History Hackers: Victorian Venture

Tilda's brother dismissed her comments with a wave. "I already know what life was like in Victorian times – we studied it last term."

"Oh, really?" Tilda fixed her brother with a challenging stare. "Tell me what it was like, then."

After shrugging his slim shoulders and casually twitching both eyebrows, Charlie said, "Everyone was poor! They wore rags for clothes, most had no shoes and they lived in slums piled with stinking sewage."

Tilda couldn't prevent a burst of laughter from exploding from her mouth. "Are you sure that you paid attention in class?"

"It's true!" Charlie insisted. "Factories belched smoke everywhere. Poor children had to go to work when they were ten and, if you didn't have a job, they threw you into a workhouse that was worse than prison."

"Nonsense," Tilda shook her head so hard that both of her sandy-coloured pigtails danced like angry snakes. "It was the end of the industrial revolution and for the first time, almost everyone had a job. People flocked to cities to work and improve their lives. York had a huge carriage-building industry."

She rapped the Charles Dickens manuscript against her knuckles. "I'd love to live or work in a Victorian family home. It certainly sounded far more pleasant and civilised than life today."

"You've been watching those historical dramas with Mum, again."

"Actually, those programmes are very educa-"



"Whatever," Charlie smirked. "My teacher said that life was harsh for ordinary people back in Victorian times. You're living in a fantasy world if you think that it was nice."

"Rubbish!" Tilda could feel anger heating her cheeks. "If we go online, we can –"

"We don't need the Internet," Charlie hissed. He shuffled across the room until he was standing beside a cork board filled with pins. "We can go back and see for ourselves – if you dare!"

The tatty cork board hanging above a seventeenth-century writing desk looked little more than a useful storage area. A collection of small, fabric bags hung from individual pins, each labelled with a period from history. These stretched from Ancient Britain to the more recent Second World War.

Charlie was wearing the grin of a mischievous toddler as he reached out and plucked a bag from the pin labelled 'Victorians'. The room filled with the clink of coins as he bounced it gently against his palm.

"All we have to do is find the doorway," Charlie reminded his sister.

Tilda felt her stomach churn with nerves and excitement. It was a feeling that she wrestled with each time Charlie reached for one of the small bags. She sometimes wondered if she would ever get used to the adrenaline rush of time travel. Before letting the excitement reach her face and become a grin, Tilda allowed her older-sister caution to take over momentarily.

"Haven't you learned anything?" Tilda wagged a finger at her younger brother. "Every time we travel back in time, we find ourselves in trouble. Think about what happened when we went back to Roman times – I was almost sold as a slave!"

"Yeah," Charlie laughed, "to me! Maybe you need to do everything I say."

Tilda snorted. "I'm serious. We need to think this through."

Charlie pocketed the small bag and quickly began to rummage through the stacks of paper and scrolls that littered the desk. Eventually, he pulled out a piece of thickly folded paper which he opened out across the worktop.

"All we have to do is find the doorway," he explained, searching the sketched streets of York, which stretched across the map like arteries and veins. "The Victorians were much more civilised than the Romans. What's the worst that could happen?"

According to Professor Howe's journal, this map plotted the location of a number of time doors – the Professor called them 'gates' – leading back to different periods in the city's history. The small bags that hung from each pin contained coins and trinkets from those periods and it was these items which could enable the holder to pass through the gate.

The two children had been sceptical at first, neither quite prepared to believe that time travel was possible. Yet, when they had finally dared to put the professor's theories to the test, the results had been astonishing.

"We'd never find the right clothes," Tilda said from her position peering over Charlie's shoulder. "We'd stand out like sore thumbs and that would attract trouble."

"We can go to the fancy dress shop," Charlie said. "They've always got Oliver Twist costumes in stock – is that a Dickens one?"

As exciting possibilities began to bubble in Tilda's mind, her eyes skirted the map's inked streets and roads until she found one marked 'Shambles'. Perhaps York's most historic and famous street, the Shambles was still filled with timber-framed buildings which hung over the ancient cobbles like the hoods of watchful spectres.

Tilda's gaze settled upon the sketch of a key sitting a few backstreets away. A single word, so carefully written beneath the key, grabbed her attention: 'Victorians'.

Perhaps sensing his big sister's brewing enthusiasm, Charlie dragged the little fabric pouch out of his pocket and dropped it onto the map.

"We can both be in Victorian York by tomorrow lunchtime. We'd see for ourselves what life was really like and remember, Tils, time stands still here while we're away, so we've nothing to lose. It'll be a laugh!"



Questions

1. Where were the bags of coins kept? **Select one**.

   - ○ On a desk
   - ○ In a drawer
   - ○ Pinned to a cork board
   - ○ In the shop

2. Find and copy a **simile** which the author uses to describe the movement of Tilda's hair.

   _____

3. Find and copy a word which shows that the children felt unconvinced or doubtful at first that time travel was possible.

   _____

4. What was the difference between Charlie and Tilda's views on Victorian England?

   _____

   _____

   _____

5. What problem had Tilda faced when going back to Roman times?

   _____

   _____

6. What is the name of the famous York street mentioned in the extract?

   _____

7. Look at the line: '...searching the sketched streets of York, which stretched across the map like arteries and veins.'
   What impression does this give about the layout of the streets on the map?

   _____

   _____

   _____

8. Match each character description to the correct sibling. Write 'Charlie' or 'Tilda' for each description.

	Charlie or Tilda?
slim shoulders	
sandy-coloured pigtails	
the grin of a mischievous toddler	

9. How did Tilda's feelings change during the extract about going back to Victorian times?

10. Using any evidence from the text, what do you predict will happen to Charlie and Tilda if they travel back in time to Victorian York?