

Quiet time activities

Needlework and handicrafts

As part of their training to be wives and mothers, parents encouraged girls to make useful and decorative things for the home.

Both at school and home, girls were taught sewing and needlework. These were important skills because girls would have to make many of their family's clothes and most of the household linen. Girls sewed tiny examples of everyday clothes such as shirts, pantaloons and petticoats. They crocheted **doilies** and **runners** to put on tables. They embroidered pictures and **samplers** to hang on the wall.

Keeping busy

Girls also made decorative things for the home. They knotted string to make potholders. They made figures out of wax and clay. They made elaborate flower arrangements from wool. Girls were supposed to be always busy!



A sampler

Mary Ann Gorringer embroidered this sampler in 1851 when she was 12 years old. The picture shows her town's courthouse.



Needlework

Young girls made tiny copies of shirts to show their skills at needlework.



Settler's home

Charlotte Rushby made this model of an Australian settler's home in the 1850s. She made the hut from scraps of wood and bark. The figures were modelled from clay and carefully painted.

This model cow was one of a number made by Wilhelmina Jurd in the 1870s. Wilhelmina made a shape out of wire, covered it with wax and then pushed in the tiny cow's hairs one at a time to make a smooth coat.



Model cow

Books

There were lots of books for children to read and most told stories that encouraged children to be good. At the time gold was first discovered, children's books were becoming much more beautifully illustrated. New technologies made it possible to print in colour, where previously each page had been coloured by hand.



The Grasshopper's Ball

This was a particularly popular story about a dance held by the creatures of the forest.



Uncle Buncles New Stories about Animals

This story taught children about the creatures that gave them milk and meat, carried them from place to place, or lived with them as pets.

Golden stories

Painting books

Some children had to go out to work to help support their families.

Painting pages of books was one job thought suitable for children aged under 10. They sat at a large table with hundreds of separate pages. Each page was passed around. One child painted all the red bits on the page. The next child painted all the yellow. The page continued around the table until it was finished. With so many pages to paint, children worked long hours for very little money.



Warne's Picture Puzzle Book

This story came with characters and animals to glue on each page.

Sundays

On Sundays, children had to be very quiet and well behaved. Some spent most of the day at church with their parents. In the morning they went to a church service and in the afternoon they went to Sunday school. On some goldfields, these were the only schools.

No playing

In religious households, children were not allowed to play on Sundays. They could not run, skip, sing songs or dance. They had to sit quietly, reading stories from the Bible instead.

Noah's Ark

The one toy parents thought suitable for Sunday play was Noah's Ark. In this Bible story, God warns Noah that a terrible flood will cover the earth. To survive, Noah has to build a special boat called an ark. He invites a pair of all the animals in the world to join him. Children loved playing this game and marching the animals on board 'two by two'.



This Noah's Ark was made in Germany. All the figures were carved by hand and individually painted

Pets

Parents encouraged children to have pets. They thought it taught children to be responsible as they had to remember to feed their animals and care for them.

Birds

The most popular pets on the goldfields were caged birds. Almost every home had a birdcage by the front door with budgerigars, parrots or cockatoos.

Guard dogs

Most families had a dog. These were not always pets that children could cuddle. Many were vicious guard dogs bought to protect the family's home from robbers.



A homemade birdcage

Golden stories

Cats

In the early years of the diggings, cats were very popular for their mouse- and rat-catching skills.

But cats were scarce. In 1852 on the Bendigo goldfields, the price of a cat was an **ounce** of gold or more than £2. At Gympie, the owner of a cat that had kittens refused to sell them, even for their weight in gold. Diggers were so desperate to buy that the owner had to keep them locked in his hut.

He stood guard at the door with a loaded shotgun.



The pet kitten

— Frances Corkhill and her children Norman, Pearl and Edith photographed in the gold town of Central Tilba about 1900. Edith carefully cuddles her tiny pet kitten.

Children at work

Gold digging and other work

Many children on the goldfields went to work. Some were caught up in gold fever. Boys as young as 10 had their own claims. They dug, washed and rocked the **cradles** alongside older family members. Others helped their parents with the search for gold. Children were encouraged to keep a sharp eye out for gold specks and nuggets.

Children took on casual jobs to make extra money for the family. Although they were not paid much, every bit helped. Boys and girls took messages for people, helped out in shops and looked after diggers' horses. Boys found work milking cows or working **bellows** for the **blacksmith**. Some children had to work as their parents could not support them.

Like all children, those on the goldfields grew up, found jobs and had children of their own. Some stayed in goldfields' towns while others moved away. Although all had their own adventures, life was probably never as exciting again as when they joined their parents in the rush to the diggings.

Golden stories

The net maker

Walking around the diggings, Ellen Clacy met a young girl making and selling green nets. These were worn over the top of hats to keep mosquitoes and flies away. When Ellen asked why she was working so hard, she said that her parents had died and only her grandfather was left. He was very sick and not able to work. She earned what money she could to buy food for them to eat and to buy medicines for her grandfather.

Two boys, one only a toddler, help their mother and father search for gold



Glossary

apprenticed

learning a trade by working with a particular tradesperson for a fixed period

bellows

a device that produces a blast of air helping the blacksmith's fire to remain hot

blacksmith

a person who works with iron to make horseshoes, tools and other objects

book-keeping

learning to keep records of money in banks or businesses

bustle

a pad or wire frame worn underneath a dress

cane

a long, hollow wooden stem used as a rod for punishment

colonies

the six British settlements of New South Wales, Victoria, Tasmania, Queensland, South Australia (including the Northern Territory) and Western Australia

cradles

wooden boxes specially designed to separate gold from mud and rocks

damper

bread made from flour, water and sometimes baking powder. It is baked in the coals of a fire or in a camp oven

doilies

small mats, often embroidered and with lace edging

domestic

relating to the home

hand-me-downs

clothes that have been owned and worn before they are given to others

hymns

songs praising God

ink

a coloured liquid used for writing. In the 1800s, ink was made from a special powder mixed with water

mangles

wooden rollers turned by a handle. These squeezed out the water and pressed the clothes flat

omnibus

a horse-drawn bus

ounce

a unit of weight equal to about 30 grams

parlour

the best room in a house, a sitting room

£ (pounds)

currency introduced to Australia from Britain and used until 1966 when pounds, shillings and pence were replaced with dollars and cents

prospecting

searching for gold or other minerals

runners

long mats laid down the centre of tables and sideboards, often decorated with embroidery and lace

sampler

a piece of cloth with examples of needlework and sewing

slates

made from thin pieces of a special rock that was easy to draw on and wipe clean