



Key Stage 1 – 2

A day in a Victorian classroom, developed by the Old Donnisson School (Sunderland)

08.55 Hand bell rings, pupils line up according to height (one line for girls, and another for boys).

Boys enter the classroom first. Pupils stand to attention, in silence, by their desks. Boys clasp their hands behind their backs and girls clasp their hands in front.

Teacher says “Good morning”, and pupils respond “Good morning Miss.../Mr.... or Ma’am/Sir”.
Boys then bow and girls curtsy. Teacher instructs pupils to sit down.

09.00 Teacher calls out pupils’ names, and each answers “Yes Ma’am/Sir”.

Teacher inspects that pupils are properly dressed, and also inspects for clean hands.

Teacher then asks about absences, and instructs on punctuality – with reference to future employment – and threatens use of cane if pupils are late.

09.30

Prayers are said.

Teacher: “Let us pray, hands together, eyes closed, heads bowed. Repeat after me:

*Lord teach a little child to pray
And fill my heart with love
And make me fitter every day
To go to heaven above”*

A hymn can be sung at this stage if time allows e.g. *All things bright and beautiful*. Pupils should stand to sing the hymn.

All pupils to sit down, in silence, with their back straight and palms on the desk.

09.45

Study of poem and recitation. Pupils should be selected at random to recite the poem, and then the group should recite the poem in unison while teacher taps his/her cane on table to keep time.

*I wandered lonely as a cloud
That floats on high o’er vale and hill
When all at once I saw a crowd
A host of golden daffodils
Beside the lake, beneath the trees
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze
(William Wordsworth)*

The poem should be written on a board. Teacher may draw attention to the word “o’er” and ask pupils if they know what it means.

09.50 Object lesson (this can be optional, depending on time available).

Teacher would introduce an object, such as a flower or piece of coal, and ask pupils questions to build their knowledge of a particular object that would be in context to the Victorian period.

10.00 Teacher selects two monitors – they should be responsible for handing out materials and collecting them back in.

The monitors are asked to hand out slates and pencils.

The arithmetic class should be next – 3, 5 and 8 times tables.

Teacher to ask pupils to write down on their slates the answers to each question e.g. $5 \times 3 = 15$

After completing a series of these, and holding their slates up in the air with the answers, pupils should recite in unison the times tables selected. Teacher should tap his/her cane on table to keep time.

An explanation about naughty pupils could be included – in Victorian times naughty children would have been caned across the bottom or hand!

10.20 If possible, pupils to go outside for drill – but they should leave and return to the classroom in silence and order.

For drill, pupils should start with correct posture – hips firm and feet together.

Arms to shoulders, sideways upward stretch, repeat counting to eight.

Turn head to the left, then to the right and repeat.

Raise heel then down again, repeat.

Turn knees outwards, bend and repeat.

Run around in a large circle, jogging the walking.

Stand at ease.

Recess: play with Victorian toys.

10.35 The next class is spelling. Teacher instructs pupils to sit up straight and write the correct spelling (on their slates) of the following words: school; discipline; children; punishment; gentle; obey; respect; education.

Pupils may raise their hands quietly if they wish to ask a question.

Then the class should repeat the vowels a – e – i – o – u.

10.50 The next session should be on writing. The monitors should pass around writing scripts, slates and chalk. Victorian pupils would have learnt to write in ‘copperplate’ style. Teacher should emphasise the importance of good

handwriting for those who want to be clerks (in Victorian times).

- 11.15** Monitors collect all material. The class should recite the alphabet and practice correct pronunciation of the letters.
- 11.30** Pupils receive their reading scripts and are instructed to read one by one.
- 12.10** Prayers are then said again, and the class is dismissed for lunch.

Pupils can then ask questions, and should be encouraged to explain/describe how they felt about their Victorian classroom experience.



Year 5 pupils, from Hill View Junior School, experience the Victorian classroom at the Old Donnison School, Sunderland.
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