Hands On Learning
with Reading Museum Service

FIFTEENTH CENTURY COSTUME-BOY AND GIRL H21

These replica costumes are in the style of those worn during the medieval period. There are few surviving pieces of clothing that date to the fifteenth century therefore other sources have to be studied closely for information about how people dressed during this period. Written accounts provide some clues, but writers of the time often provide no more detail than simply naming the item being worn. Often costume historians have to rely heavily on images produced in paintings, drawings, sculptures and tapestries from the time in order to gain an understanding of the fashions of the period. Children do not feature as much in these sources as illustrations of adults, but when they are pictured they are often shown as wearing scaled down versions of adult costume.

During this period most people would have worn clothes made of wool with linen undergarments. Poor people would have worn very plain, simple clothing that they made themselves. The wealthier however would have had their clothes made for them by tailors and the richer you were the finer your clothes. Bright colours, which were costly to produce, expensive fabrics and the use of lots of material were all signs of greater wealth. The middle or merchant class strove to imitate the fashions of those who were wealthier and laws were even passed by the ruling class to try and restrict the use of certain fabrics and luxury items.

Men's Tunic

The tunic in this box is a typical design of men's tunic during this period. This type of garment is often known as a doublet or a *cotehardie*. From the mid-fourteenth century short costume, which exposed the legs, became fashionable for men. The doublet, originally a padded tunic worn under armour, developed into a long-sleeved jacket cut to fit the upper body closely, and buttoned or laced closed down the front. It was worn over a chemise or shirt of fine linen, which protected the doublet from skin oils and sweat. Often the doublet barely reached the hip in length. Below this men would wear linen or wool stockings (hose) on their legs. By the fifteenth century, hose were similar to modern tights in that they joined at the fork.They were held up by



Reading Borough Council
Heritage Lottery Fund

laces or points that passed through holes in the bottom edge of the doublet. This example has slashed sleeves lined with a contrasting colour of fabric, which make the garment look more extravagant.

Lady's Robe

Ladies in the fifteenth century are sometimes shown wearing a floor length robe like this one. It is sometimes referred to as a 'Burgundian' as it appears to have been fashionable in the courts of Burgundy in France. They were often made of heavy fabrics such as wool or velvet and lined or trimmed with fur. Underneath an undergown and a chemise would be worn. On their legs women wore stockings, which were probably calf length. Wealthy ladies would have decorated themselves and their clothes
with jewels and jewellery.



Hands On Learning
with Reading Museum Service

FIFTEENTH CENTURY COSTUME-BOY AND GIRL H21

Lady's Headdress and Man's Hat

The tall conical hat that some wealthy ladies wore is known as a *henin*. Unlike this one, which can be tied around the chin, for ease of wearing, illustrations of original *henins* do not appear to show chinstraps. Therefore, it is thought that they were probably kept in place on the head by means of a loop fixed to the forehead or by attachment to the hair. Some illustrations also show a loop, which goes around the ear. These hats were probably made from stiffened parchment or fabric such as felt or canvas attached to a wire frame. Men would also have worn hats of many different styles, including small woollen ones like the example in this box.



Footwear

People who could afford shoes would wear ones made from leather. Very often these shoes had pointy toes and even curved up at the toes in a kind of hook, to be extra fancy. Wooden clogs, called pattens could be worn over your shoes to protect them and raise you higher, so that the hems of your clothes did not get dirty.