Changing Images of Childhood in America: Colonial, Federal and Modern England

Curriculum Unit 91.02.09
by Penny Snow

Introduction

Worthington Hooker, a k-4 elementary school, was designated by the city of New Haven as a mini-arts magnet school. The term “magnet” indicates that it draws students from every part of the city because of the strength of its arts program; the term “mini” refers to the fact that the school remains first of all committed to being a neighborhood school. Due to its proximity to Yale University graduate student housing, the school population reflects that international community, and students at Worthington Hooker come from twenty-five to thirty-five countries. Students, then, represent many varied cultural groups. There is at the school a widespread consensus that art activities, rather than being a separate subject and perhaps a “frill”, are an integral part of how children learn and grow, and an important mode of expression.

Through art, students not only learn basic concepts that they then can use in other areas (kindergarten children learn to read and clap rhythmic patterns from left to right before they read words; students can learn pattern and sequence in music and visual art before studying it in math), but are actively and affectively involved in learning through their own art. In an age when technology encourages passive reception of received ideas—when programmed workbooks, computer programs and achievement tests encourage “the right answer”—it is even more important to develop skills of independent observation, critical comparison and individual expression.

In most years, a school-wide theme at Worthington Hooker has focused on a sharing, through art activities, of the different cultures represented at the school. As art is a direct expression of the spirit of a culture, active engagement in the arts of another culture allows students to enter into and understand it better. This unit differs in that place (New England) remains constant and circumscribed, and the focus is on change through time. Examining New England children’s lives at two different stages of American history, colonial and federal, through artifacts and art projects, and comparing these historical childhoods with their own, may not only help to focus the experience of international students on a particular place, but help American-born children to understand the history and mores of their own culture.

As arts coordinator this past year, I was responsible for coordinating resources, trips, activities, and visiting
artists, and for teaching art classes around a common theme, as well as organizing a culminating celebration—all-day, school-wide performances, exhibits and sharing of activities. This current unit will focus on a sequence of art projects for third and fourth grades that may be coordinated with the classroom teacher’s social studies, science, math, and language art activities, and could culminate in a school-wide sharing of activities. I have been discussing and coordinating this curriculum with another seminar member, Jeanne Sandahl, who is a fourth grade teacher in the same school.

**Unit Objectives**

1. To explore with students two time periods of another culture (albeit one that is related to some of us historically), using active investigative methods in social studies, language and visual arts, and science.
2. To increase student abilities in observation, description, in making comparisons, and expression.
3. To increase students’ awareness of their own place in society and history through a comparison of these other times with their own.
4. To increase art skills, and familiarity with art materials.

**Strategies**

The anticipated duration of the unit is fifteen weeks, with one art period a week for each of four classes, third and fourth grades. In general, this interdisciplinary unit will combine:

1. Slide presentations
   a. Children as portrayed in paintings
   b. Samplers
2. Field trips: to The British Art Center, Center Church on the green, the Eli Whitney Museum, the New Haven Colony Historical Society, the Pardee Morris House, the Yale Art Gallery. Field trips will be preceded by a class discussion that generates student questions, and will be followed by an opportunity to record experiences.
3. Art projects, of varying class duration from one class to a period of a month.
   a. Ongoing: drawing from observation for fifteen to twenty minutes at the beginning of each class; a class timeline that includes drawings, as places are visited, and as historical figures and objects are studied.
   b. Discrete: personal timeline; maps; self-portraits; sampler.
4. Language arts: readings, classroom discussions and followup written exercises either in the classroom or as homework.
   a. Ongoing: then-and-now worksheets; journals; reading aloud in class.
   b. Discrete: examining objects from our own culture.
The development of skills in formal object analysis, as introduced in this seminar, “The Family in Art and Material Culture”, will be an ongoing and cooperative class activity. Both the image and self-image of children can be discussed and compared in terms of the child’s place in the family, experience in school and kinds of recreation.

Slides, maps and written material in the resource packet and available at the Yale-New Haven Teacher’s Institute range in time period from early New England colonial (1641) through the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth centuries.

**I: Historical Time and Place**

As place in this unit is limited to New England, New Haven is the most obvious and accessible representative town to explore. Since one of the objectives of the unit is to examine change through time, maps of New Haven at various times can be compared and constructed. Both public and personal events will be charted in chronological time.

**Section 1: Maps**

A map is a representation of a specific area on paper. The relationship between the area and the representation on paper is expressed by using scale, direction, distance and landmarks. There is a map of the world in the room. What other kinds of maps are there? What are they used for? Have some additional examples such as a highway or topographical map.

*Direction* Using a compass, students determine the orientation of the school. We will look at how direction is indicated on maps with a compass rose.

*Scale* Suggested drawing projects (#1) are illustrated in the resource packet. This may be followed by a class discussion using examples from life or literature. Children’s literature has abundant examples, from “Goldilocks and the Three Bears” to *Alice in Wonderland*, of children examining scale and disproportionate size.

*Landmarks* Worthington Hooker School is one man-made landmark in our neighborhood. What other kinds of landmarks are there? Students will be given a xerox map of the city and a homework assignment: using three different colored pencils, find three different routes from home to school on the current city map. Identify personal landmarks (as the location of a friend or relative’s home, where grocery shopping is done, where clothing and toys are purchased, etc.). Maps are saved in a folder constructed of folded and stapled oak-tag or construction paper that may also be stenciled. Fieldtrips may be indicated on city maps.

Vocabulary: Scale, distance, landmarks and compass rose.

At the beginning of the second class, students draw from memory on graph paper the route they took to school that morning. Students may estimate that each block or two on the paper can be used to represent a city block and thus combine scale and distance. The insurance map of 1901, the year that Worthington Hooker School was constructed, shows the proportionate size of blocks in the area contiguous to the school.

The class takes clipboard, paper and pencil outside to draw the front exterior of the school—a neighborhood
landmark. Preparatory to drawing, we discuss the rectangular shape of the building, the smaller rectangles of windows, chimneys, and doors, the semi-circle archway, the horizontals of the steps, the triangles formed by the roof. As the front exterior of the building is perfectly symmetrical, an exercise in symmetry—paper-folding and cutouts—may also precede the drawing. Drawings of the school should be kept at school and later added to either the class or individual timeline as illustration.

Five other maps representing different times in the history of the city of New Haven are available in the resource materials packet. During the next class and before the field trip to The Green, students will be given copies of maps for a class discussion to chart the growth of the city from nine squares and observe changes in land use. For example, we can compare the differences between the 1641 map and that of 1748 in 1) area covered, 2) number and kind of buildings, 3) changes in water areas. The map of 1824 shows neither canal nor basin. By 1830 the Farmington Canal is completed as well as the Union Basin in the harbor. By 1868, the canal has been converted to a railroad line.

Some students may enjoy working on their own with a xerox of one of these maps, using watercolors, or tempera, and turning a map into a jigsaw puzzle or board game, as was done in the eighteenth century. In 1762 John Spilsbury in England produced jigsaw maps as a teaching aid; in 1759 John Jefferys invented a board game called “A Journey Through Europe or The Play of Geography” (Gottlieb and Plumb xxviii).

Classrooms plan for construction of a relief map of New Haven made of paper mache, clay, cardboard, or wood. In addition to being a three dimensional exhibit in the upstairs hall, the map is photographed. Successive groups of students alter the map to show changing features of the city as the unit progresses. Mounted photos of all stages invite inspection by other classes in the school. Construction of the paper mache map will be an ongoing and cooperative art project.

This unit may logically be extended with science projects concerning water, as water has played such an important role in the city’s development, from its location on Long Island Sound, to water used for transportation and trade, the important oyster industry, and power—for the Whitney factory. Experiments could investigate the properties of water as a solid, liquid and gas, the water cycle, and the different ways water has been used in this city.

Lesson four will be a field trip to the New Haven Green to see and draw New Haven architecture. Before leaving for field trips, the class can plot some possible routes to get there on the map, and examine our historical maps for clues to how the area looked. This will generate a group of questions to think about during the trip to focus observations. From the 1824 map, for example, we see the present position of the three churches. What buildings might still be in the same place? (The John Pierpont House of 1767 remains at 149 Elm Street, the Nicholas Callaham House of 1770 at 125 Elm Street). How has Center Church changed? (Both in structure and position.) Special cards for taking notes and answering questions accompany trips. Responses are written before reboarding the bus.

Students bring clipboards and drawing paper to draw the exterior of Center Church.

Section 2: Timelines

In order to place both people of former times and ourselves in time and in history, we create a scrolled timeline out of unwaxed shelf paper on one wall of the classroom. The school year 1991-1992 lends itself to beginning the timeline with 1492 and the celebrated (in 1992 probably much celebrated) discovery, for
Europeans, of the North American continent by Columbus. The *National Geographic* map “Where Did Columbus Discover America?” (resource materials packet) which shows possible routes and some translated excerpts from his diary (see materials packet) can be used to begin discussions of this “discovery”. What does “discover” mean? What did Columbus discover? What can we learn about him by reading his diary? There is an opportunity for classroom teachers to submit student “Columbus Day” essays for a city-wide contest.

Since we are comparing children’s lives in three time periods, the main purpose of the timeline is to establish landmarks of each period, and to make transitions visible, for example, an idea or the creation of an invention, and its later effect on everyday life. Two hundred and fifty years after Columbus’ diary records his arrival in San Salvador, and half-way to the present time on the timeline, 1742, marks the colonial period. The “pre-modern” federalist period is our next stage, and the present time is the last. As the unit progresses, other dates, events (international, national or city), and historical New Haven figures, such as Eli Whitney, can be filled in on the timeline and illustrated.

As a homework assignment, students create a personal timeline in the form of a scroll, from their birth to the present, that might include photos, drawings of their present house or apartment, a family tree, important personal events like the first day of school or the first day at Worthington Hooker School, learning to ride a bike, swim. During this week, students spend about thirty minutes a day working on their timeline; parents will be asked to help if needed. (A letter home to parents would be helpful.)

## II: Written Records

### Section 3: Historical Diaries, Student’s Own Journals.

We can learn details of daily life and attitudes of people of former historical periods through words left in diaries, or reminiscences. “Then and Now” sheets use quotes from diaries and journals for students to read and compare aspects of their own lives with those of children of other eras. See sample sheets in resource materials packet. These sheets may be introduced as part of a field trip, or in connection with other language arts activities, such as reading aloud in class *A Gathering of Days*, by Joan W. Blos.

Excerpts included are from *Diary of Anna Green Winslow, a Boston schoolgirl of 1771*, from Lucy Larcom’s *A New England Girlhood*, published in 1889 but written about growing up in early nineteenth century New England, and from the autobiographical *A New England Boyhood*, by Edward Everett Hale, published in 1893, which begins its narrative in 1822. Topics for discussion include food, clothing, the child’s role in the family, education, and holidays.

Classroom teachers can plan for their students to enter notes in journals regularly twice a week during this unit.
III: Objects as Documents

Section 4: Objects of our own time

Preparatory to visiting a museum to see objects of another time and as a class exercise, we will practice describing a typical object of our time, for example, a car. As a class assignment, students can write a description of a television (or a MacDonald's) from the point of view of a cultural outsider.

Furniture, dishes, and housewares may be examined at the Yale Art Gallery. A field trip to the Pardee Morris House will examine interiors as they were “then” lived in. This section will overlap, and continue to make use of “then and now” sheets.

Other objects, which may be common to both cultures, can be examined to see the different role they play in the culture, for example, the changing role of guns, and the necessity and the concept of the hearth. Questions concerning the function of the hearth, for preparing food, for warmth, and as a gathering place, lead to further questions: when do we come together at present, as a class, as a family, as a community?

We will cook and taste typical foods. See resource materials packet for drying foods and recipes. This may be extended to a “then and now” comparison of medicinals.

Additional information (from the educational department of Sturbridge Village) on creating everyday objects is available in the materials packet, and may be used during class or during special workshops on a school-wide culminating day of exhibits and sharing of activities.

IV: The Visual Record

Section 5: Slides of Paintings

To learn more about the appearance of children and their role in the family, we will examine slides of children and family portraits and visit the Yale Art Gallery and the British Art Center.

Then, as now, children in portraits reflected the ideals and beliefs of their parents. Puritan religious beliefs of the early New England colonial period governed the structure and conduct of family and community life. For example, the 1641 map show the meeting house as the center of this life; in the beginning of New Haven’s history, only those allowed to belong to the church were involved in the political process (Atwater 2). The Puritan view that all men were innately sinful is reflected in portraits of that time; children are painted as miniature adults, with stiff posture, serious expression, and often holding emblems of adult status. The wealth then displayed by children’s clothing was justified by religious beliefs: material possessions were the result of hard work and were an expression of the grace of God (Brent 1,2).

By the time of the American revolution, ideas about children had been influenced by the English philosopher John Locke, 1632-1704, who wrote, “Let us then suppose the mind to be, as we say, white paper, void of all characters, without any ideas” (Russell 610). Although a clear refutation of Puritan beliefs, Locke’s theory of the tabula rasa, the blank slate to be educated, was not as radically opposed to the Puritans’ as that of Jean
Jacques Rousseau who wrote “Man is naturally good, and only by institutions is he made bad” (Russell 688). Recognition of childhood as a separate stage is reflected in portraiture by children’s clothing, posture, and the objects they hold (Brent 4).

These portraits may be compared with present-day photos of children and families.

See resource materials packet for slides, which are in general arranged horizontally by century, and vertically to show the progression of the changing image of childhood.


**Section 6: Creation of a Sampler**

The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary defines a sampler as being a model, a pattern, something to be imitated, an archetype. When we think of samplers, we not only envision a pattern for stitches, but that very image of a sampler stands as a symbolic archetype of domesticity, recalling for us an age when clothes were constructed by hand, and handicrafts were a part of everyday life.

The sampler was both a process, a method of education particularly but not exclusively for young girls, and evidence of that education, a finished work (Bolton 116). It transmitted values and essential sewing skills from one generation to the next. And regardless of its changing function within the household, it was a tangible object that remained an expression of the maker.

By making a sampler, then, students are themselves following a model; they engage in a typical activity and create a typical object from earlier times. They become familiar with the main elements of samplers: ground, thread, stitches, and design. Like the children of the pre-industrial period, they create a textile that can be displayed on a wall.

**A brief history of samplers.**

Samplers must have been common in Elizabethan England, for Shakespeare referred to samplers in *A Midsummers Night Dream*. In Act III, Scene ii Helena says:

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We, Hermia, like two artificial Gods
Have with our needles created both one flower
Both on one sampler, sitting on one cushion.
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For Helena the reference was to the sisterhood of close friends, and evokes the harmonious image of women working on samplers together. The reference also underlines the strong initial English influence on early New England samplers. In seventeenth century England needlework decorated handkerchiefs, tablecloths, sheets, towels, napkins, etc. There were no early books of patterns, and samplers served literally as examples. The narrow, (commonly seven inches), long, (up to three feet), English samplers featured designs on the upper half, and drawn or cut work on the lower, with an occasional alphabet. English samplers were widely imitated in New England for the first hundred years.
The first extant and most famous New England sampler was stitched c. 1650 by Loara Standish, eldest daughter of Miles and Barbara Standish of Plymouth Colony. It is now in Plymouth Hall, Pilgrim Society, Plymouth Massachusetts, and a photo is included in *American Samplers* by Bolton and Coe. It has the long English shape, 27 1/2” long by 71 1/4” wide, with English designs. It is distinguished by having the first-known stitched aphorism. There are not many other surviving examples of American samplers from the seventeenth century.

American samplers of the first half of the eighteenth century developed distinct national tendencies: 1) they became more square; 2) borders became more prominent; 3) content became more pictorial; 4) the number of verses increased; 5) the visual focus was on the lower half; and 6) a variety of materials were used, including sequins, beads, and metallic threads (Krueger 19). Adam and Eve developed as a popular motif.

Along with cooking and household management, sewing skills were an essential part of a girl’s education. Very young children were being taught to sew either at home or in Dame Schools. The composition of their samplers was limited to alphabets, verses and numerals, with a name and date in cross stitch.

Samplers in the second half of the century became more free, and took their models from nature—trees, deer, dogs, and flowers. They were produced as part of the formal schooling for older girls. New Haven samplers of this time were distinguished by black-worked borders, and some of them exhibit careful attention to the architectural detail of houses and public buildings. One example of this was stitched by Lydia Church, age 13, in 1791 at Mrs. Mansfield’s School in New Haven. Worked in silk and metal on linen it is now at the Connecticut Historical Society in Hartford.

Samplers that are also genealogies became common after 1800. As well as being decorative, they were a record of family births, marriages and deaths. The average age of sampler-makers in the nineteenth century was eleven.

After 1830 there was a noticeable decline in workmanship and number of samplers. As other subjects, such as botany, history, arithmetic, geography and music were offered, training in ornamental arts decreased (Brant 99).

In the nineteenth century, silk thread, either floss or twist, was used most frequently, and linen was the most common ground. The majority of stitches were either cross stitch, tent stitch, satin stitch and stem.

Samplers have served different functions in different periods: as reference, as education and for display. They were a model for designs and stitches for the decoration of household linen executed by adults, an educational exercise for young children that enlarged and reinforced the sewing skills necessary to construct clothing, an exercise to reinforce limited book learning, a family record, a symbol of a young woman’s education and her family’s wealth, and an artistic expression.

Vocabulary words: aphorism, border, genealogy, horizontal, sampler, stitch, vertical.

As a class we will examine a slide of a sampler made by Emily Clark, who was born in New Haven.

Background for a Formal Analysis

Physical Characteristics: 17 1/2” high, 18 and 1/8” wide; silk on linen ground; the stitch is predominantly counted cross stitch, but she also uses bullion, eyelet and outline stitches. She may or may not have used a hoop.
Words within the garland: “Emily Clark’s sampler wrought in the 12th year of her age under the tuition of M.C. Spencer”. On either side of the garland are verses from the Bible. Underneath the garland is a brief meditation.

The buildings on the bottom of the sampler represent Yale College (old brick row).

**Field trip to the New Haven Colony Historical Society.**

When first completed, samplers in museums would have had color, brightness, and a visible texture of the ground and various stitches. Although now faded and too fragile to handle, antique samplers at the New Haven Colony Historical Society retain texture and some clarity; they demonstrate a variety of stitches and levels of artistic accomplishment. Each sampler that is available for viewing is a visually powerful and unique work.

**Creation of a sampler**

After visiting the Historical Society to see samplers, students will design and execute a sampler that relates to their own life, depicting objects they feel are important. Creation of a sampler will be preceded by a lesson to learn three stitches and to draw an outline of the design. Students may practice stitches by using paper with evenly-spaced dots as a guide, or cardboard with holes punched out, and tapestry needles and yarn. See resource packet for a sample practice sheet, and an illustration of some basic stitches.

Samplers will be worked on burlap with colored yarn and tapestry needles.

**Art Materials**

- Drawing paper—twenty minute observation and drawing each class.
- Graph paper—maps, tapestry design
- Shelf paper, unwaxed—timelines
- Construction paper
- Large rolled paper, brown or white—self-portraits 20 lb. weight paper—field notes
- Shirt cardboards—covers for drawing, maps
- Pencils
- Charcoal
- Colored Pencils
- Oil pastels
- Watercolors
- Tempera paint—self portraits
- Brushes
- Burlap—sampler
- Yarn—sampler
- Tapestry needles—sampler
- Fabric, beads, foil, wallpaper—self-portraits
- Clipboards
Materials in Resource Packet

Art Projects for #1: Scale
Art Project #2: Self-portraits
Maps:

Maps 1-6: Yale University Library, Map Room

2. Wadsworth Map, New Haven in 1748
3. Doolittle Map, New Haven in 1824
4. Doolittle Map, New Haven in 1830
5. Beer Atlas of New Haven County, 1868
7. Current city map

Recipes
Sampler stitches and practice sheets

Slides:
Slides 1-15: Yale University Slide Library

1. Freake Limner, “The Mason Children”, 1670
2. Freake Limner, “Margaret Gibbs”, 1670
4. Freake Limner, “Mrs. Freake and Baby Mary”, 1674
5. John Durand, “The Rapalje Children”, c. 1769
6. Joseph Blackburn, “Isaac Winslow and His Family”, 1755
7. Anonymous, “Two Children with a Deer”, XVIIc
8. Winthrop Chandler, “Eunice Huntington Devotion”, 1772
9. Ralph Earl, “Mrs. Noah Smith and Her Children”, 1798
10. Erastus Field, “Girl Holding Rattle”, c.1835
11. Ralph Earl, “Mrs. Noah Smith and Her Children”, 1798, detail
12. Ralph Earl, “Mrs. Noah Smith and Her Children, 1798, detail
13. Erastus Field, “Joseph Moore and His Family”, 1841
14. Erastus Field, “Girl in Blue”, c. 1840
15. The Beardsley Limner, “Little Boy in Windsor Chair”, c. 1800
18. Emily Clark, sampler, 1832; New Haven Colony Historical Society
19. Emily Elizabeth Beers, sampler, 1842, and Catherine Slade, sampler, March 1827, New Haven Colony Historical Society
Teacher Bibliography


Detailed history of the city of New Haven includes biographies of members of the community who have made significant contributions.


Illustrated survey of American folk painting and painters.


A comprehensive catalog of samplers with many illustrations.


An essential text for this unit with many illustrations and reproductions.

Calvert, Karin, “Children in American Family Portraiture, 1670-1810”, William and Mary Quarterly.

An article that surveys important changes in the family as they are reflected in portraiture.

Casas, Fray Bartolome de las, abstracted *The Diario of Christopher Columbus' First Voyage to America 1492-1493*, transcribed and translated into English by Oliver Dunn and James E. Kelley, Jr., University of Oklahoma Press, Norman and London, 1989.


Ideas for projects in mathematics that help students understand visual relationships.


Recommended reading before beginning to teach this unit.


A background text for understanding specifics of a child’s life in colonial times. It is available in the New Haven Public Library.


Gottlieb, Gerald and J.H. Plumb, *Early Children’s Books and Their Illustration*, The Pierpont Morgan Library,

Development of children’s books both in an introductory essay and pictorially.


A brief survey of childhood, with an emphasis in the last part on childhood in America.


Illustrations of the range of samplers.


A good introduction to samplers, with many clear illustrations.


Personal reminiscences about being a child at the beginning of the nineteenth century.


Organized biographically, with many illustrations.


Collection of writing of the more well-known Puritan writers.


A reproduction of an early popular primer, it has engaging woodcuts with rhyming couplets.


A good reference text for this unit.


An elegantly written article that is an essential introduction to formal object analysis.


For non-philosophers, more explanation of the ideas of Locke and Rousseau in context.


Abundant and interesting illustrations accompany separate chapters on different aspects of New Haven’s history. One chapter includes details of the architectural transformation of Center Church. Available in the New Haven Public Library.


Informative background for understanding the role of sewing in the lives of American women.


Excerpts from this diary are in the resource packet, and can be used for class discussion or written assignments.

**Student Bibliography**


A well-written, fictional account of a fourteen-year old.


Articles, stories, poetry and games appropriate for fourth graders.


Possible resource books for student reports. They are available at the New Haven Public Library.

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