



# Back To School

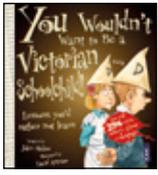
A 'News-Roundup' Programme for Children's TV.

This play is in the style of Children's TV News, where a young reporter speaks to camera 'on location'. In this broadcast, the reporter has gone back in time via a time machine to a Victorian school.

Parts:	Ricky	presenter
	Vicky	presenter
	Mr Wackit	Headmaster
	Miss Fitt	Schoolmistress
	Mabel	Schoolchild
	Walter	Schoolchild

## *News Theme Music*

- Ricky: *(In TV studio)* Hello and welcome to this week's News-Roundup – where we report from a time and place selected by our very latest time-travel machine called ROTTERS. That's the Randomizing-Operational-Time-Teleporting-Electro-Robotic-Segway. Our reporter Vicky just set off on the segway and we're expecting a satellite link to come through any second. Can you hear me, Vicky?
- Vicky: *(In an old schoolroom)* Indeed I can, Ricky. I'm receiving you loud and clear.
- Ricky: That's terrific. So where has the time-segway taken you this week?
- Vicky: Back in time to 1855, Ricky.
- Ricky: 1855? That's five to seven in the evening.
- Vicky: Not the time of day, but the year 1855. Queen Victoria has been



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on the throne for eighteen years.

Ricky: That's a long time to sit still on a posh chair. She must be a bit stiff by now.

Vicky: No, but she's been reigning for eighteen years.

Ricky: Raining for eighteen years? She must be soaked to the skin. No wonder she's not amused.

Vicky: I'm in Victorian Britain and I've come to Grunge Street School to meet some of the people who come here every day. It looks a bit gloomy.

Ricky: Then I'll let you see what's going on, Vicky. Watch out - it looks as if there's a miserable-looking gentleman just behind you. (*Mr Wackit appears, with cane*)

Mr Wackit: I hope you have your tuppence, young lady?

Vicky: I beg your pardon?

Mr Wackit: It costs two pennies a week to come to school. Name?

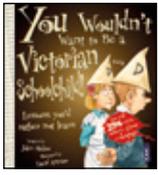
Vicky: My name is Vicky, sir.

Mr Wackit: Vicky? Vicky? What sort of name is that?

Vicky: It's short for Victoria, sir.

Mr Wackit: Queen Victoria is quite short enough already. Her Majesty is barely five feet tall.

Vicky: That's only about one hundred and fifty two centimetres.



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Mr Wackit: I have no idea what you are talking about, girl. And what ridiculous clothes you are wearing. Now hurry up and get to the girls' classroom. My cane awaits any child who arrives late to lessons. It has a point on the end to poke each latecomer.

Vicky: That's not nice.

Mr Wackit: You've got a point there. And so has my cane!

Vicky: When do we start, sir?

Mr Wackit: Nine o'clock sharp. Ha – pointy-cane sharp! So get a move on and don't dawdle. Can't you hear the bell? (*Miss Fitt enters ringing a handbell*)

Miss Fitt: Goodness me, Headmaster – it's raining in the playground.

Mr Wackit: Then you must be ringing wet, Miss Fitt.

Miss Fitt: Exactly, Mr Wackit. My classroom roof is leaking and it is very cold. I told young Walter to light a fire in the hearth.

Mr Wackit: Only five lumps of coal, Miss Fitt. We don't want the children falling asleep from getting too warm, do we?

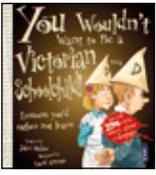
Miss Fitt: But yesterday it was so cold all the ink froze in the inkwells. How can we write with iced ink?

Mr Wackit: With what?

Miss Fitt: Iced ink. Iced ink. Iced ink.

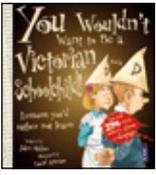
Mr Wackit: You stink? Then you need a wash, Miss Fitt.

Miss Fitt: Whoever is that strange creature, headmaster?



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- Mr Wackit: You have a new girl in your class. This is Victoria. But, unlike our good Queen, she is revealing far too much ankle. Get it covered.  
(Exits)
- Miss Fitt: (Looking horrified) Whatever is the girl wearing? You look ridiculous. Now fetch a slate from the table and start writing. It is essential for the three R's.
- Vicky: Three R's, miss? Would that be Religious Education, Research and Russian?
- Miss Fitt: Nonsense. Reading, 'Riting and 'Rithmetic. They're the most important parts of your education. I will be testing you on them shortly – and woe betide you if you fail. You will be punished. Now, go into the classroom and sit over there next to Mabel.
- Vicky: Yes, miss. (Sits at the desk) Hello, Mabel.
- Miss Fitt: AND NO TALKING! Take out your copybook to practise handwriting. Mabel, you are ink monitor today. Take round pen nibs and all the inkwells.
- Mabel: Yes, Miss Fitt.
- Miss Fitt: Don't you dare drop any on the desk and blot your copybook.
- Mabel: No, Miss Fitt. Er... where are they, miss?
- Miss Fitt: Read the label on the table, Mabel. If you're able, check the table is stable, Mabel.
- Mabel: Yes, Miss Fitt.
- Miss Fitt: Everyone copy down what I write on the blackboard in chalk. NO MISTAKES. Then you must copy out a page from your



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catechism.

Vicky: *(Whispering)* A cat-a-what?

Mabel: A catechism is a text book full of questions and answers and no pictures.

Vicky: Mabel, what do I do with this ruler and pencil?

Mabel: Make sure your pencil is sharp and your ruler is straight. You have to draw lines in your copybook to write on. Don't make a smudge or miss will shout. She may slap you over the knuckles with a little ruler.

Vicky: A little ruler? Like Queen Victoria – she's a ruler of the empire and only five feet tall! *(They giggle)*

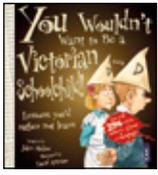
Miss Fitt: Quiet! No talking. And you, girl, sit up straight. You're slouching. You need poise and posture for producing perfect copperplate handwriting. Put that back-straightener on to make you sit up and concentrate.

Mabel: Yes, Miss Fitt.

Vicky: That looks nasty.

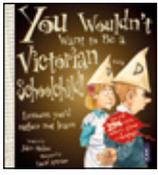
Miss Fitt: How dare you speak, new girl. Report immediately to the headmaster next door. He is teaching the boys arithmetic. Tell him you have been most impudent, impertinent and presumptuous.

Vicky: Yes, Miss Fitt. Sorry, Miss Fitt.  
*(She stands and goes into the classroom next door where Mr Wackit stands teaching at the front with a cane but doesn't notice Vicky enter the room)*



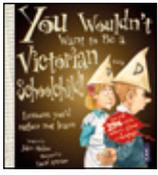
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- Mr Wackit: Now listen here, you bunch of ragamuffins, rascallions and scallawags. Arithmetic is the most important of the 'three Rs' and boys have to be better at fractions, decimals and interest than girls, so your sums will be harder than theirs.
- Walter: Please, sir – is that because boys' brains are cleverer, sir?
- Mr Wackit: Not in your case, Walter. What is nine times twelve?
- Walter: Er... I haven't got an abacus to work it out, sir.
- Mr Wackit: You silly little urchin. It's one hundred and eight. You're a dunce, boy. Go and put on the dunce's cap until the lesson is over.
- Walter: *(Upset) Sorry, sir. (Puts on dunce's cap and stands in the corner)*
- Mr Wackit: Now, Walter the Dunce, repeat after me the following:  
One dozen is twelve. One score is twenty. One gross is one hundred and forty four.
- Walter: One dozen is twelve. One score is twenty. One gross is one hundred and forty four.
- Mr Wackit: Sixteen ounces are one pound,  
Fourteen pounds are one stone.  
One hundred and twelve pounds are eight stone.  
Carry on, Walter...
- Walter: Eight stone are one hundredweight.  
Twenty hundredweight are one ton.
- Mr Wackit: Twelve inches are one foot.  
Three feet are one yard.  
Six feet are two yards are one fathom.  
Carry on, Walter...



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- Walter: Twenty two yards are one chain.  
Ten chains are one furlong.  
Eight furlongs are 1760 yards are one mile.  
Carry on, Walter...
- Vicky: *(To herself)* I would never remember all that. It's like another language
- Mabel: *(Enters the room)* Please, sir – Miss Fitt sent me.
- Mr Wackit: What do you want, girl?
- Mabel: Miss Fitt wants to know if you have punished the new girl yet, sir.
- Mr Wackit: She can write out lines. Write five hundred times the following:  
'I will be obedient at all times, respect my elders and betters, and remember that children should be seen but not heard.'
- Walter: That's not fair, sir – it's only her first day here.
- Mr Wackit: *(Furious)* WHAT?! I will not be spoken to like that by the dunce of the class. Bend over, boy – for six of the best. *(Walter bends over and Mr Wackit raises his cane)*
- Vicky: Please don't cane poor Walter, Mr Wackit.
- Mr Wackit: I shall thrash you, as well, for such impudence. You, Walter and Mabel will be beaten as soon as I've recorded your bad behaviour and punishments in the school logbook.
- Mabel: But I haven't done anything wrong, sir?
- Mr Wackit: That's no excuse. You can still be beaten for answering back. So while I record your punishments in my book, you can each recite



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a verse of a poem. The school inspector is calling tomorrow and will want to hear it, as well as ask you such questions as 'name an animal that has no brain'. And I don't mean Walter.

Walter:

It's a starfish, sir.

Mr Wacket:

For once you are right, you ragamuffin, rascalion, scallawag and dunce. Memorising is such an important part of education. We learn by rote here.

Walter:

Is that because we wrote it down, sir?

Mr Wackit:

Doh – you dunderheaded dim-witted dumb-brained dunce. Rote is learning by repetition, which is what we do here. So I will recite the first verse of a well-known poem and you will continue:

The boy stood on the burning deck

Whence all but he had fled;

The flame that lit the battle's wreck

Shone round him o'er the dead.

*(He is now so busy writing he doesn't hear what the children say)*

Walter:

The boy stood on the burning deck,

His feet were all in blisters.

He split his trousers down the back

And had to wear his sister's.

Vicky:

The boy stood on the burning deck,

The flames, he tried to swat 'em.

A spark shot up his trouser leg

And scorched him on the ... elbow!

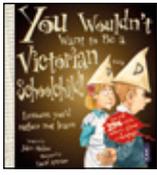
Mabel:

The boy stood on the burning deck,

His knees were all a quiver.

He gave a cough, his leg fell off

And floated down the river.



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*(Mrs Fitt enters the room, unnoticed)*

Walter: Mr Wackit's a strict old man,  
He goes to church on Sundays  
And prays that he'll be given strength  
To wallop the boys on Mondays!

Miss Fitt: I heard that. Headmaster, all these children must be punished  
immediately.

Mr. Wackit: Indeed, Miss Fitt. I intend to start with the new girl. Come here  
for a jolly good hiding...

Vicky: In that case, it's time for me to head back to the future. I've  
already had enough of life in a Victorian school. Being a  
schoolchild one hundred and sixty years ago could certainly be  
unpleasant and tough.

*(To camera)* This is Vicky hopping back on my time-travelling  
segway – so while I make my escape, it's back to Ricky in  
the studio.

Ricky: Yikes! On that breaking news, we must leave you with the  
shocking sound of swishing canes and scary thwacks. Which all  
goes to show **YOU WOULDN'T WANT TO BE A VICTORIAN  
SCHOOLCHILD... EVER!**

*News Theme Music*