5. The Victorian Age

1837-1901

1837
Accession of Queen Victoria

1838
People’s Charter calls for social reforms and universal male suffrage

1839-42
First Opium War against China

1840
Queen Victoria marries Prince Albert of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha

1845
Irish Potato Famine

1846
Repeal of the Corn Laws

1851
Great Exhibition

1853-56
Crimean War

1840

1845

1846

1851

1853-56

1856-60
Second Opium War

1857
Indian Mutiny

1859
Charles Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species* is published

1860
The Republican candidate Abraham Lincoln wins the presidential election

1856-60

1857

1859

1860

1861-65
American Civil War

1863
First section of London Underground, the world’s first underground railway, opens

1865
Assassination of President Lincoln

1867
Second Reform Act extends the right to vote to some sections of the working classes

1869
The Suez Canal opens and the Union Pacific Railroad connects the East and West coasts of the USA

1870
Education Act establishes the basis of elementary education

1877
Victoria becomes Empress of India

1884
Third Reform Act extends voting to all male householders

1899-1902
Second Boer War: the British against Dutch settlers in South Africa

1901
Queen Victoria dies

Interactive timeline
1. **The Queen Victoria Memorial** in front of Buckingham Palace, London, was unveiled by King George V in 1911 as the symbolic hub of the British Empire. The centrepiece by Sir Thomas Brock features the white marble figure of Queen Victoria surrounded by the symbols of her reign: Truth, Justice and Motherhood. Above her is the gilded statue of Victory, with Constancy and Courage at her feet.

2. **St Pancras Station** in London is one of the wonders of Victorian engineering and a magnificent example of Gothic architecture. Built to connect London with England’s major cities, it was opened in 1868. The renewal of the station at the beginning of this century adapted it to modern international trains and routes without altering its original beauty.

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**AN OVERALL VIEW**

A. The accession of Queen Victoria gave monarchy a new image of duty. National pride and optimistic faith in progress were celebrated in the Great Exhibition.

B. The Victorian Age was a period of widespread acceptance of a certain middle-class morality, mirrored in the royal family; however, in the last decades there was a growing sense of uncertainty and doubt.

C. The rest of Europe experienced revolutions in 1848. There was serious discontent in Britain, but the government was able to avoid revolution through compromise. Parliamentary reforms satisfied the middle classes but the working class was still without a voice, except for the Chartist movement.

D. The building of a network of railways over the whole country not only distributed goods but also moved people and united the nation.

E. Reading was a national leisure pursuit. Industrialisation had made literacy a necessity and a national education system provided it.

F. British foreign policy was based on free trade and liberalism. China was forced to open to British trade, and the Crimean War was fought to keep Russia out of the Ottoman Empire and India.

G. In the USA the gap between the industrial North and the agricultural South widened as settlers moved west and the question of slave owning split the nation in the Civil War. The Confederate South was defeated by the Unionist North and slaves were freed. Though free, black Americans faced poverty and discrimination.

H. During the Victorian Age the British Empire achieved its greatest expansion.

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**STUDY SKILLS**

18. The Cornell note-taking system
19. How to answer oral questions
20. How to write a commentary
21. How to go from text to context
22. How to give your personal response
23. How to compare and contrast different authors
24. How to develop a topic
5.1
The dawn of the Victorian Age

Queen Victoria
When Queen Victoria came to the throne in 1837, she was just 18 years old. She was to rule for almost 64 years and gave her name to an age of economic and scientific progress and social reforms. Her own sense of duty made her the ideal head of a constitutional monarchy: she remained apart from politics and yet provided stability. In 1840 she married Prince Albert of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha. They had nine children and their family life provided a model of respectability. Prince Albert was a clever man and Victoria relied more and more on his advice and help. In 1857 she gave him the title of Prince Consort, in recognition of his importance to the country.

An age of reform
The 1830s had seen the beginning of what was to be called an ‘age of reform’. The First Reform Act (1832), also called the Great Reform Act (→ 4.3), had transferred voting privileges from the small boroughs, controlled by the nobility and the gentry, to the large industrial towns, like Birmingham and Manchester. The Factory Act (1833) had prevented children aged 9 to 13 from being employed more than forty-eight hours a week, and no person between 13 and 18 could work more than seventy-two hours a week. The Poor Law Amendment Act (1834) had reformed the old Poor Laws, dating from Elizabeth I, with the creation of workhouses, institutions where the poor received board and lodging in return for work.

Workhouses and religion
Life in the workhouses was appalling on account of their system of regimentation, hard work and a monotonous diet. The poor had to wear uniforms and their families were split. This apparent hard line was due in part to an optimistic faith in progress and to the Puritan virtues of hard work, frugality and duty. The idea behind the workhouses was that awareness of such a dreadful life would inspire the poor to try to improve their own conditions.

Workhouses were mainly run by the Church. Religion was a strong force. In industrial areas the nonconformist Churches, such as Methodists, promoted study and abstinence from alcohol.

Chartism
In 1838 a group of working-class radicals drew up a People’s Charter demanding equal electoral districts, universal male suffrage, a secret ballot, paid MPs, annually elected Parliaments and abolition of the property qualifications for membership. No one in power was ready for such democracy and the Chartist movement failed. However, their influence was later felt when, in 1867, the Second Reform Act enfranchised part of the urban male working class in England and Wales for the first time and, in 1872, the secret ballot was introduced with the Ballot Act.

The Irish Potato Famine
Bad weather and an unknown plant disease from America caused the destruction of potato crops in 1845. Ireland, whose agriculture depended on potatoes, experienced a terrible famine, during which a lot of people died and...
many emigrated, mostly to America, in search of a better life. The Irish crisis forced the Prime Minister, Sir Robert Peel, to abolish the Corn Laws in 1846. These laws imposed tariffs on imported corn, keeping the price of bread artificially high to protect the landed interests.

**Technological progress**

In the mid-years of the 19th century, England experienced a second wave of industrialisation which brought economic, cultural and architectural change. While European monarchies were toppled by revolutions in 1848, England avoided the revolutionary wave. In 1851 a Great Exhibition, organised by Prince Albert, showed the world Britain's industrial and economic power. The exhibition was housed at the Crystal Palace, a huge structure of glass and steel designed by Sir Joseph Paxton and erected in Hyde Park. More than 15,000 exhibitors from all over the world displayed their goods to millions of visitors. People became very fond of exhibitions, so money was invested in setting up several museums, including the Natural History Museum, the Science Museum and what is now called the Victoria and Albert Museum. Entrance was free. The building of the London Underground began in 1860 and railways started to transform the landscape and people's lives. They transported large quantities of raw materials and products quickly and cheaply. People were able to travel for work and leisure, and the middle classes could live in the suburbs instead of the crowded town centres.

**Foreign policy**

Steel steamships expanded the Victorians' world even further. In the mid-19th century, England was involved in the two Opium Wars against China, which was trying to suppress the opium trade. The First Opium War (1839-42) was fought between China and Britain, while the Second Opium War (1856-60), also known as the Anglo-French War in China, was fought by Britain and France against China. England gained access to five Chinese ports and control of Hong Kong. The most lucrative colony of the British Empire was India. In 1857 widespread rebellion, known as the Indian Mutiny, against British rule began, after which the Indian administration was given fewer responsibilities. Britain also supported some liberal causes like Italian independence from the Austrians. When Russia became too powerful against the weak Turkish Empire, the Crimean War (1853-56) was fought. It began as a dispute between Russia and the Ottoman Turks, but soon France and Britain got involved since they wanted to limit Russia's power in the area. The Crimean War was the first conflict reported in newspapers by journalists 'on the ground'. People were genuinely shocked by the reports. Florence Nightingale (1820-1910) volunteered to lead a team of 38 nurses at Scutari base hospital during the war and she became known as the 'Lady with the Lamp' for her night rounds giving personal care to the wounded. Once back in England, she formed an institution for the development of the nursing profession.
Prince Albert of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha (1819-61) was the second son of Ernest III, Duke of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, and Victoria’s cousin. He married her shortly after her accession to the throne and played an important role in British public life. He became a patron of the arts and supported technological development and agricultural reforms. The German artist Franz Xaver Winterhalter (1805-73) painted several portraits of the royal family. In this painting he depicted Prince Albert in military uniform, with spurs on his heels and his left hand resting on a large sword. Victoria and Albert enjoyed a very happy marriage and she was devastated when he died prematurely.

Franz Xaver Winterhalter, 
Portrait of Prince Albert of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, 
5.2

The Victorian compromise

A complex age

The Victorian Age was marked by complexity: it was a time of unprecedented change but also of great contradictions, often referred to as the ‘Victorian compromise’. It was an age in which progress, reforms and political stability coexisted with poverty and injustice. Listening to sermons was a popular pastime, yet vices were openly indulged. Modernity was praised but there was a revival of Gothic and Classicism in art.

Religion played an important role in people’s lives; Evangelicalism (→ 5.3), in particular, encouraged public and political action and created a lot of charities. Philanthropy led to the creation of societies which addressed every kind of poverty, and depended especially on the voluntary efforts of middle-class women. The Victorians believed in God but also in progress and science. Freedom was linked with religion as regarded freedom of conscience, with optimism over economic and political progress, and with national identity.

Respectability

Increasing emphasis was placed on education, and hygiene was encouraged to improve health care. Self-restraint, good manners and self-help came to be linked with respectability, a concept shared both by the middle and working classes.

There was general agreement on the virtues of asserting a social status, keeping up appearances and looking after a family. These things were ‘respectable’. However, respectability was a mixture of morality and hypocrisy, since the unpleasant aspects of society – dissolution, poverty, social unrest – were hidden under outward respectability.

There was growing emphasis on the duty of men to respect and protect women, seen at the same time as physically weaker but morally superior, divine guides and inspirers of men. Women controlled the family budget and brought up the children.

General attitudes to sex were a crucial aspect of respectability, with an intense concern for female chastity, and single women with a child were marginalised as ‘fallen women’. Sexuality was generally repressed in both its public and private forms, and moralising ‘prudery’ in its most extreme manifestations gradually led to the denunciation of nudity in art, the veiling of sculptured genitals and the rejection of words with a sexual connotation from everyday vocabulary.

Key ideas

WRITE down the key ideas using the prompts.

compromise

philanthropy

keeping up appearances

prudery

Competence: Reading and understanding information

READ the text again and explain:

1 why the Victorian Age was complex;

2 the role of religion in people’s lives;

3 the concept of freedom;

4 what respectability implied;

5 views of women;

6 general attitudes to sex.
The Victorian era, which covered most of the 19th century in Britain, was a time of dramatic adjustment in the lives of most of the population. It saw the rapid development of the Industrial Revolution, the growth of a wide and powerful empire and advances in medicine, transport, education and commerce. For some, it was a time of great wealth and privilege, but for the majority, life was hard with long working hours in unhealthy factories or mines and overcrowded insanitary living conditions. There was growing industrial and urban expansion which gave an affluent and pleasant life to those with affluence, but working poor. There was a huge increase in the population, which nearly doubled during the century. This was particularly rapid in urban centres stimulated by the industrial growth that attracted more and more skilled and unskilled workers. But housing was inadequate and rapidly became slums with little hygiene and a high mortality rate. Often whole families shared one room with no running water, and toilets were communal pits.

Child labour was common and very young children were employed at minimum wages in dangerous jobs like chimney sweeping and in the coal mines. Others worked as errand boys, shoeblacks, flower sellers or match sellers in the streets. The author Charles Dickens (→ 5.14), for example, began working at the age of 12 in a blacking factory when his father was put into a debtors’ prison. The more fortunate managed to find work as apprentices to respectable trades like building or as domestic servants, but working hours were long for them too.

The widespread poverty and harsh reality of the working-class children were overshadowed by an even more shocking underclass made up of the most vulnerable in society, often young orphans totally dependent on the support of others. Destitute children often turned to crime or were enrolled in criminal gangs. The towns were also home to the expanding industrial and commercial middle classes. Their new affluence led to an increased demand for goods and services, and factories and workshops provided clothes, toys, fine cutlery, silverware, pottery and glass. Goods that in the previous century would only have been seen in aristocrats’ houses were now to be found in every middle-class home. The middle classes were usually self-employed merchants and shopkeepers who lived in large houses, educated their children and employed servants. White-collar work on the railways, in banks or for the government was also increasing, producing a respectable lower middle class.

Both the upper and lower middle classes desired respectability and the queen became their iconic symbol. She represented the ideal femininity that revolved around the family, motherhood and propriety. She and her adored husband Albert, with their nine children, were seen as a model. It was partly due to this reality that the Victorian Age was the first in which childhood was recognised as a distinct and precious phase in life and the Victorians entertained their children with imaginative stories about animals like Black Beauty by Anna Sewell (1820-78), with adventure books like Treasure Island by R.L. Stevenson (→ 5.22) or with the eccentric brilliance of Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland by Lewis Carroll (→ 5.16).
1. The urban working poor in Victorian England lived in
   A. communal cottages.
   B. converted farms.
   C. unhealthy conditions.
   D. factory grounds.

2. Child labour was common in
   A. dirty or dangerous trades like the army.
   B. factories, mines, street trades and domestic service.
   C. agricultural areas.
   D. the privileged classes.

3. Which social classes expanded the most in this period?
   A. The upper middle class.
   B. The working class.
   C. The lower middle class.
   D. The middle and lower middle classes.

4. The queen was seen as an iconic symbol of
   A. upper-class superiority.
   B. feminine beauty.
   C. middle-class respectability.
   D. majesty and tolerance.

5. In the Victorian Age childhood
   A. was recognised as an important stage in life.
   B. became less important.
   C. was an important source for literature.
   D. became the symbol of respectability.

6. Which of the following sentences best describes the main characteristics of Victorian Britain, according to the article?
   A. The time was one of incredible opportunities for people at all levels of society.
   B. The quality of life could dramatically vary in different social realities.
   C. Victorians were hypocrites who did not even try to see the reality around them.
   D. This was one of the best times to be British.

**Listening – Part 2**

2. **Sentence Completion.** You will hear a History teacher talking about the coming of the railways. For questions 1-10, complete the sentences with a word or short phrase.

   Before the railways (1) _________________ had been the principal means of transporting goods.
   By (2) _________________ George Stephenson had shown that a (3) _________________ was possible when the Stockton to Darlington line was opened.
   In 1831 the famous engineer Isambard Kingdom Brunel began the construction of a railway line from (4) _________________.
   By 1840 the cities of Birmingham, Manchester and Brighton were connected to London by nearly (5) _________________ of railway track.
   The building of the railways required the employment of tens of thousands of engineers, mechanics, repairmen and technicians, as well as (6) _________________.
   The railway was an important stimulus to industry in the country as the (7) _________________ costs meant goods cost less and were available to a wider market.
   Travel by rail also made it possible for people to go on (8) _________________ to the country or the sea.
   Fresh goods could be brought into towns from the countryside and (9) _________________ could be sent out from London all over the country.
   New towns grew up around the new railway stations and people could live (10) _________________ from their workplaces than before.

**Writing – Part 2**

3. **An Article.** You have been asked by your school’s History Club to write an article about the living conditions in the Victorian Age. Write 140-190 words.
At the beginning of the 19th century epidemiological measuring and mapping of mortality led to the clear association of pollution and disease, followed by appropriate environmental health measures. In 1831 cholera made its first appearance in England. The first symptom of cholera was nausea, followed by stomach ache, vomiting and diarrhoea so profuse that it caused victims to die of dehydration. When a major breakthrough came in 1854, the British physician John Snow (1813-58) demonstrated that infection was not spread by miasmas – bad smells arising from sewers, garbage pits and other foul-smelling sites of organic decay. As people did not have running water or modern toilets in their houses, they used to dump their sewage into rivers or town wells. It was this habit which led to a rapid spread of the disease, according to Doctor Snow. He realised that these conditions characterised several London areas and that if cholera epidemics had to be eliminated, wells and water pipes should be kept isolated from drains and sewers. To avoid a clash with most of the physicians of the time, who refused the theory that germs could cause the disease, Snow did not directly state that a living organism could cause cholera. Instead, he spoke about a particular ‘poison’ that could ‘multiply itself’ within the digestive tracts of cholera victims, before being scattered to new victims through polluted food or water. From the end of 1849 until 1853 Britain experienced few cases of cholera. Snow continued to develop his theory that drinking water was the primary means of contagion. In 1883 a German physician, Robert Koch (1843-1910), finally identified the bacterium *Vibrio cholerae* as the causative agent. He stated that cholera was not contagious from person to person, but it was spread only through unsanitary water or food supply sources. This was a major victory for Snow’s theory. The cholera epidemics in Europe and the United States ended towards the end of the 19th century, when cities finally improved water supply sanitation.
SURGERY AND ANAESTHESIA

Methods for reducing the sensation of pain during surgery date back to ancient times. Before the 19th century, when patients needed surgery for illness or injury, they had to rely on alcohol, opium (a natural narcotic derived from the opium poppy) or fumes from an anaesthetic-soaked cloth in order to lessen the pain of the surgeon’s knife. A group of men used to hold the patient down during an operation in case the opium or alcohol wore off. Under these conditions, a lot of patients died of shock caused by the pain itself.

During the 1840s nitrous oxide, ether and chloroform were first used as anaesthetic agents. In 1799 the English chemist Sir Humphry Davy (1778-1829) had discovered nitrous oxide as an anaesthetic. However, it was only in the next century that the American dentist Horace Wells (1815-48) began to use nitrous oxide as an anaesthetic during tooth surgery.

The surgeon Crawford Williamson Long (1815-78) was the first to use ether during an operation in Georgia in 1842. However, this operation was not recorded and official credit went to another dentist, William Thomas Green Morton (1819-68), who made a public demonstration of an operation using ether in a Boston hospital in 1846. In the same period the surgeon John Collins Warren (1778-1856) removed a neck tumour without the patient feeling any pain thanks to ether. After that, ether general anaesthesia began to be practised all over the United States and Europe.

Chloroform was introduced as a surgical anaesthetic by the Scottish obstetrician Sir James Young Simpson (1811-70) in 1847 for pain during childbirth. This substance was also used by John Snow for Queen Victoria’s eighth confinement in 1853. Specialised surgical instruments and techniques followed with mixed results, since unsterile equipment used to lead to fatal infection. Antiseptic surgical procedures were introduced by Joseph Lister (1827-1912), who used carbolic acid (phenol) in 1869 in Edinburgh. What followed were aseptic procedures, involving sterilisation of whole environments.

5.3

Early Victorian thinkers

Evangelicalism

Victorian values found their basis in some of the movements of thought of the age. The religious movement known as Evangelicalism influenced Victorian emphasis upon moral conduct as the test of the good Christian. Inspired by the teachings of John Wesley (1703-91) – the founder, with his brother, of Methodism (→ 3.3) –, the Evangelicals believed in:

- the literal truth of the Bible;
- obedience to a strict code of morality which opposed many forms of entertainment;
- dedication to humanitarian causes and social reform.

Bentham’s Utilitarianism

The other movement which exerted an important influence on 19th-century social thinking was Utilitarianism, based on Jeremy Bentham’s (1748-1832) principles. The origins of this movement can be traced back to the Greek philosopher Epicurus (341-270 BC). According to Utilitarianism, an action is morally right if it has consequences that lead to happiness, and wrong if it brings about the reverse. Therefore all institutions should be tested in the light of reason and common sense to determine whether they are useful, measuring the extent to which they provide for the material happiness of the greatest number of people.

Utilitarianism suited the interests of the middle class and contributed to the Victorian conviction that any problem could be overcome through reason.

Mill and the empiricist tradition

The utilitarian indifference to human and cultural values was firmly attacked by many intellectuals of the time, including Charles Dickens (→ 5.14) and John Stuart Mill (1806-73), a major figure in the British empiricist tradition. Educated by his father according to the principles of Benthamite philosophy, Mill found them inadequate with regard to the rapid changes of his time, and restated his belief as follows:

- he maintained that happiness is a state of the mind and the spirit, not a mere search for selfish pleasures;
- he thought legislation should have a more positive function in trying to help men develop their natural talents and personalities;
- he conceived a good society as one where the free interplay of human character creates the greatest variety;
- he believed progress comes from mental energy, and therefore accorded great importance to education and art;
- he promoted a long series of reforms including the causes of popular education, trade union organisation, the development of cooperatives, the extension of representation to all citizens, and the emancipation of women (→ Route 8).
Challenges from the scientific field

In the mid-Victorian Age new challenges came from the fields of geology, biology, archaeology and astronomy. Geologists found fossils in rocks and began to question the Book of Genesis. The question was brought to the wide public by Sir Charles Lyell’s *Principles of Geology* (1830-33) and Robert Chambers’s *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation* (1844). In his work *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection* (1859) Charles Darwin (1809-82) presented his theory of evolution and natural selection. He later developed it in his work *The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex* (1871). According to Darwin’s theory:

- all living creatures in existence have developed their forms through a slow process of change and adaptation in a struggle for survival;
- favourable physical conditions determine the survival of a species, unfavourable ones its extinction;
- man evolved, like any other animal, from a less highly organised form, namely a monkey.

On the one hand, Darwin’s theory discarded the version of creation given by the Bible; on the other hand, it seemed to show that the universe was not static but perpetually developing, that the strongest survived and the weakest deserved to be defeated.

The Oxford Movement

British Catholics replied to the challenges of science by returning to the ancient doctrines and rituals. The religious revival found its expression in the movement headed by the English cardinal John Henry Newman (1801-90), which went under the name of ‘Oxford Movement’ because it began at Oxford University.

Route 8: Women in the 19th century
The difference between the North and the South

The first half of the 19th century in America was characterised by economic expansion, social change, impulse towards scientific discovery and inventions, and an extraordinary moment of literary expression. The political situation was tense because of the economic differences between the northern and southern regions. While industrialisation was well established in the North, the economy of the South was still based on the vast plantations of tobacco and cotton, and on slavery. There was also a huge difference in the density of population: the white population increased, due to the immigrants from Europe who settled especially in the North, bringing with them their languages and customs. In the South, instead, there were about 4 million black slaves. Furthermore, life in the American South was based on a rigidly divided class system, with the aristocracy of the plantation owners still linked to the old values of gallantry and honour. After the 1830s several northern States adopted emancipation, while the international demand for cotton meant the economy of the South continued to rely on slave labour. On the one hand, the abolitionists attacked the exploitation of slaves, the separation from their families and the cruelty they suffered, and the fact that they were given no education. On the other hand, the supporters of slavery held that it was an institution which gave the blacks employment, protection and taught them the principles of Christian faith.

The Civil War

Northern abolitionists, who included writers, intellectuals and religious associations, began to organise themselves into a political movement. From what had formerly been the Whig Party arose the Republican Party, which demanded that slavery be excluded from all territories of the Union. In 1860 the Republican candidate Abraham Lincoln (1809-65) won the presidential election. Soon after, 11 southern States seceded and formed the Confederate States of America, under the presidency of Jefferson Davis (1808-89). War followed because Lincoln, supported by a majority of northerners, refused to concede that any American State had the constitutional right to withdraw from the Union. The Civil War broke out in 1861 and lasted four years, ending in 1865, when the blue northern troops commanded by Ulysses S. Grant (1822-85) defeated the grey Confederates led by Robert Lee (1807-70). Five days later, President Lincoln was assassinated by a southern fanatic. The poet Walt Whitman wrote O Captain! my Captain! under the emotional impact of his death, pointing out how important Lincoln’s leadership had been.

The Civil War determined what kind of nation the United States would be – an indivisible nation with a sovereign national government – and it ended the institution of slavery. However, these achievements cost about 625,000 lives. It was the largest and most destructive conflict in the Western world between the end of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815 and the onset of World War I in 1914.

The abolition of slavery

Furthermore, the abolition of slavery, sanctioned by the 13th Amendment to the Constitution in 1865, did not grant the blacks equality and economic security. They were free but without money and a home. Some migrated to the industrial cities in the North, others remained with their old masters in the South, who, impoverished by the war, could not afford to pay wages, but would share the crops with the workers and provide them with tools and a cabin.

A wave of resentment and violence, embodied by the racist 'Ku Klux Klan' movement, terrorised the blacks and their families. The so-called 'black codes' were created, which segregated the blacks in schools, hospitals and means of transport.
A new version of the American dream
While the economy of the South had collapsed during the war, the northern factories had increased their output to supply military needs. The country’s natural resources – including coal, copper, iron and oil – were fully exploited. Big fortunes were made, and financial empires were created by men who rose from nothing, like Cornelius Vanderbilt (1794-1877) and John Rockefeller (1839-1937). They embodied a new version of the ‘American dream’: the myth of the self-made man who went from ‘rags to riches’. The other side of the coin was that the majority of workers were exploited and did not have a share in the wealth and leisure. They soon organised themselves and, in 1866, founded the American Federation of Labor (AFL), which became the strongest group of trade unions.

The expansion and settlement in the West
At the same time expansion and settlement in the West were encouraged above all by the discovery of gold in California in 1848-49, which resulted in the ‘gold rush’. Then the Homestead Act (1862) granted free soil to the first occupants. This migration westwards had two main consequences: it led to the disappearance of the frontier and to the extermination of buffaloes, with the consequent starvation of the American Indians, who were subjugated, mass-deported or brutally exterminated. Cattlemen – the cowboys – became the new Western symbols, so deeply rooted in American tradition.

COMPETENCE: READING AND ORGANISING INFORMATION

1 READ the text and complete the table below with the differences between the North and the South in America in the 19th century.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>North</th>
<th>South</th>
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<tbody>
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</table>

2 FOCUS on the question of the abolition of slavery and gather information about abolitionists and supporters of slavery.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abolitionists</th>
<th>Supporters of slavery</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Who they were</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What they said</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

3 WRITE down the causes and consequences of the American Civil War.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Causes</th>
<th>Consequences</th>
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COMPETENCE: READING AND UNDERSTANDING INFORMATION

4 ANSWER the following questions.
1 How did the lives of the blacks change after the end of the Civil War?
2 What was the ‘American dream’? Who embodied it at that time?
3 What encouraged the expansion and settlement in the West? What were its consequences?
INTERNET POINT
Abraham Lincoln

COMPETENCE: USING TECHNOLOGY TO ACQUIRE AND INTERPRET INFORMATION

1 CARRY out some research about Abraham Lincoln. You can start by browsing the sites www.history.com/topics/us-presidents/abraham-lincoln and www.history.com/topics/american-civil-war/gettysburg-address.

1 Collect information about:
   - Abraham Lincoln’s early life;
   - his road to the White House;
   - the wartime years and the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863;
   - Lincoln’s victory and death.

2 Surf the Net and listen to the famous Gettysburg Address delivered by Lincoln during the Civil War, in 1863, at the dedication of the Soldiers’ National Cemetery in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. It is regarded as one of the most famous and poignant speeches in American history. Then answer the questions below.

Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth, upon this continent, a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.

Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived, and so dedicated, can long endure. We are met here on a great battlefield of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of it as a final resting place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this.

But in a larger sense we cannot dedicate – we cannot consecrate – we cannot hallow this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note, nor long remember, what we say here, but can never forget what they did here. It is for us, the living, rather to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they have, thus far, so nobly carried on. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us – that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they here gave the last full measure of devotion – that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain; that this nation shall have a new birth of freedom; and that this government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.

3 Say:
   - what Lincoln reminds the audience of in the first two lines;
   - what he points out in the second sentence;
   - what meaning the war acquires;
   - who Lincoln wants to remember when he says ‘We are met here on a great battlefield of that war’;
   - what rhetorical devices he uses and what their aim is;
   - what the final two sentences of the address sound like;
   - how Lincoln finishes his speech.

4 Write down the key ideas of this speech.
The Liberal and the Conservative Parties

When Prince Albert tragically died from typhoid in 1861, Queen Victoria withdrew from society and spent the next ten years in mourning. She still remained an important figure even though the political panorama was changing with the regrouping of the parties. The Liberal Party, as it was called from the 1860s, included the former Whigs, some Radicals and a large minority of businessmen; the party was led by William Gladstone (1809-98). The Conservative Party, which had evolved from the Tories in the 1830s, reaffirmed its position under the leadership of Benjamin Disraeli (1804-81).

Benjamin Disraeli

Disraeli briefly became Prime Minister in 1868 and regained the office after the elections in 1874. In his second term, his government passed an Artisans’ and Labourers’ Dwellings Act (1875), which allowed local public authorities to clear the slums and provided housing for the poor; a Public Health Act (1875), which provided sanitation as well as running water; and a Factory Act (1878), which limited the working hours per week. Disraeli’s foreign policy was dominated by the Eastern Question, that is, the decay of the Ottoman Empire and the attempt by other European countries, such as Russia, to gain power there. In 1875 Disraeli encouraged the purchase of more shares in the Suez Canal Company to protect Britain’s route to the East.

William Gladstone

Gladstone was Prime Minister four times, starting in 1868. At that time, reforming legislation focused on education. Elementary schools had long been organised by the Church; the 1870 Education Act started a national system by introducing ‘board schools’, mainly in the poorer areas of the towns. By 1880 elementary education had become compulsory. Other reforms included the legalisation of trade unions in 1871, with the Trade Union Act, and the introduction of the secret ballot at elections in 1872, with the Ballot Act. Gladstone was re-elected three times (1880, 1886, 1892). The Third Reform Act of 1884 extended voting to all male householders, including miners, mill-workers and farm labourers. This extension of the franchise gave public opinion an important role as a political force.

The Irish Parliamentary Party, sitting as a group in Westminster and led by Charles Stewart Parnell (1846-91), demanded self-government for Ireland – the so-called ‘Home Rule’. Gladstone believed that Home Rule was the way to bring peace to Ireland and tried to get Parliament to pass a bill three times; but an Irish government was granted only after World War I (→ 6.4).
The Anglo-Boer Wars
The struggle with France at the beginning of the 19th century had led to Britain's global hegemony – with its naval power and its enormous financial and economic strength, Britain seemed invulnerable. However, since Waterloo, its foreign policy had been defensive. Many areas of the world were characterised by political and cultural fragmentation and it was there that Britain began to gain control without major political intervention. This was the situation in South America, in Asia and most of all in Africa, where Britain competed with the other European countries to divide up the continent. In South Africa, by the 1870s, the British controlled two colonies, Cape Colony and Natal, while the Dutch settlers, the Boers, had the two republics of the Transvaal and the Orange Free State. When Britain took over Transvaal in 1877, the Boers rebelled and war broke out. The Boer Wars (1880-1902) ended in 1902 with a British victory.

Empress of India
In 1877 Queen Victoria was given a new title, Empress of India. In the last decades of the 19th century, the British Empire occupied an area of 4 million square miles and more than 400 million people were ruled over by the British. The Empire, however, was becoming more difficult to control. There was a growing sense of the 'white man's burden' (→ 5:23), a difficult combination of the duty to spread Christian civilisation, encouraging toleration and open communication and at the same time promoting commercial interests. It was a strongly felt obligation to provide leadership where States were failing or non-existent, especially in Africa and India. India was economically important as a market for British goods and strategically necessary to British control of Asia from the Persian Gulf to Shanghai. By 1850 the East India Company directly ruled most of northern, central and south-eastern India. In the late Victorian period the new imperial government became more ambitious and through free market economics it destroyed traditional farming and caused the deindustrialisation of India. At one time the main manufacturer of cotton cloth for the world, India, now became the largest importer of England's cotton.

The end of an era
The Victorian Age came to an end with the death of Queen Victoria in 1901. For almost a century she had embodied decorum, stability and continuity. Her Golden and Diamond Jubilees for 50 and 60 years on the throne had been celebrated with huge public parades, and for her funeral London streets were packed with mourners. She was buried beside her beloved husband in the Frogmore mausoleum at Windsor Castle.

Key ideas
WRITE down the key ideas using the prompts.

- hygiene and sanitation
- education
- extension of the franchise
- global hegemony
- the British Empire
**COMPETENCE: READING AND UNDERSTANDING INFORMATION**

2 **READ** the text on pages 17-18 again and explain what is meant by the ‘regrouping’ of the parties.

3 **COMPLETE** the table below with the main facts of Disraeli’s and Gladstone’s governments.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Disraeli</th>
<th>Dates</th>
<th>Gladstone</th>
<th>Dates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Home policy</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Foreign policy</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4 **EXPLAIN** the following in your own words.

1 Home Rule

2 the white man’s burden

3 Golden and Diamond Jubilees

5 **DESCRIBE** the reasons that led to Britain’s global hegemony.

6 **DISCUSS** the importance of India to the British Empire and the impact of British imperialism on the Indian economy.

**COMPETENCE: USING THE VISUAL TOOLS OF COMMUNICATION**

7 **USE** the pictures on pages 17-19 to talk about the late Victorian Age.

1. Look at pictures 1 and 2. Who are the two men represented?

2. Consider pictures 4 and 5 and explain what Queen Victoria represented in the last part of her reign.
5.6
The late Victorians

**VOCABULARY**

1 MATCH the highlighted words and phrases in the text with their meaning.

1. taverns .................................................................
2. excessive desire for wealth ..............................................
3. damage ..................................................................
4. produced ..................................................................
5. strongest ..................................................................
6. handmade .................................................................
7. basis ..................................................................
8. the sale of goods through shops .................................

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1. The Temperate House at Kew Gardens, London, is the largest surviving Victorian glasshouse in the world.
2. William Logsdail, St Paul’s and Ludgate Hill, ca 1887.

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**Victorian urban society and women**

In the later years of Victoria's reign, Britain was primarily an urban society. Victorian cities had gas lighting, rubbish collection and there were many public buildings, such as town halls, railway stations, libraries and museums, music halls, boarding schools and hospitals, police stations and prisons. This was a period of a retail consumer boom – with many new shops, public houses and theatres. Even now some Victorian institutions can still be seen in British cities.

Middle-class women became increasingly involved in public life as leaders in campaigns against prostitution, as teachers and as volunteer charitable workers. Further education opportunities for women became available with the opening of women's colleges in the 1870s. However, a strong taboo remained regarding family issues such as control over property, conditions of divorce and rights over children as well as questions of sex and childbirth. The 1882 Married Women's Property Act gave married women the right to own and manage their own property independently of their husbands for the first time.

**Social Darwinism**

Darwin's theory of evolution became the foundation for various ethical and social systems, such as Social Darwinism, which developed in the 1870s. The philosopher Herbert Spencer (1820-1903) applied Darwin's theory of natural selection to human society: he argued that races, nations and social classes, like biological species, were subject to the principle of the 'survival of the fittest' and that the poor and oppressed did not deserve compassion.

Eugenics was a similar interpretation created by Darwin's cousin, Sir Francis Galton (1822-1911), and attracting many intellectuals. They exhorted the middle classes, regarded as nature's fittest, to reproduce more, especially educated women who seemed to neglect their racial duty to breed.

**Late Victorian thinkers**

In the second half of the 19th century, Britain reached the peak of its power abroad; however, some ideological conflicts were beginning to undermine the self-confident attitude that had characterised the first part of Victoria's reign. Changes regarded several fields, especially scientific achievements, industrialisation, sexuality and religion, and a growing pessimism began to affect intellectuals and artists, who expressed in different ways their sense of doubt about the stability of Victorian society. Among the thinkers of the late Victorian period, a significant role was played by those who protested against the harm caused by industrialism in man's life and in the environment. Karl Marx (1818-83) based the theories he expressed in his treatise in three volumes Das Kapital (1867, 1885, 1894) upon research done in England, the most advanced European industrial nation of the time.

His works influenced some English writers like the art critic John Ruskin (1819-1900) and the artist William Morris (1834-96). They were looking for a different form of progress, a blend of utopianism and nostalgia in which the future in many ways resembled the past. While studying at Oxford in the 1850s, William Morris drew inspiration from Ruskin's works on Gothic architecture and his criticism of the inhumanity of industrialisation, and from Thomas Malory's medieval romance Le Morte d'Arthur (→ Route 1). Together with the Pre-Raphaelite painters (→ Route 9), he started a battle against the age he was living in. He set up a firm to produce craft-made furniture, wallpaper and other decorative objects as a reaction to utilitarian mass-produced goods. In 1883 he became a militant in the Social Democratic Federation.
The spread of socialist ideas
The 1880s saw the rise of an organised political left after the foundation of the Fabian Society in 1884. It was a middle-class socialist group whose members aimed at transforming Britain into a socialist State not through revolution, as Marx advised, but by systematic, progressive reforms. Its early members included Sidney and Beatrice Webb and George Bernard Shaw (→ 5.25). The Independent Labour Party was set up in 1893; it was a non-Marxist socialist party which attracted both male and female intellectuals. Various socialist groups were joined by young skilled workers and intellectuals who read John Ruskin’s criticism of the greed, competition and ugliness of industrial society.

Patriotism
In the late 19th century, expressions of civic pride and national fervour were frequent among the British. Patriotism was deeply influenced by ideas of racial superiority. Towards the end of Victoria’s reign the British considered themselves the leaders of European civilisation. There was a belief that the ‘races’ of the world were divided by fundamental physical and intellectual differences, that some were destined to be led by others. It was thus an obligation imposed by God on the British to spread their superior way of life, their institutions, law and political system on native peoples throughout the world. This attitude came to be known as ‘Jingoism’. Colonial power and economic progress made for the optimistic outlook of many Victorians.


**COMPETENCE:**
**READING AND UNDERSTANDING INFORMATION**

2 READ the text and complete the mind map about the condition of women in late Victorian society.

3 EXPLAIN what human society and biological species had in common, according to Spencer.

4 WRITE down the key ideas of Ruskin’s and Morris’s thought.
• John Ruskin .................................................................
• William Morris ............................................................

5 HIGHLIGHT some examples of the rise of an organised political left in England.

6 ANSWER the following questions.
1 How did the British see their role in the world?
2 What was Jingoism?
3 What was the Victorian optimistic outlook based on?
Two kinds of poetry
During Victoria’s reign, poetry became more concerned with social reality and was expected to express the intellectual and moral debate of the age. This led on the one hand to the creation of majestic poetry linked to the myth and belief of the greatness of England; on the other hand to the creation of poetry more inclined towards anti-myth and disbelief which had to solve the ethical problems raised by science and progress.

The new image of the poet
Now the poet was seen as a ‘prophet’ and a ‘philosopher’. People expected that he could reconcile faith and progress, as well as sprinkle a little romance over the unromantic materialism of modern life. Optimists believed that the benefits of progress could be reached without altering the traditional social organisation or destroying the beauty of the countryside; they wanted to find a corresponding attitude in poets and to be told that modern life was as susceptible to romantic behaviour as the remote legends of King Arthur or the Italian Renaissance.

Outstanding poets
The major poets of the age were Alfred Tennyson (→ 5.13); Robert Browning (1812-89), who is remembered for his best ‘dramatic monologues’ in which he was an original creator of characters; Elizabeth Barrett Browning (→ Route 8), who wrote beautiful love sonnets; Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844-89), noted in particular for his rhythm which broke with conventional rules; and Matthew Arnold (1822-88), who used poetry to express his dissatisfaction with his time.

The dramatic monologue
The dramatic monologue is a narrative poem in which a single character may address one or more listeners. It is related to the soliloquy used in Elizabethan plays: in Hamlet’s famous soliloquy (→ T21), for example, the character addresses himself and the audience in a moment of self-exploration. In a dramatic monologue the speaking character is different from the poet himself, and is caught in a crucial moment of crisis; a non-speaking listener, whose presence has to be inferred from clues in the speaker’s monologue, is present and conditions the development of the monologue. Since the poet does not speak with his own voice, the reader has to infer whether he is intended to accept or criticise what is said by the speaker. As the speaker must be judged only on his own words, different points of view may be justified and supported. This suggestion of the absence of a unique truth was the exact opposite of the Victorian love for certainties and it paved the way to new possibilities for poetry in the Modern Age, bringing verse closely in touch with the often unpredictable movements of the human mind.

In the dramatic monologue, the tone of the language is argumentative, aiming at revealing the main character’s thoughts, thus reflecting a great interest in human psychology.

Study the visual analysis of this extract from the poem *Porphyria's Lover* from *Dramatic Lyrics* (1842) by Robert Browning.

**Be sure I looked up at her eyes**

Happy and proud; at last I knew

Porphyria worshipped me; surprise

Made my heart swell, and still it grew

While I debated what to do:

That moment she was mine, mine, fair,

Perfectly pure and good: I found

A thing to do, and all her hair

In one long yellow string I wound

Three times her little throat around,

And strangled her. No pain felt she.

I am quite sure she felt no pain.

As a shut bud that holds a bee¹,

I warily oped² her lids: again

Laughed the blue eyes without a stain⁴.

And I untightened⁵ next the tress

About her neck; her cheek once more

Blushed bright beneath my burning kiss:

I propped⁶ her head up as before,

Only, this time my shoulder bore

Her head, which droops upon it still²:

The smiling rosy little head,

So glad it has its utmost will;

That all it scorned at once is fled,

And I, its love, am gained instead!

Porphyria's love: she guessed not how

Her darling one wish would be heard.

And thus we sit together now,

And all night long we have not stirred⁸,

And yet God has not said a word!
Readers and writers
During the Victorian Age, for the first time, there was a communion of interests and opinions between writers and their readers. One reason for this close relationship was the enormous growth of the middle classes (→ B2 Exams, p. 8). Although its members belonged to many different levels where literacy had penetrated in a heterogeneous way, they were avid consumers of literature. They borrowed books from circulating libraries and read the abundant variety of periodicals. Moreover, Victorian writers themselves often belonged to the middle class.

The publishing world
A great deal of Victorian literature was first published in a serial form. Essays, verse and even novels made their first appearance in instalments in the pages of periodicals. This allowed the writer to feel he was in constant contact with his public. He was obliged to maintain the interest of his story gripping because one boring instalment would cause the public not to buy that periodical any longer. There was a further advantage because an author could always alter the story, according to its success or failure. Reviewers also had a strong influence on the reception of literary works and on the shaping of public opinion.

The Victorians’ interest in prose
The Victorians showed a marked interest in prose, and the greatest literary achievement of the age is to be found in the novel, which soon became the most popular form of literature and the main source of entertainment. The spread of scientific knowledge made the novel realistic and analytical, the spread of democracy made it social and humanitarian, while the spirit of moral unrest made it inquisitive and critical.

The novelist’s aim
During the 18th century, novels generally dealt with the adventures either of a social outcast or a more virtuous hero (→ 3.8), but their episodic structure remained the same. The idea of a thematic unity was brought in by Jane Austen (→ 4.16), with the theme of a girl’s choice of a husband, and by the Gothic writers (→ 4.6) who set their novels in a remote, at times strange and exotic, past. In the 1840s novelists felt they had a moral and social responsibility to fulfil. They wanted to reflect the social changes that had been in progress for a long time, such as the Industrial Revolution, the struggle for democracy and the growth of towns and cities. The novelists of the first part of the Victorian period described society as they saw it, and, with the exception of those sentiments which offended current morals, particularly regarding sex, nothing escaped their scrutiny. They were aware of the evils of their society, such as the terrible conditions of manual workers and the exploitation of children. However, their criticism was much less radical than that of contemporary European writers, like Balzac, Flaubert, Turgenev and Dostoyevsky, because the historical conditions of Britain were quite different from those of France or Russia.
Didacticism was one of the main features of Victorian novels, because novelists also conceived literature as a vehicle to correct the vices and weaknesses of the age.

**The narrative technique**
The voice of the omniscient narrator provided a comment on the plot and erected a rigid barrier between 'right' and 'wrong' behaviours, light and darkness. Retribution and punishment were to be found in the final chapter of the novel, where the whole texture of events, adventures and incidents had to be explained and justified.

**Setting and characters**
The setting chosen by most Victorian novelists was the city, which was the main symbol of the industrial civilisation as well as the expression of anonymous lives and lost identities. In their effort to portray the individual motives for human action and all that binds men and women to the community, Victorian writers concentrated on the creation of realistic characters the public could easily identify with, in terms of comedy – especially Dickens's characters (→ 5.14) – or dramatic passion – the Brontë sisters’ heroines (→ 5.15).

**Types of novels**
- **The novel of manners.** It kept close to the original 19th-century models (→ 4.8). It dealt with economic and social problems and described a particular class or situation. A master of this genre was William M. Thackeray (→ Text Bank 47).
- **The humanitarian novel.** Charles Dickens's novels are mostly admired for their tone, combining humour with a sentimental request for reform for the less fortunate. They constitute the bulk of what is generally called the 'humanitarian novel' or the 'novel of purpose', which could be divided into novels of a 'realistic', 'fantastic' or 'moral' nature according to their predominant tone or issue dealt with.
- **The novel of formation.** The *Bildungsroman* (novel of formation or education) became very popular after the publication of Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and Dickens's *David Copperfield* (→ Text Bank 50-51). These novels dealt with one character’s development from early youth to some sort of maturity. The works by the Brontë sisters can be linked to the persistence of the Romantic and Gothic traditions; they focus on intense subjective experiences rather than on a world of social interaction.
- **Literary nonsense.** A particular aspect of Victorian literature is what is called 'nonsense', created by Edward Lear (1812-88) and Lewis Carroll (→ 5.16). In his famous novel *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865), Carroll created a nonsensical universe where the social rules and conventions are disintegrated, the cause-effect relationship does not exist, and time and space have lost their function of giving an order to human experience.

**Women writers**
It is important to underline that a great number of novels published during the mid-Victorian period, up to 1870-80, were written by women such as Charlotte and Emily Brontë and George Eliot (the pen name of Mary Ann Evans) (→ Text Bank 64, Route 8). This output is surprising considering the state of subjection of Victorian women. It is less surprising if one remembers that the majority of novel-buyers and readers were women. Middle-class women had more time to spend at home than men and could devote part of the day to reading. However, it was not easy to get published, and some women used a male pseudonym in order to see their work in print. Creative writing, like art and other public activities, was considered 'masculine'. From Jane Austen to George Eliot, the woman's novel had moved in the direction of a realistic exploration of the daily lives and values of women within the family and the community.
2. READ the text on pages 24-25 and make notes under the following headings.
1. A close relationship between writers and readers
2. Circulating libraries
3. The publishing world
4. A novel with new features
5. A novel deeply linked to society
6. The role of the narrator
7. A new approach to setting
8. The new characters

3. COMPLETE the diagram about the main trends in Victorian novels.

4. EXPLAIN why the output of women writers increased in the Victorian Age and why women used a male pseudonym.
The New England Renaissance

The centre of American cultural life in the 19th century was New England, where the influence of Puritanism was still very strong. The period from the 1830s to the end of the American Civil War is known as the 'New England Renaissance', also called 'American Renaissance'. The term did not indicate the rebirth of something, but the beginning of a truly American literature, with themes and a style of its own.

The Puritan heritage

The great literary output of the period constituted a sort of reaction against the Puritan doctrine. However, the Puritan heritage could still be traced in the flourishing of symbols and emblems, as well as in the use of allegory that writers such as Nathaniel Hawthorne (→ 5.17) and Herman Melville (→ 5.18) widely employed in their works.

Transcendentalism

The most influential figure in framing the thought of the American Renaissance was Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-82), who led the Transcendental Club and expressed his philosophy, called 'Transcendentalism', in his essay *Nature* (1836). His ideas developed under various influences, including English Romanticism, German Idealism, political liberalism and eastern mysticism, which Emerson combined in a new, 'American' way. The key ideas of Transcendentalism were:

- all reality was seen as a single unity (oneness and multiplicity were the same thing), a concept which well suited the reality of the 'melting pot', of a country where people from all over the world formed a national unity;
- contact with nature was the best means to reach truth and awareness of the unity of all things. Emerson saw nature according to its 'uses': as a commodity, as a source of beauty and symbolic images, as discipline in educating man to understanding and reason;
- the 'over-soul' was the spiritual principle linking everything together;
- man was the emanation of the over-soul, and the emphasis lay on his individuality, on his self-education.

The power of human consciousness

This philosophy encouraged an optimistic and self-reliant point of view, which found expression particularly in the poems of Walt Whitman (→ 5.19). Transcendentalism praised mankind's ability to transcend the mortal world through reflection and intuition. This belief in the power of human consciousness to discover eternal truths in the natural world became the dominant theme in Emily Dickinson's poetry (→ 5.20).

The most faithful follower of Emerson’s theories was his friend Henry David Thoreau (1817-62), who published *Walden, or Life in the Woods* (1854). In this work he described the two years he had lived in a hut in the woods near Walden Pond, Massachusetts, in order to prove that an individual can lead a rich life in solitude, living only on what he grows. Thoreau also wrote an essay, *Civil Disobedience* (1849), where he stated his belief in the individual's right to resist the power and the laws of the State when they were in conflict with his own honest, moral convictions.
The realistic novel
The late Victorian novel mirrored a society linked to a growing crisis in the moral and religious fields. Darwin's evolution theory (→ 5.3) influenced the structure and the organisation of the realistic novel, which started to follow an evolutionist pattern. Coincidences were fully exploited to solve the intricacies of the plot, and chance played a Darwinian role. The best representatives of the realistic novel were Thomas Hardy (→ 5.21) and George Eliot (→ Text Bank 64, Route 8). While Eliot focused on the psychological and moral complexity of human beings, Hardy presented strong individuals, the manifestations of the strong forces of nature to whom he opposed the strong social forces of history and human civilisation. Hardy's protagonists are also defined by their native regions and, at the same time, painfully alienated by them.

The psychological novel
Robert Louis Stevenson's The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde (→ 5.22) tried to capture the monstrous, illogical aspects of life and described the double nature of Victorian society. Stevenson seems to be concerned not only with the duality present in every individual but also in Victorian society as a whole, where aristocracy was only superficially kind and refined, but hid dark secrets in their beautiful houses. Most of the action in the novel takes place at night and much of it in the poorer districts of London, considered the place of evil-doers. Most significantly, Mr Hyde enters and leaves Dr Jekyll's house through the back door, which seems a metaphor for the evil that lies behind the beautiful façade of civilisation and refinement. The names Jekyll and Hyde have become synonymous with multiple personality disorder.

Colonial literature
The Victorian period marked the highest point of British imperialism. The most obvious influence of colonialism on Victorian literature can be found in the works of Rudyard Kipling (→ 5.23). His novels (→ Text Bank 69) and short stories are set in the distant lands colonised by Britain: it is the reality of colonialism which makes up the background where an adventurous narrative is made possible. Kipling exalted the British imperial power as a sacred duty in the poem The White Man's Burden (→ T81). Here he legitimised the belief that it was the task of the white man, and in particular of the British, to carry civilisation and progress to the savages.

1. Fredric March as Henry Jekyll / Edward Hyde in the film Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde (1931) directed by Rouben Mamoulian.

**COMPETENCE:** READING AND UNDERSTANDING INFORMATION

1. **READ** about the realistic novel and explain:
   1. what the late Victorian novel mirrored;
   2. what Darwin's evolution theory influenced;
   3. who the best representatives of the realistic novel were and how they differed.

2. **FOCUS** on the psychological novel and point out:
   1. what Stevenson represented in The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde;
   2. when and where most of the action of this novel takes place;
   3. what the names Jekyll and Hyde have become synonymous with.

3. **EXPLAIN** what colonial literature was characterised by.
5.11 Aestheticism and Decadence

The birth of the Aesthetic Movement
The Aesthetic Movement developed in the universities and intellectual circles in the last decades of the 19th century. It began in France with Théophile Gautier (1811-72) and reflected the sense of frustration and uncertainty of the artist, his reaction against the materialism and the restrictive moral code of the bourgeoisie, and his need to redefine the role of art. As a result, French artists withdrew from the political and social scene and 'escaped' into aesthetic isolation, into what Gautier defined 'Art for Art's Sake.' The bohémien embodied his protest against the monotony and vulgarity of bourgeois life, leading an unconventional existence, pursuing sensation and excess, and cultivating art and beauty.

The English Aesthetic Movement
This doctrine was imported into England by James McNeill Whistler (1834-1903), an American painter who worked in England. However, the roots of the English Aesthetic Movement can be traced back to the Romantic poet John Keats (→ 4.15), as well as to Dante Gabriel Rossetti (→ Route 9). Rossetti was a remarkable example of an artist dedicated wholly to his art. John Ruskin (→ 5.6) too, in his search for beauty in life and art, even while insisting upon moral values, paved the way for the works of Walter Pater (1839-94), who is regarded as the main theorist of the Aesthetic Movement in England.

The theorist of English Aestheticism
Walter Pater's Studies in the History of the Renaissance (1873) and his masterpiece Marius the Epicurean (1885) were immediately successful, especially with the young, because of their subversive and potentially demoralising message. He rejected religious faith and said that art was the only means to halt the passage of time, the only certainty. He thought life should be lived in the spirit of art, namely 'as a work of art,' filling each passing moment with intense experience, feeling all kinds of sensations. The task of the artist was to feel sensations, to be attentive to the attractive, the courteous and the cheerful. So the artist was seen as the transcriber 'not of the world, not of mere fact, but of his sense of it.' The main implication of this new aesthetic position was that art had no reference to life, and therefore it had nothing to do with morality and did not need to be didactic.

Walter Pater's influence
Pater's works had a deep influence on the poets and writers of the 1890s, especially Oscar Wilde (→ 5.24), as well as the group of artists that met in the Rhymers' Club and contributed to The Yellow Book. This periodical, published from 1894 to 1897, reflected 'decadent' taste in its sensational subjects. The term 'decadent' generally implied a process of decline of recognised values. By the end of the century it was used as an aesthetic term across Europe.

1. Aubrey Beardsley (1872-98) provided the illustrations for The Yellow Book, above all with black and white drawings.
The features of Aesthetic works
A number of features can be distinguished in the works of Aesthetic artists:
• excessive attention to the self;
• hedonistic and sensuous attitude;
• perversity in subject matter;
• disenchantment with contemporary society;
• evocative use of language.

The European Decadent Movement
Decadence must be seen as a European movement. In the late 1880s a group of French writers contributed to the journal Le Décadent; they were the Symbolists Rimbaud, Verlaine, Mallarmé, Laforgue, who were much influenced by Charles Baudelaire’s Les Fleurs du mal (1857). Joris-Karl Huysmans (1848-1907) wrote À rebours (1884), a novel whose hero, Des Esseintes, tries to create an entirely artificial life in his search for unusual sensations. This character became the model for Wilde’s dandy. The main representatives of Decadence in Italy were Gabriele D’Annunzio (1863-1938), and Guido Gozzano (1883-1916). The poetry of Rainer Maria Rilke (1875-1926) was one of the most remarkable expressions of the Decadent sensibility in the German language.

CULTURAL INSIGHT
The dandy
The term ‘dandy’, which probably derives from the Scottish nickname for ‘Andrew’, was first used in the song Yankee Doodle Dandy, sung by the British troops during the American Revolution (→ 4.1). The words of the song mocked the colourful uniform of the American soldiers: the imaginary character Yankee Doodle, standing for the American rebel, was depicted riding a pony, with a feather on his hat. So the term ‘dandy’ referred to a man who boasted about his appearance even though he was wearing odd and ordinary clothes. Vanity, extravagance and refinement were linked to the more positive idea of the dandy which developed thanks to the figure of George Bryan Brummell (1778-1840). He became the leader of early 19th-century fashion for the exquisiteness of his dress and manners, and for 20 years had the Prince Regent (later George IV) as a friend and admirer. A quarrel and gambling debts forced him to flee to France, where he eventually died in an asylum for the poor. Brummell created dandyism as a lifestyle. From England this trend spread to France, where it was connected to artistic movements, such as Symbolism and Aestheticism. Reinforced by the French influence, dandyism reappeared in England towards the end of the 19th century with the figure of Oscar Wilde.

2. John Singer Sargent, portrait of the French painter Carolus-Duran, 1879. With his casual pose and elegant clothing, he is presented as a dandy. Williamstown, Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute.
Victorian drama

5.12

Drama between 1700 and the late 19th century

There is often said to be a gap in the history of the English theatre between 1700 and the late 19th century. In fact, apart from William Congreve (→ 3.9), no great author had written plays of any worth after the Elizabethan times. Several factors can explain this situation:

- the rise of the novel;
- the power of theatrical managers, who decided what plays might appeal to the audience and give financial returns;
- the presence of great actors and actresses whose virtuosity often turned very poor plays into great success;
- the fact that the rich middle classes did not appreciate drama as a form of art, and actors were still considered as men of little respectability.

The new Victorian theatres

However, new theatres were built in London and in other cities during the Victorian Age. These playhouses were smaller than the ones built in the previous century. In the second half of the Victorian era various improvements made the theatres more comfortable and the new methods of lighting the stage were capable of producing more realistic effects. Actors were thus given the opportunity of developing a subtler style of performance.

Stage directions

The stage directions of Victorian plays were much longer and more detailed: they served various purposes, such as illustrating aspects of the characters' personalities, describing in detail their actions or gestures, and conveying the author's comments. The developments in stage techniques meant that theatre productions were far more complicated, and instructions were needed. When the electric lighting was introduced in theatres, it greatly affected how performances were staged; in fact, since then actors have performed in bright light in front of an audience hidden in darkness. Thus the viewer's experience has become individual rather than communal.

Theatrical performances

Going to the theatre became as important as the play people were going to see. The theatre architecture, the audience's attire and the stage mirrored Victorian society.

The types of theatrical performances which flourished in the Victorian era were music hall, pantomime, farce, and melodrama with a sensational and romantic plot. The ingredients were often the same: virtuous heroines in danger, hard-hearted conspiring villains, and happy endings with the triumph of true love and the punishment of the villain.

Playwrights

Oscar Wilde (→ 5.24) and George Bernard Shaw (→ 5.25) were by far the most outstanding playwrights of the end of the 19th century. Wilde wrote brilliant comedies whose main feature was dialogue full of humour and wit intended to expose the faults and hypocrisy of his age (→ T85). George Bernard Shaw considered drama as a vehicle for presenting his views on social institutions and human experience in a provocative form. He was influenced by the great Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen (1828-1906), who addressed the social and domestic problems of the time. Ibsen's works had a tremendous impact on the English theatre. Ibsen opened up new dramatic possibilities and his example encouraged writers to concern themselves with social and personal problems, regardless of the strict Victorian censorship.

1. Music sheet cover for a burlesque performed in 1889.