

A day in the workhouse

Here is the timetable, meals and work for a day in the workhouse.

6.00 am	Time to get up	A bell is rung to wake the paupers. Prayers are said.
6.30 am	Breakfast time	Breakfast – Seven ounces of bread, one and a half pints of gruel.
7.00 am	Time for setting to work	Work – Breaking stones, making sacks or picking oakum (a tar covered rope). The rope was unravelled and the tar removed.
12.00 noon	Dinner time	Dinner – Seven ounces of bread, one ounce of cheese.
1.00 pm	Time for setting to work	Work – Breaking stones, making sacks or picking oakum.
6.00 pm	Time for finishing work	
6.00 pm – 7.00 pm	Supper time	Supper – Seven ounces of bread, one ounce of cheese.
8.00 pm	Bedtime	Prayers are said before bedtime.

One day a week dinner is fourteen ounces of suet pudding with vegetables.

Another day a week dinner is fourteen ounces of meat pudding with vegetables.

Conversion of measures

One ounce approximately 28g.

One pint = 570 ml

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Age range

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

Resources

Copies of the worksheet. Old piece of rope, measuring jug, weighing scales, watery porridge (gruel), bread and cheese.

Using the worksheet

People only entered the workhouse if they were destitute. Poor people who entered the workhouse were called paupers. You may like to explain a little about admission into the workhouse. The pauper would sit in a waiting room and then be interviewed by workhouse staff. If a family was being admitted to the workhouse, the men and women and children would be split into different groups and they would live and work separately. The paupers would then have a wash and exchange their clothes for workhouse uniforms.

Younger students

If the students have done the activity **3B** they could compare a day in the workhouse with a day working in a mill and a day at their school. They could answer the following questions. You could measure out some gruel using the recipe on page 19 and cut some bread and cheese and weigh it to show the amounts provided at each meal. The students should note that the measures given are for men. Women had an ounce less of bread and a quarter of an ounce less of cheese. They also had two ounces less of puddings and vegetables.

Questions (and answers)

Write these questions on the board for the students to try.

1. How long is allowed to eat breakfast, dinner and supper? (Two and a half hours.)
2. For how many hours did the paupers work in the morning? (Five hours.)
3. For how many hours did the paupers work in the afternoon? (Five hours.)
4. Take a piece of rope and unravel it. What do you think it would be like to be unravelling rope all day?

Outcomes

The students can:

- Make comparisons from information in a text.
- Make calculations on information in the text.
- Perform a simple task and empathise with people in the past.

Older students

If the students have done activity **3B**, they could compare a day in the workhouse with a day working in a mill and a day at their school.

If you have prepared some gruel as suggested on page 19, you could let the students use a measuring jug to measure out a portion into a bowl. If the students' behaviour is appropriate you could let them cut up some bread and cheese and weigh them to see what a meal looked like. The students should be made aware of how to use the conversion table.

The students could also take a piece of rope and unravel it. They could time how long it took them. They could now calculate how many hours a day they would have to spend unravelling rope in the workhouse and comment on how they would feel doing it.

Outcomes

The students can:

- Make comparisons from information in a text.
- Make calculations on information in the text.
- Use a conversion table to measure out food.
- Perform and time a simple task and empathise with people in the past.