



SPINNING

Twisting fiber into thread and yarn has been done for a very long time. Today big factories made thread and yarn. Before that it was done by hand by women. Women did the spinning in their own home for their own families.

To twist the fiber into thread and yarn, women used a drop spindle. A drop spindle has something very heavy like a rock or dried clay at one end of it. Later on wood or bone was used instead of rock or clay. This heavy thing is called a whorl. The whorl has a stick attached to it. The stick is called a spindle. Wool, flax or cotton fiber is tied to the spindle. To make thread or yarn women spun the spindle. At the same time they dropped the spindle. What do you think happens to the fiber when it is spun by the spindle and dropped? Why is there a whorl on the end of the spindle?

The Chinese invented the spinning wheel a very long time ago. When the spinning wheel finally came to Europe it changed everything. Using a spinning wheel made spinning thread much faster. This meant that bigger pieces of cloth could be made. Bigger pieces of cloth could then be sewn together. With bigger pieces of cloth bigger sails could be made. With bigger sails bigger ships could be built. Bigger ships could sail farther away. New lands were discovered. People moved to the new lands. People traded new goods from the new lands to people back home.

Spinning has always been done by women. Words that we use today came from spinning. Have you ever heard the word “spinster?” It is used to describe a woman who is older and not married. A long time ago the person who did the spinning of thread was the single woman in the household. Have you ever heard the term “spinning your wheels?” It means to work at something, but to stay in one place or to get nowhere. That’s just like the spinster who stayed in one place spinning thread all day long.