

Name _____



Date _____

Colonial Clothing

By Sharon Fabian

What did colonial people wear? Did they have lots of clothes? What styles were popular? How did they take care of their clothes? Where did they buy them?

The way people dressed back then was much different from the way we dress now. The clothes were different. The fabrics were different. The way they got their clothes was different. The way they took care of their clothes was different too.

Colonial clothing was made of natural fabrics. Many clothes were made of cotton or wool. Dressy clothes were made of silk, velvet, or brocade.

The clothes were all made by hand.

Some colonists made their own clothes. They spun the thread, wove the cloth, and sewed the clothes. Many families on the frontier made all of their own clothes.

Some people bought their clothes. They ordered them from England. Then they waited months for their clothes to arrive by ship. In cities like Williamsburg, colonists kept up with the latest fashions from Europe.

Some clothes made in the colonies were colorful. They were dyed blue, violet, red, or another color. Materials like indigo plants and certain bugs were used for dyes.

An outfit of clothes could take months to make. Clothes were expensive to buy, too. Some colonists had only two outfits - one for every day, one dressy.

Some clothes were washed by hand. The colonists used a washboard and a tub of water for this job. This type of washing was used for shirts and underclothes. Some clothes were not washed. Waistcoats, jackets, and other heavy clothes were not usually put in the wash. Dirt spots on them were cleaned as needed.

What did a colonial outfit look like? There were three main types. There were clothes for men, clothes for women, and clothes for young children. Children over the age of eight or so dressed like adults. There were no teenage styles.

Women wore long dresses, often made in two parts. The top part was called a bodice. The bottom was a full skirt. The bodice buttoned up the front. It had long sleeves. Sometimes, the sleeves were separate pieces too. The skirt was gathered at the waist. It came down to the ankles.

Fancier dresses had layers of petticoats to make the skirt fuller. Women wore corsets pulled tight to make their waist small. Lace collars and cuffs might be added to the dress.

Men wore loose shirts, waistcoats, and breeches. A waistcoat was a sleeveless vest worn over the shirt. Breeches were pants that stopped just below the knees. Men also wore stockings that looked like the tights girls wear today.

A dressy outfit might include a fancy waistcoat and a jacket. Some were made of brocade or velvet. Men wore lace collars and cuffs too. They wore three-cornered hats.

Young children wore loose dresses, called shifts. Both boys and girls wore this comfortable style. Some toddlers wore a padded cap called a pudding cap. It was like a little helmet; it protected the toddler's head. Clothes were passed down to younger brothers and sisters.

This is how people dressed in colonial times. Can you draw a picture of a family in colonial style clothing?



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Questions

- _____ 1. Colonial women wore _____.
 - A. suits
 - B. three-cornered hats
 - C. jeans and T-shirts
 - D. long dresses

- _____ 2. Colonial men wore _____.
 - A. jogging suits
 - B. suits with matching slacks and jackets and a tie
 - C. shirts, waistcoats, and breeches
 - D. khaki pants and sweaters

- _____ 3. Young colonial children wore _____.
 - A. blanket sleepers
 - B. super hero T-shirts
 - C. shifts
 - D. waistcoats and breeches

- _____ 4. Clothes worn in the colonies were made of _____.
 - A. wool
 - B. cotton
 - C. silk
 - D. all of the above

- _____ 5. Colonial clothes were sewn by _____.
 - A. hand
 - B. home sewing machine
 - C. factory machines
 - D. all of the above

- _____ 6. Colonists _____ kept up with the latest fashions.
 - A. on the frontier
 - B. in the cities
 - C. on the Mayflower
 - D. none of the above

- _____ 7. Colonists washed their clothes in a _____.
 - A. laundromat
 - B. tub
 - C. washing machine
 - D. well

- _____ 8. Colonial dress was different from today's dress because the colonists _____.
 - A. had fewer clothes
 - B. washed their clothes less often
 - C. wore only handmade clothes
 - D. all of the above

