



Victorian Schoolroom at Reading Museum

At the museum we have a supply of pinafores for girls, waistcoats and Eton collars for boys. Some schools do like to come to the session in their own costume. If you would like to do this, the following suggestions may be helpful for you.

Male Teachers:

- Black tail coat or black frock coat - or any dark jacket
- Dark trousers
- White shirt and stiff, stand up, wing collar
- Neck tie or small silk scarf used as a cravat
- Top hat useful for an authentic look on special occasions
- Dark socks and shoes
- Other details such as watch chain or old spectacles are also useful

***N.B.** in general a mortar board and gown would be unusual in an elementary school since the headmaster would probably not have had a university degree.*

Female Teachers:

- Long black or plain dark coloured Victorian style dress or a dark plain blouse and long dark skirt
- Alternatively a white blouse and dark skirt which was beginning to become fashionable in the later Victorian era
- Suitable dark coloured shawl or short fitted jacket
- Shoes which need to be dark and flat, worn with dark thick tights
- Hair tied up or drawn off face, minimal make up or none at all
- A lace cap or other hat
- Props such as Victorian jewellery, spectacles or keys attached to the belt would be useful, but remember that Victorian teachers were not well paid!

Boys can wear:

- Dark jacket or waistcoat
- 'Granddad' shirt (cut off the collar from a ragged old shirt) or a long-sleeved white or grey school shirt. *Avoid jumpers, tee shirts or track suit tops but in the winter the schoolroom can be cold so wear extra layers underneath if needed.*
- Dark school trousers. Avoid jeans or tracksuit trousers
- Dark socks into which trousers can be tucked
- Alternatives: sailor collar, jacket and stiff white Eton collar, countryman's smock
- Muffler or neckerchief - worn inside the shirt collar to keep it clean
- Fingerless gloves
- Baker boy cap can be worn, but remove before entering the schoolroom. *It is also advisable to label caps as they do often get left behind!*
- Dark shoes
- Hair could be parted and smoothed down
- Ragged clothes could be worn if the boys are dressing as urchins

Girls can wear:

- Pinafore worn over a long sleeved and dark calf-length skirt or long dress which is plain and dark, or which has a small flowered print
- Most children at a national school would have been very poorly dressed in shabby, torn hand-me-downs that did not fit properly
- Flat, dark shoes

- Plain knee length socks or thick tights
- Long hair should be tied back off the face with a plain hair ribbon at the nape of the neck. A section of hair can be gathered up and tied with a ribbon high on the back of the head but pony tails are not authentic. Hair can be plaited in plain plaits. Girls who have long hair might choose to tie it in rags the night before to have ringlets.
- Cotton sun bonnet or straw hat
- Girls did not wear trousers in the Victorian period

We suggest that pupils do not wear jewellery, watches, plastic hair ornaments, nail varnish and other 21st century items. In the Victorian era children would have been expected to bring a cotton rag or handkerchief, possibly pinned to the clothes, rather than paper tissues. It is also worth remembering that sticking plasters had not been invented. You could cover up any obvious plasters with cotton rags.

For more information visit our website
www.readingmuseum.org.uk