

Children in Colonial America

The colonists, who settled in the New World beginning in the early 1600s, had hard lives. The lives of colonial children were also difficult. They had to follow strict rules and do a lot of work around the home.

Even babies had a job to do! Crawling was considered an animal behavior, so little ones wore stiff **stays** under their clothes to help them stay upright, keep good **posture**, and learn to stand and walk as soon as possible.



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During mealtimes, children were expected to be “seen, and not heard.” This means they tried their best to eat quickly and silently. Kids sometimes weren’t even allowed to sit at the table. Instead, they stood behind the adults, who passed food back to them.

Kids had a lot of chores to do, so they did not have much time for playing. Even young children had jobs such as shelling corn (removing dried kernels from the cob) and **carding** wool to prepare it for spinning.

Colonial children also learned differently than today’s students. Some communities had school buildings, but often kids simply spent a little time each day using special **hornbooks** to learn the alphabet and some basic reading skills.

By age 14, young people were already considered adults. Boys often spent four to seven years as **apprentices** in order to learn a **trade**. A young man would often work long hours for no pay while he practiced a skill such as **blacksmithing**.

A few girls had apprenticeships in crafts such as weaving, but most often girls learned to cook, take care of the home, and raise children. Girls were expected to get married when they were still teenagers.

Vocabulary Words

1. Stays: <http://www.history.org/history/clothing/children/cglossary.cfm> (scroll down to “S” for the definition)
2. Posture: <https://www.vocabulary.com/dictionary/posture>
3. Hornbooks: <http://www.americanhornbooks.com/HornbookHistory.html>
4. Carding: <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/carding>
5. Apprentices: <http://www.history.org/kids/visitUs/colonialPeople/apprentice.cfm>
6. Trade: <http://www.history.org/Almanack/life/trades/tradehdr.cfm>
7. Blacksmithing: <http://www.history.org/Almanack/life/trades/tradebla.cfm>

Use this worksheet with: http://www.educationworld.com/a_lesson/colonial-history-children-common-core-informational-text.shtml