

Museums
& Galleries
Edinburgh

Museum
of Childhood

VICTORIANS

Second level

The museum introduces three key themes of childhood; life, learn and play

Encourage the children to read the information panels to find the answers to these questions.

When was school made compulsory for children in Scotland?

1872.

Did children go to school before that date?

Yes, but because it wasn't compulsory many did not attend and attendance was irregular. Many children could not read or write.

How was life for children different after school became compulsory?

All children from 5 - 13 years had to go to school. The standard of education improved.

What was school like for children in the Victorian era?

Schools were often a harsh environment - obedience was strictly enforced. Children were expected to learn by repetition, even if they did not understand what they were being taught.

Were boys and girls treated the same? How does that make you feel?

No, they were taught different subjects and there was an emphasis on domestic training for girls.

What subjects did they teach in school?

Reading, writing and arithmetic (the 'three Rs'). Religion. PE. Needlework (girls) and woodwork (boys).

Why did they have these in school?

To maintain discipline. They would strike children across their hands and backs of legs.

What are they made from?

Leather.

Would this be a good method for punishment? Why?

Why do you think they stopped using this type of punishment in school?

Can you find out when this was banned?

In the 1980s. Use of the Lochgelly tawse and all forms of corporal punishment was banned in all state schools in 1987.

Optional extra questions

Can you find evidence of other things that changed in childhood in gallery 1?

School, clothing, less illness, priorities - since the 1950s children have been at the centre of family life.

What were children told to be in Victorian times?

Little children should be seen and not heard.

Do you think it was nice to be a child during the Victorian period - give reasons for your answer?





This gallery has a large collection of toys

including; Musical, Optical, Marionettes, toy vehicles, doll houses, animals (farm, zoo and circus), trains, 'when I grow up' toys, and some toy theatres.

Play: Find the case with the optical toys. There are two favourite Victorian toys in this case: the zoetrope and the thaumatrope. Read the information to find the answers to the questions.

What was the other name for zoetrope?

Wheel of Life.

Why was this a popular Victorian toy?

Victorians were interested in moving images and many of the toys in this section reflect that.

Have a go at the zoetrope on display - spin slowly and look through the slits. What is the story?

Find number 12. What is this toy and how does it work?

It is a thaumatrope. You spin the image of the bird and it makes it look as though the bird is in the cage.

What are the images you can see on the green wall - what images do you think are on the reverse sides?

Horse, lion and bird cage.

When was this thaumatrope made?

1825.

And how much would it cost to buy?

3 shillings.

Was that an expensive toy in the Victorian period?

It was quite expensive.

Who played with toys like this?

Wealthy upper class children and adults.

How are the zoetrope and thaumatrope are similar?

They are interested in moving images.

Find the toy theatres. Look closely at the theatres on display. When were these toys most popular?

During the early Victorian period.

Which famous author, from Edinburgh, loved toy theatres?

Robert Louis Stevenson.

Which Prime Minister played with toy theatres?

Sir Winston Churchill.

- There are many other interesting objects in this gallery which give an insight into the lives of Victorians. Look at the Doll Houses and the 'When I grow up' section - there are mangles and other household items used in Victorian homes.
- The doll houses show how wealthy families would employ servants and the contrast between living arrangements.





This gallery is full of dolls, teddy bears and automata

Can you find the doll which is dressed as Queen Victoria?

There is a photograph of Victoria next to the doll.

What date was her Golden Jubilee?

1887.

Why do you think that dolls dressed as Queen Victoria were made?

Queen Victoria was a very popular queen. It would have been very exciting to own a doll such as this one.

Are there any other dolls in this gallery from the Victorian era?

Yes - there are several. (1837 - 1901).

What are these dolls made from?

Some, like the Queen Victoria doll, were made with soft material bodies and wax heads. Others are made with wood, paper mache, bone, shoes - a huge variety of materials.

What kind of children would play with these dolls?

The shoe doll and bone doll are examples of toys for children who came from lower poorer families.

Looking in the display cases in this gallery what other things can you find that go with the dolls?

Furniture, beds, dressers, tea chests, bikes etc.

What other things can you learn from this gallery about the Victorians?

Automata

- The automata in this gallery range in date from 1870s - 1900s. Automata toys use a clockwork mechanism.
- These toys all have various moving sequences. For example; The bunny slowly pops up, waggles his ears and then pops in again.

A clockwork device is mechanical and has these key components:

- A key you wind to add energy.
- A spiral spring to store this energy.
- A set of gears (these release the energy and control the speed and force).
- A mechanism the gears drive which make the toy work.
- Toys like this are an example of advances in technology and invention during the Victorian era.

Look at these toys - how do they move?

What action do you think each toy performs?

Which is your favourite doll?





This gallery has a collection of hobbies and games on display

Play (and learn)

Which books were available in the Victorian period?

Grimm's Fairy Tales, Hans Anderson's, Wonderful Stories for Children, Lewis Carroll's Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and more.

Who would have had books like this?

More wealthy families - books were a luxury.

Who wrote during the Victorian period but didn't have anything published until 1902?

Beatrix Potter.

What was her first book called?

The Tale of Peter Rabbit.

Which game became a 'craze' during the Victorian era?

Solitaire.

Can you find any other popular Victorian games or toys?

There are many in the various display cases (including; cup and ball, spinning tops, gird and cleeks, skipping ropes etc).

Looking at the games in these display cases - what were most of the toys made from?

Wood, metal, string and metal.

Can you find a picture of Queen Victoria? What is it?

The Phoenix Magazine (1897). The magazine was intended to circulate amongst readers' contributors, each keeping the magazine for a maximum of 6 days.

There are hobbies shown in this gallery which were gender specific. Can you make a list of 'girl' hobbies and 'boy' hobbies?

Needlework for girls and woodwork for boys.

What do you think about the different types of hobbies for boys and girls?

Are there hobbies now which are gender specific?



THINK ABOUT ALL THE TOYS YOU HAVE SEEN OVER THE LAST THREE GALLERIES – WHAT DOES THIS TELL YOU ABOUT CHILDHOOD IN THE VICTORIAN PERIOD? DO YOU STILL PLAY WITH THE SIMILAR TOYS NOW?



This gallery is set up as several scenes. Including a street, an old classroom, a nursery and a fancy dress display

Learn (play and life)

Please note some of the items in the classroom are post Victorian, however, the display is still accurately depicting a Victorian classroom.

The classroom

In what way is this classroom like your classroom? How is it different?

Individual desks, blackboard, equipment, teacher's desk, the lessons which are visible, the tawse and the map.

What can you learn about Victorian schools from this classroom?

What kind of things they studied, what teachers were like, how they had to behave.

Can you list any toys, games or other things you can see that you have seen in previous galleries?

Tawse, diabalo, gird and cleek.

Street scene

Look closely at the clothes worn by children. Can you identify how many of the children are girls and how many are boys?

3 of each.

Is there something about the way children dressed that was surprising to you? What?

Some of the boys look like girls - they are wearing dresses.

Do you know why clothes were like this? (read the folder to find the answers).

It wasn't until the 1920s that this tradition was phased out. 'Breeching' was a rite of passage for boys and generally happened between 4 and 8 years old. This was the process of boys graduating from dresses to trousers. This tradition could have come about because it made potty training easier - there were no easy poppers or zips back then!

What do you think the children are doing in this scene?

Opposite the street, you will see a shoe shop

How do the shoes compare to the shoes you wear?

They are smaller. Some are just fabric and look very delicate.

What other things are available to buy in this shop?

Bags, purses and both, long and short gloves.

The Nursery scene

What caused adults to change clothing styles for children?

The change in styling of children's clothing reflected changes in education - clothes needed to become more practical. Girls as well as boys were expected to take part in sports and gymnastics.

What date did this change start?

In the 1870s a group of adults wanted more relaxed clothing for kids but this was a small number of people, however, by the 1900s clothing moved away from copying adult styles and moved towards more relaxed clothing.

Fancy Dress

Did children dress up in fancy dress during the Victorian period?

Yes.

Why was this popular?

Children's fancy dress parties were made popular by Queen Victoria. She gave Prince Albert a Fancy Dress Childrens's Ball at Buckingham Palace in 1859.