

Bringing up Baby

Skills: working with others, enquiry, problem solving

Curriculum: PSHE, History

Clothing for Tudor Babies and Children

When a baby was born it was washed then **swaddled**. This means the baby was wrapped in linen bands from head to foot. People believed that this was important. They thought that if they did not do this the child would grow up with a deformed body. Sometimes the nurses would try to change the shape of the baby by wrapping the bands very tight.

The baby lived indoors for the first month of its life and during that time it would be completely swaddled. After that time the baby's arms would be left free and it was sometimes carried about instead of being left in the cradle. After eight or nine months the baby was taken out of swaddling bands.

Tudor children were dressed to look like little adults. Until the age of seven both boys and girls were treated as females and boys would wear the same clothes as their sisters.

Young rich girls had to wear bodices and corsets made with iron and whalebone rods. These were supposed to make their bodies grow in an attractive way. Sometimes they could harm the girls. They could break their ribs and stop their lungs developing properly.

Young rich boys were treated like girls when they were very small. They wore clothes like their sisters until they were about six or seven years old. Then they were 'breeched'. This meant they got their first pair of knee length breeches. This was an important time for the boys and the beginning of the time that they were expected to behave like men.

Activity: Artwork Investigation

Portrait of Cornelia Burch Aged 2 months (1581)

Bring up the image portrait of Cornelia Burch from the Mylearning resource on your whiteboard. Alternatively, print copies for small groups to explore together.

Use the following discussion questions (bold). Suggested answers are below each question.



Resources needed

Discussion Questions

Modern baby clothes

Doll (more than one of possible to enable group work)

Linen swaddling bands

Braids to secure swaddling

Drawing paper, pencils and collage materials

Activity 1: Discussion Questions

This is the oldest portrait in the Ferens collection. It is very special because there are not many 16th century portraits of babies.

With this painting we know the sitter or person in the picture but not the Artist. Can you see anything that might tell us who the child is?

The top right corner has an inscription. It has been incorporated into an architectural feature in the composition. Although the artist is Dutch, Cornelia herself was probably British. The artist may have visited the country to work painting portraits for the rich Elizabethans.

**Do you think Cornelia was born into a rich or a poor family?
Take a vote on who thinks rich or poor to revisit at the end of the discussion.**

Look at Cornelia's face? Does she look like a real baby?

Think about a baby you know. Do the babies look as still and straight as this when they are awake?

Can you describe her clothing – the custom in the sixteenth century was to wrap all new born infants in swaddling bands, long strips of linen or cloth. This child has a rich silk outer layer secured with gold cord. Her arms have elaborate velvet sleeves and she has a wide headdress over her white baby cap which would have been modelled on her mother's. It was the fashion to dress children in similar clothing to adults.

**What do you think Cornelia felt like wearing these clothes?
Would it be comfortable? Would there be advantages? Would there be disadvantages?**

Baby might feel cosy and secure. Baby might feel restricted. It would be a long job to dress and change the baby.

Look at the fabrics Cornelia is dressed in. What do they tell us about her parents?

They are very wealthy.

Would these clothes be easy to use and wash?

Look at the modern day baby clothes. Make a list of all the ways they would be better for the baby and for the parents.

What do you think Cornelia is holding in her hand?

Cornelia is holding a golden rattle with a toother, these were only available to wealthy children. The toother was probably made from shark's tooth.

Why might Cornelia's family have commissioned her portrait?

To celebrate her birth or christening. Babies were traditionally presented on a cushion and “bearing cloth” such as the fringed and patterned cloth shown here. A christening could also explain the gold cross and sumptuous clothes.

Fear of infant mortality meant that children were christened at a very young age. Portraits of such young children are very rare. A large percentage of children did not live past their fifth birthday, regardless of their class. It was important for the nobility (or wealthy families) to have large numbers of children to ensure that their family name would continue. To demonstrate their strength and importance Tudor nobility filled their homes with portraits of their relations.

More activities

Activity 2: Wrap the baby in swaddling bands

You will need some long linen bands, a length of braid or cord and a doll. Wrap the doll neatly and tightly in the swaddling bands from shoulders to feet. Tie the braids over the top in a criss-cross fashion to secure the bands. How long does it take you to do this?

Look at some modern day baby clothes. Compare them with the clothes in the portrait. How long would it take you to dress the doll in a baby grow?

Which would be easier to change?

Make a collage of Cornelia Burch

Use different textured materials and fabrics to describe what you see. Look very carefully and try to copy the detail of her clothes.