

## WARM UP

- 1 Can you remember the dates of Queen Victoria's reign?**

## THE VICTORIAN COMPROMISE

The Victorian period was a time of contradiction, often referred to as the Victorian Compromise: on the one hand there was the progress brought about by the Industrial Revolution, the rising wealth of the upper and middle classes and the expanding power of Britain and its empire; on the other hand there was the poverty, disease, deprivation and injustice faced by the working classes.

The change brought about by the Industrial Revolution was rapid: towns and cities grew at an incredible pace as new factories and industries were started and thousands of people moved to the cities for work. The inventions, developments and new industries showed how advanced the country was and how it was a world power. The upper classes continued to prosper and the middle classes had the possibility to improve themselves and their fortunes. Under Queen Victoria's reign (1837-1901) the values of the Church, family and home were fundamental. The family unit was based around the authoritarian father, with the mother in a submissive role. Morality and respectability were key, and society became almost puritanical. Monuments and buildings were constructed to celebrate civic identity and pride. Philanthropy and charity were important, so libraries, wash houses and swimming baths were also built to allow members of the working classes to improve themselves. However, in reality, this was hardly possible. The mortality rate, disease and deprivation faced by the working classes in Victorian towns and cities across the country were some of the worst in the civilised world. People were forced to live in overcrowded rooms, in degraded slums with a lack of hygiene. Young children were forced to work, for example in textile mills, mines and as chimney sweeps, and poverty and debt were considered crimes to be punished with imprisonment.

It is clear that the morals, beliefs and values of the Victorians were not reflected in the reality of the society around them. Nonetheless, this contradiction meant many reformers fought to improve and change conditions for the working and lower classes, particularly in areas such as health and education.

### READING COMPREHENSION

- 2** **PET** Read the text and choose the correct option.

- What is the purpose of this text?
  - To explain the effects of the Industrial Revolution.
  - To criticise Victorian morals.
  - To describe the incongruities in the Victorian period.
  - To talk about the power of the British Empire.
- Why did towns and cities grow so quickly?
  - People no longer wanted to live in the countryside.
  - There were so many new industries and factories.
  - The upper classes had more money to spend.
  - The middle classes moved to the towns and cities.
- What were conditions like for the working class in Victorian Britain?
  - They were different depending on the location of the town.
  - They were similar to many other places in the world.
  - They were better than most other places in the world.
  - They were worse than most other places in the world.
- What happened to poor people or those in debt?
  - They were made to work harder and longer hours.
  - They were helped by charitable organisations.
  - Their children were made to work.
  - They were put in prison.
- Which sentence best describes the Victorian Compromise?
  - There was an enormous difference between Victorian values and the reality of Victorian life.
  - The upper classes did not want to make compromises in order to help the lower classes.
  - The lower and working classes did not want to improve their position.
  - There was a huge contrast between the public and private lives of Victorians.

### INTERNET RESEARCH

- 3** Find out about one of these topics regarding the Victorian period and write a short report.

- Life in a workhouse
- Life as a child chimney sweep
- Middle class family life