

Key stage 2

Pupil B – Piece C: a balanced argument

Context: building on their reading of 'Street Child', by Berlie Doherty, and their history topic, pupils researched information about Victorian workhouses. After discussing the basic structure for the text as a class, pupils planned and wrote their own balanced argument.

Were workhouses a positive or negative aspect of Victorian society?

In Victorian times, people who were poor or had no job had to enter a workhouse. People agree that workhouses were like "barbaric prisons" where paupers had no choice but to go to. On the other hand, some people think they did a good job because they provided food and shelter. There were many reasons for whether or not workhouses were good or bad. Were they positive or negative? Let's find out.

The main idea of a workhouse was for it to be a very menacing place and people would go there as a last resort. Life in the workhouse was hard. Countless families were split up. Men and women were divided into two parts of the workhouse. Inmates at the workhouse were badly treated. It was a horror.

Children also went to the workhouse. If they broke any rules, they would be harshly punished. The punishments were being beaten with the knot of a rope by a teacher countless times, making them kneel on hot water pipes (which caused awful blisters) and

preventing the poor souls from eating or seeing their family.

The punishments were harsh in a Workhouse but they were not as awful as the jobs! The jobs were so painful and back aching, they were made to be boring and difficult! In fact you had to do the jobs all day! The jobs were stone breaking (which was boring), picking oakum (which led to blisters) carpet beating (which women had to do) and tons more.

The Workhouse was difficult to get out of and it's safe to say that, "it was a tough time." How would you like to spend your life in a Workhouse?

The food in a Workhouse was very small. In fact youths would receive three potatoes, half a loaf of bread and a little slither of grilled cheese for a whole week! That's nearly half the amount of food you eat at home!

However the Workhouse still had a positive side. They provided food which helped them keep going. They also provided shelter which was better than being on the streets. Workhouses were very cruel and bleak places to live but they did save many lives of people who entered.

Furthermore Workhouses provided lots of education to children who are there. Boys were taught 3 hours of arithmetic and reading each day and girls were taught cooking and knitting in order to

become maids.

In conclusion I think it's safe to say Workhouses were terrible. Although it had some benefits, it was still a really cruel place. It could've been a little more kinder and supportive but that was not the case. Luckily they were shut down on the 1st of April 1930. No one will ever enter a Workhouse again.