

Games & Toys

Introduction

Children of 18th century America loved playing, just like they do today. But, their toys were usually simple and often homemade, and their games did not require specialized equipment.

Games and toys were usually associated with one gender or the other. Girls played with dolls and jacks, and boys with marbles and tops, for example. Of course modern children may play with any toys they wish!

Card and dice games were usually associated with adults and gambling, though it is not necessary to gamble while playing – you can just play the game too!

How We Know

We know about the games and toys from the 1700s from two sources: archaeological and written materials. Archaeology has turned up items such as clay marbles from the slave “trash pits” at Mount Vernon, showing that the slave children George Washington owned enjoyed playing games. Some books survive from the time period that include written game instructions. Unfortunately, books aimed at children’s amusements were not common until the 1800s, so it is sometimes necessary to extrapolate from the descriptions of adult games, from engravings and paintings, and from books written in the early 1800s.

We hope you have fun with this lesson and perhaps learn a new game to take back to your modern life.

