

Edwardian Britain

Before you read

1 Match the pictures with these expressions.

- 1 The working class
- 2 A poor family
- 3 A middle-class family
- 4 The upper-class or aristocracy



Reading

2 Read the text and complete it with the words from the box.

food poor shopkeepers wealthy
horses children clothes car

The 19th century ended on 31st December 1900. It was the end of the Victorian era and the beginning of the Edwardian era: the 14 years before the outbreak of the First World War (1914-1918).

There were many similarities between Edwardian and Victorian Britain. There were still strong class distinctions between the rich and the (1) _____, but it was possible for talented individuals to move up the social scale. On the one hand, the (2) _____ were able to live a life of luxury and leisure; on the other hand, the poor or working class struggled to survive. The pace of life was slower than it has been since the First World War: the motor (3) _____ was a rich man's luxury (women drivers were still unknown) and (4) _____ were still the most common means of road transport; the aeroplane was an amazing new invention; going to the cinema was an interesting new pastime, but in general the Edwardians' life was not very different from their parents'. The population increased from 40 to 45 million. Although the birth-rate was going down, the

death-rate was also falling, because fewer (5) _____ were dying in the first years of childhood. This was because there were more and better medicines and health care improved: Welfare Centres gave advice to mothers and there was free milk for poor working class families.

Upper-class landowners were rich and they paid low taxes and so they could live in large houses, wear elegant (6) _____ and employ lots of domestic servants. The aristocracy also worked in business and industry.

The lower middle class were the less successful businessmen, (7) _____ and professional men. A family with at least one servant in the home was middle class: servants were usually maids (they usually cleaned the house), menservants (they looked after the master's everyday needs, such as his clothes) or cooks. Servants' wages were low but they did not pay rent and they had free clothes and (8) _____. This world, with its fixed social classes, came to an end with the outbreak of the First World War.

3 Read the statements and write T (true) or F (false), then correct the false statements.

- 1 Edwardian and Victorian Britain were very different. _____
- 2 The First World War changed life in Britain. _____
- 3 In Edwardian times, there were a lot of new inventions. _____
- 4 Health care got better in Edwardian times. _____
- 5 Everyone had servants in those days. _____
- 6 All children had free milk. _____
- 7 Servants had free food and clothes. _____

4 Answer the questions.

- 1 When did the First World War begin?
- 2 Who lived a very comfortable life?
- 3 What were some of the new inventions in the Edwardian era?
- 4 How did most people travel?
- 5 Why did some families get free milk?
- 6 Describe the three main social classes in Britain at the time.

Listening

5  **5** You will hear a woman talking about life in the Edwardian era. Is she from the working class, the middle class or the upper class? How do you know?

6  **5** **P** Listen again to the interview, then choose the correct answer (✓).

- 1 Where did the speaker's family keep the meat?
 - a in a fridge
 - b in a cupboard
 - c in an icebox
- 2 When did housewives buy meat?
 - a in the morning
 - b the day before
 - c late in the day
- 3 What was cheap in those days?
 - a clothes
 - b coal
 - c shoes
- 4 The working class could afford to go...
 - a for a drink.
 - b cycling.
 - c on holiday.
- 5 People without work got money from...
 - a their friends.
 - b the government.
 - c the bank.

Speaking

7 Find out about life for the following social classes in your country before the First World War (1900-1914) and make notes about it. Write questions to ask your partner about the people he/she chose and get ready to answer questions about your research.

servants	very poor people
aristocrats	the middle class

- A What did they eat?
 B They ate meat and vegetables.
 A Did they often buy new clothes?
 B No, they didn't.
 A Did they go on holiday?
 B Yes, they did.

STUDY SKILLS

Using paragraphs

When you have to write a text, it is better to organise your writing into three or four topics and use one paragraph for each topic. For example:

Paragraph 1: introduction to the topic
 Paragraph 2: example of topic 1 (*The rich*)
 Paragraph 3: example of topic 2 (*The poor*)
 Paragraph 4: conclusion (*Differences between rich and poor*)

You can introduce new paragraphs with expressions such as:

In this essay, I would like to...
First of all...
Now I want to look at...
To sum up, we can say that...

Writing

8 Find information about Europe before the First World War. How was it different from today? Think about these topics and make some notes:

- Which were the most powerful countries?
- Who were the most important leaders?
- What were the most serious problems?
- Poverty and wealth: were there big differences?
- Education: was there school for everybody?
- How did people enjoy themselves?

9 **P** Write three or four paragraphs describing Europe before the First World War, using your notes from exercise 8. Try to include real facts, mentioning real people and events. Remember to use paragraphs (beginning each one on a new line) with introductory phrases.