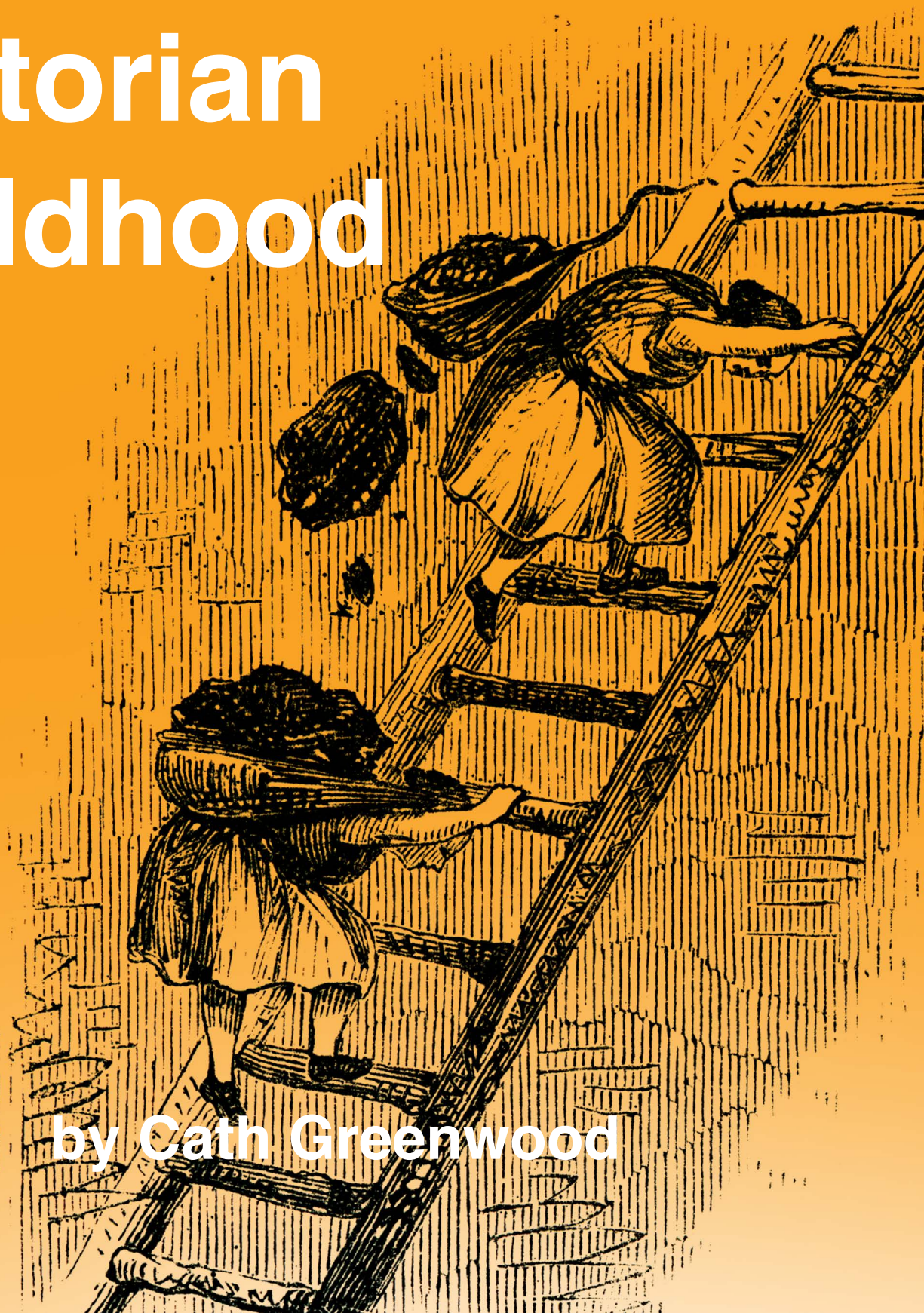


Framework 2

Victorian childhood

by Cath Greenwood



Overview

Session 1: Childhood now and then

The Victorian childhood framework suggests ways to enrich this KS2 history topic, bringing it alive by imagining what it was like for children living at that time. Pupils will develop creative skills, collaborative working and critical thinking as they explore child labour in Victorian Britain and legislation to protect children and introduce schooling.

We have provided key information for this framework to get you started, but you may want to complete more extensive background research. We have endeavoured to make the factual information provided accurate and reflect the reality of the time. However, sometimes the needs of the drama take precedence - for example, it would be very unlikely that such large numbers of staff would start work at the Manor House on the same day and the servants would not be so strictly confined to specific jobs and areas of the house.

*Activities outlined in Session 2 of the framework are demonstrated in **Film 2: Continuing a drama**. The drama strategies used in Session 1 are modelled in **Film 1: Beginning a drama** and the final film - **Film 3: Concluding a drama** - will take teachers through the activities of the final session in this framework.*

In Session 1 pupils will

- Explore the concept of childhood - comparing childhood in the present day with childhood in the early Victorian era
- Explore the experiences and working conditions of children sent out to work in Victorian Britain

Featured drama strategies

- Simple *Still image* and *Mime*
- *Stop and Go*
- *Short scene making*

Activity

Still image - 'A day in the life'

Children share their experience, knowledge and thinking about childhood and physically embody the 'day in the life' of children from the present day in a series of freeze frames.

Running the activity

Start with a discussion about what it means to be a child:

- *What do we mean by 'childhood'?*
- *How do the children of today spend their time?*
- *What are the things children like to do and what are the things children are less keen to do?*
- *Are there things children aren't allowed to do?*
- *What are the things adults do that children don't?*

Think about a day in the life of a present day child. Ask pupils to find a space in the hall or the class room and when you say the time of day to create a still image of what a child might be doing at that time of day.

Agree that this will be a school day so we'll include school time and free time for the children we imagine. Go through the different times: first thing in the morning; 7.30 am, 9am, 11.15am, lunchtime, 2.45pm, etc.

With each image the children create you can ask them to bring them to life and mime what it is they are doing, then freeze them in a still image and ask different children around the room to say what they are doing at this particular point. Notice the different activities children have chosen to depict.

Discuss what you have shared and discovered about present day childhood from your drama work.

Activity

Discussion - Victorian times

Providing historical context that will be needed in the drama work.

Running the activity

Before setting up *Stop and Go* explore what childhood was like in the Victorian era. First find out what children already know about Victorian times. You could share some of the basic information from **Resource 1**.

Share images of childhood in the Victorian era including images of work, play, home life and the work house (**Resource 2 - slideshow / Resource 2 - document**). You'll refer to the Resources in the activity which follows.

There are also testimonials from children working in the mines and the mills which can be looked at here or later in your drama work in **Resource 3**.



The teacher in role as the housekeeper inspects the new employees.

Activity

Stop and Go

This activity encourages the children to work together to build focus and concentration, before introducing a key strategy of our drama work, still images, in which children physically embody the characters and settings that give context to - and will be developed further in - our drama.

Running the activity

Play a game of *Stop and Go*, creating individual and group images of Victorian children at work and at play, finishing with a whole class image lining up to enter the workhouse. You can use the suggestions in **Resource 4**.

Move into the hall and set up a simple game of *Stop and Go*.

Ask the children to find a place in the hall, spreading out to cover the whole space.

When you say 'Go!' ask children to move around the room, weaving in and out of each other and aiming to walk at the same pace. When you say 'Stop!' children freeze like a statue, as if they have been turned to stone.

Now introduce new instructions: 'Jump!' and 'Clap!'. Aim for the class to do these as one.

When the class is working well, reverse the instructions: so 'Stop!' means 'Go!' and 'Clap!' means 'Jump!', etc.

Next ask pupils to create statues, or still images, of the lives of Victorian children. Ask them to think how they can use their bodies and facial expressions to show what is happening in each moment. You can ask children to bring an image to life for a few seconds showing what they are doing before saying 'Freeze!' or 'Stop!' and then return to a still image.

At different moments in the game stop and notice what individual children or small groups are showing. You can also thought track some of them. Ask children to speak their thoughts out loud while holding their still image, so they speak in the first person from within the image they've created.

*A more detailed description of how to run this activity is provided in the **Teacher Notes** and the activity is demonstrated in **Film 1: Beginning a drama**.*

Activity

Short scene making

Children work as a team to combine their different creative ideas to shape a short scene. The structure - starting and ending with still images and limiting dialogue - ensures children have to work together to negotiate meaning and the best way of communicating that in their work.

Running the activity

In small groups ask the children to create a short scene showing a family whose children work in the cotton mill or coal mine. On the day in question there's been an accident and a child has been injured.

Start by deciding who is in the family. Create a still image of them all at home in the evening. What are they all doing?

You can distance the event by explaining none of the family witnessed the accident, but have heard about it from other workers who were there.

Now ask them to bring their image to life and improvise what they are talking about that evening following the accident. What have they heard about the it? How do they feel?

Imagine that at least one of the children works in the mill or the mine and, despite what has happened today, they will have to return to their job tomorrow as usual.

- *What does each of them think and feel about the accident?*
- *What do they say about what happened?*
- *How does the parent talk to the child or children who have to go back to work tomorrow?*
- *Can the parent comfort the child as well as helping them accept they need to return to work?*

When the groups have improvised their ideas ask them to edit their scenes so that each person has no more than two lines of dialogue. They will need to make decisions about what is most important for the characters to say.

Ask them to find a still image to begin and end their scene.

*More detail on how to run the Scene making activity is provided in the **Teacher Notes** and demonstrated in the **Film 2: Continuing a drama**.*

*You can use the image of the home of a factory worker to help set the scene - see **Resources**.*

Remind the children of what we know about how important the children's wages are to the family and the threat of the workhouse if they lose their jobs.

Activity

Short scene making, continued**Share scenes**

Share some or all of the small group scenes. You could **thought track** some of the characters at the beginning or end of each scene, hearing what they are thinking - including some of the thoughts they might not feel able to voice in this situation. For example:

- *What does the parent say to the child who has to return to the mill tomorrow?*
- *What are they thinking? Is it the same?*
- *What are the thoughts of the children?*

Extension: developing a script

You could ask the children to write their scenes as scripts including setting, stage directions and dialogue.

Children could also write a monologue - or *soliloquy* - in which a character speaks directly to the audience, voicing the thoughts and feelings of their character.



Pupils show their short scene, working in the busy Victorian laundry.

Overview

Session 2: Working in a big house

In Session 2 pupils will

- Explore the conditions of servants working in a big house in the early Victorian era
- Develop an understanding of the technology of the time
- Share ideas and different perspectives as they negotiate their group drama

Featured drama strategies

- *Writing in role*
- *Teacher and children in role*
- *Still images into Improvisation and Small scene making*



The teacher enters the scene in role to question pupils.

Activity

Discussion - A new job**Running the activity**

The next part of our exploration takes place in a large Manor House owned by the Lord and Lady who are also the mill owners in your community.

The housekeeper has advertised for new staff and the children are going to imagine that they are a young person who has applied successfully for a job and are about to start work as a servant for the Lord and Lady.

Ask pupils to imagine that they are a little older now - maybe 12 or 13. They have worked in the past doing one of the jobs we explored in the last lesson. Now they have applied for a job as a live-in servant and they have been accepted. They have younger siblings still living at home and working in the cotton mill or coal mine.

Explain that a job like this would have been very well thought of and competitive to get: the pay is good and it could offer job security if they do well in their role. Discuss as a whole class:

- *What do you think a young person might look forward to in leaving home to work in a big house for a Lord and Lady?*
- *What might they miss?*
- *What do you imagine it would be like as a 'live-in' servant, rather than going home at the end of the working day?*
- *What might they look forward to about the work?*
- *What might they be worried about starting the new job, in a new place, with people they don't know?*

Activity

Writing in role

Writing in role as a character allows the children to imagine and invent more detail, tapping into their character's thoughts and feelings and thinking about what is important to them at this point in the drama.

Running the activity

Ask the class to find their own space and to sit down. Give each person a pencil and a piece of plain paper. Explain that they have got up early ready to start their new job. Narrate:

Today is the day you will leave home and go to work at the Manor House. You are leaving your old work in the mill or the mine behind. You know this is a good job - much better than the job you had before. Your family need the money and you will send most of it home to help them. You have not left home before.

Ask the class to start to mime packing their bag and to think about the kind of things someone from a poor background might pack when leaving home in 1843.

This is a chance to develop the pupils' understanding of the historical context - eg the possessions of poorer people. For example, they are unlikely to have a photograph as photography is still being developed. As they pack, ask them to think about the things they will miss about home and the things they are looking forward to in their new jobs.

When they have packed their bags ask pupils to decide who they might want to leave a note for - it might be a brother, sister, parent or friend. What might they write to them?

Write the letter that you will leave behind. Will you say how you're really feeling, or will you hide some of your feelings?

Ask pupils to underline one sentence from their letter that they are happy to share and ask them in turn to say out loud the sentence from their letter.

*More detail on how to run this activity is provided in the **Teacher Notes** and demonstrated in **Film 2: Continuing a drama**.*

Questions might include:

- What clothing might they pack? (NB: they will be provided with uniform).
- What might they take with them that is precious to them?
- Is there something they might take to remind them of home and their family?

Hearing something from all pupils will build a picture of the hopes and concerns of the servants as they prepare to leave home and start work in an unfamiliar environment.

Activity

Teacher and children in role

Teacher in role is an effective way of developing depth by joining the children in the drama in what is a whole class improvisation. When everyone is in the imagined world together the teacher is able to play alongside pupils, asking questions and challenging thoughts and feelings from inside the story. You can pose problems and help pupils explore dilemmas, imagine future possibilities and take action within the drama.

Running the activity

Explain to pupils that they are lucky: they have managed to get a job in a big house. Share the images of a grand country house from **Resource 5**. If you wish you can also share **Resource 6** which is an animation showing the floor plan of a large country house, indicating the different function of each room.

Move the children into groups where they each have a job in a different part of the house, with different responsibilities: kitchen staff, laundry workers, stable hands, gardeners and butlers and maids.

Show each group images that will help them understand where they will be working and to help them imagine the different jobs they will do in their roles. There are some examples in **Resource 5** to get you started.

Set up the classroom, or hall, as a meeting space, using benches can help create this area. It's the place where the housekeeper and head butler meet with staff each day to give their briefing.

You can use the script provided in **Resource 7** to conduct the morning meeting welcoming the new workers to the house and outlining their responsibilities.

This teacher and children in role allows you to provide information about the rules of the big house and the expectations you have of them in their different jobs.

*More detail on how to run this activity is provided in the **Teacher Notes** and demonstrated in **Film 2: Continuing a drama**.*

Allowing the children to ask and answer questions in role will help them to inhabit their roles more fully and invest in the drama.

Activity

Still image into Improvisation

Running the activity

Ask each group to create a still image of their group of servants hard at work, showing the range of tasks they are doing in their jobs. Once the groups have created their still image, ask them to practice bringing it to life for a few seconds with clear, repeatable, actions that show clearly what it is they are doing. Improvise what they are saying to each other on this first day in their new job.

As the children are improvising in their separate spaces you can briefly visit them, in role as the housekeeper, and comment on what they are doing in their jobs and ask them questions in role.

Activity

Short scene making

Running the activity

Ask the groups to create a short scene where something goes wrong - only a minor mistake, but something that makes their first day difficult and that they need to resolve in some way. Each person in their scene can have one line of dialogue - so they need to decide what is most important for the audience to hear.

Share the groups' scenes showing what the mistake is and what they do about it. Begin and end with a still image.

At the end of the scenes you could enter as the housekeeper. Does the housekeeper discover the mistakes? Do they give a warning, or punishment, dock their pay, or congratulate them on the way they resolved the issue?

Reflection

Discuss how different it is to working in the mills or the mines and how important their income is for their families. Think about how it feels when you get something wrong - particularly when it is your first day somewhere new and it is important to impress your employer.

Try to balance encouraging them in their new jobs with a reminder of how important it is for them to do well for the Lord and Lady if they are to keep their jobs.

Overview

Session 3: Campaigning for children's rights

In Session 3 pupils will

- Develop an understanding of how children's rights changed during the Victorian era due to legislation regarding child labour
- Explore different perspectives about child labour, education and rights

Featured drama strategies

- *Conscience alley*
- *Teacher and children in role*



Children working in the coal mines of Victorian Britain - see [Resource 8](#).

Activity

Conscience alley

A Conscience alley allows pupils to explore a moment of dilemma by voicing a character's inner thoughts as they consider different possible actions they might take.

Running the activity

Explain to pupils that they have their Sunday afternoon off work and are planning to walk through the village and go for a picnic. Display **Resource 8** and explain that they pass a village hall where there is a poster advertising a meeting about child labour and the need to advance the rights of children.

In pairs ask the children to discuss what the servants might think as they see the poster advertising the meeting:

- *Would they want to go in and listen to the discussion, or would they carry on to their picnic?*
- *They are no longer young children, but still have family members younger than them who work in the mills and the coal mines.*
- *They know that the Lord of the house they work in owns the mill that provides work for many local families. What might happen if they are seen attending the meeting?*

Set up a *Conscience alley*, with children in two lines representing the journey from the lane outside the village hall to the entrance of the meeting.

Ask for one child to volunteer as the servant and ask them to walk slowly towards the entrance to the meeting.

The children who are creating the alley should speak their thoughts out loud, voicing the reasons for and against the servant joining the meeting.

*More detail on how to run this activity is provided in the **Teacher Notes** and demonstrated in **Film 3: Concluding a drama**.*

Encourage the pupils to share how this exercise made them feel - both within their role as a Victorian young person, but also as themselves in present day reflecting upon how different the circumstances of their lives are.

Activity

**Teacher and children in role -
campaigning to change child
labour laws****Running the activity**

Set up the space as the meeting in the village hall. Explain that you will go into role as a campaigner who wants to change the laws regarding child labour.

You can use the script provided in **Resource 9** to begin the meeting. The aim is to hear from those with experience of and thoughts about children's lives. Begin by giving context: the laws have been changed in 1837 so that no child under the age of nine should work in the mills or the mines, but that these laws are not being properly enforced. It was also made law that no child should work more than ten hours a day. Your position is that these laws need to go much further.

Open the meeting outlining your position on child labour, education and rights. Ask the people attending the meeting their experience, thoughts and opinions about child labour and what changes they would like to see.

Finish the meeting by thanking all those who have contributed to the discussion. Explain the next steps you will take in your campaign.

Reflection

Discuss the drama work you have done over the three sessions and what you have discovered and understood about childhood in the Victorian era.

Discuss the legislation that has defined children's rights since that period.

Look at the United Nations International Rights of the Child and discuss how some children around the world still work in dangerous and difficult conditions.