Good Night, Sleep Tight!

How do you get ready for bed at night? Draw the different steps you take before getting into bed and then flip the page to compare your nightly routine to one from the past!
In the 1700s and 1800s people went to bed using candles to light their way. Without electricity, the house was very dark at night! People had to remember to blow out all the candles before they went to bed at night. Have you ever used a candle or a flashlight to find your way in the dark?

“Going to Bed,” woodcut in *The Rose Bush; or Stories in Verse* (New York: n.d.); Courtesy of *Our Own Snug Fireside*, Jane C. Nylander

Do you take a bath every night before you go to bed? Believe it or not, most people did not bathe very often during the 1700s and 1800s. Before bed they might wash their face and hands, but they would not take a daily bath. Some people even went weeks, or months, without bathing. Running water was not common until the 1900s. Imagine carrying buckets of clean water into the house every time you needed a bath!

Detail: “Getting Dressed,” woodcut from *The Pleasant Journey*, 1845, Courtesy of *Our Own Snug Fireside*, Jane C. Nylander
Do you wear pajamas to bed at night? So did people in the 1700s and 1800s, but their pajamas might look a little different than yours! Boys wore long shirts while girls wore long simple dresses called “shifts” to sleep and under their other clothes during the day. Only partway into the 1800s did people start to wear separate clothing at night like these nightgowns. Do these look like the pajamas you wear at night?

Nightgowns, Concord Museum Collection

In the past, children often recited prayers or hymns as part of their bedtime regimen. This was the way that some children learned how to read. Do you read books before you go to sleep at night?

_Hymns for Infant Minds_, Ann and Jane Taylor, England; 1808; Concord Museum B1116F
During the winter, the bed would be cold at night. Before getting into bed, people might want to warm the bed first. Many people used warming pans made of metal and filled with hot coals and placed them between their sheets. They could even use heated stones or bricks. If they were very cold, they might even move their bed next to the fireplace! How do you keep warm at night during the winter?

Bed Warming Pans, Concord Museum Collection

Babies and small children often slept in the same bed as their parents. This would help them keep warm when it was cold. Older siblings would also sleep together in a small bed next to their parents. Have you ever slept in the same room or bed as a parent, sibling, or a friend?

From *A Visit from St. Nicholas* by Clement C. Moore, designed and engraved by Theodore C. Boyd, 1848
Teacher Guide

During the 1700s and 1800s, getting ready for bed at night was a very different ritual than it is today. To start learning about these differences, children will begin by thinking about what activities they perform before going to bed at night. Some examples might include putting on pajamas, taking a bath, brushing your teeth, and reading a bed time story. After students have reflected on some of their own nighttime rituals, they will learn how people in the past completed similar tasks. Refer to the attached exhibition photos to see examples!

Bathing
Many students might take a bath before going to sleep at night. During the colonial period, people bathed much less regularly, and went without washing their clothes for extended periods of time. Aside from washing the most visible parts of the body regularly such as the hands, face, and neck, many people did not feel the need to bathe fully – most people never even fully undressed to wash themselves. During the mid-1700s specialized washstands with a basin and pitcher were introduced to the household, but it was not until the mid-1800s that the idea of bathing, or at least washing yourself daily, took hold.

Putting on your pajamas
Most students wear pajamas when they go to bed at night. During the colonial period, both men and women wore special garments to bed as well. Women wore a loose-fitting dress-like garment called a shift to bed, which was worn under their clothes during the day. Because the women of the house had to mend all of the clothing for the family, clothing was designed to last for years on end. Most garments, including the shift, could be tightened or loosened to fit the person wearing it with drawstrings. Men wore a similar undergarment simply called a shirt that could reach all the way to the knees.

Warming the bed
One thing students might not have to think about when they get ready at night is the temperature of their bed (or their bedrooms!). But in the 1700s and 1800s during the cold winter months, it was very uncomfortable to go to bed without warming it first. Some people placed stones or bricks that had been warming by the fire between the sheets to heat the bed. Others had special metal warming pans filled with hot coals that could be used to warm the bed as well. However, in using the warming pan they had to be very careful in order to avoid spilling the coals or scorching the sheets!
Commode with chamber pot, privacy board, bathing tub, washstand and pitcher on exhibit in “Behind Closed Doors: Asleep in New England” at The Concord Museum
Nightgowns, 1800s, Concord Museum Collection
Bedstead with quilt and trundle bed partially pulled out on exhibit in “Behind Closed Doors: Asleep in New England” at The Concord Museum
Warming pans, Concord Museum Collection