

TEACHER'S HISTORY FACT FILE

*Definitions of words in bold provided for students on the supporting PowerPoint.

The Little Match Girl is a famous fairytale by Hans Christian Andersen, first published in 1845. It tells the story of a young match seller, cold and shoeless, struggling to sell her matches for money to avoid her angry father. She lights her matches to keep her warm and alive in the freezing weather conditions. She imagines scenes of happiness and a better life before her final match burns out and takes her life.

It's a sad story that depicts how hard life was for the poor living on the streets in the 19th century. There were few **labour laws** to protect them and give them better living conditions. It was common in Victorian times for children to work in the labour trade and they could often be found on the streets selling goods to help provide for the family. They would sing songs known as cries to attract people into buying their goods. This job was particularly common for homeless older people, women and little girls due to the gender division and **state regulations** of Victorian times. Men were expected to commute to work to complete more skills-based labour for the day as they were seen to be more able, while women and children completed home-based work. This was a big part of the **industrialisation** period. Home-based work included match making, glove making and artificial flowers. Poor conditions would mean these match-sellers often acted as if they were selling matches when they had in fact run out and their boxes and baskets were empty. They were begging to stay alive. This meant that as the working-class children had to work they did not get to attend school and often their families couldn't afford to send them to school.

Until the production of matches started in the factories, these street sellers would make the matches themselves. They would use small flints of wood and dip them in **brimstone** before melting the brimstone on the end of the flint to make a flame. It was a dangerous job to prepare the matches but also to light them using flint and steel to 'strike a light', which was kept in a metal box.

Then science progressed and they could use chemical preparation to prepare hundreds of matches. This made them much easier to use, especially in the **dead of night**. These types of matches were known to have an awful smell at first but as they developed they became more popular. These matches were known as lucifers and could be lit by drawing the match along sandpaper. They were sold in places such as swag shops and oil shops.

Due to rapid development in science, many inventions evolved. These modern inventions out-dated the need of old handmade matches. Inventions such as a pistol tinder box which cost very little and was easy to use or the manufactured lucifer match. They became available at every turn and were popular on street markets and in shops due to large factory manufacture. They eventually made the role of a match seller out-dated. They often turned to trade other wears or turned to other jobs to obtain their **daily bread**. On top of this, police began to clear the streets of beggars as they became a bother to the higher classes.

Sources:

- <https://www.victorianlondon.org/professions/matches.htm>
- <http://researchingfoodhistory.blogspot.com/2019/09/selling-matches-on-street.html>
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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dR4WJY7DA0U>
- <https://theconversation.com/meet-the-matchstick-women-the-hidden-victims-of-the-industrial-revolution-87453>
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- <https://www.historic-uk.com/HistoryUK/HistoryofBritain/Match-Girls-Strike/>