

# Teaching Notes: ODELIA AND THE VARMINT

Written by Jenny Moore  
Illustrated by Elisa Paganelli  
Published by New Frontier Publishing



## SYNOPSIS

*'What if I don't want to go back to a life of storms and soggy sea biscuits?' said Captain Blunderfuss. 'What if I'd rather stay here and search for treasure instead?'*

When a pair of unruly fictional pirates escape out of their book into Victorian London, 11-year-old Odelia Hardluck-Smythe's lonely life is turned upside down. Captain Blunderfuss and Cook are rude, dangerous and obsessed with marzipan fruits, but they could be the answer to all her prayers. Pirates mean treasure and poor, fatherless Odelia could really do with some of that. Unfortunately, there's more to 'treasure' than buried chests of rubies and diamonds, as Odelia's about to discover the hard way.

A fast-paced, rip-roaring Victorian adventure with twists and turns galore!

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jenny Moore is a freelance writer from Devon, writing for all ages from toddlers to adults. She was the first ever UK winner of the Commonwealth Short Story Competition and was shortlisted for the Greenhouse Funny Prize. Her numerous children's books include *Audrey Orr and the Robot Rage* which was selected by the Reading Agency for the 2020 Summer Reading Challenge. Jenny read English at Cambridge University and holds an MRes from the University of Strathclyde.

## ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Elisa Paganelli was born in Modena, Italy, and since childhood has considered books to be her best friend. After a career in advertising and as an entrepreneur, she now lives and works in the UK as a freelance illustrator and creative designer, accompanied by her beloved pets. Elisa's award-winning books include *The Highland Falcon Thief* (Children's Fiction Book of the Year at the 2021 British Book Awards), *The House with Chicken Legs* and *Moon's First Friends*. Her aim is to work on projects linked to mental wellbeing, nature and animal rights. She feels most at home when she's out in the natural world and on her bedside table is always a pile of psychology books, and very often one of her cats.



# Teaching Notes: ODELIA AND THE VARMINT

Written by Jenny Moore  
Illustrated by Elisa Paganelli  
Published by New Frontier Publishing



## EDUCATIONAL APPLICABILITY

*Odelia and the Varmint* tells the story of a poor fatherless girl who, together with a wild, uncouth pirate and his mate, race round Victorian London on the hunt for treasure to restore the family fortune. With themes of Victorian England, adventure, resilience and friendship woven into the plot, this is a fantastic resource for those interested in the Victorian era and historical fiction, as well as those who like a good mystery with twists and turns until the very end.

## HISTORIES AND MYSTERIES

### MYSTERY

*Odelia and the Varmint* is a great mystery adventure story with twists and turns in every direction. Discuss the mystery genre with the class.

- What is a mystery?
- What are the elements of a good mystery? There's lots to discuss here and maybe you can draw a mind map on the board.

Key elements are:

- **A strong hook** – the mystery should intrigue the reader and prompt them to try and put together the clues to solve the mystery. We, as the reader, really want to know more about Captain Blunderfuss after he appears in Odelia's brother's nursery.
- **A crime** – this event prompts the investigation and is central to the plot. Here Odelia's baby brother, Samuel, is kidnapped and it takes Odelia, Captain Blunderfuss and Cook all their strength to find him. There's also missing treasure to find, or so Odelia thinks.



# Teaching Notes: ODELIA AND THE VARMINT

Written by Jenny Moore  
Illustrated by Elisa Paganelli  
Published by New Frontier Publishing



- **An investigator** – this is usually the main character of the story, who is determined to solve the crime. With this book, it's Odelia, along with Captain Blunderfuss, although he's a bit of a mystery, too. They have to solve the mystery that's happened to them!
- **A villain** – the perpetrator of the crime. The investigator is usually trying to figure out the villain's identity and their motives. In this case the villain is Mr Bugwell... or is it Admiral Arbuckle?
- **Clues** – a good mystery should have clues peppered throughout the story. An attentive reader might even unravel the mystery before the investigator! We can feel Odelia's frustration when a clue she's following leads her to a dead end/stumbling block. Sometimes a clue can be purposely misleading, taking the investigator and the reader down the wrong path. This is known as 'a red herring'.
- **A twist** – it's exciting for the reader when the mystery leads them somewhere they weren't expecting. A twist at the end of the book can be very effective – just when the story seems to be over, something new and surprising is revealed. It looks like it's all over for Odelia when she goes to the police station to turn herself in, but the appearance of the bank notes in the biscuit tin changes everything.
- **A conclusion** – the conclusion should satisfy the reader and unveil the truth. What's the conclusion in this story?



# Teaching Notes: ODELIA AND THE VARMINT

Written by Jenny Moore  
Illustrated by Elisa Paganelli  
Published by New Frontier Publishing



## HISTORY

This book is set in the Victorian era, in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Queen Victoria was a fascinating queen. Read more about her here.

## QUEEN VICTORIA

Victoria became queen when she was just 18! She succeeded the throne in 1837, after the death of her uncle, William VI. No one thought Victoria would ever become queen of England because there were many people in line for the throne before her ... but they all died. The first thing she did after her coronation was to take her bed out of her mother's bedroom!

In 1840, Victoria married her German cousin, Prince Albert. They had nine children! The eldest was called Victoria. In 1851, Albert organised [The Great Exhibition](#) to celebrate the Industrial Revolution. Crystal Palace was built to display over 100,000 industrial items.

In 1861, Albert died of typhoid. For the next 13 years, Victoria went into [mourning](#), refusing to appear in public and seeing all state papers in private. Encouraged by her family and friends, Victoria came out of mourning in 1874. She made public appearances and people celebrated her [Golden Jubilee](#) in 1887.

By the end of her reign, Victoria ruled over one quarter of the world's population. In 1876, she was made Empress of India. Victoria cared for her soldiers and during one war in South Africa, she sent tins of chocolates to them.

When Victoria died in 1901, the nation went into deep mourning over the loss of their beloved queen. She had ruled for 64 years. Her eldest son, Edward, became King Edward VII.

What else can  
you find out  
about Queen  
Victoria?



# Teaching Notes: ODELIA AND THE VARMINT

Written by Jenny Moore  
Illustrated by Elisa Paganelli  
Published by New Frontier Publishing



## TOP VICTORIAN INVENTIONS

The Victorian era saw incredible advances in all areas of life. Look at some of these Victorian inventions below.

### Telephone

Alexander Graham Bell considered his invention to be an intrusion on his real work as a scientist. He refused to have a telephone in his study!

### Kitchen gadgets

Cheese graters, potato peelers, can openers, and even an ice cream maker were Victorian inventions!

### Stamps

Paying for post with a sticky stamp was the invention of an English school teacher called Rowland Hill. The first ever stamp was called the penny black (it had a picture of Queen Victoria on it), and its price was based on the weight of the letters rather than the distance they had to travel.

### Christmas cards

Sending cards at Christmas time has been a tradition ever since the first card went on sale in 1843.

### Bicycle

Kirkpatrick Macmillan from Scotland built the first pedal bicycle and James Starley from England invented the penny-farthing bicycle. Although it might look ridiculous, it was the first machine that could out-distance a horse in a day's riding. Only men were able to use the bike, though, because women's long dresses always got tangled!



# Teaching Notes: ODELIA AND THE VARMINT

Written by Jenny Moore  
Illustrated by Elisa Paganelli  
Published by New Frontier Publishing



## Train

Before creating the railway, if you wanted to travel from London to Edinburgh via horseback, it would take you 12 days. The first railroad built in Great Britain to use steam locomotives was the Stockton and Darlington, opening in 1825. It used a steam locomotive built by George Stephenson and was practical only for hauling minerals. The Liverpool and Manchester Railway, which opened in 1830, was the first modern railroad, carrying both passengers and freight.

## The Underground

The world's first underground railway, The Metropolitan Railway, opened in London in 1863. The line ran between Paddington and Farringdon. It used wooden carriages and was hauled by steam locomotives and lit by gas lamps. It was a huge success with 38,000 passengers on opening day. A lack of ventilation shafts meant that smoke would accumulate in the tunnels, causing health complaints for the drivers.

The first electric underground railway system was opened in 1890.

## The toilet

The Victorian era saw huge improvements in sanitation. The first public flushing toilets, designed by George Jennings, were installed at the Great Exhibition of 1851. They proved very popular, with 827,280 visitors paying one penny to use them, which is where the saying 'spending a penny' comes from. For their penny, people got a clean toilet seat, a towel, a comb and their shoes shined.

Thomas Crapper designed and patented many toilets, but not the modern toilet. He was the first person to have a shop where he could show his work.

There were far fewer public toilets available for women than men. They had to fight for the right to use a toilet outside of the home. When women began working in industries, they fought for the same rights as men.

Can you find  
out about more  
Victorian  
inventions?



# Teaching Notes: ODELIA AND THE VARMINT

Written by Jenny Moore  
Illustrated by Elisa Paganelli  
Published by New Frontier Publishing



## VICTORIAN FAMILY LIFE

Life was good for rich Victorians but not so good for the servants who had to work for them.

For the upper- and middle-class Victorians, family life was very important. The father was the head of the family and his role was to work and provide for the family. A woman's place was definitely in the home. Entertainment was a crucial part of family life. Victorians spent many hours at home in the drawing room, where they received guests and gathered to play music, read, enjoy games and talk. It was during the Victorian era that Christmas became the family occasion that it is today. Prince Albert (Victoria's husband) introduced the German custom of having a decorated Christmas tree and presents for all the family to gather around.

Victorian families were often quite large with many children. Parents were usually quite strict with their children, who were expected to be seen and not heard! Nannies looked after young children in the nursery, which was at the top of the house. Boys were then sent to public schools and girls remained at home to be taught by governesses.

Every upper- and middle-class family had servants. Some homes had one or two, but others employed a whole army of staff including a housekeeper, butler, kitchen maids, nannies, dressers, gardeners, cooks and coachmen, to name a few! It was tough work – servants worked between 15 and 18 hours a day, with only half a day off each week and the pay was low. There was no running water, and without washing machines or vacuum cleaners, all housework had to be done by hand. In 1871, more than a third of British women aged 12 to 20 years old were 'in service'.

One of a maid's daily duties was to empty everybody's slop buckets. Flushing lavatories only appeared in wealthy homes in the 1850s! Washing was done by the laundry maid. Soap was grated into tubs filled with warm water and swirled around with a stick. Washing was rinsed many times and then squeezed out and aired. Family members had baths in their own rooms so maids had to carry buckets of hot water upstairs from the kitchen.

Pretend you are a maid or a member of an upper-class family. Write a diary entry of a typical day. What do you see and hear? What are your feelings?



## WORDSEARCH ACTIVITY

Find all the words below in the *Odelia and the Varmint* wordsearch.

S N F H B A L O I I T U E M  
 R T H L L E W G U B N A R N  
 E L K C U B R A R T I A U O  
 K E S M N I G D T L M N S I  
 C O A N D V P T E S R I A S  
 O S O N E I D D Y F A R E T  
 B C Q C R C O B A O V O R A  
 R E B A F T N P W S O G T E  
 E G T R U O R A A S N F E T  
 K E D P S R S C T N E P V A  
 C Y J N S I T O A S Y O C W  
 I Z O L R A A E H E N M E Y  
 N P H H L N B U T A H O W R  
 K E N D T E O T I L O R C T

ARBUCKLE  
 BLUNDERFUSS  
 BUGWELL  
 CARP  
 CONSTANCE  
 COOK

KNICKERBOCKERS  
 ODELIA  
 PIRATE  
 PONSONBYSMARM  
 SAMUEL  
 THATAWAY

TOAST  
 TREASURE  
 VARMINT  
 VICTORIAN







ARBUCKLE  
BLUNDERFUSS  
BUGWELL  
CARP  
CONSTANCE  
COOK

KNICKERBOCKERS  
ODELIA  
PIRATE  
PONSONBYSMARM  
SAMUEL  
THATAWAY

TOAST  
TREASURE  
VARMINT  
VICTORIAN



FUN  
ACTIVITY!

## DESIGN A COVER

Why don't you have a go at designing your own cover for the book? You could include elements from the book's cover or use your own ideas.



# VICTORIA SPONGE CAKE

The Victoria sponge cake was named after Queen Victoria. Have a go at making it!

## Ingredients:

4 free-range eggs  
225g caster sugar, plus extra for dusting the finished cake  
225g self-raising flour  
2 tsp baking powder  
225g butter, plus extra to grease the tins  
Strawberry jam

## Method:

- 1) Preheat the oven to 180C/160 Fan/Gas 4. Grease and line two 20cm sandwich tins. Use a piece of baking paper to rub a little butter around the insides of the tins, then line the bottom with a circle of baking paper.
- 2) Break the eggs into a large mixing bowl, then add the sugar, flour, baking powder and butter. Mix together with an electric hand mixer (make sure an adult does this).
- 3) Divide the mixture evenly between the tins.
- 4) Bake the cakes for roughly 25 minutes. Check them after 20 minutes. The cakes are done when they're golden brown and coming away from the edge of the tins. Set aside to cool for 5 minutes. Run a rounded knife around the inside edge of the tins and carefully turn the cakes out onto a cooling rack.
- 5) To assemble the cake, place one cake upside down onto a plate and spread it with jam. Top with the second cake, top side up. Sprinkle over the caster sugar.



## WORDPLAY ACTIVITY

There is lots of wordplay in *Odelia*. Captain Blunderfuss is always getting his words muddled up and never seems to know what words actually mean.

Can you match the following words with their correct definitions?

How many words can you make out of the word, Odelia? Then try Captain Blunderfuss!

Vex

To give or bring life to

Verbose

Great courage in the face of danger

Vale

To move around unsteadily in a different direction

Vivify

Adverb for greedy

Vixen

A female fox

Veer

To irritate or frustrate

Valour

A valley

Venally

Talkative

Now it's your turn! Write down some unusual words and their definitions and then mix them up. See if your friends can guess the correct meaning.

Check your answers in a dictionary.

