

Life in Colonial New England Activity

Make Your Own Popsicle Stick Loom

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 cardboard, cut to approximately 8"x12" (size can vary depending on the desired size of your loom)
- Paper (either color or plain white)
- Yarn or thick string
- 6 popsicle sticks (thick popsicle sticks work best)
- Glue
- Scissors
- Strong adhesive tape

Warmup

- Before beginning the activity, ask students to try answering the following questions as a class:
 - What kind of clothes do you think colonial children wore?
 - How might they differ from your clothes?
 - What kind of material do you think this clothing was made from? The same as yours today?
 - Ask students to look around at the clothing everyone in the room is wearing and list the colors they see.
 - Ask students what colors they think clothing would be in the colonial period.

Activity Directions:

- As a class, read the Clothing in Colonial America information sheet.
- Begin the craft by having each student align their piece of paper with the cardboard square and glue it down so it covers all exposed backing. This will be the front of the loom.
- Glue three popsicle sticks together, one on top of the other. The bundle of popsicle sticks should be about ½ inch thick.

- Repeat step two—there should now be two popsicle stick bundles.
- Glue these bundles to each of the short sides of the cardboard. Set this piece aside to dry.
- Cut 10 strips of yarn, approximately 2' each.
- Once the popsicle sticks and cardboard have dried, begin tying each string (from left to right or right to left) tightly across the cardboard so they rest on the popsicle bundles at either end. Each string should be approximately ½ inch away from one another.
- Once each strand is tightly pulled across the cardboard, tie the string on the back of the loom. Tape the string to the back with a strong adhesive tape to keep the string securely in place.
- Take an additional popsicle stick and tie the yarn to its end. You may need to make a small notch in the popsicle stick to keep the yarn in place.
- Take the single popsicle stick and yarn and begin to weave it through the string in an over-under pattern. Begin at the top and continue through back and forth.
- Continue weaving for desired length.

Exit Ticket:

- Show the class a picture of a real seventeenth-century tape loom (a small hand-held loom used for making small strips of fabric):
<https://www.historicnewengland.org/explore/collections-access/gusn/2412>
- An illustration of a full-sized loom can be seen here:
<https://www.sciencephoto.com/media/988171/view/weaver-16th-century>
- Ask the class:
 - Does your loom look like the seventeenth-century tape loom? How are they different?
 - Think about some of your favorite pieces of clothing—how long do you think it would take to create a full piece of clothing on a bigger seventeenth century loom?
 - Based on what you read before beginning this craft, at your age, what kind of tasks would you be expected to complete? Would you be responsible for making and fixing cloth?

Clothing in Colonial America

The children of early America dressed very differently than kids today. As babies, boys and girls wore long dresses. Around the age of 4, boys would begin to wear doublets (a fitted jacket), though they still wore skirts for several years. Boys would begin wearing breeches (pants) when they were between 6-8 years old. This was considered an important rite of passage in a boy's life. When young men began wearing breeches, they would also start wearing a frock coat (a long, knee-length coat), waistcoat (a vest), and hat.

Girls continued to wear dresses throughout their childhood years. A grown woman would wear a long-sleeved wool waistcoat, a bodice that had stays (stiffened supports, often made of bone), and a petticoat (a skirt worn under a dress).

As adults, both men and women would wear a long shirt or dress made of linen (a light cloth made from flax plants) under their clothing as underwear. Usually, both men and women also wore something around their neck such as a collar or linen kerchief, as well as a head covering. Men and boys wore wool caps or hats, while women wore linen coverings over their hair called coifs.

At first, colonists brought as much of their own clothing and bedding to the New World as possible. Over time, they began to produce crops that could be spun into fabric. The dominant fibers used for cloth in early America were hemp, flax, and wool. Flax was particularly important, as nearly every farmer in New England used it for making clothing, bedding, and other cloth needs.

It is a common mistake to assume the Puritans only wore black and white. Earth tones were the most available dyes, and were often used when making clothing. However, in addition to these earthy colors, we know early settlers also owned colorful clothing, including violet, orange, blue, and even red.