

The Victorian Age

Queen Victoria came to the throne in 1837, when she was eighteen years old and reigned until her death in 1901. Victoria is often called the "grand mother of Europe" because she and her husband Albert had nine children who married other European princes and princesses. The present monarch, Queen Elizabeth II. and her husband Philip are both descended from Victoria. After Albert's death, Victoria retired from public life and wore plain clothes for the rest of her life.

During her reign, which is called the "Victorian Age", Britain became the most powerful country in the world, with the largest empire that had ever existed, ruling a quarter of the world's inhabitants. This included India, Australia, Canada and parts of Africa.

In Britain most people now lived in the cities, which became bigger and overcrowded.

Families were large and they lived in terrible conditions often in only one room. New factories and machines produced food, clothes and work for them.

Trains now transported goods to and from the factories. Soon people started travelling on them too. As a result people, goods and news started to move more easily and more quickly round the country.

Some people, especially factory owners, became very rich. However, life in the city was very difficult for poor people, who worked long hours for very low pay. It was difficult to earn enough money to live so women and children worked too. In 1842 it became illegal for boys under ten, women and all girls to work underground in the mines. Primary education became compulsory in 1876.

Rich families were generally large too. The father was respected and feared. Discipline in the house was very strict. Children often lived with a servant called a "nanny" and saw their parents for only a few minutes every day.

Women were considered inferior, not particularly intelligent and rather delicate. They didn't work and they were financially dependent on their husbands. Their role was to make the home comfortable for him and to give a moral education to the children.

Women often did "good work" trying to help poor families.

During Victorian times people believed that it was important to behave according to the very strict rules of Victorian society. They were very religious and it was important not to create scandals so problems were kept secret.

Answer these questions.

1. How long was Queen Victoria on the throne?
2. Why is she often called the "grandmother of Europe"?
3. Why did she always wear black clothes when she was older?
4. How much of the world formed the British Empire?
5. Where did most people live?
6. What were trains first used for?
7. Who became rich during the Victorian Age?
8. Why did women and children have to work?
9. Why was 1842 an important date for poor children?
10. What happened in 1876?
11. Did Victorian children have a close relationship with their parents?
12. How were Victorian women considered?
13. Why did Victorians keep their problems secret?
14. Do you live in a town, a city or the country? What problems are there living in the city or the country?

Now look at questions 1-13.

Use the questions as a guide and speak for a few minutes about the Victorian Age.