**Slide 1 – Queen Victoria and Optimism**

Queen Victoria reigned from 1837 to 1901 and was England’s longest monarch (63 years) after Elizabeth II.

In this period England became the most powerful nation in the world after defeating Napoleon at Waterloo in 1815. It was one of the few states where there were no revolutions.

Her empire covered one quarter of the Earth and Q. Victoria was also Empress of India.

**Slide 2 – Victorian society**

There were 3 social classes:

The upper one was the old aristocracy, which had political power

The middle class was gaining power; it expanded and included a lower class (shopkeepers), a middle one (factory owners) and an upper middle class (lawyers and doctors);

The working class was excluded from the political process. They lived in extreme poverty.

Women were considered «the angels of home». They had to be perfect mother and wives.

**Slide 3 – Victorian compromise**

So on one hand there was **prosperity**, on the other **poverty** and social problems.

There was optimism for the technological progress, but in reality it created more problems.

As a result, this became a period of **COMPROMISE**: the rich didn’t want to see the problems around them. They had progress but exploited the poor people. The middle class was full of corruption and had no morality.

There was a contrast between liberalism and the condition of the working class and also a contrast between industrialization and the desire to return to nature.

**Slide 4 – Economic and social change**

On one side there was the growth in industry, on the other there were difficulties in agriculture. These difficulties were:

The *Enclosure Acts*, by which there were no ‘open/public’ lands, but only private ones;

The *Corn Laws*, which kept the price of corn (and bread) artificially high.

So people moved from rural to urban zones.

Cities became overpopulated. Housing, sanitation and factory working were in terrible conditions.

**Marx** and **Engels** denounced the growth of injustice and inequalities, so many important social reforms were introduced.

**Slide 5 – Workers’ rights and Chartism**

The working class started asking for more rights, especially the right to vote.

The ***First Reform Bill*** (1832) gave the right to vote only to property owners. So workers organized themselves in a movement to demand the vote for all men, known as Chartism (from the CHARTERS that they presented to Parliament).

With the Third Reform Bill (1884) all male workers, labourers, farmers and miners, had the right to vote.

In 1918 all man had the right to vote.

In 1928 it was given to everybody.

**Colonialism and Empire**

In the 19th century there was the expansion of the British empire. In Africa there was the abolition of the slave trade but commercial activities remained. They expanded to Egypt and Sudan, but caused problems of Afrikaaners (Dutch colonizers).

Australia was initially colonised as a place for criminals. Then, they expanded to New Zealand, Hong Kong and Singapore (in Asia), Gibraltar, Malta and Cyprus and had a sea passage on the Suez Canal.

Colonies were controlled by the India Office and the Colonial Office: in each territory there was a governor representing the British Crown, who appointed local governors.

**United States and American Colonialism**

Settlers in America occupied the south west area to produce cotton, sugar and tobacco and exploited the slaves.

Many northern states started to abolish slavery and in 1860 Abraham Lincoln became President because he opposed slavery.

The southern states, however, still wanted slavery. They left the Union and created a Confederacy. This division caused a Civil War in America (1861).

In 1865 Lincoln was assassinated but the war finished. However, the division between northern and southern stated and racism persisted.

The years from 1865 to 1900 saw a great industrialization of north, while the economy in the south was re-built.

Many people moved from England to America to look for gold.

America gained the Hawaii peacefully. Then, after a war with Spain, also Philippines and Puerto Rico, while Cuba stayed independent.

**VICTORIAN NOVEL**

Novel is the literary genre which best represents the Victorian age: novels dealt with the most important themes of the time, like industrialisation and philanthropy.

The typical features of Victorian novel were:

1. Omniscient narrator
2. Complicated and long plots.

The characters’ thoughts and evolution were also important: the *Bildungsroman* (“romanzo di formazione”) was a form adopted by Victorian novelists.

Novel interpreted human condition but at the same time it was an entertainment for the middle-class reader.

**The novel’s success**

* The novel’s success was due to these factors:
1. There were more and more people able to read;
2. Works were published in instalments and magazines so the cost was lower;
3. The authors had profit for their novels. So many genres developed: historical, psychological, sentimental, adventurous, social etc.

**Classification of Victorian novels**

1. Early Victorians – deal with social themes. **Dickens** used REALISM and described poverty, bad housing and bad education; **Thackeray** in his novel *Vanity Fair* described the upper class society;
2. Mid-Victorians – women like Elizabeth **Gaskell** (novel about the conflict between employers and workers); Emily and Charlotte **Bronte** (who described feelings and emotions); George **Eliot**, who wrote *Middlemarch*, dealing with ethical conflicts and social issues and founded the psychological fiction.
3. The late Victorian years saw a profound change in the society. The optimism was replaced by fatalism in **Thomas Hardy**: in *Tess of the d’Ubervilles*, the protagonist Tess is the victim of the fate. In *The Portrait of a Lady*, **Henry James** describes the relationship between English and American society, with psychological depth which anticipated the modernist novel, in the role of the narrator.

**The American Renaissance**

The period between 1850 and 1855 is called American Renaissance because some of the most important American literary works were published in this period.

For example, Nathaniel **Hawthorne**’s works focus on the struggle between good and evil. *The Scarlet Letter* is about the relationship between a judge and a woman considered a witch.

The most famous novel in this period was **Melville**’s *Moby Dick*, the story of the captain of a ship, Ahab, and his adventures to kill a white whale.

**Mark Twain** worked as a journalist and then wrote novels. *Tom Sawyer* and *Huckleberry Finn* tell the picaresque stories of 2 boys and their dramatic childhood in America.