10 and 20 siblings. Though sadly not all of these children would live to adulthood in the rough conditions of early New England, it was normal to have a very big family.

Children were expected to participate in household chores almost from the moment they could walk, typically beginning as early as five years old! Because the early settlers had to make almost everything in their home, from their food to their clothes, chores were very different from the ones you might be expected to complete at home today. Girls learned how to spin yarn, sew, help prepare food, and mind younger siblings. Boys were taught to tend cattle, plant and harvest, and were introduced to other useful skills like hunting and fishing.

Though children were put to work at an early age, younger children were still allowed a degree of freedom for play. Many people think of the Puritans as strict and stern parents who forbid fun or games. While Puritans lived a serious, structured life, they also danced, drank alcohol, told jokes and riddles, and sang. For the Puritans, life was all about moderation—fun activities had their time and place, and were encouraged when combined with hard work and a life of sincere religious practice.

During their free time, children played games, the same as they do today. Common games included marbles, sack races, spinning tops, leap frog, playing with dolls (usually homemade), jumping rope, and sometimes even ball games. Riddles and tongue twisters were also popular games during this period.

It was typically between the ages of seven and fourteen that children were expected to seriously prepare for adulthood. However, we know adults had fun in their free time as well! They danced, particularly at weddings or celebrations, played games, and participated in sports. These activities were allowed, at appropriate times, when work was finished. However, not every person was able to live up to the standards of moderation, as there are records of adults getting in trouble with the law for playing games at inappropriate times.