

Fashion victims

MISSION OBJECTIVES

- To understand what some rich Tudor women did to their skin to create their 'perfect face'.

The modern cosmetics industry is big business: shops and the media offer us thousands of products to make us look more beautiful, healthier, younger and more attractive. It wasn't like this in Tudor times but rich women in particular wanted to look their best. Many women made their own cosmetics, often with disastrous effects.

To be considered beautiful and wealthy, a Tudor woman desired pure white skin, ruby red lips, rosy cheeks, bright eyes and fair hair. A rich woman wanted white skin because she didn't want anyone to think that she needed to spend any time outside working and getting a tanned face.

Tudor women did many things to their faces to gain the 'perfect face'.

Today, many women (and men) suffer to make themselves look good. However, all our modern day suffering doesn't compare to the pain a Tudor woman must have gone through. She really was a fashion victim.

Eyes: Her eyes had to be large and shining.
Solution: Put a chemical in them called **belladonna**.

Face/neck: Had to be VERY white.
Solution: Drink rosewater and asses' milk in the evening. A mixture of white lead and vinegar would cause the skin to whiten in the day. Wear a mask when outside to prevent the sun causing freckles. Cover face with sublimate of mercury.

Hair: Must be light in colour.
Solution: Bleach with sulphur and lead mixture.

Eyebrows: These had to be very thin.
Solution: Pluck them out and paint on thin lines.

Lips/cheeks: Her lips had to be bright red, perhaps with matching red cheeks (to look like she was blushing).
Solution: **Cochineal** (crushed beetles) mixed with egg. Alum was then rubbed on the flesh to roughen up the skin. This would make the dye hold.

Teeth: These had to be very white.
Solution: Clean them with the frayed end of a stick dipped in brick dust and honey.

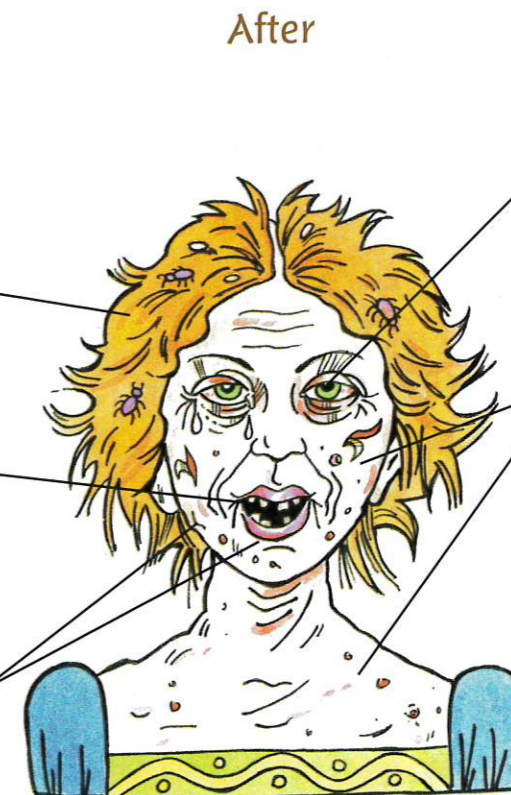
If face badly marked, sublimate of mercury took off all the top skin.

Ingredients: belladonna, oil, quill, quill, asses' milk & rosewater, white lead poison, mercury poison.

Hair: Women would use sulphur and lead to try to bleach their hair as light as possible. However, this would cause a woman's hair to fall out. Until that happened, she would pile her hair on top of her head. It would have been full of lice and other vermin because she rarely washed it.

Teeth: Most women over the age of 20 had smelly mouths, full of black teeth. As well as removing stains, the brick dust removed the enamel on the teeth leaving them prone to decay.

Lips/cheeks: Cochineal was one of the safest substances used (we still use it today in cake icing – enjoy!). Alum, however, caused their skin to become very rough and scarred.



After

Eyes: Belladonna was made from deadly nightshade that was extremely poisonous and damaged the eyes of the user. It fogged their vision so they couldn't see properly.

Face/neck: White lead was extremely poisonous. It caused women to have wrinkles and, even worse, open sores that didn't heal. Sublimate of mercury is a very nasty chemical. It caused women's skin to peel like flaking paint. They hoped that the new layer of skin underneath, which would have been very painful to touch, would be whiter than the last.

FACT Bath time

The Tudors thought bathing was unhealthy and very rarely washed. Even Queen Elizabeth, who was regarded as being extremely clean, only bathed two or three times per year. No wonder people carried scented items around with them and wore lots of expensive perfume, **imported** from the East – what a stink!

WISE-UP Words
belladonna
cochineal
imported

Work

- 1 a** Listed below are some chemicals that Tudor women used. Write them out in your book. Next to each one, write down what each was used for. For example: Belladonna – a chemical made from deadly nightshade, used to make Tudor women's eyes shine.

belladonna • cochineal • white lead • brick dust • sulphur • mercury

b Now write down the effects, if any, on a Tudor woman's face.
- 2** Why did a rich Tudor woman want white skin?
- 3 a** Using a full page in your book, draw an outline of a Tudor woman's face. Around the face, make a brief note of your favourite five Tudor beauty tips. Add the title 'My top five Tudor beauty tips'.

b Using another full page, draw an outline of your face. Around your face, make notes of your own beauty tips (don't be shy, we all try to look after our hair, face and teeth). Add the title 'My own top five beauty tips'.

c What are the main differences between the way we look after our faces and the way they did in Tudor times? Think carefully – are there any similarities?

+ Hungry for MORE
Imagine you were an older Tudor woman whose face had suffered after years of damage from her strict 'beauty' regime. Design a warning leaflet to hand out to younger girls, outlining the dangers of all the terrible treatments.

MISSION ACCOMPLISHED?

- Can you name three chemicals used by Tudor women in an attempt to improve their looks?
- Can you outline the damage these chemicals did?