

Schools in Victorian Britain

At the start of Queen Victoria's reign, only a few children attended school. Most poor children worked, and their earnings were an important part of the family income. By going to school, their families would lose this money.

There were village schools in some parts of the country, which were run by the church, or small 'Dame' schools, usually run by one woman. 'Dame' schools were often more about child care than learning. Sadly, some places which called themselves 'schools' were actually workshops. The children would be used for cheap labour, making lace or plaiting straw.

In many big towns there were Ragged schools, set up by people like Dr Barnardo who cared about the children. As well as gaining an education, they would be fed and cared for. In 1870, the Education Act was passed, which said there had to be a school in every town and village, meaning that all children had to go to school.

Boys and girls went into school through separate doors, sat in separate rows and were taught separately. The rules of the class were very strict. Pupils were hit with canes if they misbehaved. The children write on slates with slate pencils and spent lots of time copying from the blackboard.

In class, the teacher sat at the front. There were maps, books, a bible, a globe, an abacus and a picture of Queen Victoria on the wall. Boys learned science, woodwork, technology and extra maths. Girls learned sewing and housework. They both learned reading, writing, spelling, arithmetic and drill.

Questions

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1. Why did some families not want their children to go to school?
2. What happened in 1870?
3. What subjects did the girls learn in school?

Vocabulary

4. Victorian times could be described as arduous for children. What could the word arduous mean?
5. Use arduous in a sentence.

Inference

6. How might parents feel sending their children to school in Victorian Britain?
What evidence is the to support your answer?