

**Investigating the Victorian era**

Look at the two pictures below and make notes about what you see in each one and any striking comparisons or contrasts between the two scenes:

Insert a picture of the pastoral landscape before the Industrial Revolution.  
<http://www.foxearth.org.uk/Emigration/constablesmall.jpg> has a scene by Constable which contrasts with the other one well.

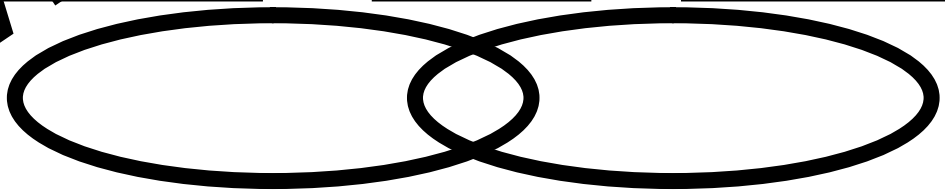
Insert a picture of the landscape of the Industrial Revolution.  
<http://www.flatrock.org.nz/topics/history/setting-up-industrial-revolution.jpg> is a good example, particularly if you can show it to students in colour.

Write your ideas in a Venn diagram like the one shown below:

Comments on scene 1

Comparisons

Comments on scene 2



Read through the following information which is about **religion** in the Victorian era:

The most important thing to remember about religion in Victorian England is that there was an awful lot of it. The nineteenth century was marked by a revival of religious activity unmatched since the days of the Puritans. This religious revival shaped that code of moral behavior, or rather that infusion of all behavior with moralism, which we still call, rightly or wrongly, "Victorianism." Above all, religion occupied a place in the public consciousness, a centrality in the intellectual life of the age, which it had not had a century before and did not retain in the twentieth century.

That is the second important thing to remember about the Victorian religious revival: that it did not last. It was not merely that the churches lost, or rather had never had, the growing working classes of their increasingly urbanized society; they could hardly be blamed for being defeated by demographics. But the striking thing about the decline of the Victorian religious revival is that it took place, in the latter decades of the century, within that very middle class whose virtues it sanctified. Most importantly, those special segments of the middle class which served as culture-bearers to their age and shapers of the next, the intellectual and professional classes, had their faith eroded in a distinctive and decisive manner. [58/59]

Extract from: <http://www.victorianweb.org/religion/altholz/a2.html>

1. What does the writer suggest happened to religion during the time of the Victorian religious revival?
2. What sort of impression do you get of religion from the extract above?
3. Do you think, from reading the extract, that many people went to church?
4. What sort of people do you think attended church regularly?
5. What do you think could have caused some members of society to have 'their faith eroded in a distinctive and decisive manner'?

Now read the following piece from Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre*. The narrator, who was **educated** at Lowood Boarding School, describes how each Sunday was spent:

Sundays were dreary days in that wintry season. We had to walk two miles to Brocklebridge Church, where our patron officiated. We set out cold, we arrived at church colder: during the morning service we became almost paralysed. It was too far to return to dinner, and an allowance of cold meat and bread, in the same penurious proportion observed in our ordinary meals, was served round between the services. At the close of the afternoon service we returned by an exposed and hilly road, where the bitter winter wind, blowing over a range of snowy summits to the north, almost flayed the skin from our faces. I can remember Miss Temple walking lightly and rapidly along the winding line, her plaid cloak, which the frosty wind fluttered, gathered close about her, and encouraging us, by precept and example, to keep up our spirits, and march forward, as she said, "like stalwart soldiers." The other teachers, poor things, were generally themselves too much dejected to attempt the task of cheering others.

How we longed for the light and heat of a blazing fire when we got back! But, to the poor ones at least, this was denied: each hearth in the schoolroom was immediately surrounded by a double row of great girls, and behind them the younger children crouched in groups, wrapping their starved arms in their pinafores. A little solace came at tea-time, in the shape of a double ration of bread--a whole, instead of a half, slice--with the delicious addition of a thin scrape of butter: it was the heavenly meal which we all looked forward from Sabbath to Sabbath. I generally contrived to reserve a moiety of this bounteous repast for myself, but the remainder I was invariably obliged to part with.

The Sunday evening was spent in repeating, by heart, the Church Catechism, and the fifth, sixth, and seventh chapters of St. Matthew; and in listening to a long sermon, read by Miss Miller, whose impressed jawns attested her weariness. A frequent interlude of these performances was the enactment of the part of Eutychus by some half-dozen of little girls, who, overpowered with sleep, would fall down, if not out of the third loft, yet off the fourth form, and be taken up half-dead. The remedy was, to thrust them forward into the centre of the schoolroom, and oblige them to stand there till the sermon was finished. Sometimes their feet failed them, and they sank together in a heap; they were then propped up with the monitors' high stools.

1. Summarise the typical events of a Sunday for the narrator and the other girls.
2. How far do the girls have to walk?
3. How many services do the girls sit through?
4. How do you think the narrator feels each Sunday and which words and phrases give you this impression?
5. What sort of place do you think the girls are in?
6. Do you think the narrator likes Miss Temple and the other teachers or not? What makes you think this?

Read the following extract which comes from an article by Bruce Robinson and is available at:

[http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/victorians/victorian\\_medicine\\_01.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/victorians/victorian_medicine_01.shtml). It is all about the **development of medicine** in Victorian times:

It may be harsh to say so, but to the modern eye medical practice in the early 1800s looks pretty medieval. Harsh, because the 17th century had seen important breakthroughs in the fields of pathology, obstetrics and vaccination that would be built upon in the next century.

The foundations were laid, but there was more to be done. Medicine in 1800 was a scary combination of chance and quackery, what Blackadder would have found familiar. Macbeth-like medicines were overwhelmingly botanical, with preparations of mercury, arsenic, iron and phosphorous also popular. Doctors might recommend a 'change of air' along with vomiting and laxatives and those old remedies, bleeding or leeches. The power of prayer was regularly used. All in all, not ideal. Yet a century later medicine would be available in a form easily recognisable to anybody today: hospitals, stethoscopes, white coats and x-rays. What happened?

Two things. Together, cities and science forced real progress in both prevention and cure.

...

This growth [in cities and towns] had enormous consequences. Death rates were high, and far worse in cities than in the countryside. Smallpox, typhus and tuberculosis were endemic, and cholera alarmingly epidemic. Overcrowding combined with poor sanitation and often grinding poverty to leave many people vulnerable to the latest outbreak of anything that came along.

1. Summarise what Robinson says about the state of medicine at the beginning of the nineteenth century.
2. What sort of cures did doctors offer to patients at this time? Do you think these forms of medicine were particularly useful?
3. Explain the reasons for your answer to question 2.
4. Make a list of the illnesses Robinson mentions above and write down definitions of the words 'endemic' and 'epidemic'; make sure you understand the definitions you write!
5. If you have the opportunity, read the rest of this article and make a list of the various developments that took place in medicine through the Victorian age.



The following information is about the **status of women** in the Victorian era and comes from:

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women\\_in\\_the\\_Victorian\\_Era](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women_in_the_Victorian_Era):

The status of **Women in the Victorian Era** is often seen as an illustration of the striking discrepancy between England's national power and wealth and what many, then and now, consider its appalling social conditions. During the era symbolised by the reign of British monarch Queen Victoria, difficulties escalated for women because of the vision of the "ideal woman" shared by most in the society. The legal rights of married women were similar to those of children; they could not vote or sue or even own property. Also, they were seen as pure and clean. Because of this view, their bodies were seen as temples which should not be adorned with jewellery nor used for physical exertion or pleasurable sex. The role of women was to have children and tend to the house, in contrast to men, according to the concept of Victorian masculinity. They could not hold a job unless it was that of a teacher or a domestic servant, nor were they allowed to have their own checking accounts or savings accounts. In the end, they were to be treated as saints, but saints that had no legal rights.

1. List some of the difficulties that women in Victorian times faced. Look at the restrictions placed on women and discuss some consequences this might have led to.
2. Do you think it would have been possible for any woman to be the 'ideal woman'? Explain the reasons behind your decision.
3. Why might the fact that England had a queen as a monarch be seen as contradictory to the way women were viewed generally?