Life in Victorian Britain with Ellie the Elephant

Learning objective: To understand key aspects of daily life, schooling, and industry during the Victorian era.

Read the text carefully and answer the questions below using full sentences. Look closely at the details Ellie has remembered!

Ellie the Elephant has an incredible memory for history. She remembers that the Victorian era, which lasted from 1837 to 1901, was a time of great change. During this time, Britain became the workshop of the world because of the Industrial Revolution. Many people moved from the quiet countryside to busy, crowded towns to work in large factories.

Life was very different for children back then. Many children from poor families had to work long, dangerous hours in coal mines or as chimney sweeps to help their parents earn money. Schooling was not free for everyone until late in the Victorian period. When children did go to school, they used chalk slates instead of paper, and their lessons often focused on reading, writing, and arithmetic. A typical school fee might have been a few pence a week, which was a lot of money for a working family. Thankfully, life improved as new laws were passed to protect children and limit the hours they could work. Today, we look back at these times to see how much our lives have changed for the better.

Word bank: Victorian · Industrial · Workhouse · Chimney sweep · Invention · Education

1. According to the text, what two jobs were children from poor families often expected to do? (2 marks)

2. What did children use to write on in Victorian schools instead of using paper? (1 mark)

3. Why do you think the author describes Britain as the 'workshop of the world' during this time? (2 marks)

4. Why was it difficult for poor families to send their children to school during the early Victorian period? (2 marks)

5. Do you think life as a child in the Victorian era was better or worse than life today? Give one reason for your answer. (3 marks)

Draw: Draw a Victorian classroom showing the wooden desks and the slates the children used for their maths and writing lessons.

Extension challenge: Research one Victorian invention, such as the telephone or the steam train, and write two sentences explaining how it changed the way people lived.