In the Bedroom

19th Century Bedchamber, Concord Museum
Teacher Guide

This activity is designed to be an introduction to the subject of bedtime and daily life in the 1700s and 1800s. During this period, bedrooms were used for multiple activities other than sleeping, including household tasks such as spinning or weaving, entertaining guests, and even storing food when it was cold outside. People also used this space to bathe or to go to the bathroom, and women even gave birth at home. As a group, look together at the image above of the 1800s bedchamber, and ask students the following questions to encourage careful observation.

- What kinds of activities do you think would happen in a room like this?
- What do you see happening here?
  ○ What do you see that makes you say that? (To encourage students to explain the reasons for each statement)
- Do you notice any differences between this room and your bedroom at home?
- Is there anything about this room that surprises you?

These questions should allow students to focus closely on specific objects and consider what may look different from their own bedrooms at home. Below are some of the aspects that might stand out to students.

- **Table:** They may notice that along with a large bed, there is also a table with chairs topped with cookies and tea. Often, the bedchamber would double as a place for women to entertain or enjoy the company of friends, especially in the warm spring and summer months.

- **Washstand:** Students may also remark that there is a washstand in the corner of the room. Complete with a basin and pitcher, this area would be used to bathe certain parts of the body such as the face, neck, and hands before bed.

- **Chamber pot:** In the left corner of the room beside the bed is stationed a chair. What many students may not realize is that this chair would have a chamber pot stored beneath it for convenience when going to the bathroom outdoors was made difficult during the winter or at night.

- **Cradle:** Students may be surprised to learn that during the 1700s and 1800s women gave birth at home in bed and kept their children close by at night. Infants slept in a cradle such as the one seen here during the day and generally slept in bed with their parents at night. Once older, children would sleep in a smaller trundle bed placed next to that of their parents and stored underneath the larger bed during the day.
Sewing in a Chamber, woodcut, Albert Alden proof book, 1840, Courtesy of Our Own Snug Fireside, Jane C. Nylander
Getting Dressed, woodcut, 1840-45, Alexander Anderson Scrapbooks, Courtesy of Our Own Snug Fireside, Jane C. Nylander