

A Victorian picnic

You can find out a little about the lives of middle- and upper-class people through a Victorian picnic. Here is what you should do.

Preparation

You will need a table cloth on which to lay out the food, a napkin for each person in the picnic party, rugs to sit on while eating and a container, such as a hamper, for the food, plates, cups and cutlery.

The food

Most picnics took place in the afternoon so the food was mainly cakes and biscuits. You could select your food from some (or all!) of the following – jam and scones, tea biscuits, shortcake, spiced tea cakes, Windsor Cake, Sally Lunn, balm cakes, strawberries and cream. You can use iced tea, lemonade or ginger beer for drinks.

If you wished to have a picnic lunch, you could have fewer cakes and biscuits and replace them with roast chicken, pork pies, kedgeree, caesar salad, cucumber sandwiches, cheese and Victorian chutney.

Leaving for the picnic

The gentlemen carry the hampers, cloths and rugs. The ladies may carry their parasols if it is sunny.

Selection of a picnic site

This is the responsibility of the gentlemen. They should select a site away from cliffs in case the ladies are distressed. They should select a site away from ant hills to avoid discomfort to all. They should select a site in the shade because the ladies cannot eat while holding a parasol.

During the picnic

As no servants will be present, the gentlemen should set out the food and serve it to the ladies. Everyone is allowed to make polite conversation which may include amusing stories. Brass band music could be played.

After the picnic

The ladies and gentlemen may play blind man's bluff and tag. They may walk around admiring the flowers and trees, or sit and make sketches. If the picnic is to be at the site of the ruin this too may be inspected. The gentlemen should tidy away the picnic and carry away the hampers, cloths and rugs at the end of the picnic.

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Age range

- Years 3/4 (SP4/5).
- Years 5/6 (SP6/7).

Resources

Copies of the worksheet. Table cloths, napkins, rugs, cutlery, plates and cups (use paper and plastic but remind the students that in Victorian times crockery and glass would be used). Food selected from the lists, parasols (optional). Scarf for blind man's bluff (optional), sketch pads and pencils (optional). Brass band music and portable player (Many picnics were in parks where a brass band would be playing).

Using the worksheet

You may like to use this activity at a lunch-time during your work on Victorians. Alternatively you may like to use it as part of a Victorian day, when the students are in costume, and have the picnic in the afternoon. A copy of the sheet could be sent home with the letter to parents or carers explaining that you plan to have a Victorian picnic. Many of the foods selected are available at shops and supermarkets. Part of the worksheet is written in the style of the many etiquette books that were popular in Victorian times. In planning your picnic and after picnic activities make sure all your school policies are followed. You may like to take the students to a location such as a ruin or other location as part of some other work.



Older students

The students can work together as a class to decide on the nature of the picnic and plan it. They can then have the picnic and evaluate their work later.

Outcomes

The students can:

- Appreciate the genteel way of life as demonstrated by a Victorian picnic.
- Take part in an activity with others.
- Work as a group to plan an event.

Younger students

Some male students may need reminding of their responsibilities at various times during the picnic activity.

Outcomes

The students can:

- Appreciate the genteel way of life as demonstrated by a Victorian picnic.
- Take part in an activity with others.