



Victorian handling box: Teachers' notes

Our Victorians Handling Box is a free resource for you to use with your class. The box will be ready for you when you arrive at the museum. There is a key for you to unlock and lock up the box. There are over nineteen different objects in the collection. Many of the items are original, dating from the Victorian era while others are modern replicas.

You can see many more Victorian objects in the Museum of Scotland, on Levels 3, 4 & 5. We have suggested some key objects for you to look at.

Object Notes

The objects in the box aim to tell the story of a day in the life of a Victorian child. There would obviously have been major differences between the lives of rich and poor children, urban and rural children; rather than concentrate on one particular sector, we have aimed to choose objects which would have featured more or less universally, the differences being in the quality of the items. The objects are organised into four themes: **Getting dressed** (Open Shelf), **Home life** (Drawer 1 & 2), **Playtime** (Drawer 3) and **School** (Drawer 4).

Open shelf: Getting dressed

1. Original girl's drawers (knickers)

A wealthy Victorian girl would have worn a great deal of underwear: a chemise (like a kind of vest), then drawers (long knickers), then stays (a softer version of a corset), then stockings and at least two petticoats! Women would be expected to make their own underwear and underwear for their family.

The drawers are designed to cover most of the leg; to show your legs or an ankle was seen as being unrespectable. They are open at the legs to make it easier to go to the toilet, even with a heavy dress. We are used to having clean underwear every day but in Victorian times people had far fewer clothes and washing was much harder work, so it would have been more common to change underwear possibly only once a week, after your weekly bath.

2. Original girl's pinafores

Young girls wore pinafores like this over their dresses to keep them clean. It was much easier and quicker to wash a cotton pinafore than to wash a heavy dress. It was fastened at the back by a cotton tie at the neck.

3. Original boy's boot and button hook

Poorer children would have gone barefoot at this time; a richer child would have worn a miniature version of an adult's boot. The boot is fastened with small, fiddly buttons which the boy's nanny or nursemaid would have fastened for him, using the button hook. The nanny would reach through the button hole with the hook and pull the button through. This is perhaps why some of the buttons are missing. The button hook is made of ebony wood.

Most of the clothes which have lasted from Victorian times until now belonged to wealthy people. Clothes which belonged to poor people were generally worn until they fell to bits.

4. Replica boy's sailor suits

From about 1890 sailor suits became extremely popular for richer boys and girls, the girls wearing a long skirt rather than trousers. These were originally modelled on the uniforms worn by naval officers in the Royal Navy and became popular after Queen Victoria's eldest son wore one. Although the suit looks formal to us, it was more relaxed and allowed more freedom of movement than children's clothes earlier in the century.

Drawer 1: Home life

5. Original wash dolly and washboard (right of drawers)

Washing was a major domestic chore before the automatic washing machine. Wealthier families employed a laundry maid to carry out the washing, drying and ironing of all clothes, often in a special laundry room. Poorer families sometimes washed clothes in a communal wash houses or public laundries known as 'steamies'.

Hot water was heated up on the kitchen range or over a fire and then poured into a washing tub. Dirty clothes were scrubbed with a bar of soap against a ridged washboard to try and rub out all the dirt. A wash dolly would be thumped up and down in the water to make sure that the water swirled around all the clothes to get them clean. A mangle would squeeze out the water from the clothes before they were pegged out or hung up to dry.

6. Replica carbolic soap

Ask the children to guess what this is before telling them! They may need to sniff it first. These long bars of red carbolic soap were used for every aspect of cleaning in Victorian times: for cleaning clothes, floors, bodies and hair – even school pupils’ mouths if they were cheeky! For washing clothes, the end of the bar would be grated into the hot water, or the bar itself rubbed against the washboard to get rid of bad stains.

7. Original flat iron

Flat irons were heated up in front of the fire or range. They became very hot and were picked up using a padded cover. The temperature then had to be judged, often by spitting or dropping water on to the iron. If it was too hot, you would scorch your clothes! People usually had at least two irons, so that one could be heating up by the fire while the other one was being used.

In the *Victorians* and *Edwardians* gallery on Level 5 look for: Kitchen range and washing equipment

8. Original candle moulds

Although gas lighting was available in houses in the second half of the nineteenth century and electric lighting from 1881, their use was not widespread, particularly away from the cities. Candles and paraffin lamps were universally used. This is a pair of tin candle moulds, used to make candles from melted candle ends, bees wax or tallow. First a wick would be inserted into the mould, its tip appearing through the hole at the bottom. Then melted wax was poured into the moulds and allowed to cool. The cold candle could easily be removed from the mould.

Drawer 2: Home life

9. Original stone hot water “pig”

In the times before central heating, bedrooms and houses in general were much cooler than we would find acceptable today. It would have been unusual for anyone but the richer people to have a fire in the bedroom and many houses would have felt damp. To warm up cold, damp beds you could use a type of stone hot water bottle known as a pig, because of its shape. The stopper had to be on the top of the bottle to reduce the risk of leaking.

10. Replica chamber pot

The chamber pot was used as an indoor toilet at night time in many houses even after the flushing toilet had been developed. In tenements there might be only one toilet shared between several households, and the journey to this toilet at night time would have been cold, dark and often unpleasant. After use, the following day the contents of the pot would be tipped into the flush toilet or outside earth closet, or into an open sewer, depending on the wealth of the family. The chamber pot would be kept under the bed during the day, or in richer households in a specially designed cupboard. Squares of newspaper were used as toilet paper or in rural areas families might have used leaves or moss.

In the *Victorians* and *Edwardians* gallery on Level 5 look for: Washstand, ewer and basin, slop bucket and chamber pot (Out Shopping case).

Drawer 3: Playtime

For children in working class families there was little time for playing. Children worked in the fields and factories to bring in extra money. At home there were lots of chores to do. Boys ran errands, chopped wood for the fire and helped in the garden. Girls were expected to help their mothers, especially on washing day, and look after the younger children. Sometimes they were kept home from school to help. Most toys, if they existed at all, were home made and were played in the street. By the end of the 19th century cheap tin toys were being produced and sold in Britain, often using cheap child labour and were sold by street sellers for as little as a penny. At school, girls and boys would play in separate playgrounds.

Life was quite different if you grew up in a wealthy home. There were no chores to do and children spent most of their time in the nursery, supervised by a nanny. There were toys to play with, such as dolls and a dolls' house, a rocking horse, toy soldiers, board games and on Sundays a wooden Noah's ark. Many toys were designed to prepare children for their adult lives.

Ask the children to think why it is that few Victorian toys have survived, so that all the toys we have here are copies.

11. Original sampler

Even for girls in wealthier households, sewing was considered an essential life skill. Samplers played a key role in the teaching of those skills. They were small pieces of fabric embroidered with a variety of different stitches and patterns to make an elaborate design on a piece of woven cloth. The samplers usually included letters of the alphabet, animal and flower shapes, and often the girls would sew their names into the pattern. They were a way of demonstrating your skill in sewing. Sitting quietly and sewing was considered a suitable activity for a young girl.

This sampler was made by a girl called Jessie Thorburn at about the turn of the century.

12. Replica gird and cleek (door)

A popular toy for playing outside was the hoop and stick or, in Scots, the gird and cleek. The gird is an iron hoop, often an old wheel with the spokes removed, or an iron band used to hold a barrel together, or if you were lucky, specially made by a friendly blacksmith. This was then whacked and guided along by the metal cleek until it got faster and faster and noisier and noisier. A letter to The Times in 1842 talks angrily of the 'hoop nuisance' in London streets! Children would take their own girds to school each day and parked them along the school railings until playtime. If pupils want to try out the gird and cleek, please be careful when moving about the education centre.

13. Replica marbles

In Victorian times the game of marbles could be played with marbles as we know them today, or with stones, seeds, nuts or the glass balls used at that time as bottle stoppers. In its simplest form, the game of marbles was played by drawing a ring in the dirt or chalking it on the street. Everyone who was playing would put marbles into the circle. The aim was to try and knock another person's marbles out of the ring, using a bigger than normal marble, often known as a 'shooter'. A player would continue playing until he or she failed to knock any more marbles from the ring, at which time the next person was allowed to take a turn. Traditionally it was a boys' game, but many girls enjoyed playing marbles too.

14. Original coins: a farthing, three pennies, a fourpence piece, and a sixpence piece

Few Victorian children would have had money to spend as they wished in the way that children nowadays have pocket money. On holidays or on special occasions children might have been given a few coins to spend on sweets or toys, like children today. They might have spent the money as follows:

- Lemonade – ha’penny a glass
- Buns or cakes – penny
- Toy windmill – ha’penny
- Packet of chocolate – fourpence
- Lollipop – ha’penny
- Donkey ride – penny

On the coins here, children will notice how worn some of the coins are, and also the aging profile of Queen Victoria. Pennies with the younger head on them are sometimes known as “bun” pennies, because of the Queen’s “bun” hairstyle.

15. Replica cup and ball

A favourite Victorian toy, the cup and ball game has been around for centuries. In concept it sounds very easy to play, but is much harder than it looks. The player tries to catch the wooden ball in a wooden cup to which it is attached with a piece of string.

In the *Victorians* and *Edwardians* gallery on Level 5 look for: Toys (Leisure Time case).

Drawer 4: School

After the passing of the 1872 Education Act, all Scottish children were required to attend school from the age of 5 to 13. In practice, many children did not attend school consistently, instead helping out on seasonal work on farms, or with childcare.

16. Original slate (and slate pencil)

Resources were limited in schools at this time, with paper still relatively expensive. Slate boards such as these were used as a form of re-usable jotters. Young children would learn to write their letters using their fingers in sand trays. Later they would progress onto slates such as these. The board was made from a piece of quarry slate set in a wooden frame. A slate pencil (not chalk) was used to form the letters. This slate pencil was often sharpened on the school wall. Afterwards they could be wiped clean with a damp cloth, or, more commonly by spitting on to the slate and then wiping it clean with a sleeve! Writing slates could be available in many designs: lined slates, slates divided into squares, slates with maps, two and three-leafed slates. Slates and slate pencils were used in many Scottish schools well into the twentieth century.

17. Replica tawse

Discipline in Victorian schools was very strict. Children were expected to keep still and to speak only when they were spoken to. A common form of punishment was the leather tawse. Children would receive strokes from a tawse on their hands, the number of strokes depending on what they had done wrong, and on the mood of the teacher that day. It was used in many Scottish schools until it was banned in 1986.

Punishment books were kept by teachers, listing what the child had done wrong and the punishment that was given. The lists of wrongdoing included lateness, disobedience and rude behaviour. Other punishments included being caned or birched and children who fidgeted or picked their noses might find their fingers being tied with a miniature set of 'finger stocks'. Victorian children were constantly reminded to sit up straight and walk with straight backs. To prevent slouching and encourage good deportment, wooden back straighteners were placed behind the child's back, with each arm hooked over the narrow ends.

18. Copy of merit certificate and replica medal

Rewards such as a medal or certificate were given by the teacher to a pupil for amongst other things punctual attendance, good conduct and improvement at school. The certificate was issued in 1899 to a girl called Christina Chapman who attended a girls' school for passing her exams. It also gives a comment on her behaviour. Domestic Economy would have included subjects such as sewing and cooking. The medal is a copy of one issued in 1899 for attendance.

19. Replica copy book

Older children learned to use pen and ink by writing in copybooks. Copy books were called this because children copied out the alphabet, or lines of writing, from examples they were given. Through doing this repetitive copying, children were able to learn and practise good handwriting, which was called 'fair hand'. Before typewriters were widespread, most office work as well as personal correspondence would be conducted by hand.

Ink pens were made from wood with a steel nib. Before this type of nib was invented quill pens made from feathers were used. Neither of these pens stored ink. They had to be dipped in an inkwell regularly, and this often led to blobs and blots, for which children were punished. Each morning the ink monitor filled up little clay ink wells and handed them round from a tray.

In the *Victorians* and *Edwardians* gallery on Level 5 look for: Slates, tawse, certificates and jotters (*Learning case*).

Ideas for using the Victorian Handling Box with your class

1. Working in groups

There are over 19 objects in the Victorian box. To make sure that your pupils have the chance to see and handle all the objects, you can divide your class into four groups.

You can either:

- Give each group one set of objects to look at and discuss
- Give each group one object from each theme to look at and discuss in detail

Allow each group 5-10 minutes to talk about and/or draw the objects, then move each group on to the next set of objects.

2. Asking questions

Asking questions can help focus children's attention on the objects, especially questions that can be answered by inspecting the object, rather than requiring prior knowledge. Useful questions could include:

- What is it made out of?
- Does it look like anything we have today?
- Do you think it's really Victorian or is it a modern copy?
- Is it made by hand or with a machine?
- Is it broken? Do you think any parts are missing?
- Who might have used this?
- What do you think it is?

Children often ask their own interesting questions about objects. It is useful get someone to make a note of any un-answered questions that the children have so that they can continue their research later, either in the Museum's galleries or back at school using the web and library.

3. Drawing and writing

Drawing an object is a useful activity as it encourages pupils to look very closely at an object. Pupils could make a sketch or create their own museum label, or write a short descriptive piece.

Eg:

My favourite object was the...

I liked it because ...

I thought it was interesting because

Victorian handling box – checklist

We hope that you have enjoyed working with the handling collection. Please help us by:

- 1 making sure that all the items are returned to the box and signing this form
- 2 telling us how you think we could improve our handling collections

Thank you!

Object	Returned (please tick)
Open shelf	
1 Original girl's drawers (knickers)	<input type="checkbox"/>
2 Original girl's pinafores	<input type="checkbox"/>
3 Original boy's boot and button hook	<input type="checkbox"/>
4 Replica boy's sailor suites	<input type="checkbox"/>
Drawer 1	
5 Original was dolly and washboard	<input type="checkbox"/>
6 Replica carbolic soap	<input type="checkbox"/>
7 Original flat iron	<input type="checkbox"/>
8 Original candle moulds	<input type="checkbox"/>
Drawer 2	
9 Original stone hot water "pig"	<input type="checkbox"/>
10 Replica chamber pot	<input type="checkbox"/>
Drawer 3	
11 Original sampler	<input type="checkbox"/>
12 Replica gird and cleek	<input type="checkbox"/>
13 Replica marbles	<input type="checkbox"/>
14 Original coins	<input type="checkbox"/>
15 Replica cup and ball	<input type="checkbox"/>
Drawer 4	
16 Original slate	<input type="checkbox"/>
17 Replica tawse	<input type="checkbox"/>
18 Copy of merit certificate and replica medal	<input type="checkbox"/>
19 Replica copy book	<input type="checkbox"/>

Name of School _____ Visit Date _____

Teacher _____ Signed _____

Comments