By Barbara Cole

Imagine shivering on a cold winter’s night. The tip of your nose tingles in the frosty air. Finally, you climb into bed and find the toasty treat you have been waiting for—your very own hot brick.

If you had lived in colonial days, that would not sound as strange as it does today. Winters were hard in this New World, and the colonists had to think of clever ways to fight the cold. At bedtime, they heated soapstones, or bricks, in the fireplace. They wrapped the bricks in cloths and tucked them into their beds. The brick kept them warm at night, at least for as long as its heat lasted.

Before the colonists slipped into bed, they rubbed their icy sheets with a bed warmer. This was a metal pan with a long wooden handle. The pan held hot embers from the fireplace. It warmed the bedding so well that sleepy bodies had to wait until the sheets cooled before climbing in.

Staying warm wasn’t just a bedtime problem. On winter rides, colonial travelers covered themselves with animal skins and warm blankets. Tucked under the blankets, near their feet, were small tin boxes called foot stoves. A foot stove held burning coals. Hot smoke puffed from small holes in the stove’s lid, soothing freezing feet and legs. When the colonists went to Sunday services, their foot stoves, furs, and blankets went with them. The meeting houses had no heat of their own until the 1800s.

At home, colonial families huddled close to the fireplace, or hearth. The fireplace was wide and high enough to hold a large fire, but its chimney was large, too. That caused a problem: Gusts of cold air blew into the house. The area near the fire was warm, but in the rest of the room it might still be cold enough to see your breath.
Reading or needlework was done by candlelight, or by the light of the fire. During the winter, animal skins sealed the drafty windows of some cabins and blocked out the daylight. The living area inside was gloomy, except in the circle of light at the hearth.

Early Americans did not bathe as often as we do. When they did, their "bathroom" was the kitchen, in that toasty space by the hearth. They partially filled a tub with cold water, then warmed it up with water heated in the fireplace. A blanket draped from chairs for privacy also let the fire's warmth surround the bather.

The household cooks spent hours at the hearth. They stirred the kettle of corn pudding or checked the baking bread while the rest of the family carried on their own fireside activities. So you can see why the fireplace was the center of a colonial home.

The only time the fire was allowed to die down was at bedtime. Ashes would be piled over the fire, reducing it to embers that might glow until morning.

By sunrise, the hot brick had become a cold stone once more. An early riser might get dressed under the covers, then hurry to the hearth to warm up.

Maybe you'd enjoy hearing someone who kept warm in these ways tell you what it was like. You wouldn't need to look for someone who has been living for two hundred years. In many parts of the country the modern ways didn't take over from the old ones until recently. Your own grandparents or other older people might remember the warmth of a hearthside and the joy of having a brick to cuddle up to.

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1. You would probably read this article if you wanted to know how the colonists
   
   A) cooked their food  
   B) traveled in the winter  
   C) washed their clothes  
   D) kept warm in cold weather

2. After reading this article, would you like to have lived during colonial times? What information in the article makes you think this?

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3. Some of the ways that colonists kept warm during the winter were different from the ways that people keep warm today. Tell about two of these differences.

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4. Do you think "A Brick to Cuddle Up To" is a good title for this article? Using information from the article, tell why or why not.

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5. Give two reasons stated in the article why the hearth was the center of the home in colonial times.

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6. A colonist would probably have used a foot stove when

A) going on a trip
B) sleeping in bed
C) sitting by the fireplace
D) working around the house

7. Pretend that you are an early American colonist. Describe at least three activities you might do during a cold winter evening. Be specific. Use details from the article to help you write your description.

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8. In writing this article, the author mostly made use of

A) broad ideas  
B) specific details  
C) important questions  
D) interesting characters

9. Does the author help you understand what colonial life was like? Use examples from the article to explain why or why not.

Question 2
Evidence of full comprehension - Student Response

2. After reading this article, would you like to have lived during colonial times? What information in the article makes you think this?
No, I would not like to have lived in the colonial days. Because nobody I know or me would like to cuddle up to a brick or have to take a bath very seldom. And having to carry a foot warmer.

2 After reading this article, would you like to have lived during colonial times? What information in the article makes you think this?

I would not like to live during colonial times because for a bath you would run cold and then pour in some water that was heated by the fire. At bedtime you would not soapstone or bricks from the fireplace and then wrap them in cloth to keep them warm.

Scorer Comments:
Both responses provide specific details from the article to support an opinion as to why they would not have wanted to live during colonial times.

Evidence of partial or surface comprehension - Student Response

2 After reading this article, would you like to have lived during colonial times? What information in the article makes you think this?

No, I wouldn't like to live in colonial times because it sounds like it's very hard to live in the winter.

2 After reading this article, would you like to have lived during colonial times? What information in the article makes you think this?

NO Because they didn't have clothes for the winter and I would of froze to death.

Scorer Comments:
Both responses demonstrate a general understanding of the winter as a hard time for the colonists, but do not support their opinion with specific details from the article.
Evidence of little or no comprehension - Student Response

2 After reading this article, would you like to have lived during colonial times? What information in the article makes you think this?

I would like to live in colonial days because I would like cuddling up in bed.

2 After reading this article, would you like to have lived during colonial times? What information in the article makes you think this?

Well to live there would be a very nice thing.

Scorer Comments:
Neither of these responses demonstrates an understanding of colonial life during the winter as described in the article. The first response would need to specify cuddling with a brick. "Cuddling up in bed" does not refer specifically to colonial times.

Question 3
Evidence of full comprehension - Student Response

3 Some of the ways that colonists kept warm during the winter were different from the ways that people keep warm today. Tell about two of these differences.

"Back in the "old days" they had fireplaces and bed warmers. Now we have heaters and electric blankets."

3 Some of the ways that colonists kept warm during the winter were different from the ways that people keep warm today. Tell about two of these differences.

"One difference is that, instead of just turning on a heater or an electrical bed warmer, they had to put bricks in their houses and make a fire."

Scorer Comments:
Both responses connect text descriptions to prior knowledge by comparing two ways by which colonists kept warm during winter to the ways by which people keep warm today.

Evidence of partial or surface comprehension - Student Response

3 Some of the ways that colonists kept warm during the winter were different from the ways that people keep warm today. Tell about two of these differences.

"The difference is that colonists kept their self-candle with bricks and we use blankets and other stuff."

3 Some of the ways that colonists kept warm during the winter were different from the ways that people keep warm today. Tell about two of these differences.
You put up a lot brick in
there bed from the fire place
They baking animals there to
real off drafty windows.

Scorer Comments:
The first response provides only one difference between colonial and contemporary ways of keeping warm. The second response demonstrates understanding of how colonists kept warm, but does not connect the text description to a contemporary way of keeping warm.

**Evidence of little or no comprehension - Student Response**

3 Some of the ways that colonists kept warm during the winter were different from the ways that people keep warm today. Tell about two of these differences.

I would keep warm by staying
in side and make a fire.

3 Some of the ways that colonists kept warm during the winter were different from the ways that people keep warm today. Tell about two of these differences.

People kept warm different back then
and now we have heaters and heating pods.

Scorer Comments:
These responses provide ways to keep warm today, but neither demonstrates understanding of the ways colonists kept warm as described in the article.

**Question 4**
Evidence of full comprehension - Student Response

4 Do you think "A Brick to Cuddle Up To" is a good title for this article? Using information from the article, tell why or why not.

Yes, I do think it is a good title. It is a good title because the article tells about how colonists kept warm in the winter by using heated bricks to keep warm.

4 Do you think "A Brick to Cuddle Up To" is a good title for this article? Using information from the article, tell why or why not.

Not really because that title only tells about the brick, not the foot stool or the bed to sit on for comfort.

Scorer Comments:
The first response supports an opinion about the title with a reference to the article’s theme and with a specific detail from the article. The second response points out the limitations of the title by providing specific details that the title does not encompass.

Evidence of partial or surface comprehension - Student Response

4 Do you think "A Brick to Cuddle Up To" is a good title for this article? Using information from the article, tell why or why not.

I think it is a good title because that’s what the paragraph is about.

4 Do you think "A Brick to Cuddle Up To" is a good title for this article? Using information from the article, tell why or why not.
Yes because it describes the story.

Scorer Comments:
Both responses support an opinion about the title with a general reason but do not specify how the title relates to the article.

Evidence of little or no comprehension - Student Response
4 Do you think "A Brick to Cuddle Up To" is a good title for this article? Using information from the article, tell why or why not.

Yes, I think "A Brick to Cuddle Up To" is a good title.

4 Do you think "A Brick to Cuddle Up To" is a good title for this article? Using information from the article, tell why or why not.

Yes, because they put the title in the story and I like it when they put the title in the story.

Scorer Comments:
Neither response provides any reason for the title's appropriateness for this article.

Question 5
Evidence of full comprehension - Student Response

5 Give two reasons stated in the article why the hearth was the center of the home in colonial times.

The hearth was the center of the home because they needed it for cooking and for warmth.

Scorer Comments:
These responses retrieve relevant information as to why the hearth was important and provide two reasons why it was the center of the home in colonial times.

Evidence of partial or surface comprehension - Student Response

5 Give two reasons stated in the article why the hearth was the center of the home in colonial times.

because if you sit on it you will get warm quick.

Scorer Comments:
These responses retrieve relevant information and provide one reason why the hearth was important.

Evidence of little or no comprehension - Student Response
5 Give two reasons stated in the article why the hearth was the center of the home in colonial times.

Because a fireplace was fine. But the chimney was too large.

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5 Give two reasons stated in the article why the hearth was the center of the home in colonial times.

Because a fireplace was in colonial time, and a blanket too.

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Scorer Comments:
These responses show understanding that the hearth was a fireplace, but provide no reason why it was important in the home in colonial times.

Question 7
On a cold winter evening, I would probably get out a game and play it with my family. We would have a nice hot snack and drink to keep them warm. We would all sit around the fireplace, maybe tell old stories when we were little. We could tell ghost stories. When they went to bed, I would put the warm brick under their bed. While they were asleep, I would knit a warm blanket for church or trips.
we would build a fire place and when it was bedtime we would put the brick with clothes on put in top of us and of covers, or we could sleep close to the fire place, in traveling we would put hot coal so they could keep you warm or when we were going to travel to were the animals skin or were covers so we could be warm or put on clothes that we were going to were before we went to sleep close to the fire place.

Scorer Comments:
The first response begins with activities that are not typical of colonial life as described in the article, but goes on to include three activities related to staying warm. All the ideas in the second response, while less clearly presented, relate to the need to stay warm.

**Essential - Student Response**

7 Pretend that you are an early American colonist. Describe at least three activities you might do during a cold winter evening. Be specific. Use details from the article to help you write your description.

I would sit by the fireplace and read, or do needlework, or stir a kettle or corn pudding, or check the baking bread.

7 Pretend that you are an early American colonist. Describe at least three activities you might do during a cold winter evening. Be specific. Use details from the article to help you write your description.
I would put a blanket
by the candle light and
this would be made out of animal
skin. I would warm up a stone
brick to keep me warm at
night and I would read.

Scorer Comments:
In the first response, all the activities are text-based, any one of which in connection to being by the
fireplace relates to the need to stay warm. In the second response, both sewing a blanket of animal skins
and warming up the stone relate to the need to stay warm.

Partial - Student Response
7 Pretend that you are an early American colonist. Describe at least three activities you might do during a
cold winter evening. Be specific. Use details from the article to help you write your description.

I would read a book
while sitting by the
fire, I would eat a lot.

7 Pretend that you are an early American colonist. Describe at least three activities you might do during a
cold winter evening. Be specific. Use details from the article to help you write your description.

I would sit and try
to learn how to
row and how to make
toys with help from
my mom and dad.
If I had a little
sister, I would help
her take a bath. I
would help my mom
make meals.
Scorer Comments:
The first response contains one activity done by the fire. The second response contains activities referred to in the article, but none are connected with the need to stay warm.

**Unsatisfactory - Student Response**

7 Pretend that you are an early American colonist. Describe at least three activities you might do during a cold winter evening. Be specific. Use details from the article to help you write your description.

I might do in the winter:
- Go sledding with a wooden sled.
- I might have a camp fire with friends. I might build a snowman.
- I would stay in the house when I would get cold. I would make tunnels in the snow. Shovel the driveway.

Scorer Comments:
These responses provide winter activities; however, none of these activities are text-based examples of what colonists might have done on a cold winter evening.

**Question 9**
Evidence of full comprehension - Student Response

Does the author help you understand what colonial life was like? Use examples from the article to explain why or why not.

Yes, she does. She gives specific details on how they did the things they did to keep warm. She gave the specific details of how a food store was used. And when it was used.

Scorer Comments:
The first response supports a statement about the author's use of specific details with an example from the article. The second response provides specific information from the article to illustrate the author's competence in telling about colonial life.

Evidence of partial or surface comprehension - Student Response

Does the author help you understand what colonial life was like? Use examples from the article to explain why or why not.

Yes, the author did help explain what the colonial life is like by explaining how the colonists kept warm on cold winter nights.

Does the author help you understand what colonial life was like? Use examples from the article to explain why or why not.
The author does help me learn about the colonial life in the winter, it was very cold for them.

Scorer Comments:
These responses support an opinion about the author's ability to convey information about colonial life with a text-based generalization.

Evidence of little or no comprehension - Student Response
9 Does the author help you understand what colonial life was like? Use examples from the article to explain why or why not.

Yes, because now we can look back and find out things about back then.

9 Does the author help you understand what colonial life was like? Use examples from the article to explain why or why not.

Yes, he described how they did it when they did and why.

Scorer Comments:
These responses provide personal opinions with no text-based support.