CHILDHOOD PRESENTATION NOTES/BRAINSTORMING:

* Protestantism: 1500s, shift to idea that children were “moral agents” and therefore in need of “shaping”. Shaping meant making them work as a “weapon in the battle against evil”.
  + This idea became the norm, right up until the industrial revolution in Victorian times.
  + Children helped around the house and with their parent’s work, such as farming and trades, and might have worked with their families out of necessity, but with this religious imperative children were now expected to hold jobs just as adults were; chimney sweeps, factory workers, coal mines, etc. Became common places for poor children to work.
  + This was thought to be good for a child’s emotional and social development, according to protestantism.
* Stories and authors like “The Little Match Girl” and Charles Dickens helped to show the plight of lower class working children, and helped foster merciful attitudes that eventually lead to changes in child labour laws.
  + The illustrations from these books will help show changing attitudes… from ignorance to romanticism and pity
* When did child labour laws come into play? Was it a result of economic factors (factorization making child labour useless) or social pressure?
* http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Timeline\_of\_young\_people's\_rights\_in\_the\_United\_Kingdom
  + Child labour in the Industrial Revolution: find images! Happy chimney sweeps? Paper boys? Flower girls/match girls?

The Victorian era lasted between 1837 until 1901, or the reign of Queen Victoria of the British Empire. This era was dominated by the industrial revolution, a time period when the poor and disenfranchised flocked to urban centres looking for work, only to find horrendous living conditions, long hours, and very little pay in crowded and incredibly dangerous factories. Today, the infant mortality rate for the UK is 4.5 deaths out of 1000 births. In Victorian England, only half of infants survived their first year. The likely death of young children was a fact of life for everyone, as the high birth rate also affected the wealthy upper class. Add into that poor understanding of sanitation and healthy eating and work habits, and you have many families losing children or children losing parents to disease, starvation or malnutrition, and unsafe working conditions. It was a grim time to be alive.

When you have so many families in extreme poverty, many with adults who are sick or maimed from a life of hard work and toil, the burden of survival was shared with the relatively able children. In Victorian England poor children who worked for a living were an important staple of the industrial economy. Children worked in numerous factories and mills, as chimney sweeps, servants, match and flower sellers, couriers, labourers, and beggars. Children as young as 6 were regularly found working long hours in factories. When you’re family is hungry or your parents are dead or gone, they did what they had to do to survive.

For them there was no childhood. For them, there was work, and the hope that their employers would look after them and they’d earn enough money to feed themselves or their families. This wretched reality was in sharp contrast to how middle and upper-class children were treated in the same time period.

In the Victorian era, childhood was heavily idealized, and treated in a very sentimental manner. Children were seen as innocent and pure, yet they needed to be carefully groomed into moral, Christian beings. Picture books, fairy tales, fables, and children’s novels were a booming business in this time. The books were used to teach proper moral values and behaviour, as well as the ideals of the time. However, the children of the lower classes, most of whom couldn’t read or write let alone afford the books, lived very different lives. They didn’t play, they didn’t go to school, they didn’t read books and play pretend. They worked, in harsh conditions, and many didn’t survive to adulthood.

Child labour was tolerated and continued so long because the causes of it weren’t addressed. Many attempts at regulation were made throughout the 1800s, but many of it was difficult to enforce if it was enforced at all. Until poverty, education, and healthcare needs were met, child labour was accepted as an unfortunate necessity at best. In Britain, all of these things weren’t properly provided until the 1940s, when Welfare State laws finally came into effect to ease the worst of the poverty that children were living in.

[CALVINISM GOES HERE?]

In 1789 and 1794, William Blake published two volumes of poetry and illustrations, a couple of which were about the plight of young chimney sweeps, who often faced burns, disfigurement, disease, and death in their daily work. In 18th and 19th century England young boys and girls were often apprenticed or sold to masters who trained them to be chimney sweeps or “climbing boys” thanks to their small size. This is only one example of child labour that was popular and socially accepted in those times.

For many children in 18th and 19th century England, life was not about learning and playing, but about hard work and survival. The industrial revolution, immigrants from the Irish Potato Famine, and an inexplicable population boom kickstarted an exodus of people to urban centres, where they hoped to find a job to provide for themselves or their family. Instead, many of them faced abject poverty and horrendous living conditions, and any jobs they did find were likely low-paying and incredibly dangerous. Children were often hit the hardest in this setting, despite numerous attempts by the government to regulate their treatment while working.

The Victorian era, which lasted from 1837 to 1901, had incredibly high mortality rates for children; as many as 1 in 3 babies died before their first birthday, for the upper classes as well as the poor. As such, death was an inescapable part of life, and much of children’s literature at the time dealt with themes that would seem rather dark or morbid today. A book by Charles Kingsley, “The Water Babies”, published in 1863, featured a main character named Tom, a young chimney sweep, who falls in a river and drowns at the beginning of the story. Upon his death he is transformed into a water baby, and embarks on a journey of moral development and repentance. This is only one example of popular children’s stories at the time that dealt with the subject matter of death; many fairy tales and fables, such as Hans Christian Andersen’s “The Little Match Girl” (1846), or Oscar Wilde’s “The Happy Prince” (1888), tried to teach children the importance of virtue and kindness in a life that was often much too short and full of suffering, with the added assurance that they would find peace and happiness in the afterlife.

The cruel irony for much of Victorian children’s literature is that those children who suffered the most and who became the protagonists of such stories were highly unlikely to ever read or benefit from the works. Children who worked didn’t go to school. Most of them couldn’t read, couldn’t write, and definitely didn’t have the money to spend on picture books and novels. Their lives were a grim reality that many were unable to escape, and for them, the concept of a “childhood” was a construct that could only be realized by those in the middle and upper classes. In the Victorian era many families turned away from the Calvinist ideals that “idle hands were the tools of the devil”. Childhood was increasingly seen as a time period that should be protected for education and enjoyment, and many advertisements and syrupy sweet sentimental images reflected this change in opinion. Childhood became a commodity in which adults could escape the grim realities of life and bask in a romantic ideal of purity, innocence, and care-free naïveté. All this when a massive subset of the economy relied on the labour from children as young as 6 years of age.

Child labour was deemed an unfortunate necessity by many of those in power. The root causes that drove children to work, such as poverty, lack of education, or lack of regulation, were never fully addressed until as late as the mid 20th century. Even though child labour slowly declined over the latter half of the 19th century thanks to increased social pressure and from government regulation, it wasn’t until the 1940s when a series of supportive welfare reforms came into existence in Great Britain that provided government aid to those in need of help. As a result of these reforms and similar laws, child labour rates rapidly decreased and education rates rose, and most children finally had a stab at having a “childhood” like the one that was idolized from the Romantic early days of the Victorian era.

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“What explains the sluggish pace of reform? The rise of industrial capitalism created a huge demand for cheap labor, which children certainly were. Responding to this boom, Victorian economists and politicians embraced a laissez-faire approach which involved keeping state interference to a minimum. Forced to fend for themselves, many families endured such extreme poverty that their children’s wages were indeed crucial to their survival. And although the Romantic belief in childhood innocence was spreading, many clung to the Calvinist notion of original sin, which held that work was good for children, since “Satan finds mischief for idle hands to do.”” < <http://www.representingchildhood.pitt.edu/victorian.htm>