

Nancy Bell:

Spinning History: Heroines on the Home Front
Educational Guide, Grades 3-12



About the Performance

For more than 20 years, storyteller, historian, and hand-spinner Nancy Bell has delighted audiences across New England at libraries, schools, museums, and festivals with her fun, hands-on, Historical “Edu-tainment.” This program is a visual arts and women’s history performance about the role the art of spinning played in the American Revolution.

Dressed in carefully researched, hand-sewn, historically accurate clothing, Nancy demonstrates three kinds of spinning from “the Great Wheel” to the “drop spindle” and sings propaganda songs used during the Colonial Revolution to entice young female rebels to learn to spin. Students learn that true “independence” came about in part because women were instrumental in creating and replacing the existing textile economy in the colonies by learning to spin, something not many women did before the war.



About the Artist

Nancy Bell lives on a small homestead in Ashburnham, MA with her sheep, goats, chickens and rescued dogs. The experiences she brings to students are drawn both from real life, real skill, and a genuine love of bringing Living History into the present day. In addition to being a farmer, Nancy is a gifted storyteller with a rare ability to delight audiences of all ages with her passion for fiber arts, literature, history, and music. She graduated with a B.A. in literature from Gettysburg College in 1989, then certified as a High School English teacher from Moray House Teacher Training College in Edinburgh, Scotland in 1991, where she also certified to teach English as a second language. She has taught literature and poetry classes, and hosted drama camps within the home school community for many years. Her favorite thing to do is to cherish the old while learning something new!

Program Learning Goals

1. To study historical and personal contexts for the American Revolution.
2. To understand the important contributions women made to society in the Colonial era.
3. To explore the lessons of traditional folk arts in modern society.

Essential Questions

1. Why is it important to learn about the experiences of women during the Colonial and Revolutionary Periods of American history?
2. What can we learn from historical cultures and traditions?
3. Why is it important to tell stories about the past and historical events?

Nancy Bell:

Spinning History: Heroines on the Home Front Educational Guide, Grades 3-12



Vocabulary

- **Colony:** a place where a group of people from another country come to live and force under the control of their home country.
- **Independence:** freedom from another's control.
- **Revolution:** a sudden change or transformation in society, often brought about through violent rebellion.
- **Textile:** fabric or cloth made by weaving, knitting, crocheting, or other processes.

Key Facts and Context for Students

Revolution in Colonial America

In the 1600s and 1700s, British settlers came to North America looking for religious freedom, new economic opportunities, and political liberty. They created 13 colonies along the eastern coast of the continent. While each colony had its own government, the British king still enacted laws and required high taxes from all of the colonies. Many colonists wanted to start a new country separate from Great Britain, which led to the **Boston Tea Party**, the **American Revolution**, and signing the **Declaration of Independence**.



The Spinning Wheel

It was very difficult for early colonists to make their own clothes. England imposed large tariffs on cloth and the equipment to make cloth, which made colonists reliant on purchasing expensive clothing. As colonists desired to become more independent, colonial woodworkers began making spinning wheels that could turn wool into yarn, which could then be made into fabric. Wealthy, educated, unmarried women were recruited to learn to spin because they did not have the same home and family responsibilities as other women. While the handmade clothing started as scrappy linen and wool garments, it became a point of pride to be dressed entirely in homespun outfits.

Nancy Bell:

Spinning History: Heroines on the Home Front
Educational Guide, Grades 3-12

Pre-Performance Discussion Questions

- What do you know about Colonial America? What would you like to know? How could you find out more?
- What was the role of women in Colonial times? Why was this work important?
- How is clothing made? How did colonists make clothes from scratch? How would you make or design your own clothes?

Pre-Performance Activity: Life in the 1700s

Learning Goals:

- To explore the culture and norms of Colonial America.
- To reflect on the comparisons between life in the 1700s and life today.

Materials:

Books and vetted websites about life in the 1700s (*see further resources on page 6 for ideas*), “Life in the 1700s Versus Life Today” worksheet (*see page 4*), coloring/art supplies (optional)



Directions:

1. Discuss Colonial America in the 1700s. What do you think life was like? How do you think it was different from today?
2. Divide the class into seven groups. Assign each group a topic: food, homes, transportation, school, clothing, entertainment, and medical care.
3. Using books and vetted websites, have each group research their topic and note similarities and differences between the 1700s and today on the “Life in the 1700s Versus Life Today” worksheet.
4. Optional: using the information gathered on the worksheet, have each group make a poster with art supplies to display their findings in a creative way.
5. Have each group present about their topic to the class.
6. Write a short paragraph entitled, “If I Lived in the 1700s...” reflecting on one of the topics presented.
7. Ask volunteers to share their paragraphs with the rest of the class.

Nancy Bell:

Spinning History: Heroines on the Home Front
Educational Guide, Grades 3-12

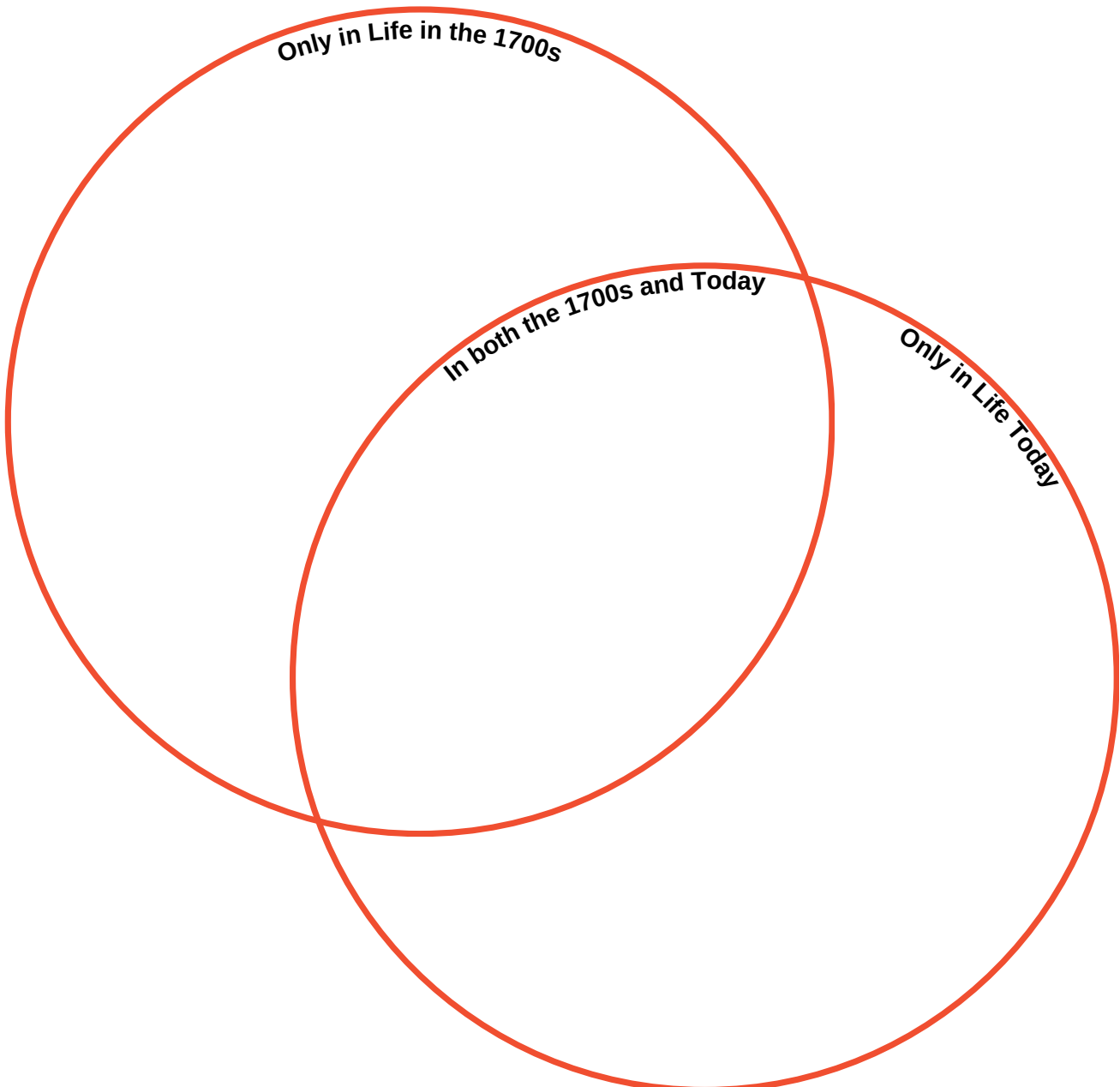


Name: _____

Topic: _____

Life in the 1700s Versus Life Today

Directions: Research your topic and note similarities and differences on the Venn diagram below between life in the 1700s and life today.



Nancy Bell:

Spinning History: Heroines on the Home Front
Educational Guide, Grades 3-12



Post-Performance Discussion Questions

- What did you learn about women in Colonial America?
- In what ways did you think about history from a new perspective?
- How does a living history portrayal like this performance compare to learning about history from books or movies? What did you like best about it?

Post-Performance Activity: Colonial Newspaper

Learning Goal:

To exercise writing skills while exploring American Colonial life and culture.

Materials:

Books and vetted websites about the Revolutionary War and Colonial America (see *resources on page 6*), newspaper, tea bags, tub of water, white paper, writing/coloring supplies



Directions:

1. Discuss Nancy Bell's performance. What did you learn about Colonial times? What was life like in America at that time?
2. Look through a contemporary newspaper together. Discuss the different sections, content, photos, format, etc.
3. Read a front page article out loud. Review the basic components of the the article (who, what, when, where, why, how, etc.).
4. Brainstorm what might have been covered by a newspaper in the 1760s. For example: breaking news about events leading up to the American Revolution, op-eds featuring Patriot or Loyalist viewpoints, advertisements for tools or home goods, etc.
5. Divide students into groups and assign each group a section of the newspaper to write together.
6. Discuss the newspaper's layout. Where should the top stories go? What should be the order of sections? Where should advertisements be strategically placed?
7. Place a few tea bags in a tub of water. Have students take turns submerging a piece of white paper in the tub of water. Place the tea soaked paper in a safe place to dry.
8. Have students transcribe their newspaper articles onto the dry tea paper and accompany the text with pictures.
9. Share the newspaper with the class.

Nancy Bell:

Spinning History: Heroines on the Home Front
Educational Guide, Grades 3-12



Further Resources

- "[Colonial America & American Revolution Learning Resources](#)" from the Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation
- Collier, Christopher and James Lincoln Collier: *The American Revolution 1763-1783*, Cavendish Square Publishing (2014)
- Forbes, Esther: *Johnny Tremain: A Story of Boston in Revolt* (1943)
- Fritz, Jean: *And Then What Happened, Paul Revere?*, Puffin Books (1996)
- Meltzer, Milton: *The American Revolutionaries: A History in Their Own Words, 1750-1800*, HarperCollins (1987)
- Raphael, Ray: *A People's History of the American Revolution: How Common People Shaped the Fight for Independence*, New Press (2016)
- Woelfle, Gretchen: *Answering the Cry for Freedom: Stories of African Americans and the American Revolution*, Calkins Creek Books (2016)

Curricular Connections

Arts Standards: Theatre

Responding

- Perceive and analyze artistic work. (T.R.07)
- Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work. (T.R.08)
- Apply criteria to evaluate artistic work. (T.R.09)

Connecting

- Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to make art. (T.Co.10)
- Relate artistic ideas and works to societal, cultural and historical contexts to deepen understanding. (T.Co.11)

English Language Arts and Literacy Anchor Standards

Writing

- Write narratives to develop experiences or events using effective literary techniques, well-chosen details, and well-structured sequences. (W.PK-12.3)

Speaking and Listening

- Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally. (SL.PK-12.2)
- Evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric. (SL.PK-12.3)

...continued on next page

Nancy Bell:

Spinning History: Heroines on the Home Front
Educational Guide, Grades 3-12



Curricular Connections, continued

History and Social Science

Grade 3

- Topic 1: Massachusetts cities and towns today and in history (HSS.3.T1)
- Topic 5: The Puritans, the Massachusetts Bay Colony, Native Peoples, and Africans (HSS.3.T6)
- Topic 6: Massachusetts in the 18th century through the American Revolution (HSS.3.T6)

Grade 4

- Topic 4: The expansion of the United States over time and its regions today (HSS.4.T4)
- Topic 4a: The expansion of the United States over time and its regions today: The Northeast (HSS.4.T4a)

Grade 5

- Topic 1: Early colonization and growth of colonies (HSS.5.T1)
- Topic 2: Reasons for revolution, the Revolutionary War, and the formation of government (HSS.5.T2)

Grade 8

- Topic 1: The philosophical foundations of the United States political system (HSS.8.T1)
- Topic 2: The development of the United States government (HSS.8.T2)

Grades 9-12

- United States History I Topic 1: Origins of the Revolution and the Constitution (HSS.USI.T1)

