

# Sarah Forbes Bonetta

## Early Life

A girl was born to a Yoruba chief in the village of Oke Odan, Nigeria, in 1843. She was named Aina and she was given the title 'Omoba'. This title means 'child of a monarch' in the Yoruba and Edo languages.

When Aina was thought to be five years old, the village of Oke Odan was **sieged**. Aina was **orphaned** and she was **enslaved** by King Gezo.

Two years after Aina was enslaved, a British Royal Navy lieutenant called Frederick Forbes met with King Gezo. Frederick was part of a mission to try to end to the trading of enslaved people. When Frederick met with King Gezo, he persuaded him to give Aina to Queen Victoria, as if she were a gift.

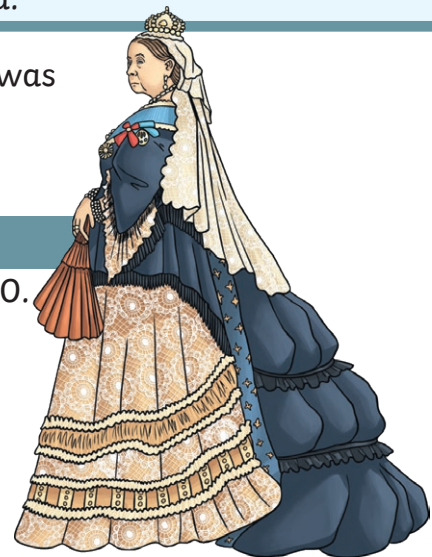
Once Aina begun her journey to Britain, she was no longer able to use her birth name. Instead, she was given three new names:

New Name Given	Reason
Sarah	Frederick chose this name.
Forbes	This was Frederick's last name and he was the person to whom she had been given.
Bonetta	This was the name of the ship that she was travelling on. It was called the HMS Bonetta.

From the moment that Aina arrived in Britain, she was known as Sarah Forbes Bonetta. Sometimes, people gave her the nickname Sally.

## Meeting Queen Victoria

Sarah first met Queen Victoria on 9<sup>th</sup> November 1850. After The Queen had met Sarah, she wrote in her journal that Sarah was very intelligent. The Queen was surprised that Sarah could already speak English fluently. She had learnt it from the crew of the HMS Bonetta. Queen Victoria decided that



she would be responsible for looking after Sarah; she arranged for her to be cared for by Frederick and his family.

Sarah travelled back to Africa to study in Sierra Leone between 1851 and 1855. When she returned to Britain, she was cared for and educated by Reverend James Schoen and his wife, Elizabeth. Sarah's letters to the Schoen family show that she loved them dearly. During this time, Sarah attended many important royal events, such as the wedding of Queen Victoria's eldest daughter, Victoria.

### Marriage

In 1862, Sarah met Captain James Pinson Labulo Davies. James was an officer in the British Royal Navy and he was a wealthy businessman. After being given permission by Queen Victoria, Sarah and James married in an extravagant ceremony in August 1862. It is reported that Sarah wore a gown made of white silk and that she arrived at the church in one of ten horse-drawn carriages.

Shortly after their wedding, Sarah and James moved to Sierra Leone and Sarah became a teacher. In 1863, their first child was born. After getting special permission from The Queen, they named their daughter Victoria Davies.

When the baby was christened, Queen Victoria was said to have sent many expensive gifts. Two of these were a gold cup and a tray. It is said that these gifts had an inscription carved into them which read:

To Victoria Davies, from her godmother, Victoria,  
Queen of Great Britain and Ireland, 1863.

For the rest of her life, Queen Victoria cared for Victoria Davies. She paid for her education, just as she had done for Sarah. Queen Victoria decided to give Victoria an annuity. This meant that Victoria would receive money from the royal household each year for the rest of her life.

### Glossary

**enslaved:** To have had your freedom and rights taken away.

**orphaned:** To become an orphan because your parents are no longer alive.

**sieged:** When a group surrounds a town and cuts off supplies to it.

# Questions

1. **Queen Victoria decided to give Victoria an annuity.**

What does 'annuity' mean? Tick one.

- important status within society
- amount of money that is received each year
- excellent education at prestigious schools
- unusual gifts made from gold

2. What nickname did people sometimes give Sarah? Tick one.

- Victoria
- Aina
- Sally
- Vicky

3. Find and copy the meaning of the title 'Omoba'.

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4. On which date did Sarah first meet Queen Victoria?

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5. Find and copy one word from the text which shows that the gifts that Queen Victoria gave to Victoria Davies were worth a lot of money.

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6. **From the moment that Aina arrived in Britain, she was known as Sarah Forbes Bonetta.**

Explain why the name Bonetta was chosen for her.

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7. What impression does the author give you about Sarah? Explain your answer.

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8. Compare Sarah's life in 1853 to her life in 1863. How is it similar?

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# Answers

1. **Queen Victoria decided to give Victoria an annuity.**

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 **amount of money that is received each year**  
 excellent education at prestigious schools  
 unusual gifts made from gold

2. What nickname did people sometimes give Sarah? Tick one.

- Victoria  
 Aina  
 **Sally**  
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3. Find and copy the meaning of the title 'Omoba'.

**child of a monarch**

4. On which date did Sarah first meet Queen Victoria?

**Sarah first met Queen Victoria on 9<sup>th</sup> November 1850.**

5. Find and copy one word from the text which shows that the gifts that Queen Victoria gave to Victoria Davies were worth a lot of money.

**expensive**

6. **From the moment that Aina arrived in Britain, she was known as Sarah Forbes Bonetta.**

Explain why the name Bonetta was chosen for her.

**Pupils' own responses, such as: The name Bonetta was chosen for her because it was the name of the ship that she was travelling on (the HMS Bonetta).**

7. What impression does the author give you about Sarah? Explain your answer.

**Pupils' own responses, such as: The author gives me the impression that Sarah was a very clever person because it says that Queen Victoria called her intelligent and that she learnt English very quickly from the crew of the HMS Bonetta.**

8. Compare Sarah's life in 1853 to her life in 1863. How is it similar?

**Pupils' own responses, such as: Sarah's life is similar in 1853 and in 1863 because she lived in Sierra Leone in both of these years.**

# Sarah Forbes Bonetta

## Early Life



In 1843, in the village of Oke Odan in south-western Nigeria, a girl was born to a Yoruba chief. She was named Aina and given the title 'Omoba', meaning 'child of a monarch' in the Yoruba and Edo languages.

In 1848, when Aina was thought to be five years old, the village of Oke Odan was **sieged** and Aina was **orphaned**. She was captured and enslaved by King Gezo and kept as a prisoner in his court.

Two years after Aina's capture, Frederick Edwyn Forbes (a British Royal Navy lieutenant) arrived in the Kingdom of Dahomey. He was sent to meet with King Gezo as part of a mission to try to end to the trading of enslaved people. When Frederick met King Gezo, he persuaded him to give Aina to Queen Victoria, as if she were a gift.

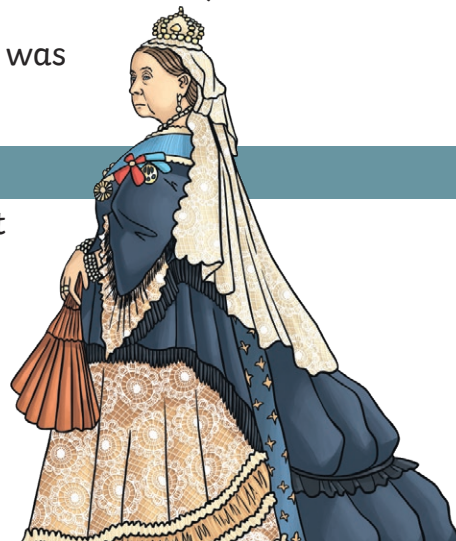
Once Aina had begun her voyage to Britain, she was stripped of her birth name and given three new names:

- 'Sarah' which was a name of Frederick's choice;
- 'Forbes' which was used because of Frederick's surname, since he was the commander to whom she had been given;
- 'Bonetta' which was used because of the ship that Frederick had commanded on his journey to Africa (the HMS Bonetta).

Therefore, upon her arrival in Britain, Aina was known as Sarah Forbes Bonetta.

## Meeting Queen Victoria

Sarah (often given the nickname Sally) first met Queen Victoria on 9<sup>th</sup> November 1850. Upon meeting Sarah, Queen Victoria wrote in her journal that Sarah was sharp and intelligent. The Queen was surprised by Sarah's fluency in English, which she



had learnt from the crew of the HMS Bonetta. Queen Victoria vowed to take responsibly for Sarah's welfare so she arranged for her to be cared for by Frederick and his family.

### Childhood and Teenage Year

While living with Frederick and his family, it is reported that Sarah had become unwell. At the time, it was believed that Sarah's illness was because of the poor weather in Britain. In January 1851, a decision was made to move Sarah to a warmer climate to continue her education. A place was found for her at a school in Sierra Leone, Africa. Here, Sarah is said to have excelled with her studies (especially music) and she learnt to speak French.

Sarah returned to Britain in 1855. At Queen Victoria's request, she was cared for and educated by Reverend James Schoen and his wife, Elizabeth, whom Sarah loved dearly. During this time, Sarah was highly regarded by the royal household; she attended many important events, such as the wedding of Queen Victoria's eldest daughter, Victoria.

### Marriage

In 1862, Sarah met Captain James Pinson Labulo Davies, who was an officer in the British Royal Navy and a wealthy businessman. After being given permission by Queen Victoria, Sarah and James married in an elaborate ceremony in August 1862. It is reported that Sarah wore a gown made of white silk and that she arrived at St Nicholas' Church in Brighton in one of ten horse-drawn carriages.

Shortly after their wedding, Sarah and James moved to Sierra Leone, where Sarah became a teacher. In 1863, their first child was born. After getting special permission from The Queen, they named her Victoria. When the baby was christened, Queen Victoria reportedly sent many expensive gifts. Two of these were a gold cup and a tray which were said to have been inscribed with the words:

To Victoria Davies, from her godmother, Victoria,  
Queen of Great Britain and Ireland, 1863.

For the rest of her life, Queen Victoria cared for Victoria and she paid for her education, just as she had done for Sarah. Queen Victoria decided to give Victoria an annuity. This meant that Victoria would receive a fixed sum of money from the royal household each year for the rest of her life.

## Glossary

**orphaned:** To become an orphan because your parents are no longer alive.

**sieged:** When a group surrounds a town and cuts off supplies to it.

# Questions

1. In which year did Sarah marry James? Tick one.
  - 1850
  - 1851
  - 1855
  - 1862
2. What was similar about the lives of Sarah Forbes Bonetta and her daughter Victoria? Tick **two**.
  - They both had their birth names changed.
  - They both had their education paid for by Queen Victoria.
  - They both lived in Sierra Leone during their lifetime.
  - They both received an annuity from Queen Victoria.

3. Look at the section called **Meeting Queen Victoria**.

Find and copy one word which means the same as 'promised'.

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4. Fill in the missing words.

Sarah attended many important events, such as the \_\_\_\_\_  
of Queen Victoria's eldest daughter, \_\_\_\_\_.

5. Why was the 9<sup>th</sup> November 1850 a significant date in Sarah's life?

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6. Explain why the name Sarah Forbes Bonetta was chosen for Aina.

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7. Discuss why the title 'Omoba' was given to Aina.

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8. Explain what is meant by the term 'annuity'.

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9. Use **two** words to describe Sarah and fully explain why you have chosen them.

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# Answers

1. In which year did Sarah marry James? Tick one.
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2. What was similar about the lives of Sarah Forbes Bonetta and her daughter Victoria? Tick **two**.
  - They both had their birth names changed.
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  - They both lived in Sierra Leone during their lifetime.**
  - They both received an annuity from Queen Victoria.
3. Look at the section called **Meeting Queen Victoria**. Find and copy one word which means the same as 'promised'.  
**vowed**
4. Fill in the missing words.  
Sarah attended many important events, such as the **wedding** of Queen Victoria's eldest daughter, **Victoria**.
5. Why was the 9<sup>th</sup> November 1850 a significant date in Sarah's life?  
**Sarah first met Queen Victoria on 9<sup>th</sup> November 1850.**
6. Explain why the name Sarah Forbes Bonetta was chosen for Aina.  
**Pupils' own responses, such as: The name Sarah Forbes Bonetta was chosen for her so that she would be named after the commander that she had been given to and the ship that he commanded. The name Sarah was chosen just because Frederick liked it.**
7. Discuss why the title 'Omoba' was given to Aina.  
**Pupils' own responses, such as: The title 'Omoba' was given to Aina because she was the daughter of a Yoruba chief. It means 'child of a monarch' in the Yoruba and Edo languages.**
8. Explain what is meant by the term 'annuity'.  
**Pupils' own responses, such as: An annuity is a fixed sum of money that someone receives each year for the rest of their life.**

9. Use **two** words to describe Sarah and fully explain why you have chosen them.

**Pupils' own responses, such as: I would choose the word 'intelligent' to describe Sarah because that is what Queen Victoria described her as in her journal. I would also choose the word 'important' to describe her because she was the daughter of a Yoruba chief, who was given a special title.**

# Sarah Forbes Bonetta

## Early Life

In 1843, in the village of Oke Odan in south-western Nigeria, a girl was born to a Yoruba chief: a baby who was named Aina and given the title 'Omoba', meaning 'child of a monarch' in the Yoruba and Edo languages.

In 1848, when Aina was thought to be five years old, the village of Oke Odan was sieged during the Okeadon War. As a result of the siege, Aina was orphaned. She was captured and enslaved by King Gezo and kept as a prisoner in his court.

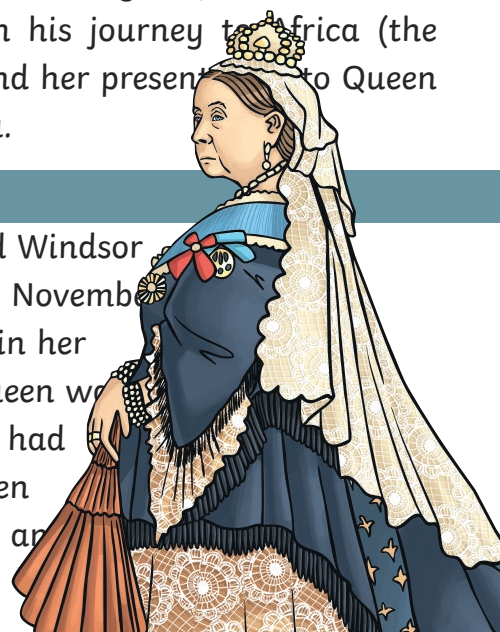


Two years after Aina's capture, Frederick Edwyn Forbes – a British Royal Navy lieutenant – arrived in the Kingdom of Dahomey as part of a mission to negotiate an end to the trading of enslaved people. Upon meeting King Gezo, Frederick bargained to save Aina, eventually persuading the King to give her to Queen Victoria, as if she were a gift.

Once Aina had begun her voyage to Britain, she was stripped of her birth name and given three new names: 'Sarah', a name of Frederick's choice; 'Forbes', his surname (as he was the commander to whom she had been given); and 'Bonetta', after the ship that Frederick had commanded on his journey to Africa (the HMS Bonetta). Thus, upon her arrival in Britain and her presentation to Queen Victoria, Aina was known as Sarah Forbes Bonetta.

## Meeting Queen Victoria

Sarah (often given the nickname Sally) first visited Windsor Castle – one of Queen Victoria's residences – on 9<sup>th</sup> November 1850. Upon meeting Sarah, Queen Victoria wrote in her journal that she was sharp and intelligent; The Queen was surprised by Sarah's fluency in English, which she had learnt from the crew of the HMS Bonetta. The Queen vowed to assume responsibility for Sarah's welfare and protection; she paid for Sarah's expenses and



arranged for her to be cared for by Frederick and his family.

While living with Frederick and his family, it is reported that Sarah had become unwell and had a cough which did not seem to be going away. At the time, it was believed that Sarah's cough was as a result of the poor weather in Britain, to which she was unaccustomed. In January 1851, a decision was made to move Sarah to a warmer climate to continue her education and a place was found for her at a school in Sierra Leone, Africa. Here, Sarah is said to have excelled with her studies – especially music – and she learnt to speak French.

For four years, while Sarah was in Sierra Leone, Queen Victoria stayed in touch with her and sent her gifts before eventually asking for her to return to Britain. Sarah returned to Britain in 1855 and, at Queen Victoria's request, was cared for and educated by Reverend James Schoen and his wife, Elizabeth, whom Sarah loved dearly. During this time, Sarah was highly regarded by the royal household and attended many important events, such as the wedding of Queen Victoria's eldest daughter, Victoria.

## Marriage

In 1862, Sarah met Captain James Pinson Labulo Davies: an officer in the British Royal Navy and a wealthy businessman, whose parents had been Yoruba people just like Sarah's. After being given permission by Queen Victoria, Sarah and James married in an elaborate ceremony in August 1862, when Sarah was 19 years old. It is reported that Sarah, wearing a gown made of white silk, arrived at St Nicholas' Church in Brighton in one of ten horse-drawn carriages with her 16 bridesmaids.

Shortly after the ceremony, Sarah and James moved to Sierra Leone, where Sarah became a teacher. In 1863, their first child was born: a daughter whom, with special permission from The Queen, they named Victoria. Upon the baby's christening, Queen Victoria reportedly sent many expensive gifts, including a gold cup and a tray which are said to have been inscribed with the words:

To Victoria Davies, from her godmother, Victoria,  
Queen of Great Britain and Ireland, 1863.

For the rest of her life, Queen Victoria cared for Victoria, paying for her education as she had for her mother's. Queen Victoria vowed in her journal to give Victoria an annuity, meaning that Victoria would receive a fixed sum of money from the royal household each year for the rest of her life.

# Questions

1. With which of these people did Sarah live during her time in Britain? Tick **two**.

- Queen Victoria  
 Elizabeth Schoen  
 Frederick Forbes  
 Victoria Davies

2. Draw **four** lines and match each location to its relevance in Sarah Forbes Bonetta's life.

Oke Odan

Windsor Castle

Sierra Leone

Brighton

This is where she first met Queen Victoria.

This is where she studied.

This is where she was born.

This is where she got married.

3. Find and copy **two** of the items reportedly gifted by Queen Victoria upon Victoria Davies's birth.

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

4. Fill in the missing words.

To Victoria Davies, from her \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_,  
Queen of Great Britain and Ireland, 1863.

5. What was the HMS Bonetta?

\_\_\_\_\_

6. Summarise the significance of the names that Sarah Forbes Bonetta was given.

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

7. Using the first paragraph of the **Early Life** section, discuss **two** ways in which the author makes it clear that Aina was from an important family.

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8. Discuss why Queen Victoria may have chosen to give Victoria Davies an annuity.

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9. What impression does the text give you about Sarah Forbes Bonetta? Give **two** points, using evidence from the text to support your answer.

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10. Explain why the inscription on the gifts given by Queen Victoria might be important to historians.

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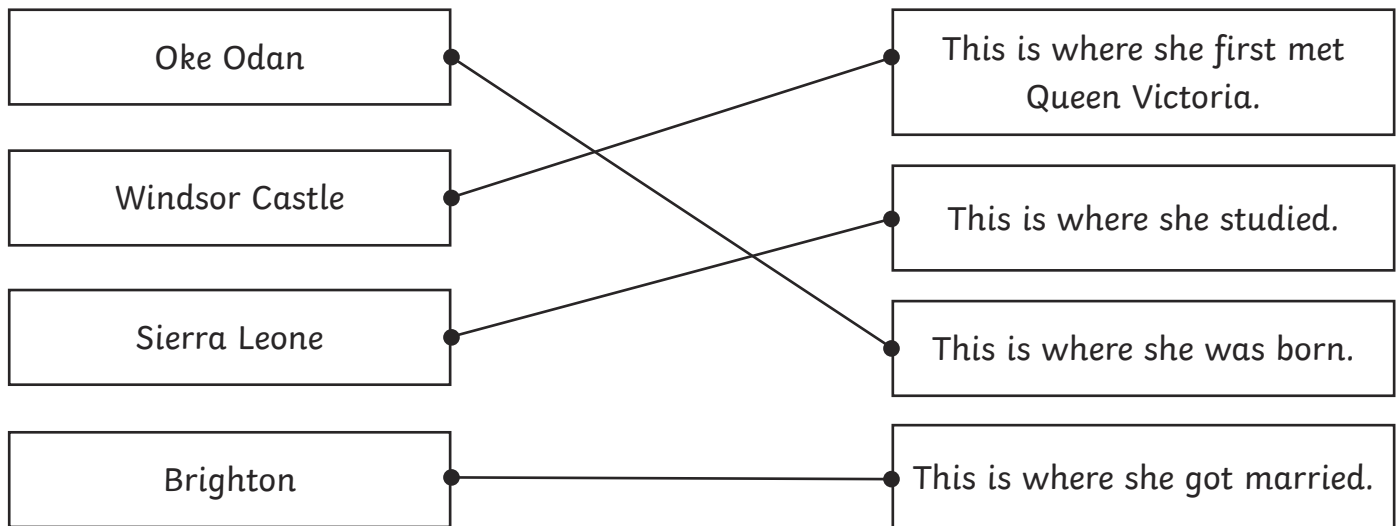
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# Answers

1. With which of these people did Sarah live during her time in Britain? Tick **two**.

- Queen Victoria  
 **Elizabeth Schoen**  
 **Frederick Forbes**  
 Victoria Davies

2. Draw **four** lines and match each location to its relevance in Sarah Forbes Bonetta's life.



3. Find and copy **two** of the items reportedly gifted by Queen Victoria upon Victoria Davies's birth.

- a gold cup**  
**a tray**

4. Fill in the missing words.

To Victoria Davies, from her **godmother, Victoria**, Queen of Great Britain and Ireland, 1863.

5. What was the HMS Bonetta?

**The HMS Bonetta was the ship that Frederick had commanded on his journey to Africa.**

6. Summarise the significance of the names that Sarah Forbes Bonetta was given.

**Pupils' own responses, such as: The name Sarah Forbes Bonetta was chosen for her so that she would be named after the commander she had been given to and the ship that he commanded. The name Sarah was chosen just because Frederick liked it.**

7. Using the first paragraph of the **Early Life** section, discuss **two** ways in which the author makes it clear that Aina was from an important family.  
**Pupils' own responses, such as: We know that Aina was from an important family because it says that she was the daughter of a Yoruba chief. It also makes it clear that she was from an important family because she was given the title 'Omoba', which means 'child of a monarch'.**
8. Discuss why Queen Victoria may have chosen to give Victoria Davies an annuity.  
**Pupils' own responses, such as: Queen Victoria may have chosen to give Victoria Davies an annuity because she was in a position to help her and wanted her to be able to have the life that she deserved.**
9. What impression does the text give you about Sarah Forbes Bonetta? Give **two** points, using evidence from the text to support your answer.  
**Pupils' own responses, such as: The text gives me the impression that Sarah was intelligent because that is what Queen Victoria described her as in her journal. The text also gives me the impression that Sarah was loving because it says that she loved Reverend James Schoen and his wife Elizabeth very much.**
10. Explain why the inscription on the gifts given by Queen Victoria might be important to historians.  
**Pupils' own responses, such as: The inscriptions on the gifts might prove to historians that Victoria Davies was Queen Victoria's godmother if there were no other records from the time (such as letters or journals) that state that this was true.**