

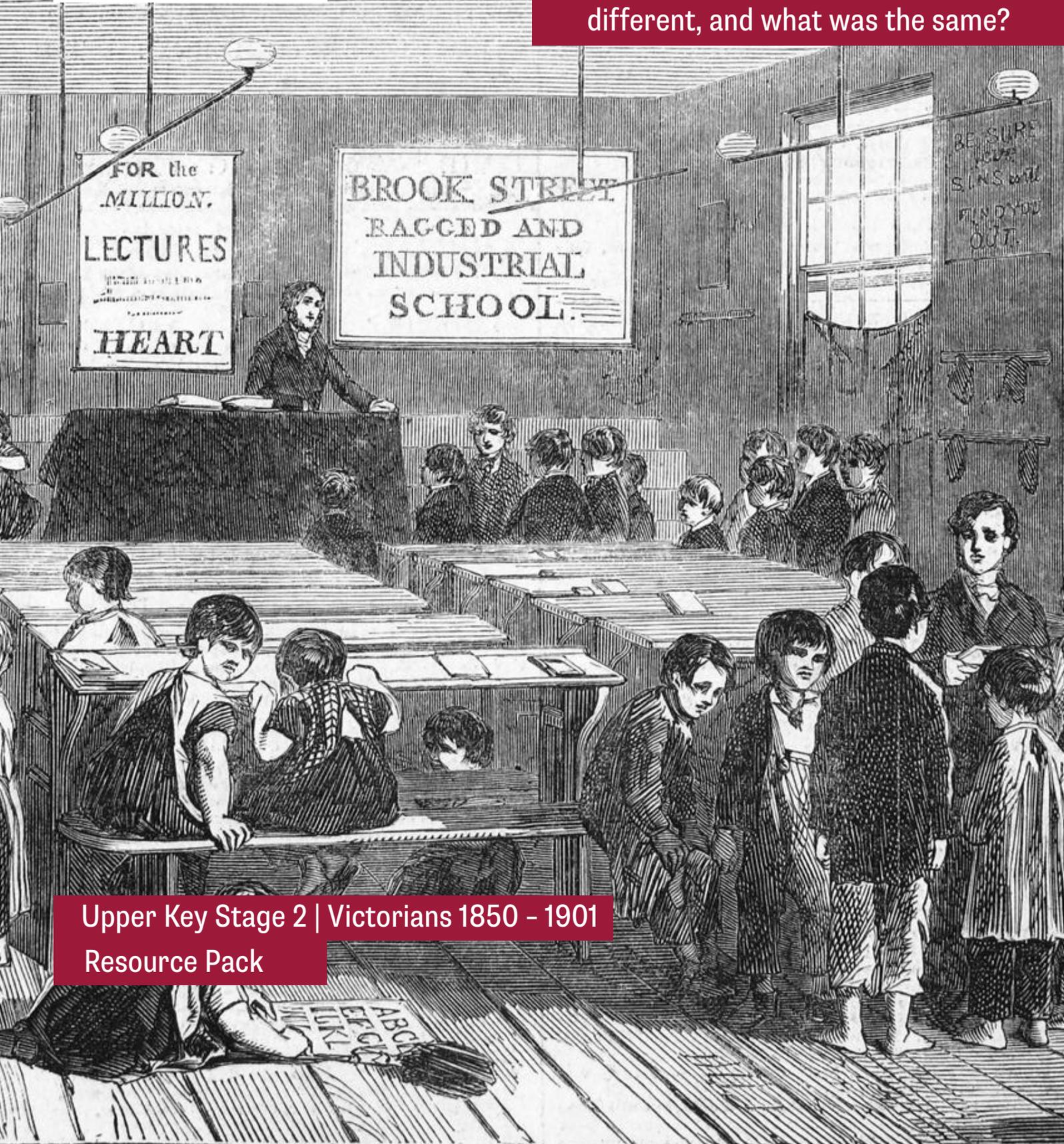
THE

NATIONAL

ARCHIVES

Going to School in the Workhouse

How was school for pauper children different, and what was the same?



Upper Key Stage 2 | Victorians 1850 - 1901

Resource Pack

Introduction

This lesson explores source material in the form of letters written by Paupers which were sent to the Poor Law Commission in London, generally complaining about the treatment and conditions the pauper children were enduring. The pupils will analyse up to 3 individual letters (see below) to gain an understanding of some of the things which happened to children during this time.

This lesson focuses on Schools and is part of a series of lessons which include a focus on Southwell Workhouse followed by two other lessons focussing on clothing and food. You can choose to do individual lessons, or all of them, depending on your context and objectives.

Suitable for:

KS 2

Time period:

Victorians
1850 - 1901

Connections to the Curriculum:

Local history
Victorians
Childhood through time

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Background

Most workhouses had their own schoolroom and it was expected that the children would receive a basic education. Opinions varied and changed during the Victorian era so the education of pauper children might be different in various parts of the country. Under the 1834 Poor Law Act, Unions were expected to provide at least 3 hours a day of instruction. Some workhouse focussed only on reading but later most workhouses felt a basic education that included being able to write, it would help to ensure the children were able to get suitable employment and therefore not end up back in the workhouse.

Further basic background is available at:

<https://www.workhouses.org.uk/education/workhouse.shtml>

Vocabulary:

Pauper, workhouse, Poor Law Commission, Inspector, Guardian, witness statement, conduct, dine, stores, struck/strike/cane/caned, improperly, recreation, parsing, religious instruction, dictation, laundry, punishment, infer, inference, aged, earn, entrust,

Related to report below:

whitewashing, panes, ward, hindered, spirits, defects, supplanted, refurnished, apparatus, sufficient, superseded

Tasks

Introduction

You could use a description of a workhouse school, for example the 1868 report by Mr Bowyer, a poor law Board Inspector (www.workhouses.org.uk)

It generally opens on a yard enclosed by a high wall, with a circular swing in its centre for exercise during play hours. ...The windows are small and square, and if they should look out upon an adult ward they are darkened by whitewashing the panes. During the dark days in winter the instruction of the children is much hindered by want of light, while their spirits and probably their health must be affected by the closeness occasioned by the low ceiling. I must, however, add that the windows are always opened whenever the weather is such to allow it, so these children do not suffer so much in health from these defects as would otherwise be the case. The floors are generally of brick or stone, but wooden flooring has supplanted the colder material in many instances. In the older schoolrooms the desk and benches are placed against the walls; in the newer ones or in the old ones that have been refurnished parallel desks have been introduced. The school apparatus is generally sufficient, though that part of it which consists in maps cannot unfortunately be renewed so often as would be necessary to keep pace with the changes effected by the events in political geography. The books most in use are the reading series of the Irish Commissioners, but they are beginning to be superseded by more recent works.

Explore the photograph provided of Southwell Workhouse schoolroom.

- What can you see that is in your classroom?
- Are there items you do not recognise? E.g. desks and benches, blackboard, slates for writing on. If possible, have actual objects or replicas available for the children to explore and try out.
- What is missing from the photograph that you have in your classroom? There is a small room beyond the main schoolroom so items such as books may have been kept in here. The door to the left gives access to the female yard – so younger children may still have seen their mother.

Photograph of Southwell Workhouse Schoolroom



Tasks

For all 3 letters Initial Introduction of the letters

Using the photograph of each original letter on your whiteboard ask the children to pick out any words they recognise. What do they think the letter is about? Who might have written it? Why? How does this photograph match the description above? Is it different in any way?

Then ask the children to examine the transcription of the letter as described below.

Using Bridget Kelpin's letter- focussing on experiences of school.

Children to read the letter in pairs underlining anything they are unsure about. Then read it through as a class sentence by sentence and discuss any words/terms or phrases they are unfamiliar with as we go through it.

Then read it through again all the way through to enable the children to make more sense of it as a whole.

- What does it tell us about the children's experience of school? Underline any sentences or phrases (in a different colour) that tell us about their day.

Children then to devise a timetable showing what the children do through the day using the letter as a source of information. A writing frame based on the chart below could be provided for Lower ability children.

For higher ability children they could devise a chart to compare these children's experiences with what they would be doing on a typical school day. The children could then compare this to the timetable from St Marylebone, London (www.workhouses.org.uk).

- Why were the timetables for boys and girls different?
- Are there any questions you would like to ask Bridget?

In the 1840s, St Marylebone (one of the London 'local Act' parishes) operated the following timetable in its workhouse school for children between 7 and 16 years of age:

Boys' School		Girls' School	
6.00-7.00	Rise, make beds, prayers, clean shoes and wash.	6.00-8.00	Rise, make beds, prayers, clean shoes, wash. Prayers and religious instruction.
7.00-7.45	Gymnastics exercises (Saturdays excepted)		
7.45-9.00	Prayers. Breakfast. Play.	8.00-9.00	Breakfast. Recreation.
9.00-10.00	Historical reading, with explanations.	9.00-11.30	Reading, spelling, tables, arithmetic.
10.00-11.00	General and mental arithmetic, tables, use of clock dial for learning the time of day.		
11.00-12.00	Grammar. Parsing and Dictation.	11.30-12.30	Working in copy books. Dictation.
12.00-2.00	Dinner. Recreation.	12.30-2.00	Dinner. Recreation.
2.00-3.00	Writing in copy books & arithmetic.	2.00-5.00	Needlework, knitting and domestic employment.
3.00-4.00	Reading with explanations.		
4.00-5.00	Geography, with maps.	5.00-6.00	Supper. Recreation.
6.00	Supper	6.00-8.00	Needlework, knitting & domestic employment.
8.00	Prayers. retire to bed.	8.00	Prayers. retire to bed.

(Neale, 1967)

Tasks

Go on to read Elizabeth Jackson's witness statement

Read through together and identify any words/phrases they are unsure of.

- How does this relate to what we learned from Bridget's letter? Does it support anything said in Bridget's letter? Using a small space as a punishment
- Do we learn anything new? Laundry used as the 'black hole' in this workhouse, Presence of black beetles
- What kind of things are you punished for? What kinds of things do you think these children were punished for?

Follow-up activity - read the draft letter from the Poor Law commission to Mr Manwaring

Again, read through in pairs to identify anything you do not understand. Read through as a class discussing it as you go through then read all the way through together.

Stick this item onto a larger piece of paper and children to identify zones of inference – first zone – what does this document tell us? Second zone what does this document infer? Third zone – what else would you like to find out?

Article 114 of the Consolidated General Order required all children in Workhouses to be given a basic education. What would your children consider to be essential for a child to know/be able to do? Then? Now? This could be a discussion or a written activity.

Read Chapter 6 of Street Child by Berlie Doherty

What are the similarities and differences between what the letters tell us, what the photograph shows and the descriptions of the Workhouse schoolroom in this chapter?

Bridget Kilpin's Letter

Catalogue Ref: MH12/14732, 39219/1856

Bradford Workhouse
Board Room.

The Declaration of Bridget Kilpin
taken before me Harry Burrard Farnall
Poor Law Inspector the 11th day of October
1856.

Who says.

I am nearly twelve years old. I am
in the first class of the girls school, I am often
at the head of it. I have been in the school
going on six years. I've been there all the time
that Miss Perkins has been there. School opens at
half past eight o'clock in the morning. School shuts
up at five o'clock. Miss Perkins comes at half
past eight o'clock, and rings the bell for us,
at ten o'clock we go out to play for half an
hour, and then in again before dinner. We
dine at twelve o'clock, and then into school about
half past one o'clock. We get out a little bit
sometimes before school breaks up for the day.
Sometimes Mary Ryan teaches the girls and
sometimes I teach - as a general rule Miss Perkins
is in the school almost always. None of the
women of the house come out to look after us.
Miss Perkins does all the school work. If
the girls are naughty they are put for fifteen
minutes or so in what we call the black hole,
this is a little room near the school where the
stoves are kept, there is no window in it, it is
a dark room - sometimes one child and sometimes
two are put in together. The girls are never struck.
I never saw a girl struck. There never was a

Bridget Kilpin's Letter (cont)

Catalogue Ref: MH12/14732, 39219/1856

a cane in the school. If any body says the children are caned it would not be true. I never saw a child caned, nor ever heard of such a thing. Our meals are never taken from us as a punishment. I am sometimes ~~employed~~ employed in the Kitchen that is on Mondays and Tuesdays, on other days I am in School, and I knit and sew. We keep our own rooms in order, we wash them and make the beds. I never saw Miss Perkins strike a girl. I never heard of a girl being flogged. I know the Inspector of Schools, we are all in School when he comes. We knit and sew after five o'clock until six. We go to tea at six o'clock. We are fifteen minutes at tea, and then we play a bit, and then we come in and knit and sew. The little girls go to bed about seven o'clock, and the big girls at eight o'clock. -
signed Bridget Kilpin.

Bridget Kilpin's Letter

This is a witness statement given by a 12-year-old girl during an inquiry into the conduct of the workhouse staff in the Bradford Workhouse.

Bridget says,

I am nearly twelve years old. I am in the first class of the Girls School, I am often at the head of it. I have been in the School going on six years. I've been there all the time that Miss Perkins has been there. School opens at half past eight o'clock in the morning. School shuts up at five o'clock. Miss Perkins comes at half past eight o'clock, and rings the bell for us, at ten o'clock we go out to play for half an hour, and then in again before dinner. We dine at twelve o'clock and then into School about half past one o'clock. We get out a little bit sometimes before School breaks up for the day – Sometimes Mary Ryan teaches the Girls and sometimes I teach – as a general rule Miss Perkins is in the School almost always. None of the women of the house come out to look after us. Miss Perkins does all the School work. If the girls are naughty they are put for fifteen minutes or so in what we call the black hole, this is a little room near the school where the stores are kept, there is no window in it, it is a dark room – Sometimes one child and sometimes two are put in together. The Girls are never struck. I never saw a Girl struck. There never was a cane in the School. If any body says the children are caned it would not be true. I never saw a child caned, nor ever heard of such a thing. Our meals are never taken from us as a punishment. I am sometimes xxxxx employed in the Kitchen that is on Mondays and Tuesdays, on other days I am in School, and I knit and sew. We keep our own rooms in order, we wash them and make the beds. I never saw Miss Perkins strike a girl. I never heard of a Girl being flogged. I know the Inspector of Schools, we are all in School when he comes. We knit and sew after five o'clock until six. We go to tea at six o'clock. We are fifteen minutes at tea, and then we play a bit, and then we come in and knit and sew. The little girls go to bed about seven o'clock and the big girls at eight o'clock.

Signed Bridget Kelpin

Elizabeth Jackson's Witness statement

Catalogue Ref: MH 12/12691, 10280/A/1843

Elizabeth Jackson. 16 years old. Sworn. I
was struck up in the Laundry 2 nights
4 black bottles in my eyes. - Sworn
I was not for going out without leave. -
Proposed by Schoolmistress
I asked leave and it was refused
because I asked in properly

Elizabeth Jackson's Witness statement

Eliz'th Jackson. 16 years old. sworn. I was shut up in the Laundry 2 nights 4 Black beetles ran over me. I was punished for going out without leave.

Cross exd. By Schoolmistress

I asked leave and it was refused because I asked improperly.

Draft letter from the Poor Law Commission by Mr Manwaring, Inspector

This is a catalogue entry, a report as to the state of the workhouses in Keighley and Bingley. This shows that some children were sent out to work rather than be in the schoolroom.

MH 12/15160/367

Folios 569-571. Draft letter from the Poor Law Board to George Spencer, Clerk to the Guardians of the Keighley Poor Law Union on the subject of the reports on the Keighley and Bingley Workhouses by Mr Manwaring, Inspector.

They state that they have received the above reports from Manwaring following his last visits. They observe that at the Keighley Workhouse eight children go to work at a factory but attend the factory school, and that the remaining eight children are taught to read by an aged male pauper. Also that at the Bingley Workhouse three boys and two girls work at a factory but do not go to school at all, being what are called long timers. The Board do not object to children going to a factory for the purpose of being taught a trade by which they may in future earn their own living but it is necessary that they should receive the instruction required by Article 114 of the Consolidated General Order. They also think it not desirable to entrust the instruction of children in workhouses to a male pauper inmate as is the case at the Keighley Workhouse, and that some better arrangement for their education should be made.