

# Unit 11 What was it like for children living in Victorian Britain?

## ABOUT THE UNIT

In this unit children find out about the lives of Victorian children, how attitudes towards children changed, and the people who are remembered for their part in these changes. Children develop their understanding of the concept of change and continuity and their sense of period, by looking at the characteristic features of children's lives in the Victorian period. They build on their understanding of chronology by locating the Victorian period within a time framework, and by sequencing changes within the period.

## WHERE THE UNIT FITS IN

This unit builds on children's understanding of social change which was introduced in relation to the Tudor period in Unit 8 'What were the differences between the lives of rich and poor people in Tudor times?'. This unit is complemented by Unit 12 'How did life change in our locality in Victorian times?'

## ADAPTING THE UNIT FOR A DIFFERENT AGE GROUP

Year 3 and 4 children could:

- be given a clear framework for looking at the portrait of the royal family
- be given reference material when researching their presentations, *eg key words, highlighted text, visual sources, tape-recorded text*
- find out about political changes through stories
- use more visual sources and artefacts as evidence
- ask questions about individual sources of evidence

## PRIOR LEARNING

It is helpful if the children have:

- used portraits as a source of information on famous people living in the past
- learnt about children in a time beyond living memory
- read/listened to biographies or stories about people living in the past

## VOCABULARY

In this unit, children will have opportunities to use:

- words associated with education in Victorian times, *eg board schools, monitors, logbooks, slates, inkwell*
- words associated with legislation, *eg Acts of Parliament, factory report, law, politician, House of Lords*
- words associated with child labour, *eg factories, mines, supervisor, inspector, machinery*

## RESOURCES

- a portrait of Queen Victoria and her family
- information on Victorian children at work, *eg contemporary engravings, extracts from contemporary authors, factory and mine reports*
- information on Lord Shaftesbury and Dr Barnardo, *eg textbooks, pack from Barnardo's on Victorian Britain*
- information on Victorian schools, *eg extracts from stories, school logbooks, inspection reports*
- information on Victorian leisure, *eg games, toys, posters, books, songbooks of children at work in factories and mines*
- contemporary novels, *eg novels by Kingsley, Dickens*
- a class time line

## EXPECTATIONS

at the end of this unit

*most children will:*

place the changes in the period within a chronological framework; make appropriate use of dates and terms; demonstrate knowledge and understanding about the everyday lives of children in the Victorian period; show how some aspects of the period have been interpreted in different ways; select and combine information from a range of visual, textbook and documentary sources; communicate their knowledge and understanding of changes to children's lives in Victorian times in organised and structured ways

*some children will not have made so much progress and will:*

recognise some similarities and differences between the lives of children from different areas of Victorian society; ask and answer questions about the period by using at least one source of information

*some children will have progressed further and will:*

describe reasons for and results of particular events; use their knowledge and understanding of the Victorian period to make links with other societies and periods; select and combine information from a range of sources to reach substantiated conclusions

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

## CHILDREN SHOULD LEARN

- to identify Queen Victoria and place the Victorian period in relation to other periods of British history
- to infer information from a portrait
- to consider what life was like for children in the past

- to collect information from a range of sources and draw conclusions about the Victorian period
- to understand that ways of life differed greatly across Victorian society
- to write a narrative using historical detail
- to understand that there are many representations of the Victorian period

- to understand that the work of individuals can change aspects of society
- to find out about important figures in Victorian times
- to present their findings in different ways

- to compare modern and Victorian schooling
- to communicate through drama their understanding of the nature of school life in Victorian times

## POSSIBLE TEACHING ACTIVITIES

**Who were the Victorians and when did they live?**

Show the children a picture of Queen Victoria and her family. Discuss what they think they can tell from the picture, *eg status of the family, lifestyle, when the person was alive.*

Ask the children to place the Victorian period on a time line.

Discuss with the children what life may have been like for Victoria's children, and whether all children would have had similar experiences.

Ask the children to work in groups and share what they already know about the period and then feed back to the rest of the class what they think life might have been like for children.

**What was life like for a poor child in the 1840s?**

Show the children an extract from a video about life for the poor in the nineteenth century. Discuss the extract and what sources of information the film-maker might have used and what other sources might be used to find out more.

Provide a range of sources, *eg extracts from contemporary authors (Kingsley, Dickens), reports on factories or mines, engravings.* Ask the children to make a list of what they can infer about the life of poor children from the sources and present it to class.

Provide some information on the numbers of working children, their hours of work, the types of jobs they did and their lack of education. Discuss why children worked in Victorian times.

Ask the children to imagine they are a Victorian child working in a factory and write an extract from a factory report describing the work a child of their age was doing.

**Who helped to improve the lives of Victorian children?**

Ask the children what they think needed to be done for Victorian children.

Talk about Lord Shaftesbury and Dr Barnardo and how they helped children, placing key events on the time line. Ask the children to find out about the work of these men, and the way that they changed some children's lives using a variety of written sources and pictures.

Ask the children to present their work using freeze-frames, brief role-plays, cartoons, extended writing or oral and visual presentations.

**What was it like going to school at the end of the nineteenth century?**

Show the children pictures of school life at the end of the nineteenth century and discuss how school appears different from today, *eg uniforms, architecture and interiors of classrooms.*

Referring to the time line, talk briefly about the 1870 Education Act, and how schooling was not free until 1891. Use sources to illustrate aspects of school life at this time, *eg extracts from stories, school logbooks, inspection reports.*

Ask the children to produce a conversation between two children, one established in school and the other a new arrival who had been working in a factory, mill or mine for years. Select children to present their work to the class.

Lead a discussion on the differences in the views of school and work and why the children in the nineteenth century would have interpreted school life differently.

## LEARNING OUTCOMES

## CHILDREN

- can place the Victorian period on a class time line
- draw inferences about the lives of Queen Victoria's family from a portrait
- suggest what life was like for children living in the past

- list a number of aspects of daily life for poor Victorian children
- produce a simple narrative to illustrate what they know about the work done by Victorian children

- answer questions about who helped to improve children's lives and how
- select appropriate information and present it, to show what they have found out about Lord Shaftesbury and Dr Barnardo

- identify distinctive features of a Victorian school
- produce a dialogue that contains appropriate historical detail
- suggest there are different interpretations of school and work

## POINTS TO NOTE

This introductory activity places the unit in a chronological framework and builds on previous experience of interpreting portraits.

There are a number of pictures of the royal family from this period, and postcard versions can be obtained from the National Portrait Gallery.

The small-group discussion is included to allow children to show the knowledge they already have about the period.

Film versions of *Oliver Twist* will provide suitable material, as will extracts from school broadcasts.

Illustrations of slums and pictures of working children can be found in many textbooks. Extracts could be from original or abridged versions of Victorian authors, *eg Kingsley, Dickens.*

Many local libraries hold copies of health reports or factory inspection reports.

This activity could be adapted by providing word banks and sentence/paragraph starters.

A link can be made to work in reading by comparing film versions of novels with extracts from the original text. Identify the differences in the way that the story is told, *eg through the loss of the narrator.* Examine the distinctive voice of contemporary accounts and compare them with modern historical fiction. Use this investigation to help them adopt an appropriate voice and style in their own writing.

Lord Shaftesbury and Dr Barnardo are included as examples of a politician and a private individual who both attempted to improve children's lives. The amount of political detail included with Shaftesbury will vary according to the maturity and interest of the children, but if possible mention should be made of Acts of Parliament and laws. A pack from Barnardo's has useful photographs.

Texts chosen to explore the lives of Shaftesbury and Barnardo could be considered as part of work in reading, focusing on biography and autobiography. Such reading should encourage children to consider statements as fact and opinion and to be sensitive to stated and implied points of view in a text.

This activity would be enhanced by a visit to one of the many reconstructions of Victorian classrooms in museums etc.

The classroom furniture could be rearranged and a Victorian lesson/school day recreated.

Museum loan services can sometimes provide artefacts from Victorian schoolrooms, including desks, books and slates.

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

### CHILDREN SHOULD LEARN

- to consider how attitudes to children and childhood changed over time

- to recall information about the life of children in Victorian times
- to select appropriate material and present it in a way that shows their understanding of the Victorian period

## POSSIBLE TEACHING ACTIVITIES

### How did different Victorian children use their spare time?

Discuss ways of spending spare time, and ask the children to list their interests and those of others in their families. Ask them to consider which would have been possible in 1890 and which not, giving reasons. Discuss with the children what leisure interests may have been available.

Give the children a range of sources on Victorian leisure pursuits, *eg artefacts, textbooks, contemporary paintings, pictures*. Ask the children to complete a table listing each leisure pursuit and describing it.

Tell the children about late-Victorian attitudes, *eg that childhood was a time for protection from 'immoral' aspects of adult life and for learning family values and moral principles*. Ask the children to compare Victorian attitudes with those of today.

Ask the children to use the sources of information to help them produce advertisements or a poster advertising the benefits of a new toy or pursuit, and highlighting what they have been told about Victorian attitudes.

### How did life change for children living in Victorian Britain?

Refer to the time line to recap the main events, dates and figures to help the children recall some of the main changes to the lives of children during the Victorian period.

Discuss with the children why the changes took place and who benefited from them. Tell the children that a large number of children were still working in 1901.

Provide the children with a range of sources and ask them to summarise what they have found out in ways that provide a sense of the Victorian period.

## LEARNING OUTCOMES

### CHILDREN

- produce advertisements or posters that reflect Victorian attitudes and values
- suggest what Victorian children might have done in their spare time
- select relevant information about a toy/leisure pursuit

- recall information about what children did in Victorian times
- present information showing knowledge and an appreciation of the Victorian period

## POINTS TO NOTE

The initial task provides an opportunity to assess whether the children are aware of what might be technologically appropriate for the period.

A range of artefacts could be provided for this activity, *eg replicas of Victorian toys and games, copies of posters, copies of original books and songbooks*.

Contemporary sources, proverbs about childhood and contemporary illustrations that idealise childhood, could be used to develop understanding of Victorian attitudes.

Comparing the attitudes of today with those of the past will contribute to the children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

It is important to give the children a chance to summarise what they have learnt, and to try to present it as 'historians'. Some children will need support with the extended writing activity.

This activity could be extended by asking children to write a detailed account of what they have learnt, using dates and terms appropriately and clearly. They can be asked to identify how the lives of some children had changed and others had stayed the same.



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