

VICTORIAN FASHION DETECTIVES

This activity lasts about 50 minutes to 1 hour. The children work in pairs. It aims to:

- (1) support children in discovering what clothes the Victorians, both rich and poor, wore;
- (2) help the children understand that fashions changed during Victoria's reign;
- (3) encourage children to consider the reasons for these changes; and
- (4) develop historical enquiry and research skills.

You will need:

- Several OHPs or large pictures of different Victorian costume;
- 'Evidence packs' – about five pictures of Victorian costume representative of the development of the period, 'red herring' pictures (modern clothes), summary information sheets, two worksheets;
- 'Information Points' – further short texts on Victorian clothes, plenty of Victorian Britain reference books, 'How We Used to Live' CD-Rom on PC, 'fashion witness' person etc.

INTRODUCTION – 10 /15 minutes

Show children different pictures on OHPs of a range of Victorians in different clothes. Ask them to describe what they see orally and say if these people are rich or poor (it helps to have contrasting pictures). Talk about the idea of change during the Victorian period. With the last picture, set the children the challenge of finding out from 'evidence' when the fashion depicted was worn (ie. which period of Victorian England). This is where they become detectives. Leave this picture on display throughout.

DEVELOPMENT/ACTIVITY – 30 minutes

Tell the children there are going to be 'fashion detectives'. In pairs, they are given a pre-prepared 'evidence pack' containing pictures of Victorian fashion from representative developments over the period. Also in the pack are some 'red herring' pictures of modern clothes (to enable later comparison) and their worksheets.

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Using the picture evidence and a 'summary' sheet of Victorian fashion included in the pack (short simple statements about women, men, children, different periods etc) they write down as much information as possible about the different types of clothes Victorians wore. Useful here to prepare the worksheet to cater for different permutations eg. Rich Men, Poor Women, Rich Children etc.

There will be, however, an 'information gap' and children will find they haven't got all the information they need (because you have deliberately left it out of the pack). This is where 'Information Points' dotted around the classroom come in – these points have further information to help them complete the task of identifying the 'challenge picture' which is still on display.

Some points have short teacher prepared texts on Victorian fashions, others use resource books with further details, and one can use the 'How We Used to Live' CD-Rom on the classroom PC. If you can arrange it, a parent/helper in Victorian costume could be a 'fashion witness' and answer questions for the children.

During this time, the children should be considering the different types of clothing in Victorian England and making initial ideas about why clothing changed.

CONCLUSION – 10/15 minutes

When you draw the class back together, discuss what the children have found out about men, women, rich, poor etc and get it up on the whiteboard with appropriate vocabulary. Check understanding of items of clothing.

Take each picture from the 'evidence' pack in turn and ask the children to place it on a Victorian timeline on the whiteboard AND to account for their decision using the information they have found out. Repeat until all the pictures are used (five in the pack is enough). Refer to the 'red herrings' – why have the children left these out?!

Ask them why we have all these different types of clothes in Victorian England – surely all Victorians wore the same clothes?!

Now see if they can fulfil their challenge – when were the fashions in the challenge picture worn? How do they know? What is their evidence? Do they all agree? Why/why not?

I found this activity engaged all the children and really got them talking about the differences and their reasons for their decisions/opinions based on the evidence they had found and considered. The more able children also offered tentative ideas as to why fashions changed over the period.

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FOLLOW UP

The children can consider the reasons behind the changes in fashions – that inventions and development in machinery due to the Industrial Revolution resulted in ready made clothing being cheaper and more readily available. Consider the progression of hand-made to machine made by individuals to mass production. Link developments in industry to the changes in fashion etc.