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Ryan's Crossing Historical Companion Guide
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Daily Life in the 1960s

Life in the early 1960s was very different than it is today. There are many conveniences we now have that did not exist at that time. So, how much different was life in 1962?

The average household had about five people, including a mother, father and three children. Most families earned only one income, as most women did not work outside of the home, and the average salary was a little more than \$5,000 a year. With only one income, household budgets were typically tight, meaning luxuries were rare and meals were smaller than what families eat today.



A new car could be purchased for about \$2,500, and a gallon of gas cost 25 cents. However, most families only had one car, and many only had one licensed driver.

A new home could be purchased for approximately \$12,500, but homes were much smaller. Most only had one bathroom, while bedrooms were considerably smaller, as was closet space. However, less closet space was needed, because in general, most people owned less clothing. Boys or girls might only have a few shirts and a few pairs of pants, and a nice suit of clothes for church and other special occasions.

Most children had fewer toys in the early 1960s as well. Outdoor toys were the most common, such as jump ropes, hula hoops, and bicycles. Baseball, basketball, football, hopscotch, croquet, red rover, and four square were the most popular games. Since children spent more time playing outside, and “junk food” was not common, there was very little problem with childhood obesity.

Many modern household conveniences of today such as personal computers, video games, microwaves, cell phones, and other items either did not exist, or were very rare and impractical. But, families did quite well without them and kept themselves entertained with conversation, reading, music and television.

School Life in the 1960s

Schools of the early 1960s were very different than the schools of today. There were different expectations in both behavior and dress. What were some of those differences?

Most schools of the early 1960s had a much stricter dress code than modern schools. Girls were required to wear skirts or dresses and pants were strictly forbidden. Also, the skirts and dresses were required to cover their knees. For most schools, the requirement was: while in a kneeling position, the skirt must touch the floor.

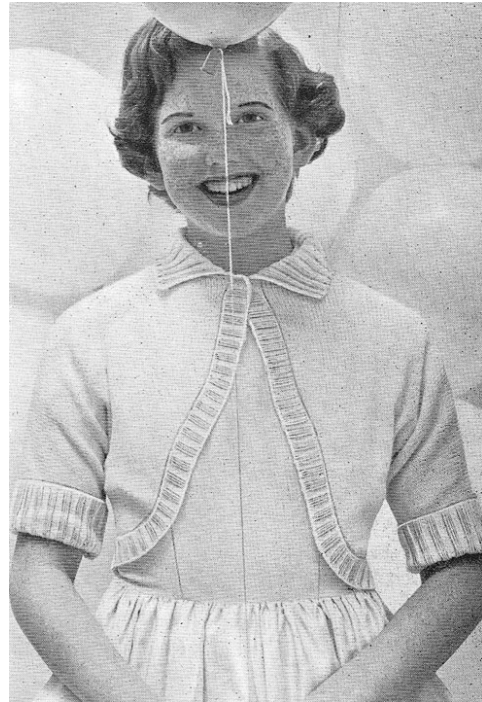
The only tops that were permissible were blouses and sweaters. Sleeveless tops and dresses were not allowed. The only shoes allowed were loafers, saddle shoes and oxfords. Makeup was allowed, but only if it was light and properly matched a girl's complexion.

Slacks were required for boys. Jeans, referred to at the time as dungarees, were expressly forbidden (for both boys and girls). Shorts were not allowed either. Shirts were required to have buttons and collars. This meant no T-shirts were allowed. A boy's hair was to be kept short and well groomed at all times. It was not allowed for their hair to touch their collar. Tennis shoes (or sneakers) were not permitted outside of gym class.

School discipline was also very different in the early 1960s. The most common form of discipline was corporal punishment (paddling). Students might receive a number of swats from a principal or teacher, depending on the severity of the infraction.

Staying inside during recess, staying after school, writing lines on paper or the blackboard, or standing in a corner were also common punishments.

These and many other rules made school life a more difficult task in the 1960s.



Multiple Choice: *Please answer the following questions related to the passages you just read:*

1. _____ The average family income in the early 1960s was approximately...
 - a. \$5,000
 - b. \$50,000
 - c. \$100,000
 - d. \$500,000

2. _____ Why were household budgets usually small in the early 1960s?
 - a. The country was in a severe depression, therefore most families were poor.
 - b. Most families were overly concerned with saving money, using little of their income on other necessities.
 - c. Most families had only one income, leaving little money for luxuries.
 - d. Taxes were very high, meaning the government took most of a family's income.

3. _____ Which of these was not a popular game played by children in the 1960s?
 - a. Baseball
 - b. Football
 - c. Basketball
 - d. Soccer

4. _____ Why was childhood obesity not a problem in the 1960s?
 - a. Children were very concerned about what others thought of them, therefore, they watched their weight closely.
 - b. Children spent most of their time outdoors and were very active.
 - c. There was an extreme shortage of food, so no one got enough to eat.
 - d. At the time, people were not as concerned with their weight, so statistics on health and obesity were not well documented.

5. _____ Which of these devices existed in the 1960s?
 - a. Video games
 - b. Cell phones
 - c. Personal computers
 - d. Refrigerators

6. _____ What types of outfits were girls expected to wear at school?
 - a. Pants with a sports jacket were the usual attire.
 - b. A school uniform consisting of a white shirt and plaid skirt with long socks.
 - c. Skirts or dresses were not only expected, but required.
 - d. There was no expected dress, girls could wear whatever they wanted to.

7. _____ Were jeans allowed in school in the 1960s?
 - a. No, jeans were not allowed in school
 - b. Yes, jeans were allowed in school
 - c. Yes, jeans were allowed, but only on Fridays
 - d. Yes, jeans were allowed, but only for students with good grades

8. _____ Shirts worn in school were required to have what?
 - a. A pocket
 - b. A collar and buttons
 - c. Long sleeves
 - d. A solid color with no designs

9. _____ What was expected of a boy's haircut in a 1960s school?
 - a. Boys were to shave their heads upon entering school.
 - b. A boy's hair was to be kept short and well groomed.
 - c. Boys could have long hair, as long as it was well groomed.
 - d. There was no expectation or requirement for a boy's haircut in school.

10. _____ The most common form of punishment in a 1960s school was?
 - a. In School Suspension
 - b. Students were sat in a corner
 - c. Expulsion
 - d. Corporal Punishment

Vocabulary: 1960s Daily Life & School Life

- | | |
|-----------------|------------------------|
| a. Conveniences | f. Corporal Punishment |
| b. Dungarees | g. Luxuries |
| c. Infraction | h. Permissible |
| d. Salary | i. Obesity |
| e. Budget | j. Requirement |

1. _____ A plan for spending; the total sum of money available for use.
2. _____ A term once used to describe denim blue jeans.
3. _____ The condition of being very overweight.
4. _____ A violation of the rules.
5. _____ Any device that saves time or simplifies work.
6. _____ Something that can be allowed; legal.
7. _____ A type of physical punishment, usually spanking, carried out by an authority figure.
8. _____ The amount of money that a person receives for working a regular period of time.
9. _____ Material objects or services that are not necessary for daily living.
10. _____ Something that is necessary, or needed.

11. At most schools, it was a _____ for girls to wear skirts or dresses.

12. The average _____ for a worker in the early 1960s was about \$5,000 a year.

13. The most common form of discipline in a 1960s school was _____.

14. The number of swats a student received was determined by the severity of the _____.

15. Students were not allowed to wear _____ in school.

16. Childhood _____ was not a problem in the 1960s, because children spent more time playing outside.

17. Families could not afford to spend much money, therefore, _____ were rare and meals were usually smaller.

18. Because the average salary was so small, most families maintained a strict _____, and spent only what they needed to.

19. Many of our modern _____ did not exist in the 1960s.

20. Blouses and sweaters were the only tops that were _____ for girls in a 1960s school.

Answer Key:

Daily Life & School Life in the 1960s Multiple Choice:

- | | |
|------|-------|
| 1) A | 6) B |
| 2) C | 7) A |
| 3) D | 8) D |
| 4) B | 9) C |
| 5) D | 10) B |

Free Response for Daily Life & School Life in the 1960s:

1. Student answers should reflect the differences in dress codes and punishment procedures. A clear answer should be provided for part two of the question.
2. Students should explain their reasoning for choosing the modern convenience they have chosen.
3. Students should justify their answer by providing clear reasoning for their response.

Vocabulary for Daily Life & School Life in the 1960s:

- | | |
|-------|-------------------------|
| 1) E | 11) requirement |
| 2) B | 12) salary |
| 3) I | 13) corporal punishment |
| 4) C | 14) infraction |
| 5) A | 15) dungarees |
| 6) H | 16) obesity |
| 7) F | 17) luxuries |
| 8) D | 18) budget |
| 9) G | 19) conveniences |
| 10) J | 20) permissible |