Poor people wore rough hardworking clothes, which were dictated by the sumptuary laws. Poor people had little money and bad housing. They had little time off for entertainment and work long hours. Because of the changes in farming, many were unable to work due to lack of jobs or disability. Even the punishment for crimes was different for the rich and the poor.

The government in Tudor England became very concerned about the poor. Before Henry VIII’s dissolution of the monasteries, the church would provide for the poor. However, after that, there was no-one to help them and there was a lot more of the poor than there were rich and there was always the potential for a Peasants Revolt (the poor rising up against the government).

In the towns and cities, finding a job was difficult but the same thing was occurring in the countryside where changes in the way farms worked lead to unemployment for many. There was the very real danger of trouble amongst the poor.

This concern about the poor was at it greatest in Elizabeth's time. It made every parish responsible for the poor and unemployed within that parish. The Justice of the Peace (JP's) for each parish was allowed to collect a tax from those who owned land in the parish. This was called the Poor Rate. It was used to help the poor. JP's appointed Overseers of the Poor to assist him in his work with the poor.

The poor were divided into three groups by the government The Helpless Poor (the deserving poor), the Able Bodies Poor and Rogues and Vagabonds (the undeserving poor). The poor had to do the best they could in very difficult circumstances. However, Tudor England saw a great increase in crime as for many it was the only way they could survive. Those who resorted to theft faced the death penalty if they were caught. Punishment was very severe for seemingly trivial cases because it was believed that any sign of the government being soft towards those who had broken the law would encourage others to do likewise. However, this belief also made criminals desperate as they would do anything to avoid capture – including murder.
Dealing with the Problem of Poverty - The Elizabethan Poor Law 1601

Before the Reformation it had always been considered Christian duty to carry out the instructions laid down in Matthew chapter 25 - that all Christians shall -

- feed the hungry
- give drink to the thirsty
- welcome the stranger
- clothe the naked
- visit the sick
- visit the prisoner
- bury the dead

After the Reformation, many of these values disappeared and the poor were left without help.

It became increasingly clear that something had to be done to help those who were genuinely in need, and something else had to be done about the increasing numbers of those who chose to beg and steal rather than work.

Source

Hark! Hark! The dogs do bark!
The beggars are coming to town:
Some in rags, some in tags
And one in a velvet gown

In 1552 Parish registers of poor were introduced. This meant that there was now an official register of poor in a parish.

In 1563 Justices of the Peace were given the power to raise funds to support the poor. Categories were also drawn up for the different types of poor and beggars that were found on the streets.

Deserving Poor – This category was for those people who wanted to work but were unable to find suitable employment. These people were to be given help in the form of clothes, food or maybe money. (Outdoor Relief)

Or Those who were too old, young or ill to work. These people were to be looked after in almshouses, orphanages, workhouses or hospitals. Orphans and children of the poor were to be given an apprenticeship to a tradesman. (Indoor Relief)

Undeserving Poor – Also called idle beggars or sturdy beggars, this category was for those who could work but chose not to. They were to be whipped through the town until they learnt the error of their ways.
Dealing with the Problem of Poverty - The Elizabethan Poor Law 1601

**Activities – Incline of difficulty – curriculum level 3 – 5**

You have just been appointed Overseer of the Poor for your Parish.

A number of people have applied to you for poor relief.

Decide which category of poor they fall into and what type of relief, if any, you will give:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Deserving/ Undeserving</th>
<th>Indoor/ Outdoor Relief or whipping</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A 20 year old man. He has no physical deformities and appears to be in good health. He says that he is unable to work due to ill health.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. A 30 year old woman. She has difficulty walking and has four children to look after all under the age of seven.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. A 40 year old man. He lost a foot while serving in the British navy during the Spanish Armada battles. He is otherwise in good health.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. A 12 year old boy. His parents were killed in a house fire. He is fit and healthy.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. Imagine you are one of the deserving poor. Write a sentence or two describing how you feel about this new act.

3. Imagine you are a rich person. Write a paragraph describing how you feel about this new act. What are the advantages and disadvantages for you?

4. The source on the sheet is a nursery rhyme thought to originate from this period. Explain the meaning of the words of the rhyme.

5. Why do you think it was necessary to make relief of the poor the legal responsibility of Parishes?

6. Why do you think there is little evidence of what the poor thought or felt?
HERE ARE A FEW STATEMENTS ABOUT THE TUDOR RICH AND THE POOR.

- There are always more rich than poor.
- The rich live longer than the poor.

- The rich wore nice clothes and had lots of them
- The poor had hard-wearing coarse clothes fit for working in.

- The rich did not work.
- The poor work very hard.

- The rich filled their days with entertainment.
- The poor did not have much time for entertainment.

- The rich had more food and more variety of food.
- The poor had whatever they could get.

- The rich had doctors to attend them or go to a barber-surgeon.
- The poor would have to go to the village ‘wise woman’ to see if she could help them.

- The rich had baths.
- The poor had few facilities for washing.

- The rich educated their children.
- The poor stayed at home and learnt the skills needed to work from their parents.

- The rich were more likely to survive the plague by moving away.
- The poor were more likely to die from the plague as they were not as well and could not move away.

- The rich had many belongings, which they passed on through wills and inventories.
- The poor had few belongings to pass on and were unable to write down their goods in inventories as they could not read or write.

- The rich could literally get away with murder.
- The poor could be severely punished for relatively small offences.

- The rich lived in nice housing with nice furniture, nice facilities and servants.
- The poor had bad housing with little furniture and lots of work.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Lives of rich</th>
<th>Lives of poor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leisure</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clothes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hygiene</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belongings</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Houses</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

© The Falstaff Experience 2009
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>EXHIBIT ONE</th>
<th>EXHIBIT TWO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What are the clothes like?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are the surroundings like?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are they doing?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who is rich and who is poor? Why?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Can you find any other examples in the museum of rich and poor?
GLOSSARY

Merchant: a rich trader.
Monarch: king or queen.
Peasant: a poor person.
Poach: hunt animals that are illegal to hunt.
Spinning wool: untangling wool using a spindle or a wheel.
Sympathetically: Behaving in nice way towards something/ someone you feel sorry for.
Timber: a type of wood.
Wattle and daub: a mud-like material used to make poor Tudors’ houses.
Well-off: wealthy.
Tudor World at the Falstaff Experience
40 Sheep Street
Stratford-Upon-Avon
Warwickshire
CV37 6EE

01789-298070
info@falstaffexperience.co.uk
www.falstaffexperience.co.uk

For special prices and activities for schools, please visit our website:

www.falstaffexperience.co.uk