

## Keeping Safe in Victorian Homes

During Victorian times, the type of house a person lived in depended on how rich they were. Poor people often lived in tiny, country cottages or dirty rooms in city slums. Wealthy Victorians lived in large mansions filled with ornaments, paintings, furniture, carpets and rugs.

As you read about some of the dangers found in Victorian homes, think about which ones still exist today.

### Danger from fire and heat

- Heating in many homes was provided by large open fireplaces with wood or coal burnt in a metal frame called a 'grate'. Metal heats up quickly and can burn, so people had to be careful. They had to keep areas around fires clear so that sparks didn't set anything alight.
- Even wealthy homes didn't have electricity until the 1880s. Light was from oil or gas lamps, or candles. Candles were even used to decorate Christmas trees!
- Some houses had no plumbing, so hot water needed to be brought up to the family's rooms for washing.



### Danger from trips, slips and falls

- Both rich and poor homes had lots of things you could trip over. Sometimes poor families lived in a cramped single room, and wealthy homes were full of ornaments and furniture that people could bump into, knock or trip over - particularly with the long sleeves, petticoats and skirts on women's dresses.
- Poor people (including children) worked hard and often did dangerous tasks. Chimney sweeps (usually orphaned boys or girls) were employed to unblock tall, narrow chimneys of soot. Sweeps had to climb up without a ladder and could easily choke or fall to their death.



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## Keeping Safe in Victorian Homes (Continued)

### Danger from sharp things

- Even some children's toys were dangerous. Rich girls had china (pottery) tea sets, which could be easily broken into sharp pieces. Many boys played with pen knives and carried these around with them!
- Sewing was a popular hobby for rich women. Needles and pins were sharp and were stored in a pin cushion to keep them from falling on the floor.
- Large meat cleavers and knives were used in the kitchen. They were very dangerous.



### Danger from poisons

- Food poisoning was common, particularly among the poor. Butchers' meat often came from diseased animals. Flies were common, so food left out had to be covered to keep it clean. Many poor people could only afford food that was old, stale or dirty and usually unsafe to eat.
- The Victorians used certain chemicals without realising they were poisonous. For example, lead (a deadly poison) was used in paint, pottery and even added to wine and cheese! Being pale-skinned was fashionable and wealthy women used arsenic (also deadly) to whiten their skin. They also used a lot of perfume, and had to be careful not to leave it where young children could swallow it.

