

# Activity: Victorian Schoolroom

History  
Years (5/6)

## ABOUT THE ACTIVITY

*As with all of our activities, this is designed to complement the work done in school – it is not meant to be a complete history unit.*

The group visits the Victorian schoolroom, in role, and has a typical lesson, including:

- Dressing up in Victorian costumes.
- Arithmetic, by chanting and using slate and chalk.
- English, by chanting and by copy writing with pen and ink.
- History, by learning the poem “The Kings and Queens of England”.
- Religious Education, by saying prayers and singing a hymn.
- Health and fitness, by doing drill in the courtyard.

## WHERE THE ACTIVITY FITS IN

### to a visit to Beaumanor

the schoolroom is one of the three major strands of a Victorian visit to Beaumanor (along with the cellars and the photo-trail), chosen because of its relevance to the experiences of a Victorian child. The visit might also include playground games and songs, a mystery, a visit to the local village and church to look at local social history and, if appropriate, research of primary historical sources (newspapers, oral testimony, etc.).

### to the QCA scheme

**History unit 11** What was it like for children living in Victorian Britain?

## ADAPTING THE ACTIVITY FOR A DIFFERENT AGE GROUP

Younger children could:

- Do the same activities, at a level appropriate to their age and abilities.

## PRIOR LEARNING

It is helpful if the children have learned:

- A hymn – preferably “Jesus Wants Me For A Sunbeam” or “All Things Bright And Beautiful”.
- About pre-decimal coinage.
- That they should be wearing no rings, watches or nail varnish on their trip to Beaumanor.
- That they need to have a clean handkerchief for the schoolroom.

## VOCABULARY

In this activity, children will have opportunities to use:

- words associated with schools, *eg. Sir, abacus, desks, slates*
- words associated with behaviour, *eg. Attentiveness, respectful, silent, slovenly, posture, deportment*
- words associated with lessons, *e.g. copperplate, blot, tables*

## RESOURCES

- Schoolroom, contemporary desks and seats, slates and chalk, pens and inkwells, cane, backboard, Dunces cap, school bell.

## EXPECTATIONS

### At the end of this activity, due to age or ability

*most children will:*

know how to use all the equipment that would be normal for a Victorian child, understand the lesson structure and the behaviour required from a schoolchild.

*some children will not have*

be able to copy writing and sums using slates and ink pens.

*made so much progress and will:*

*some children will have*

understand pre-decimal money, write fair copperplate and be able to compare Victorian school life with their own.

*progressed further and will:*

## ICT POSSIBILITIES

### In our computer suite at Beaumanor during a residential visit, or back at school after the visit

- We have an 'Internet Treasure Hunt'. Children search the web to find answers to various questions about Victorian servants.
- We have the Beaumanor census from 1851 to 1901 available. We use it to learn about the servants and also to learn about using databases (*Information Manager*). We can extend this work into more general work on using and creating databases.
- As with all visits to Beaumanor, we have several digital cameras available for use by groups. These could be used by staff and children during a residential visit and the pictures produced could be incorporated into multi media presentation packages such as 'Illuminatus', 'MS Publisher' and 'MS Powerpoint', initially at Beaumanor, then back at school after the visit.

## WORK BACK IN SCHOOL

The database of Beaumanor servants is available on floppy disc for use back in school. The disc contains files in "MS Works", "MS Excel" and "RM Information Manager" format.

A similar database of census material local to the school could be collected.

The Victorian mystery can be solved back in school after the visit. This gives lots of reading, thinking and discussion work for use in Literacy. The children can use our model to design and write a mystery of their own, based around the school or their locality.

Children can visit churchyards to find out about local people.

## RISK ASSESSMENT

### In addition to the 'Group Visits - General Risk Assessment', the following specific risks have been identified

Hazard	Risk control
Trip hazards while entering and leaving the classroom.	Children are warned, before entering, about the metal bars on the floor holding the desks together. This is repeated before they leave the room.
Pens.	Children are warned that the pens are very pointed and can hurt if not used correctly. They are taught to use pens correctly and safely. Children are not allowed to leave pens sticking up in the inkwells.
Desk lids.	Children are warned not to let desk lids fall down on their fingers.
Ink.	Children are warned that the inkwells contain ink and should not be investigated or played with. They wash their hands after the schoolroom session. When very young children use the schoolroom, the inkwells are removed beforehand.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES CHILDREN LEARN	ACTIVITY	LEARNING OUTCOMES CHILDREN	POINTS TO NOTE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How to behave as a Victorian schoolchild.</li> </ul>	<p>The group is seated in the base room and the session is explained to that they know what is expected of them. An agreement is sought to for everyone to act in role and not try to spoil the session.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Are able to conduct themselves properly in the context of the classroom.</li> </ul>	<p>We do treat the activity seriously and stay in role, but we don't overact and pretend that Victorian teachers were more beastly than they really were.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>About cleanliness and proper conduct.</li> </ul>	<p>The group lines up outside the schoolroom to have their hands and handkerchiefs inspected.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Get into role before they enter the classroom.</li> </ul>	<p>If it is raining, we don't do this activity.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How to use slate and chalk.</li> </ul>	<p>Children do sums on the slates and hold them up for inspection by the teacher.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Get used to acting as a group, not as individuals.</li> </ul>	<p>Younger children write letters and numbers rather than sums.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How children learned most of their lessons.</li> </ul>	<p>Children chant their tables, backwards alphabet and religious texts hung on the walls</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Their tables and start to learn "The Kings &amp; Queens Of England".</li> </ul>	<p>Our aim is to get children to understand how rigid and repetitive lessons normally are.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How to do Drill.</li> </ul>	<p>Children practice drill in rows, out in the courtyard</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How to do drill and that even a fun activity is done in an uninteresting way.</li> </ul>	<p>We often miss this activity out if time or weather do not permit it.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How to write properly with pen and ink.</li> </ul>	<p>Children learn how to write properly with pen and ink. They practice forming copperplate letters.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How hard it must have been for children to write neatly and how much technology has improved writing.</li> </ul>	<p>There is other material on the worksheet, which can be done back in school.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>About the religious nature of Victorian schools</li> </ul>	<p>Children sing a hymn and repeat two prayers, at various stages while in the classroom.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>About the importance of religion in English schools.</li> </ul>	<p>Our religious material is very general, and mentions only "Lord". We can leave it out if necessary, but prefer not to, as the session is history rather than religion.</p>