History Hackers: Victorian Venture

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. Number these events in the order that they happen in the story. The first one has been done for you.

- [1] Tilda's stomach churns with nerves and excitement.
- [ ] Charlie rummages through the stacks of paper on the desk.
- [ ] Charlie suggests that they go to the fancy dress shop.
- [ ] Charlie opens the map out across the worktop.
- [ ] Tilda says that they don't have the right clothes.

2. Draw lines to match the words or names with the correct descriptions.

the Shambles	a time traveller who left his journal
York	a street in York
Professor Howe	Charlie's big sister
Tilda	the city shown on the map

3. Where did Charlie suggest they could get an Oliver Twist costume from?

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4. What was contained in the small, fabric bags?

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

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6. What was Charlie's impression of life for poor people in Victorian England?

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7. Look at paragraph 14.
'...the Shambles was still filled with timber-framed buildings which hung over the ancient cobbles...'
What impression does this give of the street?

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8. 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?