

William Booth and the Salvation Army

William Booth began his work in Victorian times and it is still being done by the Salvation Army today.

William Booth was born in a terraced house in Nottingham in 1829. His father was a nailmaker but when nailmaking machines were set up in factories he lost his job and died in poverty.

William found work at a pawnbrokers shop. Poor people came into the shop to pawn their possessions for money. For example, a poor woman would pawn a ring to use the money to buy food and to pay her rent. The pawnbroker would keep the ring but after a certain time, if the woman did not repay the money, the ring would be sold. Dealing with poor people in this way made William think about how he could make things better for them.

William became a Methodist minister and helped spread Christianity. He became a very popular preacher and in 1865 set up Booth's Christian Mission which was not part of the Methodist Church. The purpose of the mission was to help the poor in the eastern part of London. The work was very hard and helpers were difficult to find.

In 1878 William renamed his Mission the Salvation Army and a uniform was developed for its members. This proved very popular and the Salvation Army began to increase in numbers. The main purpose of the Salvation Army was a religious one – helping people to become Christians – but it had a second major purpose – to improve the conditions of the poor. Salvation Army officers helped people find work, provided cheap meals and found lodgings for the homeless. William Booth died in 1912 after seeing his idea become a huge success.

The Salvation Army is still a major force in helping poor people today. It provides care for the elderly by helping them in their own homes or taking them into their residential homes. It provides care for the young with playgroups, and before and after school clubs. It supports recovering alcoholics and drug addicts. It helps people in prison and prepares them to make a better life when they are released. People who run away from their families can be traced by the Salvation Army and helped to return. When there is a disaster, such as a fire or flood, the Salvation Army works with the emergency services to provide food, shelter and clothing for the survivors.

William Booth and the Salvation Army

Age range

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

Resources

Copies of the worksheet.

Using the worksheet

The aim of this activity is to provide a link between Victorian times and the present. William Booth began his work in response to his experience of living and working among the poor. These conditions are still present today and the work begun by Booth is continued by the Salvation Army. You may like to link this activity with work on religious studies or citizenship. The subject may need treating with sensitivity.



Questions (and answers)

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

1. Does William Booth's birthplace – a terraced house – suggest that his family were rich or poor? (Poor)
2. How did the Industrial Revolution affect William's father? (It lost him his job as a nailmaker.)
3. Why did the poor go to the pawnbroker? (To raise funds by selling possessions.)
4. How old was William when he (a) set up his Christian mission (36), (b) the Salvation Army (48), (c) died? (83)
5. How may the Salvation Army help people at different times in their lives? (For young people it provides playgroups and before and after school clubs. It provides help for people who are addicted to alcohol or drugs, and people in prison. It helps people who have run away from home or who have experienced a disaster such as a fire or flood.)

Younger students

The questions can be used to stimulate a discussion about poor people in Victorian times and today and be simply answered orally in class.

Outcomes

The students can:

- Extract information from a text.
- Perform simple calculations on information.
- Interpret information.

Older students

The students can attempt the questions on their own then compare their answers. You may like to lead a discussion on poverty today both in the UK and worldwide.

Outcomes

The students can:

- Extract information from a text.
- Perform simple calculations on information.
- Interpret information.