

Parlor Games and Toys

Historic Stewart Farm's school program, Farm Kids, explores the family and community connections of the Stewart children and others living in Surrey in the late 1800s. A large part of those connections involved the things they did for recreation. This curriculum-based activity involves games and crafts for students to discover indoor Victorian games and toys that promote connection, fun, family, and community.

Curriculum Connections:

This activity focuses on social studies curriculum connections from our Farm Kids K-2 program:

- Our communities are diverse and made of individuals who have a lot in common.
- Stories and traditions about ourselves and our families reflect who we are and where we are from.
- We shape the local environment, and the local environment shapes who we are and how we live.

Background Information

Often children in Victorian times would create toys from materials they had on the farm or in the house. William and John Stewart Jr. would not be able to go purchase a game or toy from the store. The Victorian parlour games in this activity use simple household items, while the ball and cup craft uses common household materials.

Activity Instructions: Parlour Games

These parlor games are three of our favorites at Historic Stewart Farm.

1. Twirl the Plate – All you need is an unbreakable plate and a hard surface (floor). Players twirl a plate, clap as many times as possible and catch the plate before it falls. Can be played in groups or individually with variations.
2. Look-about – Victorians loved knickknacks and hunts, and what better way to celebrate that than with a game of finding things! This game is played with any object, and 2 or more people. A great family game of spot the difference without leaving the house.
3. Fictionary – Some definitions are hard to forget! Players invent their own fun dictionary-like definitions for words– while also learning the actual definitions.

Ball and Cup Craft

This toy supports hand-eye coordination and is fun to try to master. Students can use their creative skills to create a toy that the Stewart boys would have had in 1894. Children like the Stewarts made this and other toys themselves using the tools and materials they had at home, like scraps of wood. This version of the Ball and Cup toy uses things that you might have sitting at home and does not require need any power tools to assemble. See the Parlour Games and Craft Guide PDF for instructions.

Follow-Up

After creating the craft, and playing the games, have your students send along a picture of their craft creations and one of their favourite parts of the parlour games. Here are some options for encouraging discussion with students:

- For extra fun they can also have a parent film them playing the “Twirl the Plate” game to share with their classmates. How many claps can they get?
- Have your students send in a photograph of the thing that they hid in their house for the Look-about game. What was the hardest to find?
- Fictionary: Have your students send in their favourite word/fake description of a word. Which word surprised them?
- Ask your students – do they have any family games they play at home? Ask them to send you a brief description with instructions, perhaps a photo too. Share the results with your students as a follow-up activity.