What was it like for the poor in Victorian times?

Parents who worked in factories didn’t earn much money. They had to send their children to work in order to earn enough money to feed the family.

The owners of factories employed children because they could pay them less than they paid the men. Boys and girls as young as five worked in factories and mines for up to twelve hours a day.

Children working in a brickyard carrying heavy lumps of clay for the brick makers. Clay was used to make bricks.

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This painting shows the family of a travelling day-labourer at the side of the road. The father is unemployed and is moving his family to the next village in the hope of finding work. Everything they own goes with them.

In 1842 the Mines Act stopped children under ten working in mines.

In 1843 children under ten were stopped from working as climbing boys or chimney sweeps.

In 1875 the use of climbing boys was stopped altogether.

As a result of all these reforms, the poorest families were worse off. Many parents lied about their children’s ages in order to keep their children employed and earning money.

There were no pensions and benefits from the Government as we have today, so people dreaded losing their job, becoming ill and growing old.

Working people didn’t have the right to vote so they had no say in how their country was run. In the early part of Queen Victoria’s reign some people tried to change this but others laughed at them and their good intentions failed.

Life in parts of the big towns and cities was terrible. The streets were crowded, busy and dirty.

There were often no underground sewers which meant that sewage was left to find its own way to a nearby river. No one bothered to clear away rubbish so it was left to rot in the street.

Workers lived close to the factories that they worked in. They lived in small overcrowded houses and whole families often shared just one room.

Water had to be collected from a pump in the street and there were no toilets inside the houses.

The city streets were full of homeless people. Many of the homeless were orphans.

This painting by the Victorian artist William Powell Frith shows a lady waiting to cross a street while a little boy (a crossing-sweeper) begs for money for food.

A crossing-sweeper was a person who swept a path across the dirty streets in exchange for money. Some people thought they were a nuisance and refused to pay.
Can you guess why crossing sweepers were often seen on the streets in large cities?

What would life have been like for a crossing sweeper like this boy?

What would life be like for these young flower sellers?

Who were the Victorians and when did they live?

What do you think life was like for the Victorians and their children?

What was life like for the poor in Victorian times?

How do you think it was different from our lives?

Who helped to improve the lives of Victorian children?

How did life change for the children as they grew up?

Who were the Victorians and when did they live? What do you think life was like for the Victorians and their children? What was life like for the poor in Victorian times? How do you think it was different from our lives? Who helped to improve the lives of Victorian children? How did life change for the children as they grew up?

- To understand that ways of life differed greatly across Victorian society.
- To use evidence from Victorian paintings and photographs to suggest how people from the past lived.
- To collect information from a range of sources and draw conclusions about the Victorian period.
- To understand that there are many representations of the Victorian period.
- To recognise some similarities and differences between the lives of children from different areas of Victorian society, ask and answer questions about the period by using at least one source of information.
- To understand that the work of individuals can change aspects of society.
- To find out about important figures in Victorian times.