

The 1930s kitchen

Here is a description of some parts of a 1930s kitchen. Write a description of your kitchen and how it is different. You may also like to draw a plan of your kitchen and compare it to the one described here.

Flooring

Rubber blocks or sheet linoleum in 'battleship brown' with a pattern to hide dirt. Square-tiled patterns and marble-, jasper- and granite-grained designs were also popular.

Tiling

Tiling was popular but expensive. The areas around the cooking stove and sink were always tiled. If possible, cream tiling was used from the floor up to the dado rail and topped off with a narrow band of black and white chequered tiles.

Walls

The space from tiles to the ceiling was either painted in oil, enamel, or gloss paint for repeated washing, or lined in wallpaper, which was then varnished. A popular paper had a tile pattern. Pastel colours were fashionable; white, cream, apple green, pale grey and powder blue were particular favourites.

Ceiling

The kitchen ceiling suffered from rising steam, so gloss paint was best. To avoid condensation sometimes whitewash was used but it was apt to crack and flake, so many houses had papered ceilings with whitewash over the paper.

Windows

In the 1930s kitchen the window was low and large and placed over the sink so that the housewife could keep an eye on her children in the garden while washing-up.

Lighting

It was important that the housewife did not stand in her own light when cooking. For daylight work the cooker would ideally be placed so that the window was on the left-hand side. An electric filament lamp was recommended – placed to light up the whole kitchen. Lamps were totally covered by round shades to prevent steam or dust entering.

The 1930s kitchen

Age range

- Years 3/4 (SP4/5).
- Years 5/6 (SP6/7).

Resources

Copies of the worksheet, paper or graph paper, pencils, pens.

Using the worksheet

The 1930s kitchen was smaller but lighter than its Edwardian counterpart. While the Edwardian kitchen was usually the domain of servants, now the housewife herself did the cooking and cleaning.

In the space of about 25 years, the kitchen was transformed from a transient place for the preparation of food to the new heart of the home. By the end of the 1950s it was a multi-functional living space as well as the powerhouse and nerve centre of family life. The availability of new materials and finishes, as well as modern electric appliances came together in the fitted kitchen, changing the look and layout of a space which was now clearly to be enjoyed rather than merely endured.

You may like to assign this as homework, so the students can draw up detailed plans of their kitchens. The differences will vary depending on individual kitchens, and some students may well have kitchens resembling this one. However, most students should see that there is more light and more appliances in their kitchens than in the one described here, and that the wall and floor materials are easier to clean.

You may like to begin by asking students what their kitchen is used for. Everyone will say cooking, but some students will also say eating and playing or doing work. You may then explain that before the 1930s, members of the family rarely went into the kitchen because kitchens were often small. In high income families a cook was still employed and so no members of the family went into the kitchen at all. After the war, there were fewer servants and also new appliances and materials made servants unnecessary. It was now possible for one person (the housewife) to do the cooking and cleaning. However, in the 1930s, people would not have used the kitchen for a living area or for eating.

Younger students

The students may like to display their drawings and explain them to the class.

Outcomes

The students can:

- Compare text with real life personal situations.
- Make an accurate drawing.
- Know that kitchens and their uses have changed a great deal since the 1930s.
- Know that the kitchens of the 1930s were different from those of today.

Older students

The students may like to display their drawings and explain them to the class. Students may like to discuss how their kitchen is different from the 1930s kitchen. Students can discuss which type of kitchen they feel would be easier to cook and clean in.

Outcomes

The students can:

- Compare text with real life personal situations.
- Make an accurate drawing.
- Know that kitchens and their uses have changed a great deal since the 1930s.
- Know that the kitchens of the 1930s were different from those of today.