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### Victorian Voyagers

Welcome to Victorian Voyagers! Here, you will find an overview of everything you need to know before traveling to the Victorian era. Please contact your supervisor with any questions.

#### LADIES, FIND YOUR PLACE HERE!

If you are a woman entering the Victorian era, it is VITAL that you understand your role in society. Thankfully, you have the privilege of holding an esteemed role—in the household. While this may lead to some difficulty exploring the area, you will have plenty of time to document your journey while indoors. Here are three tips to ensure you will not stand out among bystanders.

**1. Do not apply for a job.** Victorian women stay home while their husbands, brothers, and sons go to work. Your deemed place in society is to take care of the home. Consult your travel partner and supervisor to see if your assigned roles are shop owners; if so, you will also be expected to maintain the finances and cater to customers while your "husband" works in the shop. Due to these expectations, it will be unusual for you to spend much time outdoors and in towns unless you are buying supplies or visiting on business.

**2. Operate as the comforter—avoid conflict, if possible.** To maintain an image as a regular and respectable Victorian woman, give the image of the comforter, the cheerleader, the caregiver. You are expected to hold stronger morals than men (refer to *The Angel in the House* by Patmore). This means that if people cry, you wipe their tears. If they mourn, you comfort them. If they are injured, you nurse them to health. You are viewed as the radiant center of the household here.

**3. Prepare to display your accomplishments.** We aren't talking about spelling bee trophies and college degrees—in fact, avoid all intellectual airs as much as possible. Middle class women are expected to have some capacity to play music (preferably the pianoforte), sing, or dance. You will especially be expected to draw, most likely floral designs or scenes before you. Avoid drawing fruit unless you would like to attract potential suitors or scandals. You may use drawing as an excuse to capture moments during your journey to report findings back to your supervisor.

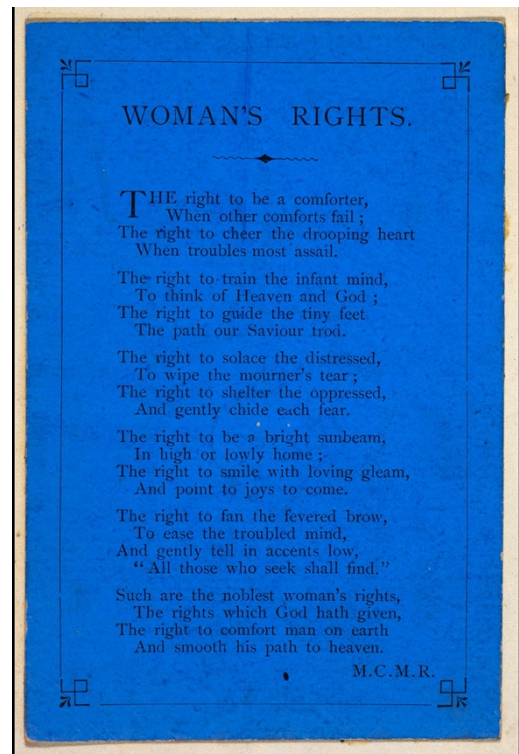


Figure 1 "Woman's Rights" (Hughes)

## BEHAVIOR IN THE BEEHIVE: VICTORIAN VALUES AND ETIQUETTE FOR MEN



Figure 2 George Cruikshank's British Beehive (Hughes)

If you think the twenty-first century is ambitious, wait until you get to the Victorian era! Here, you will be expected to exhibit a strong sense of self-help to maintain a secure role in society. You will stick out or deem yourself a social outcast if you do not find some work to apply yourself to. This is the era of the Industrial Revolution—of factories, manufacturing towns, and hardworking men. Even the women and children are put to work!

George Cruikshank illustrated the *British Bee Hive* to share the importance of the middle class (see the image to the left). Note the variety of occupations available for you to adopt during your travel, as well as the immense size of the middle class workers in the beehive. If you are a man, it is vital that you maintain this self-help, worker bee mindset.

Take on one of the following positions, or submit a proposal to your travel therapist:

### Middle Class Careers

bookseller  
glazier  
inventor  
jeweler  
mechanic  
tea dealer  
weaver

### Lower Class Careers

cabman  
coalheaver  
dustman  
shoeblick  
sweep

If you do take on a middle-class career, know that etiquette will be extremely important to projecting a respectable demeanor. Bystanders will have a keen eye to identify you as a well-educated businessman or a novice seller trying to make his way. Suggested reading includes *Self-Help* by Samuel Smiles (1859), *How to Behave*, and *Hints from a Gentleman*. You will be expected to develop skills including, but not limited to:

- how to shake hands
- how to bring a conversation politely to an end
- how to sit and stand gracefully
- what was meant by 'RSVP'
- how to deal with dirty nails or bad breath
- how to style your beard
- how to conduct yourself at a dinner party, a picture gallery or church<sup>1</sup>

If you are not yet comfortable with all of these skills, please submit a request to your travel supervisor for further education and reading. Again, these are mandatory for male time travelers with middle-class profiles.

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<sup>1</sup> This list is a direct quotation from Kathryn Hughes' "The middle classes: etiquette and upward mobility."

## BEHAVIOR IN THE BEEHIVE: VICTORIAN VALUES AND ETIQUETTE FOR WOMEN

Posing as a Victorian woman, you must keep a tighter adherence to etiquette—and even closer attention to your appearance—to fit in with bystanders. Keep in mind that your role is to stay in a separate, but "equal," sphere than the men: while it is their job to exhibit a hardworking self-help attitude, it is your duty to create a comfortable, relieving environment for them to come home to. As men's moral superiors, women are expected to provide a nice purifying space to balance out the harsh ambition of men. Listed below are three things to look out for while modeling the Victorian woman.

**1. Enlist help—you cannot display status as a Victorian woman alone.** Victorian women are not expected to keep up the harsh and grueling housework. As a middle-class woman, you will want to hire an array of servants, including:

- housemaids
- nursemaids
- cooks
- footmen<sup>2</sup>

If you are a lower-class woman, you will still want to have a maid-of-all-work to handle dirty tasks, such as dishes and garbage.



Figure 3 Advertisement for ladies' hats, 1884 (Hughes)

**2. Keep soft hands and extravagant clothing.** By keeping your hands soft and clean, you will show others you do not complete dirty work. Your wardrobe serves as your display case to communicate both you and your husband's status. While you may only wear one outfit a day in the twenty-first century, you will want to frequently change clothing as you navigate different tasks as a Victorian woman. Look into securing fashionable hats or crinoline skirts that make it difficult to complete housework.

**3. If you are assigned to a middle-class household, furnish your area with expensive local goods.** You will display both your wealth and British patriotism by doing so. Having nice things in your home will show you have good taste and that your husband makes good money. Doing so with local goods will express your support for local British goods and the workforce.

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<sup>2</sup> This list is a direct quote from Kathryn Hughes' "The middle classes: etiquette and upward mobility."

A LOVE FOR LITERATURE: VICTORIAN FICTION AND LITERARY CONTROVERSY

The Industrial Revolution brings a new air to the Victorian era, one that not most would expect—a rise in literacy. With the rise of industry comes the connections from better transportation, the decline in publishing costs, and the improvement of lighting within homes. This yields a such a greater interest in novels that you will see books everywhere, especially in circulating libraries (see Mudie's Circulating Library pictured to the right) and serial publications within magazines.

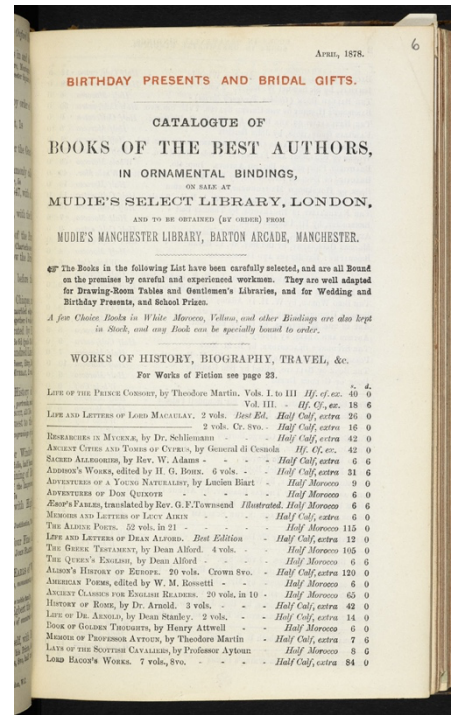


Figure 4 Catalogue of books from Mudie's Circulating Library, April 1878 (Flint)

As a time traveler, it will be in your best interest to avoid contacting authors of serial novels. Victorian era readers often engage in correspondence with these authors to share what they hope will or will not happen within the novel. For instance, note that Charles Dickens adjusted the ending of Walter Gay in *Dombey and Son* for the sake of a reader. However, it would be safe for you to engage in private letters with Victorian bystanders to discuss serial novels, as this is a normal occurrence for the time period.

Should you pose as a working citizen in the Victorian era and happen to run out of funds, do not worry about securing an affordable copy of a popular novel. Within six months of their first publications, many novels reissue as single books running for much cheaper prices. Keep an eye out for "railway" or "yellow-back" editions of Victorian books within this time frame.

Finally, know that while fiction is widely accepted in the Victorian era, there is also a fair amount of controversy surrounding fiction and its influence. Victorian readers worry about reading becoming an escapism for women. Instead of remaining content with their simpler lives, Victorian women could envy the adventures of their fiction novels and spend all day reading instead of completing necessary tasks. Additionally, Victorians are cautious of the working class reading fiction, lest the workers should attempt to surpass the upper classes or follow the criminal lifestyles so excitingly modeled in popular novels.

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## ANALYSIS

Using articles from the British Library, I created blog posts to explore Victorian gender roles in the workforce through etiquette and appearance, the expectations of women as the angels of the household, and the place of fiction and literacy. These values constructed the way that men provided for the economy, women provided for their households, and literature served as a vital facet to Victorians of all classes and occupations.

Victorian men and women were expected to remain in "separate spheres" of the social world (Hughes 1). Men were to exhibit high ambition and work ethic in their jobs to ensure the working middle class was stronger than the aristocracy, thereby keeping the aristocrats from having "an unfair advantage" over them (Hughes 1). "By creating the conditions for healthy competition," Hughes writes, "the Victorians believed it should be possible, in theory, for any man to succeed in the world through his own efforts no matter how humble his origins" (Hughes 1). Women, on the other hand, were expected to be the complete opposite of men. Hughes refers to Sarah Stickney Ellis' *The Women of England, Their Social Duties, and Domestic Habits* as she explains,

Women were morally superior to men. It was their job to create an oasis of calm and quiet virtue in which their husbands could return at the end of the day. In the process men would be washed clean of the immoral taint of the market place, absolved from the sins of greed, envy and even lust that they had displayed in their struggle to get on in the world. (Hughes 1)

Finally, Victorian fiction proved a strong facet in society. Kate Flint quotes Agnes Repplier in her article, writing:

The clerks and artisans, shopgirls, dressmakers, and milliners, who pour into London every morning by the early trains, have, each and every one, a choice

specimen of penny fiction with which to beguile the short journey and perhaps the few spare minutes of a busy day. (Flint 1)

Fiction novels were frequently published as serials within magazines or periodicals before later being republished in a three-volume format (Flint 1). This formatting came to a close at the end of the century as "fictional lengths became more variable, and this went hand in hand with the growth in genre fiction like adventure tales—often set in the Empire—detective fiction, and ghost stories" (Flint 1).

With a rise in these genres came a concern for reading them. Some Victorians wondered if ambitious fiction would become a bad influence on women and the working class. Skeptics worried that women would rather read of interesting adventures than perform their own duties, and that the lower working class would draw inspiration from popular criminal tales (Flint 1). "Many of these anxieties hinged on whether or not readers could distinguish between the escapism afforded by fiction, and the realities of their own lives," Flint clarifies (Flint 1).

In conclusion, the Victorian era was strongly characterized with separate social spheres between men and women. It appears that the Victorian society's stability hinged on the adherence of Victorian men and women to their respective and opposite, but equally important, places in the working and domestic realms. Victorian literature, on the other hand, served as both a uniting force and point of concern for society. While fiction grew popular enough to be read by most people, regardless of class or gender, this genre also risked serving as an escapism for women and an inspiration for the lower class.

(577 words)  
(1986 words total)

Works Cited

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