

Be a Fan of Fans!

People have been cooling themselves with fans for thousands of years. Ancient Egyptians, Romans, Greeks, and Chinese all used fans. By the 1800s, European and American women were using fans as much for fashion as to keep cool.

Did you know that the “Language of the Fan” was very popular in the nineteenth century? You could send secret messages across the room to your friend at a crowded party by changing the way you held and moved the fan. Check out the examples below— what do you think the women in this picture are saying with their fans?

Touching a finger to the tip of the fan means *I wish to speak with you*

Holding a fan in your right hand in front of your face means *Follow me*

Holding a fan in your left hand in front of your face means *Leave me alone*

Twirling the fan in the left hand means *We are being watched*

Touching the fan handle to the lips means *Kiss me*



Make a fan of your own!

Fans are made of all kinds of materials, including silk, lace, animal skin, ivory, turtle shell, and ostrich feathers, but you can make one from paper! Begin by decorating one or both sides of a piece of 8 ½ by 11 inch paper. Starting on one of the short sides, accordion fold (alternating creases inward and outward) the paper into ½ inch pleats. Staple or tape the bottom of the folds together to make a handle.

Get a friend to make a fan, too, so you can invent your own secret messages. Get creative!

