

Portraits: Activity 2 - Victorian people

TEACHERS' NOTES

Learning Objectives

- To increase children's knowledge and understanding of Victorian society, class and families
- To develop children's research skills, using historical sources, in particular photographic portraits, to learn about the Victorians

Cross-curricular Links

- Art

Sources



Source 1. Photograph of Mr E. Tanner, Stationmaster at Littlehampton Railway Station, c.1895



Source 2. Photograph of Ernest Tupper, chimney sweep, Worthing, c1895



Source 3. Photograph of the Newman Family of Worthing, c1890



Source 4. Photograph of the Goodchild Family of Shoreham, c1860

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Source 5. Photograph of children standing outside the Shepherd and Dog pub in Fulking, c1900



Source 6. Photograph of the Wyndham family children in the park with nursemaids, Petworth House, c1885



Source 7. Photograph of Charcoal Burners in Arundel Park, Arundel, c1900



Source 8. Photograph of the Greenfield Family, Worthing, 1890

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Photography then and now

Many people today own cameras, as they are small, relatively cheap, and easy to use. Most photos are informal shots of family events, holidays, birthdays, etc, and are usually taken by a family member or friend. Formal photographs are taken at events such as weddings and prize-givings, when professional photographers are often hired, or for school photographs. Other posed shots might be taken by newspaper photographers at sports events, town council meetings, etc.

Cameras in Victorian times were large, heavy, quite complicated to operate, and expensive. Most Victorian families would not own a camera, and those who did would usually be from the more well-off upper and middle classes. Photographs would most often be taken by professional photographers, or by keen amateurs who often formed camera clubs.

Class in Victorian society

There was a strict class structure in Victorian society with three well-defined classes. These classes seldom mixed socially and would be quite easily identifiable by the sort of clothes they wore.

The Upper Class consisted of the aristocracy and landed gentry, whose wealth was inherited and mostly generated from their large estates.

The Middle Class consisted of educated professional people and managers such as lawyers, architects, accountants, shipowners, businessmen, doctors, teachers, and stationmasters; also skilled tradesmen such as tailors, cabinet makers, and engineers.

The Working Class consisted mostly of people who earned their living by manual work such as labourers, market gardeners, farmhands, laundresses, bricklayers, railway porters, etc.

Source 1

Mr. Tanner, the stationmaster at Littlehampton, is wearing a uniform hat, and less obviously a uniform coat. Note the bow tie, waistcoat, watch chain, buttonhole, ring on little finger of left hand. He has a full beard with moustache, the fashion of the day. He is trying to give an impression of his importance.

Source 2

Chimney sweep Ernest Tupper is wearing his working clothes, carrying his brushes, and standing proudly next to his barrow. He is smoking a clay pipe and his hands are dirty with coal dust. It's quite unlikely that Mr. Tupper would have been able to afford to have his photo taken by a professional photographer. This picture comes from a collection of lantern slides originally belonging to the Worthing Camera Club, whose members photographed a variety of local scenes and people, including tradesmen such as Mr. Tupper.

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Source 3

The Newmans, a family of market gardeners in the Gannon Road area of Worthing, are standing in their smallholding, displaying strawberries in wooden boxes. They grew fruit and vegetables, and had a fruiterers/greengrocers shop in Richmond Road.

Note working clothes - aprons, caps, hats, shirts with rolled up sleeves, waistcoats; note also a man wearing a beard, and a little girl in a straw hat.

The house has weatherboard walls and a slate roof. It is quite small: the front wall is not much higher than the door, and there are only three windows across the frontage.

Source 4

A family photograph of the Goodchilds. The head of the family, Mr. Edward Goodchild, was a ship owner, and High Constable of Shoreham.

They are posed in a group on the lawn in front of their house, some sitting and some standing. Croquet equipment in foreground. There seem to be a few generations (perhaps 3 or 4) of the same family - grandparents, parents, aunt, uncles, children, baby. Notice how the face of the boy in front is blurred as he did not stay still while the camera was taking their picture. The women wear long dresses with frills, and the men wear suits with waistcoats and watch chains. The little boy is wearing a suit with short trousers. Notice a woman holding a baby in the middle window.

The house is made of stone, with decorative features above and below the windows, and is quite large. The height of the windows indicates that the rooms are high-ceilinged.

Source 5

The children standing outside the Shepherd and Dog pub are all wearing caps or hats. The girls are wearing white pinafores and their clothes are not decorated with lace or other fancy trimmings. Most of the boys are wearing waistcoats, those in the main group have white collars and are wearing long socks with knee-length trousers. The pinafores and collars might be part of their school dress. Note that all have muddy boots because the roads were not covered in tarmac as they are today.

Source 6

These are the children of Henry Wyndham, second Baron Leconfield, and his wife Lady Constance, who lived in Petworth House. The children are pictured in the grounds of the house with two nursemaids, employed to look after them. The children have good-quality clothes and hats, and leather boots or shoes, the pram cover might also be leather. The girls' hats are decorated with flowers, and their dresses have decorated collars or lace trim on the sleeve. The two older boys are wearing 'grown-up style' clothes. The younger children have toys - a hoop, small gardening tools - and those sitting on the ground are sitting on a rug or blanket, not the grass. The nursemaids are also smartly dressed with hats and lace trimmings. Although the children are in a 'playtime' situation they are stiffly posed.

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Source 7

This shows a family of charcoal burners, who would have travelled around the countryside burning wood to make charcoal. At each site where they worked, they would build a hut to live in, made of wooden poles meeting at the top, covered in sacks and then 'bricks' of turf, such as that seen on the right of the picture. The caravan on the left might have been their means of travelling from job to job, and have offered additional living space.

They are wearing plain clothes of rough quality with little or no decoration. Two of the women are holding young children.

Source 8

Members of the Greenfield family, who were builders. Four generations are shown, aged 90, 58, 29 and 2 years. The photograph suggests that the family is well off as their picture was taken in a photographer's studio with 'props' such as the curtain, a table and chair. The child* is holding a bucket. The men are all well dressed and well groomed, the child has smart leather boots. The man sitting on the right is holding an elaborately carved walking stick.

*Note: it is hard to tell from the photograph if this is a boy or a girl. Boys would wear dresses when they were very young, and did not begin to wear trousers until they were several years old.

Comparisons

As can be seen by comparing these photographs, better-off middle-class or upper-class families would most often be photographed in a studio, or in a formally posed group in their house or garden. Even their children would be shown in a formal pose. Working class people would more likely be photographed in an outdoors informal setting. The children in Fulking, while standing in a line for the photographer, are informally posed compared to the children in Petworth Park.

The middle and upper classes would not usually want any indications of their profession to be included in their photographs, while Ernest Tupper and the Newmans are clearly not ashamed to be pictured in a way that shows their trade.