

TEACHERS' NOTES

8-106A Victorian babies' clothes

Notes

The old custom of swaddling babies with tight bands of cloth virtually died out in this country in the 18th century. Instead, babies were dressed in long gowns over petticoats and bodices. Sometimes a relic of swaddling persisted with the use of a linen or flannel band wound round the body first. Long gowns became typical baby-wear until the 1960s/70s.

Gowns and petticoat

We don't know how old these garments are. They are typical of male and female babies' wear for many generations - full, long, made of white cotton, and decorated.

Flannel bodice and shirt

These provided an extra layer of warmth. Flannel in particular was considered a valuable fabric for undergarments.

Carrying cloak

Prams for babies became fashionable in the mid-19th century when the Queen ordered one for a royal infant. However, they weren't suitable for very young babies because they weren't horizontal. Until babies were old enough to sit up safely, they had to be carried. A carrying cloak might be used by a nanny taking a small baby outdoors. The baby was wrapped in the longer part of the cloak and held in the crook of the arm; the shorter part - the cape - was arranged to hang over the arm.

Discussion points

Please ask the children to wash their hands before handling these garments. When you have finished using them, re-pack them with the tissue paper.

1. Compare these clothes with modern baby clothes. Look at the style, materials, colour, decoration. What has changed and why?
2. How many different kinds of decoration can you find in the clothes?
3. Look carefully at each of the garments and try to decide whether it was made by hand or by sewing machine or by both. (A magnifying glass would be useful.)
4. What signs of wear can you find? Have any of the garments been repaired or altered?

