

THE VICTORIAN AGE

Before children's literature could fully mature, it had to abandon the shackles of moral didacticism that was more interested in the message than literary quality. These books tended to offer up what adults believed was good for children, not necessarily what children themselves enjoyed. It was not until the later nineteenth century that talented writers who were committed to writing entertaining stories for children—as opposed to morality tales—began to emerge. This phenomenon has been attributed to several developments:

- the strengthening of the family unit (brought about in part by a lowered infant mortality rate that helped to stabilize the family)
- rapidly developing technology that made possible still cheaper books along with high-quality full-color printing
- the slow, but inexorable, rise of the status of women (who have dominated children's writing from the end of the eighteenth century)
- the growth of widespread educational opportunities, including mandatory education legislation in both the United States and Great Britain, creating more readers
- the continued growth of the middle class, which further broadened the reading audience (most writers must necessarily seek a broad appeal if they are to earn a living, and writing for children was not a truly profitable enterprise until the second half of the nineteenth century)

The confluence of these forces made possible the first “Golden Age” of children's books during the reign of Britain's Queen Victoria—hence the Victorian Period.