



And You Think Your Mom Is Strict!

You have probably already read a little about the Pilgrims who came to America in the 1600s and 1700s. Did you ever read much about the Pilgrim children who came over here then? Well, their life was pretty tough. In addition to not having CD players, video games, movies, or any TV, they also had to work—and not just “set the table,” either! They had to do real, physical work like chopping wood, cooking and baking, sewing clothes by hand, working in the garden, shoveling out the barns, and taking care of animals. And they had to walk everywhere they went! No car-pool moms then! No cars!

The Pilgrims had very strict beliefs about children and their place in the family. Most of the time they were not allowed to speak unless an adult talked to them first. They were not allowed to be around whenever anyone came to their house for a visit, and if they did make an appearance, it was for a very short time and they had to be very polite. American children often have a private bedroom full of toys. The Pilgrim children didn’t really own anything at all. They had very few toys, mostly made from wood or cloth scraps found around the house. They didn’t have their own bedrooms, but instead slept in the family gathering room or a loft. If there was a church or town event, children might be allowed to play games or dance, but usually they were expected to work most of the time, just as the adults did.

But mealtime had to be the worst! The Pilgrims did not have things like refrigeration and did not know very much about being sanitary—it’s hard to be sanitary when you have to carry every drop of water you use up to the house in a bucket! Pilgrims were especially strict during meals. Children usually had to stand at the table, while the adults sat down to eat. Young people had to eat what was put before them without complaining and without reaching to get it themselves. Quite often, the children didn’t even have plates but shared a wooden “trencher” with another family member—and they ate with their hands or a wooden spoon. While they were eating, they often wiped their hands on a napkin—common enough, but these were not ordinary napkins. The napkins were very long rectangles that would be tossed over the shoulder and would hang clear to the floor. When their hands became messy, they simply wiped them on the napkin. And it was only washed about once a year—yuck!

Back then, there were almost no books for children. When they learned to read, it had to be from the Bible or from a book of morals. The Pilgrims could not have imagined letting children read about talking stuffed animals or aliens from another planet.

The next time your mom asks you to clean your room or put away your many possessions, think of this story. Your mom might be strict, but she is nothing like a Pilgrim parent!

By Mary Rose

Dear Parents

You can remind your children of this passage every time you ask them to help out with some chores at home or whenever they complain that you won't buy them the newest gadget! Have fun reading this interesting article about the Pilgrims.

TIP OF THE WEEK

Help your child compare and contrast his or her lifestyle with that of the Pilgrims by having him or her circle everything that describes life in the past and underlining everything that describes our lives today. (You can also use colors, if that is easier.) This helps readers organize the text into two distinct areas for comparison—a valuable skill not only for test-taking, but also for clarifying information in nonfiction texts.

The Questions

List four ways you can compare and contrast your life to the lives of Pilgrim children.

Be sure that each time you answer, you are comparing the same subject.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

We have completed this assignment together.

Child's Signature

Parent's Signature