Victorian Britain
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Teachers' Notes

Curriculum subject: <u>History</u>

Key Stage: <u>3</u>

Theme: <u>Crime and punishment</u>

Rationale

Using primary source material, this activity aims to give students a real insight into the attitudes that formed and came out of one of what is often referred to as one of the "bloodiest" periods of Britain's judicial history. This lesson can serve as part of an introduction to punishment in the period 1700-1900. Furthermore, it can be extended into a series of lessons examining crime, punishment and changes in attitudes towards both in the 20th century.

At first sight, the 18th century can appear to students as one of the harshest and bloodiest periods of British judicial history simply by being shown the well-trodden ground of the list of crimes punishable by death at the end of the century. Even the name assigned to laws of this period - "The Bloody Code" - evokes a sense of foreboding. But there are questions to be answered: what was the Bloody Code? How did its impact change attitudes in the 19th century? In this activity, students will use archive materials to help them to answer those questions.

Content
Historical sources:
- Henry Fielding, founder of the Bow Street Runners, describes London's tangled streets as the perfect hiding place for criminal (1751)
- Broadside on the execution of the Mannings (c 1849)
- 'Mr Charles Dickens and the execution of the Mannings', reprinted from The Times (c 1849)
- Broadside on the 'Life, Trial, Execution and Dying Behaviour of Joseph Hunton' (c 1828)
- Broadside about the execution of Catherine Foster (1847)

Recommended reading (short articles):
The working classes and the poor by Liza Picard
The built environment by Liza Picard

Key questions
- Why was public execution outlawed in 1868?

Activities

1) Introduce the Bloody Code to students. This could be done via a short role play in which students are given a selection or all of the following cards:
   - stealing horses or sheep
   - destroying turnpike roads
   - cutting down trees
   - pickpocketing goods worth more than one shilling
   - being out at night with a blackened face
   - unmarried mother concealing a stillborn child
   - arson
   - forgery
   - stealing from a rabbit warren
   - murder
   - stealing a pocket handkerchief
   - impersonating a Chelsea Pensioner
   - unnatural crimes with animals
   - de-Facing Westminster Bridge
   - mutiny
   - strong evidence of malice in children aged 7-14
   - stealing from a shipwreck

2) Students could act as a jury to decide the punishment. Alternatively, you, as the judge, could simply pass the death sentence for each one to initiate discussion of what became known as the Bloody Code. These are just a few of the 225 crimes that became punishable by death by 1815. What do students think about the list?

3) Share Henry Fieldings' views on crime and punishment. How might this partly help to explain the Bloody Code?

4) Ask students to look at the Broadside covering the execution of the Mannings, the Grand Moral Spectacle, Charles Dickens's letter and the broadside covering the life, trial, execution and dying behaviours of Joseph Hunton and others. Ask students to interrogate the sources. What can they tell us about the kinds of crime that were being punished by death and attitudes towards public execution? Were women treated any differently? You may need to provide support and structure to students' interrogation of the source material.

5) How do these sources help to explain why public execution was outlawed in 1868?