

Goals/Objectives/Student Outcomes:

Students will:

- Be introduced to the idea that tradition and social and economic conditions contributed to the way Victorians celebrated events.
- Discuss how the social expectations of women required that they create homes with decorations that were the family's haven from the world.
- Discuss how the industrial revolution had an enormous effect on Victorian families as men and women's roles evolved and new products became available.
- After discussing celebrations, "refrain from being idle" and complete typical Victorian holiday projects.

Materials:

1. Scraps and recycled items (see Activities below)

Background:

Humans are creatures who celebrate. Through time we have danced, sung, feasted, fasted, and dramatized important moments in our lives. We celebrate as members of a community of people with distinct values and ideals. From the most primitive tribe to the most sophisticated nation, all people have holidays that have special meaning for them.

Many traditional festivals grew from ancient celebrations that originally explained very early human ideas of life, the world, and the heavens. Most annual celebrations originated from seasonal changes in the lives of agricultural people, and they can be traced back through the years to a time when human survival depended directly on natural events. Many festivals related to the movement of the earth around the sun and to the changes that this made in the lives of human beings. The ancient May Day celebration is a good example.

Holidays, festivals, and celebrations also chronicle human history. It is only since the rise of nationalism a little more than two centuries ago, that festivals and religious beliefs became separate. Celebrating the 4th of July is a good example.

The Victorian era was a period of seventy years during which the industrial revolution caused many changes. By the mid 1800s many basic changes in life in the United States had begun. Railroads and waterways provided rapid transportation of goods and people. The population was shifting from rural areas to cities and suburbs that were close to new manufacturing centers. Home life and business became two separate worlds, and new land to settle and new opportunities to make money created more money to spend.

During this time men's jobs became more specialized. Specialized jobs for women also began to evolve—specifically, the care of children and the home. The man of the house and in fact the whole community looked at the home as a haven from the world of work. The home became a symbol to outsiders of how financially well-off the family was and also a place where learning of all kinds went on. Advice books and women's magazines (like *Ladies Home Journal* which circulated 440,000 copies a month in 1889 and one million a month a few years later) gave rules and standards for women and families to live up to. In *Our Department or the Manners, Conduct and Dress of the Most Refined Society*, (Union Publishing house, Chicago, 1881) Chapter 20, "Home Culture" says:

The work of home culture should be made a matter of great importance to every one, for upon it depends the happiness of earthly homes, as well as our fitness for the enjoyment of the eternal home in heaven.

After discussing how to "Cultivate Moral Courage," the "Results of Good-Breeding in the Home Circle," and "The Influence of Books," Chapter 21 continues on "Woman's Higher Education":

Idleness A Source of Misery: Perhaps the greatest cause of misery and wretchedness in social life is idleness. The want of something to do is what make people wicked and miserable. It breeds selfishness, mischief-making, envy, jealousy, and vice, in all its most dreadful forms.... Let girls take serious interest in art; let them take up some congenial study, let it be a branch of science or history. Let them write. They can do almost anything they try to do.... Idleness, frivolity, and ignorance can only be put down by education and employment.

Among other products, the industrial revolution provided new materials that were used to make crafts and decorate homes. Small paper images lithographically printed and often embossed were known as scraps, chromos, or die cuts, and were widely used in the United Kingdom and the United States.

During the 19th century the publishers of stamped embossed reliefs vigorously explored new markets and outlets for their products, and scraps were used in more and more diverse and ingenious ways ranging from confirmation wafers to educational aids. Children bought many scraps and quickly invented games and ways to use them. In fact, these inexpensive pictures could be considered the great-grandparents of the embellishment craze of today: stickers.

The process of lithography was invented in 1798 by Alois Snefelder and many scraps have been printed using this little changed lithographic technique. Since lithographic stones were very heavy and difficult to work with, their use in industry was limited. With the introduction of the steel litho plate, the production of prints became viable on a large scale. This change introduced the cheap scrap that Gleeson White points out in his 1984 article in *The Studio* (extra Christmas issue):

These cut-out devices were prepared at a cost of 4d per 1000, the hands earning about 15 shillings a week, until Germany sent over more cheaply produced imitations at one-sixteenth the cost...

By the end of the first decade of the 20th century, mass production coupled with improved transportation had made manufactured goods available everywhere while advertising had made them desirable, leaving little demand for the individual hand-crafted item. These changes in the lives of people were reflected in their celebrations. Glass, metal, and celluloid (and later, plastic) decorations replaced the need for families to make their own. But some of our Victorian past has been preserved and continues to evolve as we celebrate contemporary holidays by purchasing antique printed and plastic decorations.

Valentines Day—Many examples of Victorian valentines have been saved. These decorations provide insight into the secrets of individual hearts as well as Victorian Society at large. Valentines were among the few acceptable tokens that could be freely exchanged between men and women, and much was read between the lines. Until the early 19th century valentines were primarily handwritten love letters. When new technology provided more sophisticated printing techniques, the Victorian valentine business boomed.

In 1847 a young woman named Esther Howland of Worcester, Massachusetts received a typical commercial English valentine from a friend and was inspired to try to make some of her own. As the story goes, Esther persuaded her father, who coincidentally was a stationer, to order a supply of valentine materials from England. Miss Howland's valentines became very popular and netted her over \$1,000,000 a year. She is now known as the "Mother of the American Valentine."

May Day—The first-of-May frolic is an ancient festival that began in the English countryside before the Middle Ages. On this day young people would rise early and venture out into the fields to collect wildflowers. These would be made into garlands and baskets of spring blossoms and then delivered in secret to friends and neighbors. Later everyone would gather around a May pole with colored ribbons attached.

At the turn of the century in America elaborate and festive celebrations of May Day took place at many colleges including Iowa State College. (A "Traditions Mistress" is still in charge of annual May Day festivities at Bryn Mawr College, Pennsylvania.) Students participated in elaborate pageants. Before breakfast on the first of May, children secretly delivered their May Day baskets by hanging them on doorknobs (often knocking and then running away). If they were seen, custom required that they had to go back for a kiss and thanks!

Activities:

The following activities will provide good opportunities to use up scraps and recycled materials. In true Victorian manner you may want to designate a box in your classroom to collect materials such as wrapping paper, magazines, and ribbon. Have your students participate in acquiring the materials by saving things they might have thrown away.

A Mirror Valentine:

1. A piece of broken mirror or shiny silver paper for each child (aluminum foil will work)
2. Stiff red or white paper to make two heart shapes for each child
3. Reproduction scrap stickers or small illustrations from magazines
4. Lace, doily, ribbon scraps
5. Wax paper
6. Pens or thin markers to write sayings
7. Glue
8. Scissors

Use two pieces of stiff red or white paper and a small piece of broken mirror. Cut two hearts to cover your glass (Fig. 1), then glue the mirror to one of the hearts. Cut another heart exactly the same size as the first, and in the center leave a heart-shaped opening as large as possible, but small enough to cover the edges of the mirror.

On one side of the top of the valentine write, "Look Into This Mirror Clear," and on the other side write, "And My True Love Will Appear" (Fig. 2). At the bottom point of the valentine glue on small paper scraps. You could add bows or lace. Glue the heart-shaped frame over the glass and lay the valentine under several books until the glue dries. Be sure to place a piece of wax paper on top of and underneath the valentine.

Cornucopia May Day Basket:

1. An 8 1/2" square of stiff paper for each child (wallpaper scraps or an old wallpaper sample book would work)
2. 14" ribbon, cord or string for each child
3. Lace, doily, ribbon scraps
4. Reproduction scrap stickers or small illustrations from magazines
5. Hole punch
6. Clothespins
7. Glue
8. Scissors
9. Popcorn, small candies to fill baskets (your students could also make paper flower and tape them to twigs, small sticks, or inexpensive cooking skewers)

Paper cornucopia May Day baskets were the Victorian child's choice. To make them, cut an eight and a half inch square of stiff paper. With the paper facing you so that it forms a diamond, wrap the two points of the diamond together (Fig. 1), overlapping them to form a tight cone shape. Glue under the overlapping edge and clip together with a clothespin until the glue dries. Next, decorate with lace, ribbon, paper scraps (Fig. 2). With a hole punch, punch out one hole on each side of the cornucopia to tie your long ribbon handle. Fill with popcorn and candy.

Procedure:

1. Discuss the fact that all people celebrate holidays.
2. List the holidays that your students celebrate.
3. Define the term Victorian.
4. Define the term industrial revolution.
5. Discuss the impact that the industrial revolution and technology has had on families.
6. Talk about Victorian ideals of home and expectation of women.
7. Discuss the specific impact that the industrial revolution and its products had on Victorian families and how these still influence our lives and ideas.
8. Discuss Valentine's Day and May Day.
9. Have students create valentines and May baskets.
10. Display and evaluate projects.

Assessment of Outcomes:

Students should list and describe at least two holidays that the Victorians celebrated.

List and discuss elements of Victorian life and traditions. Compare and contrast with contemporary students lives and celebrations.

Students will define the term Victorian and list some of the economic and social conditions of the period.

May baskets and valentines will be displayed and students will explain their work.

Use additional lesson time to focus and expand on these holidays and their activities. make a May pole and recreate the dances. Look at examples of original Victorian valentines.

Create lessons where students in your classroom share their family holiday traditions. Victorian families read about how to celebrate holidays in the many magazines and articles published during the period. How do we get this information?

Have your students interview older family members to find out how they celebrate and about the economic and social conditions that contribute to their celebrations. Ask about celebrations from their childhoods and today.

Resources:

Visit the Farm House Museum at Iowa State University, (515) 294-3342, to see a Victorian home and its contents. If you are too far away visit a period home or museum in your area. Call for more information and suggestions.

Don't forget to use the human resources in your community. Invite older citizens and student family members into your classroom to talk about their memories of celebrations.

Alistair Allen and Joan Hoverstadt. *The History of Printed Scraps*. London: New Cavendish Books, 1983.

Sarah Ban Breathnach. *Mrs. Sharp's Traditions: Nostalgic Suggestion for Recreating the Family Celebrations and Seasonal Pastimes of the Victorian Home*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1990.

Doleta Chapru. *A Festival of the English May Folklore*. Village Farm, Inc. Route 3, Dodgeville, WI 52533 1991. An excellent source for history and directions for a May Day celebration.

Jessica H. Foy and Karal Ann Marling. *The Arts and the American Home, 1890-1930*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1994.

Harvey Green. *The Light of the Home, An intimate View of the Lives of Women in Victorian America*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1983.

How to Create Victorian Paper Scrap Art Video, Rocky Mountain Handicrafts, Provo Utah 1991 (47 minutes).

Dover Publications, 31 East 2nd Street, Mineola, N.Y. 11501-3582, is an excellent source for reproduction Victorian scraps for projects. They print books of scraps to be cut out as well as books of stickers. Just be sure to mention to your students that Victorian children had to cut out all their own scraps!