
Primary Source Comprehension: Colonial Manners

Primary SOLs: 6.1 a-d. 6.4 c. 6.6 b, d, e, h, i. 7.1 a-f. 7.4 a, e, f, g. 7.6 b, c, e, g, m. 8.1 c, e, g. 8.4 b, c, e. 8.6 d, e g, j.

Document Context: Built in 1747, Rippon Lodge was the private home of the Blackburn Family from 1747 until 1811. Richard Blackburn was from England and came to the colonies to start a new life. He owned vast amounts of land and grew several types of crops, including wheat, corn, and tobacco. One of his sons, Thomas, was involved in politics, serving at the House of Burgesses in Williamsburg, and was in the militia during the Revolutionary War. The household was visited by many important guests, including George Washington, and their local peer group included George Mason and Henry Lee.

Document Text: The Blackburn's entertained many important families, had financial dealings with businessmen, and were active judicially and politically. These public, social gatherings required pristine manners along with knowledge of political, legal, and economic events both in the colonies and back in Britain. In the 17th century one's behavior, how they treated and spoke to others, reflected on who they were, who their family were, and their level of education. Many books were printed on acceptable manners, as well as in-person trainings on manners from tutors and governesses. *The School of Manners or Rules for Childrens Behavior*, published in London in 1701, was one of the many sources available to families like the Blackburn's to assist in teaching their children how to behave. The handbook has lists to remind a child on how they should behave in school, at home, with company, at the dining room table, and on vacation!

Exercise: Chapters 5, 6 and 8 of *the School of Manners or Rules* include twenty eight rules for discourse, fifteen rules for traveling abroad, and twenty-six for behavior in the company of others. Here are a few from these chapters transcribed for easier reading:

1. Enter not into the company of Superiors without command or calling; nor without a bow.
2. Sing not nor hum in thy mouth while thou art in company.
3. Play not wantonly like a Mimick with thy Fingers or Feet.
4. In coughing or sneezing make as little noise as possible.
5. Read not Letters, Books, nor other Writing in Company, unless there be necessity, and thou ask leave.

6. Laugh not aloud, but silently Smile upon occasion.
7. Speak neither very loud nor too low.
8. Strive not with Superiors in Argument or Discourse, but easily submit thine opinion to their assertions.
9. If thy Superior be relating a Story; say not, *I have heard it before*; but attend as if it were to thee altogether new; seem not to question the truth of it; if he tell it not right, snigger not, nor endeavor to help out or add to his relation.
10. Boast not in discourse of thine own wit or doings.
11. Come not near wo that are whispering or speaking in secret, much less mayest thou ask about what thy confer.
12. Laugh not in or at thine own story, wit or jest.
13. Go not singing or whistling along the Street; none accustom themselves to the Practice, but those that are of sordid and lowest Education.
14. Quarrel not with any body thou meetest.
15. Affront no one, especially thy elders, by word or deed.
16. Jeer not any person, though thou know some common reproach whereby they have usually, (and it may be deservedly), been vexed and provoked.
17. Run not hastily in the street, nor too slowly: wag not to and fro, not use any antick or wanton posture either of thy head, hands, feet or body.
18. Stare not at every unusual person or thing, which thou seest.

Questions:

1. Why would men like Thomas and Richard Blackburn need to behave this way versus other men during the Colonial era?
2. What are your first impressions of these manners?
3. Are these rules too rigid? Why or why not?
4. Which one's were difficult to understand? Are there any people still practice today?
5. What do you think would happen to people who didn't follow these rules in social situations?
6. Do you think these books for manners were available to everyone?
7. How might a person have learned manners if they were not able to read or have a tutor?
8. Do you think it was important to all colonists to learn such social manners?
9. What possible role would cultural differences have in accepted behavior and manners for social situations or conversation?
10. How has technology affected manners and behavior?
11. Are people more or less tolerable of those with manners? Without Manners?

12. Has there ever been a moment when your behavior influenced others, either negatively or positively?

