



# Children in Victorian\* England

**Victorian England wasn't a good time to be a child. Poor children had to work and richer children worked hard at school. For all children, rich and poor, there wasn't much time for fun.**

## The world of work

In the early and middle 1800s, most children from poor families had to work. Their families needed the money.

### Factories and mines

Country children usually worked outside in the fields. Children from the cities often worked in mines or factories. They were dirty and dangerous jobs and children often became ill. There were often accidents. The hours were long and children did not get much money.

### The workhouse child

Very poor people with no home or job lived in 'workhouses'. Some children didn't have families. They had to live in the workhouses. Life there was very hard. There was not enough food and nobody really cared for the children. The workhouse owners often sold the children to men who needed workers. Chimney sweeps used children to climb up chimneys and clean them.



Slowly, things started to change. By 1874, no child under the age of ten could work in a factory or mine. And after 1875, children stopped going up chimneys. But when Queen Victoria died in 1901, there were still lots of older children working in England.

## 1870 – school for everyone!

For most of the 1800s, very few children went to school. But in 1870, a new law changed children's lives. Every child from the age of five had to go to school.

Victorian schools were very different from schools today. Pupils spent a lot of time copying from the blackboard. Often they didn't understand what they were writing!

All children learnt reading, writing and maths. People thought school was more important for boys than girls. Boys had

more maths lessons than girls and studied science. Girls had housework lessons.



Teachers often hit children who didn't listen or who did something wrong. There were often problems with children who didn't want to go to school.

How have schools changed since Victorian times?

Talk to a partner.

## Away from home

Some children left home and went away to school. These schools could be terrible places, like Lowood School in *Jane Eyre*. The pupils had to sit in very cold classrooms and didn't have good food to eat. They were often unhappy and ill – but the school owners made lots of money.

## Home study

Children from rich families had their own private teacher – a governess. *Jane Eyre* is Adèle's governess. Richer children had easier lives than other children, but they did not often meet or play with other children.

\* Queen Victoria was queen of England from 1819–1901. We call this time 'Victorian'.



What do these words mean? You can use a dictionary.

mine factory chimney sweep blackboard maths science