



# Doing the Laundry

This activity center is part of the **Water Attitudes** theme.

## What's the purpose of this activity?

Students will compare the laundry methods of the 1800s/early 1900s (specifically 1914) to modern methods. They will be able to see the difference in both the amount and the nature of work that needed to be done to do one load of laundry.

## Key messages:

- We can conserve water by thinking about the way in which we do laundry
- We forget the about all the work that it takes to get the water into our houses prior to our use

## Materials

### Permanent:

- antique laundry machine
- wash basin
- scrubbing board
- clothes pins
- drying rack
- clothing items

### Supplies:

- 3 bars Sunlight washing soap, dishrags, clothes pins

## What will I be doing?

You will be explaining the method for doing the laundry in 1914 (and earlier, to 1800) and asking them to explain how this is different from doing the laundry today. You will be supervising the kids while they try the old-fashioned equipment and leading a discussion.

*Does anybody know why every Monday was known as "Laundry Day" 100 years ago?* This is because most people used to have baths only once a week, on a Saturday night before going to bed so that when they woke up on Sunday morning they would wear their "Sunday best" clothes for going to church. Their dirty clothes would soak all day on Sunday and be washed

on Monday--Laundry Day! *How does this compare to the way we do things now? Do we only change our clothes once a week?*

*How else do you think the life of pioneers (1750-1850) was different from ours?* You will get many answers, take a few and then direct the discussion back to where they would get water and where we get water. *What did pioneers use water for?* Among the things they should mention is laundry, then ask *how did they get water for laundry?* Ask if they had water piped into their houses. Since they didn't, *how did they wash their clothes?* Since pioneers could only wash their clothes at the water's edge (rivers, lakes, etc.) or carry the water (from the lake, river or well) to where the dirty clothes were, it must have been a hard task, right?

Let's try it! Supervise the children while they try using the washboard, laundry bar soap and basin. Identify each part of the process to the students.

**IMPORTANT: DO NOT LET THEM CRANK THE WRINGER BY THEMSELVES.** It's dangerous.

Imagine having to wash all of your family's clothes like this, would you want to do it more than once a week?

The water we are using is cold water. If they wanted warm water (often the clothes had to be boiled to get the dirt out), pioneers used to have to heat the water in a big tub over an open fire. *Is doing the laundry like this hard only because the water's far away?* Not only do you have to carry the clothes to the water or the water to the clothes, you also have to scrub and wring and rinse! All that, plus tending the fire! It would take all day for people to do laundry back then. *How does that compare with doing the laundry now?* Have them compare other aspects of chores now with how things were done then.

Is water only important for drinking and bathing with? It's important for us to have clean clothes, too!

## Background Information:

Washing machines are much easier to use than doing laundry by hand, but they also use a lot of water. Washing machines use 150-250L per cycle. That's 20% of all the water we use at home. Do NOT run the washing machine for only a few pieces of clothing, make sure it's full. If you have one that has a load level, set the water level only high enough to cover the clothes that you put in.

Canadians have to learn to stop wasting water! The average person, just like you and me, uses 340L of water every day! That's more than 5 bathtubs full of water! In Europe, they live like we do but they use only 140L of water a day. What are we doing wrong? Ask for examples of wasting water - e.g. washing driveways with a hose, leaving the water running while brushing teeth, running the sprinkler during the day (which causes evaporation and runoff on sidewalks and down the sewer in short, waste).

### Clean Up Procedures:

Rinse all materials free from soap and place in the wash basin

Gather all other materials into a tidy pile and place in the wash basin where feasible

Leave any other materials beside the wash basin leaving the area clean and organized for the next day's volunteers