

# Victorian School Life

Life in a Victorian school was very different from today. There were no laptops, tablets or interactive whiteboards – and punishments could be very harsh.

## School

At the start of the 1800s, only some children went to school. Boys from rich families were educated in private schools, while girls were often taught at home by their governess. Some charities and churches provided free schools for poor children but the classrooms were often overcrowded, sometimes with more than 100 pupils.

In 1880, a law was passed saying that every child between the ages of five and ten had to go to school.

## Lessons

Victorian teachers were very strict. Pupils called male teachers, 'Sir' and female teachers, 'Madam' or 'Miss'. A lot of the lessons involved listening to the teacher and copying things down from the blackboard.

The three **Rs**: reading, writing and arithmetic were very important. Instead of learning in a fun way – like multiplication bingo or online games – children often had to memorise things. They would chant the times tables, for example, until they knew them off by heart.

Days were long and usually lasted until 5:00 pm. Here is an example of a Victorian school day:

Time	Lesson
9:00 - 9:10	prayers
9:10 - 10:10	scripture (Bible work)
10:10 - 11:10	arithmetic (maths)
11:10 - 11:30	recreation (play time)
11:30 - 12:00	writing
12:00 - 2:00	lunch
2:00 - 2:45	drill (PE)
2:45 - 3:30	woodwork (boys) cookery and embroidery (girls)
3:30 - 4:20	science
4:20 - 4:50	reading
4:50 - 5:00	prayers

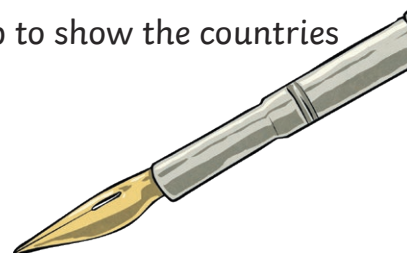
## Equipment

When writing, pupils often scratched letters onto slates (flat rocks) with something sharp. It was a bit like a whiteboard as the slates could be wiped clean and used again. Older children may have been given a fountain pen to write in 'copybooks'. The pen was dipped into a little pot of ink on the table. The inkwells were refilled each morning.

Victorian classrooms had tall ceilings with windows high up so children couldn't look outside. This was so they could concentrate on their work. The classrooms usually had an **abacus** to help with arithmetic and a map to show the countries of the British Empire.

## Punishment

Here's what might happen if you did something wrong in a Victorian school:



Action	Possible Punishment
rudeness, laziness, telling lies, skipping school	the cane (This is a stick that the teacher would hit the pupils with; boys usually on their bottoms and girls on their legs or hands.)
not understanding the work or not keeping up with lessons	dunce's hat (The teacher made the pupil wear a hat with the word 'dunce', meaning stupid, on it. The dunce was told to go and stand in the corner of the room.)



## Other Punishments

Children might have to do 'lines' where they copied the same sentence over and over again (perhaps 100 times). In some schools, if a pupil was really naughty, they would be beaten with a leather strap, or perhaps hung from the ceiling in a wicker basket using ropes and pulleys.

Would you like to have gone to school in Victorian times?