The Victorians Knowledge Organiser

The British Empire in Victorian Times

The British Empire in 1901

By 1901 (the year in which Queen Victoria died) Britain ruled over about 1/4 of the world. At this point, the British Empire was made up of around 400 million people (the population of England was only around 40 million). The empire included the entire Indian subcontinent, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and large parts of Africa. 'Dominion' (self-governing) status was awarded to 'white' countries (e.g. Australia), however, in some countries (e.g. in Africa) rule was more authoritarian.

Significant Victorians

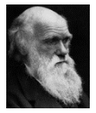
Queen Victoria (1819-1901)

The Queen of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland from 20th June 1837 until 22nd January 1901. On 1st May 1876 she was granted the additional title of 'Empress of India.' Her reign of 63 years and 7 months was the longest of any British monarch aside from Queen Elizabeth II, and was known as the Victorian era. She married her cousin, Prince Albert of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha in 1840 – their nine children married into noble families all across Europe, earning her the nickname 'the grandmother of Europe.' When Albert died in 1861, Victoria sank into deep mourning. She died in 1901 at the age of 81.

Charles Dickens (1812-1870)

A writer, who is regarded as the greatest novelist of the Victorian era. His works, including *Oliver Twist*, *Great Expectations* and *A Christmas Carol* were extremely popular during his lifetime, and have gained even further recognition since. His novels often dealt with the harsh social conditions experienced by the poor at the time, critiquing the attitudes of those with power and wealth.

Charles Darwin (1809-1882)



A naturalist and biologist who is best known for his theory of evolution. Darwin established that all species share common ancestors, and that natural selection has shaped the diversity of life on earth. Whilst his theories were initially rejected by many in scientific, religious, and public circles, they are now broadly considered as scientific fact. Darwin has been described as one of the most influential figures in history.

Elizabeth Garrett Anderson (1836-1917)

A pioneering physician and political campaigner. Despite numerous legal and social obstacles, she became the first woman to qualify in Britain as a physician and surgeon, the first woman to be elected to a school board, and the first female mayor and magistrate. She was also the first co-founder of a hospital staffed by women.

Thomas Barnardo (1845 – 1905)

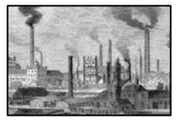
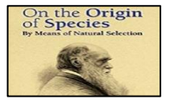
A doctor who helped poor and homeless children in the 1800s. He opened homes where children could live safely, get food, and go to school. He believed every child deserved love and care. His work helped thousands and still continues today through the charity Barnardo's.

Key Questions

- How did Queen Victoria influence the era named after her?
- How did the industrial needs shape children's lives during the Victorian era?
- What factors contributed to poverty in Victorian England?
- How did philanthropy impact Victorian society?
- How have children's rights evolved from the Victorian era to today?
- What Victorian inventions have the greatest impact on our lives today?
- How did the industrial revolution change society?
- How did the expansion of the British Empire influence global trade and culture?

Great Reads

Important Events and Life in Victorian Times

The Industrial Revolution		In the Industrial Revolution, the manufacturing of goods moved from small shops to large factories. This meant that more people moved into the cities. It was a time of new technologies and a new, more modern way of life.	When? Around 1760-1850	Key Fact: Queen Victoria took to the throne at the very end of the revolution.
The Irish Potato Famine		In the early 19th Century, potatoes were the main source of food and income in Ireland. A fungus: 'potato blight' made the potatoes rot, to catastrophic effect: about 800,000 died, and 1 million emigrated to the UK and the US.	When? Around 1845-1849	Key Fact: Many blamed the British government's inaction for the depth of the tragedy.
The Public Health Act 1848		The Public Health Act was drafted in response to requests to improve public health conditions in poor areas, where sewage openly flowed through the streets. It is seen as the first step on the road towards improved public health.	When? Initiated in 1848	Key Fact: The act was unpopular with many, seen as a government intrusion.
The Crimean War		The Crimean War was fought between Russia and an alliance of France, the UK, and the Ottoman Empire. The Allies eventually prevailed.	When? October 1853 to February 1856	Key Fact: People at home heard about the war for the first time, through journalists and photographers.
Origin of the Species Published		Darwin's masterpiece resulted from over 20 years of research. It caused an immediate stir, as it directly contradicted the bible's creation story. It was initially rejected by many.	When? November 24th 1859	Key Fact: The paper was translated into 8 different languages in Dariwn's lifetime.
Class		Despite the revolution, there were still distinct social classes: the upper class, middle class, and working class. Life was terrible for the poorest: awful working conditions and little food.	Who? The upper classes was made up of very few people.	Key Fact: The upper class lived prosperous lives, with servants and cooks.
Life for Children		Until the late 19th Century, education was a reserve of the rich. As many families were so poor, lots of children instead had to work. They worked long hours for little money.	What? Children were often paid very little for long hours.	Key Fact: Only in 1880 did primary schooling become compulsory.
Health		Medicine was nowhere near as advanced as today, Many diseases were rife, and childbirth and poverty were very real dangers to people living in the era, especially the poor.	How? Poor public hygiene played a large part in people's poor health.	Key Fact: On average, middle class people lived to 45. Working class were lucky to live half that time.
Workhouses		Workhouses were places where a person went if they could not afford to financially support themselves and their families – they quickly became extremely crowded and unpleasant.	How? People slept in dormitories, where disease was easily spread.	Key Fact: Many orphans ended up growing up in workhouses.
Food		As with all aspects of life, there were vast differences between the diets of the rich and poor. The poor survived on little more than potato scraps and rotten vegetables.	What? Workhouses only offered basic rations.	Key Fact: The rich dined on fine foods, using expensive cutlery, with servants.

Victorian Timeline

1837 – Victoria becomes Queen aged 18.

1840 – Britain claims New Zealand as a colony to head off the French.

1843 – Charles Dickens publishes 'A Christmas Carol.'

1845-1849 – Ireland suffers the Great Potato Famine, causing the deaths of about 800,000 people.

1850 – Workhouses were opened, offering basic food and beds in return for work.

1856 – Britain defeats Russia in the Crimean War.

1861 – Prince Albert dies of typhoid.

1880 – School compulsory for 5-10 year olds

1901 – Queen Victoria dies. Her son, Edward VII, becomes King.