



## Keeping Clean in the Colonies

### Introduction

Bathing was not a common occurrence in the eighteenth century. People didn't often notice the body odor of others because it was the norm. Eighteenth-century bathing, at least for the wealthy, or gentry, class, was more commonly used for relaxation and health. Those who did bathe for cleanliness generally focused on washing only their hands and faces. Wealthier colonists kept wash basins in their bedchambers for this purpose.

This lesson is best used while studying daily colonial life. However, it can be a stand-alone lesson as well. In this lesson, students will brainstorm ideas on why colonists didn't bathe regularly and understand the reasons behind their lack of bathing. Students will also be able to identify materials and objects used in the cleansing process. The lesson extensions compare bathing in the eighteenth century to bathing today.

### Objectives

In this lesson, students:

- Make inferences about why colonists did not bathe regularly
- Draw conclusions about eighteenth-century bathing
- Compare eighteenth-century reasons for and methods of bathing with those of today

### Materials

- "To Bathe or Not to Bathe"
- Large sheets of paper for brainstorming
- What's It For? activity worksheet

### Strategy

1. Begin by asking students to imagine what the room might smell like if no one had bathed in a month. Have students share out their ideas/descriptions of what they imagined.

2. Explain to students that bathing was not common in colonial times and it commonly referred to washing hands and face only. Pose the question "Why?"
3. Have students get in groups of 4 or 5 and brainstorm ideas of why they think bathing was not common in colonial times (5-10 min.). Have them record their ideas on paper. Give them the following guiding questions/thoughts:
  - a. What was the process?
  - b. Accessibility
  - c. What did they use to compensate?
  - d. Clothing
4. When groups are finished brainstorming, gather the class and share brainstorming ideas. Have each group share their ideas one at a time. If not mentioned by students (or to elaborate), be sure to discuss the following:
  - a. Difficulty in preparing bath: finding a tub, getting water, heating water (optional), find something to use as a towel, etc.
  - b. Use of harsh soaps
  - c. Clothing masking the sweat and smell
  - d. Caps covered and protected women's hair
  - e. Temperature in the winter
  - f. Modesty; finding a location to batheIf needed, read aloud paragraphs six and seven from the feature article "To Bathe or Not to Bathe" to expand or conclude the discussion.
5. In pairs or individually, pass out the What's It For? activity worksheet and have students match the images with their correct descriptions.

### **Lesson Extensions**

Have students create a Venn diagram of bathing in the eighteenth century compared to bathing today. Have them write a one-paragraph summary comparing and contrasting the information in their Venn diagram.

Have students work individually or in pairs to create a collage of today's bathing products. Provide the students with magazines, construction paper, glue, and scissors. Have them note the product's use. Then, make a class collage of images of eighteenth-century bathing (images can be found on history.org and in this month's feature article, as well as elsewhere on the Internet). Have students brainstorm why bathing has changed so much since the eighteenth century.

This lesson was written by educators Allison Straker, Vancouver, WA, and Andy Rodgers, Parker, CO, for the May 2012 *Teacher Gazette*.

## What's It For?

Match the picture with the correct description.



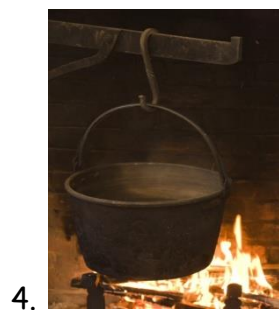
Pot used for heating water for washing.



Shaving bowl - water is put in it to rinse a shaving brush and man's face after shaving.



Lye soap - harsh soap used for cleaning.



Chamber pot - kept under the bed at night for necessities.



Wash basin and bottle - generally kept in the bedchambers for washing face and hands. Most commonly used by the upper class.