



Worst Jobs For Kids

Ever moaned about having to do your homework? What about cleaning your bedroom, or hoovering the floor? Count yourself lucky you weren't a child during Queen Victoria's reign. You were lucky if you were sent to school back then; most children were sent out to work in some of the most horrific conditions you can imagine. You've probably heard about chimney sweeps and flower sellers, but there were much worse jobs out there if you were desperate.

Do you love rolling around in the mud? How about scraping through the dirt to find any coins or lost bits of jewellery? If that sounds good, then a job as a tosher might have been right up your street. It wasn't just the muck and filth on the street though, you'd spend most of your time down in the sewers rummaging around for anything that the rich folk up above might have dropped into the drains.

Tiny children have tiny hands, and they were perfect for fixing the fiddly little mechanisms on the enormous looms that factories used to weave fabric. The sound of the shuttles flying backwards and forwards would have caused quite a din; however, they couldn't stop working just to fix a machine. Instead, children would scuttle around underneath the vast wooden machines and try to time their movements perfectly. Quite often they would get it wrong. The lucky ones only lost a finger. The unlucky ones? Well, I'm sure you can guess.

It wasn't just fixing the looms that children's dainty digits were perfect for. The rise of the steam train meant that lots of children were needed to scrape out the cinders and clean the undercarriage of the engine. Not only did this involve a lot of choking dust and ash, but the cinders were often still red-hot, and many children suffered horrific burns.

Most houses were lit by candles back then, and so matches were needed by the thousands. Dipping the sticks in the toxic phosphorus was another job saved for the cursed children. The horrible chemical would rot their teeth and often led to fatal lung disease. Not sure it was worth it for a penny a day.

1. Why do you think the author has started with questions?
2. Find the word that means a great need.
3. What is a tosher?
4. What do you think 'would of caused quite a din' means?
5. Why did they use children to fix the looms?
6. Find the words that mean small fingers.
7. What were needed in the thousands and why?
8. Why has the author called the children 'cursed'?
9. Name 4 things that happened to the children who did these jobs.
10. What do you think life was like for poor children? Use evidence to support your answer

Challenge: Choose one of the jobs and write a diary entry in role as a child doing this work. You can find lots of information on BBC Bitesize about Victorian Britain.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/topics/zcixhyc/resources/1>