The book follows a Victorian child through a day at school. It is 1887, Queen Victoria has been on the throne of Great Britain for 50 years, and universal education is still a relatively new concept. It was only in the 1870s that laws were passed that stated all children, not just those from wealthy families, should have a proper education. In Scotland, it was in 1872 that schooling became compulsory for children aged between 5 and 13, whereas it was just seven years ago, in 1880, that it became compulsory for all children aged between 5 and 10 to go to school in England and Wales. Free education is still a thing of the future; in 1887 when the book is set, school costs 2 pence (2d) a week.

Victorian teachers are very strict, and the lessons are based on memorising and recalling facts and information through rote learning. Emphasis is placed on the ‘Three ‘Rs’ – Reading, Writing, and Arithmetic’. Girls and boys are taught separately; in most schools they even have different entrances. It is a long day too. School starts at 9am and finishes at 5pm, although you do have two hours for lunch. Discipline is very important and the smallest transgressions – such as spilling ink and ‘blotting your copybook’ – are met with harsh punishments. It is clear that You Wouldn’t Want to Be a Victorian Schoolchild!

About Victorian Britain

The Victorian period is the name given to the period of British history that fell under the reign of Queen Victoria. She became the monarch at 18 years of age on 20 June 1837 and reigned until her death, on 22 January 1901. In September 2015, Queen Elizabeth II overtook her great-great grandmother Queen Victoria, to become the longest-reigning British monarch.

The Victorian period was one of peace and prosperity. There were no major wars. Britain had an Empire, which consisted of more than 60 countries and territories around the world. Queen Victoria was the Head of State of all of these; one of her other titles was Empress of India.

During Victoria’s reign, the population of Britain doubled. It was a period of industrialisation, with increasing numbers of people moving to live in towns and cities rather than in the countryside. Health standards improved, with the introduction of better toilets, cleaner drinking water, and sewage systems.

Victorian Britain was a time of great invention and inventors, with new technologies especially in communication and transport. There was an emerging concept of leisure time, with shorter working weeks and the introduction of Bank Holidays. Inexpensive railway fares and new cheap hotels saw thousands of people taking holidays by the sea – over 200 new seaside resorts developed around the coast of Britain during the Victorian period.
Popular sports during Victorian times included cricket, cycling and croquet. The world-famous (and still incredibly popular) Wimbledon tennis tournament – which is the world’s oldest tennis competition – was first contested in Victorian times, in 1877. The first modern Olympic Games also took place when Victoria was Queen. It happened in Athens in 1896. The first football league was established in Britain in 1877. The most prominent football teams of the time were Aston Villa, Blackburn Rovers, Preston North End and Sunderland.

Education and childhood in Britain saw huge changes during the Victorian period. At the start of the Victorian period, very few children from poorer backgrounds went to school, they started work at a young age in factories or down the mines, and most grew up unable to read or write. Between 1833 and 1850, parliament passed a number of laws that restricted the number of hours children could work.

In 1844, a group called the Ragged Schools Union was formed, with the aim of providing free education to poor children in British cities. In 1852, the first free public library opened in Manchester – famous novelists Charles Dickens and William Thackeray both spoke at its opening! In 1870, the first Elementary Education Act (which was commonly known as Forster’s Education Act after the Liberal MP William Forster who drafted it), set the framework for schooling of all children between the ages of 5 and 13 in England and Wales. It required school boards to use census data to ensure that they were able to provide enough school places for the children in their area. It is estimated that between 3,000 and 4,000 schools were created or taken over by school boards in the wake of the Act. However, it wasn’t until a later Elementary Education Act in 1880 that school was made compulsory for children aged 5–10 in England and Wales. In Scotland, meanwhile, compulsory schooling for 5–13 year olds was introduced in 1872. It wasn’t until 1891 that elementary education became free.

Activity 1: Comparing schools

The activity sheet shows a plan of a typical Victorian school taken from You Wouldn’t Want to Be a Victorian Schoolchild! The separate entrances for boys and girls are marked, along with the separate classrooms and cloakrooms, and the school hall. Toilets, however, would have been outside or in a separate building!

Challenge your pupils to draw a sketch plan of your own school. How does it compare to the layout of the Victorian school? What rooms and facilities does your school have that weren’t in a Victorian school building?

Talking point: what is a sketch plan? Talk about how the plan will show the layout of the school from a bird’s-eye view. Can your pupils think of any uses for plan drawings, or other types of plans (e.g. maps)?

Extension activity: working in groups, add dimensions and measurements onto your sketch plans of the rooms, corridors and other areas within your school. Can your pupils create a scale version of the plan? You might like to talk about the importance of standard units of measurement, and discuss what scale it is best to use.
Why not try... if you have a large school with many classrooms, ask each different group to create a scale plan of a different area (at the same scale!) and then combine all the drawings together to make a plan of the complete school. Did your groups’ plans match up?!

Extension activity: challenge your pupils to work together to research the history of your own school building. Is it a Victorian school? And if so, can your pupils spot any evidence to suggest this? (Some Victorian school buildings will retain the words ‘Boys’ and ‘Girls’ over external entrances, for example!) Was your school built more recently? Are there any records in the school about when it was built? Many schools also have old log books and registers that you can explore – you may even find a record of punishments given out to pupils! Can you find and interview anyone who used to attend your school when they were children? You may like to use your research to write a PowerPoint presentation or produce a booklet that could be included on your school website or shared with parents.

Activity 2: A Victorian lesson

The best way to help your pupils to understand what life was like for a child in a Victorian school is to actually recreate the experience of being a Victorian schoolchild. There are many museums across the UK with reconstructed Victorian school rooms where your pupils can experience a day in the life of a Victorian schoolchild. However, if you do not have one near you, or if resources do not extend to making a visit, why not try setting up your own classroom (or school hall) to replicate a Victorian classroom, and conducting a Victorian lesson with your pupils?

To mock-up your Victorian classroom, you will need to remove all evidence of modern 21st-century education. No interactive whiteboards, computers or projectors here! Most Victorian classrooms were fairly bland and bare; you’ll need to cover up your class displays and most pictures on the wall.

For a bit of authenticity, find a portrait of Queen Victoria for the classroom wall (an internet search should furnish you with some examples). You could also create – perhaps with your pupils beforehand – plain posters showing times tables, the Lord’s Prayer, a ‘contemporary’ map of the British Empire, and lists of historical dates such as kings and queens of the British Empire (but remember not to go beyond our ‘current’ Queen, Victoria!). A few Victorian proverbs or sayings could also adorn your walls – examples include:

- All that glitters is not gold.
- It takes two fools to argue.
- The devil makes work for idle hands.
- Children should be seen and not heard.
- Speak when you are spoken to and not before.
- If a job’s worth doing it’s worth doing well.

Desks should be rearranged into straight rows facing the front of the classroom, and the teacher’s desk and chair should be raised. You’ll need to find – or make – a blackboard. A piece of MDF painted with blackboard paint from a hardware shop will work fine.
You could encourage your pupils to dress up as Victorian schoolchildren for the day. Boys would need a white shirt and shorts with, if possible, a plain waistcoat and perhaps a neckerchief and cloth cap. Girls would need a plain dress with a white pinafore on top and a fabric bonnet. Female teachers could opt for plain-coloured austere dresses with buttons and a small collar, perhaps fastened with a brooch. Hair should be styled into a bun. Male teachers should wear a three piece suit and – if available – an academic robe.

Before starting your Victorian lesson, it is important to talk to your pupils about role play and how you as their teacher will be acting a different – and probably much stricter! – persona.

Your lesson should start with the children lining up outside the classroom. When they come in, they should stand behind their desks – for authenticity, separate the boys and girls in your class. In a Victorian school they would have been taught separately, probably in different rooms. The teacher should then greet the class and the pupils should respond. They are then invited to sit down. Ensure none of your pupils are slouching or fidgeting. Emphasise the need to sit up straight and pay attention. You could prime one or two pupils to misbehave and call them out the front of the classroom to sit on a dunce’s chair!

Most learning in a Victorian school was done by rote – continuous repetition of facts and information. Encourage your pupils to chant through some times tables. You could also get them to repeat a list of dates, or countries and their capital cities.

A writing lesson would have consisted of children copying sentences from the blackboard – again repetition is key! They would have used either a copybook with a pen and ink, or a slate and pencil. Younger pupils may have used a shallow tray filled with sand and made marks using their fingers. Reading lessons involved children taking it in turns to read aloud from a primer.

Talking point: after you have spent some time in your Victorian lesson, encourage your pupils to discuss the differences to how they are usually taught. Which method of teaching and learning do your pupils prefer, and why?

Activity 3: Timetable for a Victorian school day

A Victorian school day started at 9am with assembly; time for hymns, the Lord’s Prayer and any important school notices. 9.30am saw registration and the start of lessons, with the three ‘Rs’ given priority; each lesson tended to last around half an hour. An object lesson, or a history, geography or general knowledge lesson might also feature. Morning lessons finished at midday. Most children went home for lunch, although some ate sandwiches at school (there was no school dinner!). Lunchtime was also an opportunity for some playground games. Afternoon lessons began again at 2pm, with more reading, writing and arithmetic. Then for boys there might have been ‘drill’ which was a bit like PE with running, jumping and physical challenges, followed by technical drawing and woodwork. Meanwhile, the girls would have concentrated on ‘domestic science’ – basically housework and cookery. School finished at 5pm, although some children were kept behind for punishments!
Challenge your pupils to create a timetable for a Victorian school day – for either a girl or a boy – on the activity sheet. Can they include some detail about what they would have learnt in each lesson, or how it would have been taught?

Talking point: compare your pupils’ Victorian timetables with a typical day in your own school.

Activity 4: Playtime

Games and activities during lunch break at a Victorian school would have included: football (with a heavy leather ball), skipping, hopscotch, marbles, chasing games, throwing and catching games, and ‘hoop and stick’ which involved rolling an iron hoop around the playground using a stick.

Ask your children to write about one of the games played by Victorian children on the activity sheet. Which game would they choose to play and why?

One of the most popular games played by Victorian children with marbles was called “Ring Taw”. To play this game, a circle was drawn on the playground using chalk or by using a piece of string. Most of the marbles were placed within the circle, with each player retaining one marble, which was known as the “shooter”. The players would take it in turns to throw or flick their shooter into the circle, with the aim of knocking the other marbles out. Any marbles that were knocked out were kept by the player who threw the shooter. The game would end when all the marbles had been knocked out of the circle, and the winner would be the player who had collected the most marbles.

Why not try... setting up a game of “Ring Taw” in your school playground. Do your pupils enjoy playing it? Can they think of any other games that you could play with marbles?

Talking point: what games do your pupils play in the school playground today? Are they really very different to games played by Victorian schoolchildren?

Activity 5: Punishments

Corporal punishment was a common part of life in a Victorian school. Bad behaviour was often met with the cane to either the bottom or hand. In Scotland, teachers used a leather strap called a “tawse”. The phrase “six of the best” was used to describe this punishment as pupils were often hit six times. Another, albeit less painful, punishment was writing lines, repeatedly writing the same sentence out at least 100 times. The sentences chosen usually reflected the ‘crime’ which was being punished, so a pupil may have had to write “I must not fidget in class” or “I must always pay attention and sit up straight”.

Bad posture and fidgeting were corrected using back straighteners or backboards, and finger stocks. Back straighteners would have been made of wood and were about 75cm long. They were wider in the middle, with narrower ends. The wider section of the board was placed in the middle of the child’s back, and they would have hooked their arms behind the narrower ends, forcing
them to sit or stand straighter. The boards were used to correct bad posture and to stop
children from fidgeting. Finger stocks were designed to stop children from fidgeting
with their fingers. They consisted of two small wooden plates, each with four holes in. The
fidgety child would put one finger into each hole and the ribbons joining the two plates
would have been tied together behind the child’s back making it impossible for them to fiddle or
move their fingers.

The activity sheet has line drawings of finger stocks and a back straightener. Can your pupils
work out what these objects were used for?

Which form of punishment do your pupils think is worst? They can explain their answer on the
activity sheet.

Talking point: how does your school discourage bad behaviour?

Activity 6: The object lesson

The ‘object lesson’ was designed to provide Victorian schoolchildren with an introduction to the
world around them. Loosely speaking, an object lesson was a bit like a science lesson. Children
would be introduced to different specimens and objects and would explore what they were made
from, what they were for, how they worked, and the qualities of the materials from which they
were made.

educationalist George Ricks explained:

“The primary purpose of lessons on common objects and natural phenomena is to cultivate the
senses, to train to habits of attention, intelligent observation, and accurate comparison, and so to
lead up to the higher processes of the mind – reason and judgement.”

Teacher Elizabeth Mayo agreed in her book Lessons on Objects: As given to children between the
ages of six and eight, in a Pestalozzian School at Cheam, Surrey (London: Seeley, Jackson and
Halliday) published in 1861:

“It has been found, indeed, by long experience, that no lessons produce more continued interest,
or more enlarge the minds of children, than those on objects.

To lead children to observe with attention the objects which surround them, and then to describe
with accuracy the impressions they convey, appears to be the first step in the business of
education.

As the sphere of observation is enlarged, and the pages of history, or the fields of science, are
explored, the mind, accustomed to accurate investigation, will not rest content with less than
satisfactory evidence, either in morals or in science.”

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You Wouldn’t Want to Be a Victorian Schoolchild!
Mayo goes on to define a series of objects that she suggests should be used as the subjects of progressively more complicated object lessons:

“Glass, Indian rubber, leather, loaf-sugar, gum Arabic, sponge, wool, water, wax, camphor, bread, sealing wax, whalebone, ginger, blotting paper, piece of willow, milk, rice, salt, horn, ivory, chalk, bark of an oak tree

A pin, a cube of wood, an uncut lead-pencil, a pen, a wax candle, a chair, a book, an egg, a thimble, a penknife, a key, a cup, a coffee bean, a pair of scissors, a bird, an orange”

For each of the objects, she describes how teachers should lead a lesson outlining the objects’ qualities and uses. As you can see, each of the objects chosen would have been fairly common to a Victorian child. The second set of objects were more challenging in that they tended to be man-made or, if from nature such as a bird or an orange, more complicated.

Talking point: explain to your pupils how an object lesson would have been structured. In most lessons, an actual specimen of the object in question would have been passed around for examination (these included live specimens of animals!). Do your pupils think that they would have enjoyed an object lesson?

Why not try... conducting your own object lessons? Begin by recreating a Victorian object lesson choosing one of the objects listed in Mayo’s book. You could then choose an object that would not have existed in Victorian Britain, such as a mobile phone or computer.

Challenge your pupils to write about an object of their own choice, discussing its qualities and uses. (You could provide a selection of objects that actually featured in Victorian object lessons, taken from Mayo’s list above.) They can use the activity sheet to record their observations.

Activity 7: Victorian inventions

The Victorian period was a period of development with lots of inventions and inventors, and huge advances in technology, transportation, hygiene and more.

Introduce some of the inventions that emerged during the period, such as popular photography, telephones, electric telegraphs, penny farthing bicycles, flushing toilets and sewage systems, electric lightbulbs, a sewing machine that could be used at home, stamps, early cars, bigger ships and more.

Challenge your pupils to research a Victorian invention of their choice, and explain why it was such an important development.

Talking point: which Victorian invention do your pupils think is the most important or useful? You could conduct a survey amongst your class and other people within the school and use the results to draw bar graphs or pie charts.
Extension activity: imagine that your pupils have been asked to research a ‘reality’ TV programme about Victorian inventors called Incredible Inventors. In groups, your pupils should work together to research a Victorian inventor from the list below (or others of your choice):

- Alexander Graham Bell – telephone
- George Stephenson – steam locomotives
- Isambard Kingdom Brunel – tunnels, bridges and ships
- Thomas Edison – electric lightbulb and phonograph
- Alexander Parkes – Parkesine, the first man-made plastic

Each group should use their research to help them argue the case for their subject to be given the title ‘Most Incredible Inventor’. You could host a political style debate, with a member of each group playing the part of their inventor. Or you could ask each group to prepare a presentation or speech to explain the merits of their inventor.

Each group should present their case to an invited audience, who will be responsible for voting for the inventor who they think most deserves the title.

Activity 8: Arty challenges

Make a backboard! Help your pupils to draw the outline of a backboard about 75cm long onto a piece of thick cardboard from a packing box. Use the line drawing on the activity sheet as a guide. Carefully cut this out. Use the cardboard shape as a template, and cut out a second copy in the thick cardboard. Stick the two pieces together with strong glue. When the two pieces are securely stuck, cover them completely with a layer of papier-mâché (strips of newspaper and PVA glue or wallpaper paste). When the papier-mâché has dried and hardened, paint the backboard so that it appears to be made of wood, and add simple decoration or an instructional phrase such as “always sit straight”.

Create an illustrated proverb text! Victorian schoolrooms may have had proverbs to instruct pupils on display. Encourage your pupils to create their own illustrated proverb text by writing out one of the examples below in their best handwriting and illustrating it with simple patterns.

- All that glitters is not gold.
- It takes two fools to argue.
- The devil makes work for idle hands.
- Children should be seen and not heard.
- Speak when you are spoken to and not before.
- If a job’s worth doing it’s worth doing well.
Pupils’ pack contents

● Victorian school plan
● ‘Victorian school timetable’ activity sheet
● ‘Playtime fun’ activity sheet
● ‘Punishments: What is it?’ activity sheet
● ‘Punishments: What’s worst?’ activity sheet
● ‘My object’ activity sheet
● Blank sheet with the border top and bottom for your pupils’ own artwork and writing
The plan above is for a small Victorian school, with just one classroom for boys, and one for the girls and infants.

Larger schools in towns and cities (such as the one pictured left) would have had lots of large classrooms on two floors. Some classrooms were big enough to seat 300 pupils! Victorian schools were built of brick and the windows were high up so that the children could not be distracted by looking outside!
A Victorian schoolchild’s day is long. Use this sheet to create a timetable for a Victorian schoolchild. Can you include some detail about what they would have learnt in each lesson, or how it would have been taught? Remember that boys and girls have different lessons.

Name: ________________________________________________________________

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Games and activities during lunch break at a Victorian school would have included: football (with a heavy leather ball), skipping, hopscotch, marbles, chasing games, throwing and catching games, and ‘hoop and stick’ which involved rolling an iron hoop around the playground using a stick.

Which game would you choose to play and why?

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Punishments: What is it?

This object was made of one piece of wood. It was about 75cm long. It was wider in the middle, with narrower ends. What do you think it is and what might it have been used for?

_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________

This object had two small wooden plates about 11cm long and 5cm wide, each with four holes in. The two plates were joined together with a long piece of ribbon, which was passed through a slot in each of the plates. What do you think this object was for?

_____________________________________________________________________________
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_____________________________________________________________________________
Victorian teachers were very strict and used lots of different punishments. But what do you think would be the worst punishment?

Would writing out hundreds of ‘lines’ be worse than ‘six of the best’ with a cane or tawse? Was wearing a dunce’s cap tougher than sitting with a back straightener or finger stocks?

Tick which punishment you would find worst:

☐ Cane  ☐ Back straightener and finger stocks
☐ Tawse  ☐ Dunce’s cap
☐ Writing lines  ☐ Detention

Explain your choice below:

__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
My object

Name: _____________________________________________________________________

Object: _____________________________________________________________________

Use this box to describe your object. What is it made of? What does it feel like? Does it smell? Is it hard or soft? Is it breakable? What is it for?

Use this box to draw a labelled diagram of your object:
A ‘News-Roundup’ Programme for Children’s TV. This play is in the style of Children’s TV News, where a young reporter speaks to camera ‘on location’. In this broadcast, the reporter has gone back in time via a time machine to a Victorian school.

Parts:

Ricky presenter
Vicky presenter
Mr Wackit Headmaster
Miss Fitt Schoolmistress
Mabel Schoolchild
Walter Schoolchild

News Theme Music

(In TV studio) Hello and welcome to this week’s News-Roundup – where we report from a time and place selected by our very latest time-travel machine called ROTTERS. That’s the Randomizing-Operational-Time-Teleporting-Electro-Robotic-Segway. Our reporter Vicky just set off on the segway and we’re expecting a satellite link to come through any second. Can you hear me, Vicky?

(In an old schoolroom) Indeed I can, Ricky. I’m receiving you loud and clear.

That’s terrific. So where has the time-segway taken you this week?

Back in time to 1855, Ricky.

1855? That’s five to seven in the evening.

Not the time of day, but the year 1855. Queen Victoria has been
on the throne for eighteen years.

Ricky: That’s a long time to sit still on a posh chair. She must be a bit stiff by now.

Vicky: No, but she’s been reigning for eighteen years.

Ricky: Raining for eighteen years? She must be soaked to the skin. No wonder she’s not amused.

Vicky: I’m in Victorian Britain and I’ve come to Grunge Street School to meet some of the people who come here every day. It looks a bit gloomy.

Ricky: Then I’ll let you see what’s going on, Vicky. Watch out - it looks as if there’s a miserable-looking gentleman just behind you. *(Mr Wackit appears, with cane)*

Mr Wackit: I hope you have your tuppence, young lady?

Vicky: I beg your pardon?

Mr Wackit: It costs two pennies a week to come to school. Name?

Vicky: My name is Vicky, sir.

Mr Wackit: Vicky? Vicky? What sort of name is that?

Vicky: It’s short for Victoria, sir.

Mr Wackit: Queen Victoria is quite short enough already. Her Majesty is barely five feet tall.

Vicky: That’s only about one hundred and fifty two centimetres.
Mr Wackit: I have no idea what you are talking about, girl. And what ridiculous clothes you are wearing. Now hurry up and get to the girls’ classroom. My cane awaits any child who arrives late to lessons. It has a point on the end to poke each latecomer.

Vicky: That’s not nice.

Mr Wackit: You’ve got a point there. And so has my cane!

Vicky: When do we start, sir?

Mr Wackit: Nine o’clock sharp. Ha – pointy-cane sharp! So get a move on and don’t dawdle. Can’t you hear the bell? (Miss Fitt enters ringing a handbell)

Miss Fitt: Goodness me, Headmaster – it’s raining in the playground.

Mr Wackit: Then you must be ringing wet, Miss Fitt.

Miss Fitt: Exactly, Mr Wackit. My classroom roof is leaking and it is very cold. I told young Walter to light a fire in the hearth.

Mr Wackit: Only five lumps of coal, Miss Fitt. We don’t want the children falling asleep from getting too warm, do we?

Miss Fitt: But yesterday it was so cold all the ink froze in the inkwells. How can we write with iced ink?

Mr Wackit: With what?

Miss Fitt: Iced ink. Iced ink. Iced ink.

Mr Wackit: You stink? Then you need a wash, Miss Fitt.

Miss Fitt: Whoever is that strange creature, headmaster?
Mr Wackit: You have a new girl in your class. This is Victoria. But, unlike our good Queen, she is revealing far too much ankle. Get it covered. (Exits)

Miss Fitt: (Looking horrified) Whatever is the girl wearing? You look ridiculous. Now fetch a slate from the table and start writing. It is essential for the three R’s.

Vicky: Three R’s, miss? Would that be Religious Education, Research and Russian?

Miss Fitt: Nonsense. Reading, ‘Riting and ‘Rithmetic. They’re the most important parts of your education. I will be testing you on them shortly – and woe betide you if you fail. You will be punished. Now, go into the classroom and sit over there next to Mabel.

Vicky: Yes, miss. (Sits at the desk) Hello, Mabel.

Miss Fitt: AND NO TALKING! Take out your copybook to practise handwriting. Mabel, you are ink monitor today. Take round pen nibs and all the inkwells.

Mabel: Yes, Miss Fitt.

Miss Fitt: Don’t you dare drop any on the desk and blot your copybook.

Mabel: No, Miss Fitt. Er... where are they, miss?

Miss Fitt: Read the label on the table, Mabel. If you’re able, check the table is stable, Mabel.

Mabel: Yes, Miss Fitt.

Miss Fitt: Everyone copy down what I write on the blackboard in chalk. NO MISTAKES. Then you must copy out a page from your
catechism.

Vicky: *(Whispering)* A cat-a-what?

Mabel: A catechism is a text book full of questions and answers and no pictures.

Vicky: Mabel, what do I do with this ruler and pencil?

Mabel: Make sure your pencil is sharp and your ruler is straight. You have to draw lines in your copybook to write on. Don’t make a smudge or miss will shout. She may slap you over the knuckles with a little ruler.

Vicky: A little ruler? Like Queen Victoria – she’s a ruler of the empire and only five feet tall! *(They giggle)*

Miss Fitt: Quiet! No talking. And you, girl, sit up straight. You’re slouching. You need poise and posture for producing perfect copperplate handwriting. Put that back-straightener on to make you sit up and concentrate.

Mabel: Yes, Miss Fitt.

Vicky: That looks nasty.

Miss Fitt: How dare you speak, new girl. Report immediately to the headmaster next door. He is teaching the boys arithmetic. Tell him you have been most impudent, impertinent and presumptuous.

Vicky: Yes, Miss Fitt. Sorry, Miss Fitt.

*(She stands and goes into the classroom next door where Mr Wackit stands teaching at the front with a cane but doesn’t notice Vicky enter the room)*
Mr Wackit: Now listen here, you bunch of ragamuffins, rapscallions and scallawags. Arithmetic is the most important of the ‘three Rs’ and boys have to be better at fractions, decimals and interest than girls, so your sums will be harder than theirs.

Walter: Please, sir – is that because boys’ brains are cleverer, sir?

Mr Wackit: Not in your case, Walter. What is nine times twelve?

Walter: Er... I haven’t got an abacus to work it out, sir.

Mr Wackit: You silly little urchin. It’s one hundred and eight. You’re a dunce, boy. Go and put on the dunce’s cap until the lesson is over.

Walter: (Upset) Sorry, sir. (Puts on dunce’s cap and stands in the corner)

Mr Wackit: Now, Walter the Dunce, repeat after me the following:
One dozen is twelve. One score is twenty. One gross is one hundred and forty four.

Walter: One dozen is twelve. One score is twenty. One gross is one hundred and forty four.

Mr Wackit: Sixteen ounces are one pound,
Fourteen pounds are one stone.
One hundred and twelve pounds are eight stone.
Carry on, Walter...

Walter: Eight stone are one hundredweight.
Twenty hundredweight are one ton.

Mr Wackit: Twelve inches are one foot.
Three feet are one yard.
Six feet are two yards are one fathom.
Carry on, Walter...
Walter: Twenty two yards are one chain. Ten chains are one furlong. Eight furlongs are 1760 yards are one mile. Carry on, Walter...

Vicky: (To herself) I would never remember all that. It’s like another language

Mabel: (Enters the room) Please, sir – Miss Fitt sent me.

Mr Wackit: What do you want, girl?

Mabel: Miss Fitt wants to know if you have punished the new girl yet, sir.

Mr Wackit: She can write out lines. Write five hundred times the following: ‘I will be obedient at all times, respect my elders and betters, and remember that children should be seen but not heard.’

Walter: That’s not fair, sir – it’s only her first day here.

Mr Wackit: (Furious) WHAT?! I will not be spoken to like that by the dunce of the class. Bend over, boy – for six of the best. (Walter bends over and Mr Wackit raises his cane)

Vicky: Please don’t cane poor Walter, Mr Wackit.

Mr Wackit: I shall thrash you, as well, for such impudence. You, Walter and Mabel will be beaten as soon as I’ve recorded your bad behaviour and punishments in the school logbook.

Mabel: But I haven’t done anything wrong, sir?

Mr Wackit: That’s no excuse. You can still be beaten for answering back. So while I record your punishments in my book, you can each recite
a verse of a poem. The school inspector is calling tomorrow and will want to hear it, as well as ask you such questions as ‘name an animal that has no brain’. And I don’t mean Walter.

Walter: It’s a starfish, sir.

Mr Wacket: For once you are right, you ragamuffin, rapscallion, scallawag and dunce. Memorising is such an important part of education. We learn by rote here.

Walter: Is that because we wrote it down, sir?

Mr Wackit: Doh – you dunderheaded dim-witted dumb-brained dunce. Rote is learning by repetition, which is what we do here. So I will recite the first verse of a well-known poem and you will continue:

The boy stood on the burning deck
Whence all but he had fled;
The flame that lit the battle’s wreck
Shone round him o’er the dead.

(He is now so busy writing he doesn’t hear what the children say)

Walter: The boy stood on the burning deck,
His feet were all in blisters.
He split his trousers down the back
And had to wear his sister’s.

Vicky: The boy stood on the burning deck,
The flames, he tried to swat ‘em.
A spark shot up his trouser leg
And scorched him on the ... elbow!

Mabel: The boy stood on the burning deck,
His knees were all a quiver.
He gave a cough, his leg fell off
And floated down the river.
(Mrs Fitt enters the room, unnoticed)

Walter: Mr Wackit’s a strict old man,
He goes to church on Sundays
And prays that he’ll be given strength
To wallop the boys on Mondays!

Miss Fitt: I heard that. Headmaster, all these children must be punished immediately.

Mr. Wackit: Indeed, Miss Fitt. I intend to start with the new girl. Come here for a jolly good hiding...

Vicky: In that case, it’s time for me to head back to the future. I’ve already had enough of life in a Victorian school. Being a schoolchild one hundred and sixty years ago could certainly be unpleasant and tough.
(To camera) This is Vicky hopping back on my time-travelling segway – so while I make my escape, it’s back to Ricky in the studio.

Ricky: Yikes! On that breaking news, we must leave you with the shocking sound of swishing canes and scary thwacks. Which all goes to show YOU WOULDN’T WANT TO BE A VICTORIAN SCHOOLCHILD... EVER!
News Theme Music