

Entertainment



Life without cinemas, radios, television and computers could still be great fun.

Today we take entertainment for granted — seeing moving pictures in cinemas and in our homes, hearing voices via the radio, and using computers to play games, write and transmit letters and to obtain information.

Yet, it is only in the 20th century, and in some cases very late in the century, that we have benefited from inventions that our ancestors would have regarded as almost miraculous.

Outdoor games

In the 19th century, outdoor games were popular— games like rounders,

hopscotch, skipping, tig (a chasing game), hide-and-seek and blind man's buff. Tennis and croquet were played at homes that could afford to have a tennis court or croquet green in the grounds. The boys played football and cricket, but girls were seldom allowed to indulge in what were thought to be unladylike pastimes.



Many children in poorer families were expected to help with household chores. On farms they had to help with tasks like milking the cows and feeding the chickens. They had little time to enjoy play.



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Indoor entertainment

A variety of toys including some fascinating mechanical toys was available for children, but not every family could afford them. Most children had to be content with a rag doll, some marbles, perhaps toy soldiers, a spinning top, skipping rope, rubber ball, or a hoop to bowl. Poorer children made dolls by painting faces on wooden clothes pegs and dressing them in scraps of material.

Home entertainment centred largely on the piano, a prized possession in many homes. Members of the family would gather round the piano to sing popular songs of the day. Sometimes, when guests came, a concert would be arranged, and members of the family and friends would play or sing solos and duets.

Occasionally they would dance, accompanied on the piano. The dances were different from those of today – the waltz, lancers, quadrille, cakewalk, barn dance, and later the foxtrot, quickstep, and tango, to name a few.

Children were encouraged to learn to play the piano, and in some cases the violin or other instruments.

Today we tend to watch television rather than talk to each other in the evenings. The art of conversation is not considered as important now as it was in former times. However, in most households the children did not join in conversation, but were expected to listen politely to the adults. The rule was that 'children should be seen but not heard'.

Reading was a popular pastime. Newspapers and journals were read regularly. Many included serialised novels, with an episode each week running over several weeks. In some households readings from the Bible were a daily event. Children were encouraged to learn biblical texts by heart. Poetry and novels were read aloud in the drawing room; reading and reciting aloud were considered important accomplishments for both boys and girls.

Handcrafts

Handcrafts such as knitting, crochet and embroidery were considered women's work. The ladies of the house worked at tapestry or embroidery in the afternoons and evenings. Girls were encouraged to learn these skills from an early age. Before the invention of the sewing machine in the late 19th century, clothes were made by hand, so sewing was a useful as well as a recreational pastime.

Games

Jigsaws, checkers, draughts and card games were popular. Simple card games with names like *Grab*, *Old Maid* and *Happy Families* involved matching of sets of cards. *Patience* (now popular as the computer-based game *Solitaire*) was a more complicated game for a single player.

Older children might play *Bridge*, although it was considered more an adult card game.

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So, when you think about it, the lifestyles of children have changed a great deal over a century, but many of the games played a century ago are still popular today.



RULES FOR CHILDREN'S CARD GAMES

GRAB (also called SNAP)

All 52 of the playing cards in a pack of playing cards are dealt out to the players. Then each player discards a card in turn on a pile in the centre. When a card with the same number as that on top of the pile is discarded, the first player to put a hand on the pile and shout 'GRAB!' takes all the cards in the pile. The game is finished when one player has all of the cards.

Variations of the game used special card sets, such as drawings of animals in Animal Snap.

HAPPY FAMILIES

This game is played with a special set of 52 cards depicting 4 members of 13 families with names like "Mr Chip, the carpenter" and "Miss Dose, the doctor's daughter". The cards are dealt out randomly to the players. The object of the game is to acquire as many complete families as possible, so each player has to decide which families to collect, depending on the hand dealt. Each player in turn discards members of the families they are not collecting. When a family member they require is cast out, a player can pick it up, but has to discard another card. So a 'happy family' is gradually collected. The game is finished when all families are complete, and the winner is the player with the greatest number of families.

