

## The Great Fire of London, 1666

Aimed at Key Stage 1



### National Curriculum subject links

- Develop some understanding of chronology.
- Begin to realise that things have not always been the same as they are today.
- Ask and answer questions, choosing and using parts of stories and other sources to show that they know and understand key features of events.
- Learn about events beyond living memory that are significant nationally.
- Know where the people and events fit within a chronological framework and identify similarities and differences between ways of life in different periods.
- Events beyond living memory that are significant nationally or globally for example, the Great Fire of London.

### Coverage links

**The Great Fire of London** in 1666 makes such a fascinating subject for a historical enquiry for very young pupils as it can be linked to aspects of great interest, such as fire and fire engines, houses and homes, and how people have lived through the centuries. Young pupils need to be able to make links to their own narrow sphere of reference, this study provides that and opens up a whole new historical world of study. During this short sequence of lessons, pupils will learn about the many contributory factors that led to the fire, such as the weather, house construction and city planning. The focus of this enquiry is on the evidence we have of the Great Fire, on the artefacts, the writing, the eyewitness accounts and the state of the homes in 17th century. Pupils will begin to see that historians piece together their story from the evidence available.

**Many links** can be made to English learning through the use of questions and question marks, hot seating and role play to explore language and interview structure, report writing, newspaper articles and of course diaries.

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### Suggested learning outcomes

- By the end of these lessons, pupils will be able to:
- Place the Great Fire of London on a timeline
- Begin to realise that things have not always been the same as today
- Develop some understanding of chronology
- Find answers to their questions about the Great Fire of London
- Learn about the sequence of events of the Great Fire of London.

### Pre-lesson homework

What famous events in history do the pupils know about?

The pupil's own timeline plotted with their birth date, day they started school and other key dates, such as birth dates of family members.

### Lesson 1 - Fire!

Films to use:

- Samuel Pepys – Great Fire of London part 1
- What is a Timeline?

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Begin the lesson by showing a picture of fire. What do we know about this? Draw out knowledge of fire as heat, light and a way to cook and also as danger. Discuss and show pictures of fire engines and fire fighters. Possibly arrange a visit from the Fire Brigade to school and a fire drill. Read an introductory story such as *Toby and the Great Fire of London* by Margaret Nash and Jane Cope (Hopscotch Histories, Franklin Watts).

Demonstrate where London is on a map (in relation to the country as a whole and to your school specifically) and explain that it is the capital city of Britain.

Next, look at some paintings of the Great Fire of London – some are provided in the **Appendix**. Explain that they did not have cameras in 1666. All pictures from the time were painted by people who witnessed the events or who heard about them from someone else.

On a simple class timeline of history, show when the Great Fire of London happened. In pairs and with post-its the pupils need to think of the questions they want to ask about the Great Fire of London. You should stop and ask questions periodically, modelling the correct structure of a question and what it is we need to find out. Point out good questions (open questions) that will give lots of scope for our research. Some questions may be pictorial and need annotating by the teacher or teaching assistant.

The pupils can then share their questions and bring the post-its to a central organising place or display. You should group similar questions together. It doesn't matter that this may look messy; this is a working wall, showing on-going enquiry and demonstrates active learning.

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The next activity for pupils is to plot the date onto a timeline and while this could, of course, be done on a class timeline, it is likely that pupils will have a timeline that they update regularly as they start new history topics. If not, now could be the time to start one, using the film **What is a Timeline?** as a guide.

This timeline can sit in the front of any history or general 'topic' book. Alternatively they could have a long strip of paper that they add dates to and keep in their trays. Make sure the timeline includes the pupil's own birth date, as well as the current date. Pupils of this age need to relate history to their own short history for it to make any sense to them.

Now show the **Samuel Pepys – Great Fire of London part 1** film.

Ask your pupils to imagine:

1. How did Samuel Pepys first react when he heard about the fire?
2. Why do you think he went to the Tower of London?

## Lesson 2 - Research: What was the Great Fire of London?

Films to use:

- **Samuel Pepys – Great Fire of London part 2**

This lesson is all about learning about day-to-day life in London in 1666. It is also about the key sequence of events that transpired on 2nd September 1666 in Pudding Lane, London and then across London over the next four days.

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Start the lesson by referring to the last one. Ask pupils to consider what they know so far and what were the key questions they decided on last time.

Ask pupils to write 'The Great Fire of London – 1666' in the middle of a page, or provide a large sheet with this written on it. Coming out from this like a mind map will be lines and links where they can write what they discover. On a board or on lists on their tables, the pupils can have prompts of things to try to discover in their research. Such as: Where did the fire start? Why did it spread so rapidly? What was the weather like? What factors made the fire spread? Who was affected? Was anyone hurt? Who was the king or queen at the time? What were the houses made of? How did they stop the fire? How do we know about the fire today? Differentiate the questions appropriately for ability and prior knowledge.

Next show the pupils the film **Samuel Pepys – Great Fire of London part 2** and through discussion in pairs they should write down what they feel are 'key facts'. Remind them that they must not write down everything they have heard. They are writing the key parts of the information to add to their research. They can then also use a variety of books and other historical artefacts, web pages and pictures to do further research.

Mini-plenaries throughout will keep the pupils focused and on task. Pupils will glean information from each other, encourage them to write this down. As pupils finish their work on this, ask questions to engage pupils' interest for next time.

<http://www.fireoflondon.org.uk/game>

<http://www.fireoflondon.org.uk>

<http://www.everyschool.co.uk/history-key-stage-1-fire-of-london.html>

<http://www.mylearning.org/samuel-pepys-and-the-great-fire-of-london-of-1666/interactive-intro/4-546/>

[http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/primaryhistory/famouspeople/samuel\\_pepys/](http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/primaryhistory/famouspeople/samuel_pepys/)



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## Lesson 3 - London's burning!

Films to use:

- Samuel Pepys – Great Fire of London part 3
- Samuel Pepys – Great Fire of London part 4

This lesson looks at the factors that made London burn so well. Ask pupils to think back to previous lessons – what were houses like in 1666? What were they made of? What was the weather like on 2nd September 1666? Explain that houses were made out of a mixture of horsehair, clay and sticks called wattle and daub. This burned very easily.

Show Samuel Pepys: **Great Fire of London part 3** and then **part 4**. Ask your class what reasons were given by Pepys for the fire spreading. Houses were built very close together and overhanging the street. Explain that the footprint of the house determined the tax a homeowner paid. Look at the footprint of one pupil at the front of the class and demonstrate what this means and the relative size of the pupil. Explain that the houses went up and out (like we do!) but this meant that highly flammable houses were almost touching. What might this mean in the event of a fire? What did the class discover about the weather in the last lesson? The summer had been very very dry. The timbers were parched and the ground was dusty. Explain that you are going to recreate this.

(If you're doing this in school, you will need to complete a risk assessment for this activity and let your head teacher know what you are doing.)

Demonstrate making a simple cubic house with crafting matchsticks. Attach corners with small pieces of masking tape. Houses do not have to be neat or pretty. You will need:

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- crafting matches
- rolls of masking tape (flammable tape, i.e. not sellotape)
- a large metal tray or similar
- a bucket full of water
- safety matches.

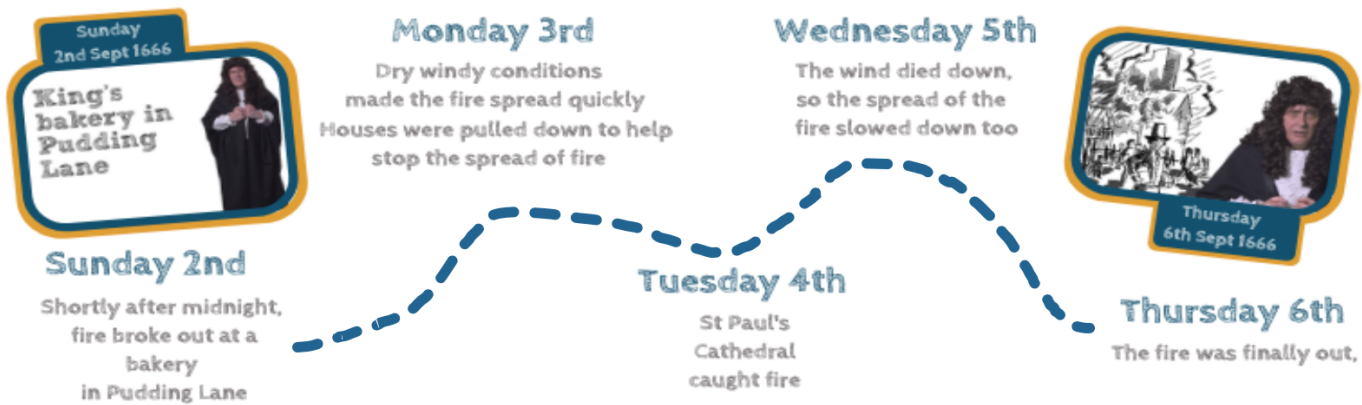
Your house may include a tiny sign saying 'Pudding Lane' or 'Thomas Farynor, baker'. In pairs, the pupils make as many tiny matchstick houses as they can and place them on the tray to the side of your first house. Houses should be touching or almost touching and in a line.

Put the tray with the houses on it in the playground or a similar outdoor open space with nothing overhead. Make sure the pupils are sitting in a circle and are well back from the tray. Place a bucket of water near the tray. If the wind is blowing then line up the tray accordingly so that the fire will spread from the bakery and the pupils are not down-wind. Make sure the pupils know what to expect and how to conduct themselves safely. Explain what the bucket is for. Light a match to the bakery. Stand well back and talk the pupils through what happens. Take close-up photographs documenting the progression of the fire. The fire will burn quickly. Embrace the excitement of the moment and use this to inspire enthusiasm for the topic.

At the end of the lesson look at the photos and discuss what happened. Was it what the pupils expected to happen? Do they think that the Great Fire of London was in any way similar? How would it have been different? How did the fire make them feel?

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### Lesson 4 - Newspaper report

Films to use:

- **Samuel Pepys – Great Fire of London part 5**

Using the pupils' research and the close-up photos of your recreation of the Great Fire of London, pupils should create a newspaper report of events. It should contain an eyewitness report and an interview of Samuel Pepys.

Show pupils the film **Samuel Pepys – part 5**. Ask pupils what Samuel Pepys buried. Why did he bury these things? What would the pupils save from their home if it was burning?

Pupils should carry out a role-play activity in pairs, in which one pupil is the interviewer who asks questions of an eyewitness.

Next the pupils can create newspaper reports using newspaper blanks differentiated by ability. They could use computers to create these in pairs over a number of sessions. Alternatively, a class newspaper report could be created jointly. Discuss the use of past tense with the class.

Younger/less able pupils can create a newspaper report as a group, using a newspaper scaffolding format. You should lead them to show them how to include photographs or pictures, headlines, eyewitness reports and a simple chronological report of the events. Pupils should use the past tense with support.



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Sunday  
2nd Sept 1666

King's  
bakery in  
Pudding  
Lane

Sunday 2nd

Shortly after midnight,  
fire broke out at a  
bakery  
in Pudding Lane

Monday 3rd

Dry windy conditions  
made the fire spread quickly  
Houses were pulled down to help  
stop the spread of fire

Wednesday 5th

The wind died down,  
so the spread of the  
fire slowed down too

Tuesday 4th

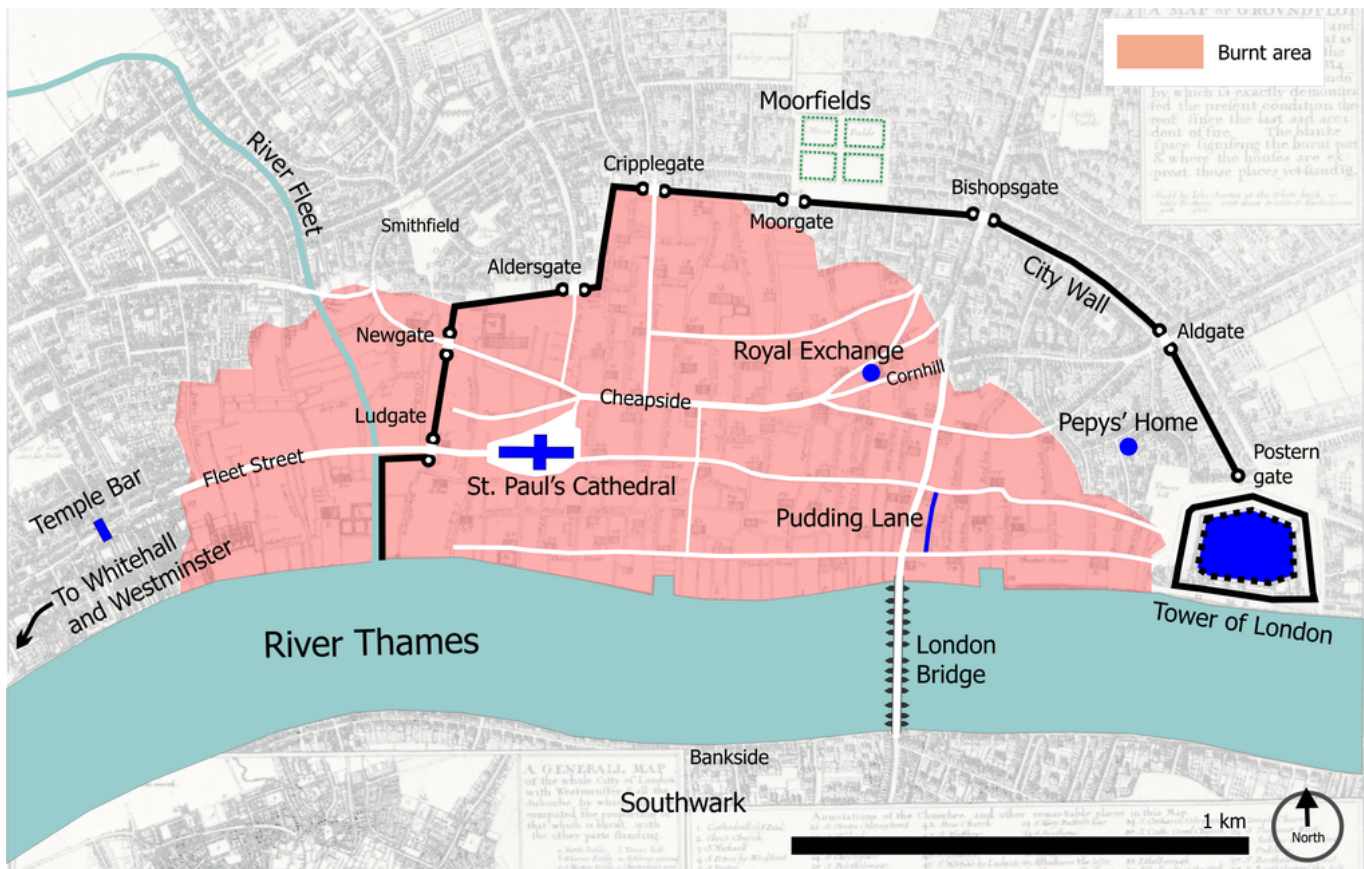
St Paul's  
Cathedral  
caught fire



Thursday  
6th Sept 1666

Thursday 6th

The fire was finally out.



By kind permission of: Bunchofgrapes at the English Wikipedia

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### Extension

To challenge pupils, you could give them some more difficult sources in Lessons 1 and 2 and prompt them to look at more thoughtful questions. You can encourage them to imagine how they might feel as an eyewitness to events. As an additional study, you could encourage the pupils to look at what happened in London the year before 1666 (the Great Plague). How do the pupils feel the Great Fire helped or hindered conditions that made the Great Plague spread?

### Scaffolding

Pupils who need support might be asked more targeted questions in hot-seating, they may be given questions to ask. You could put a simple timeline of the events (with pictures) on the tables of pupils who need support.

### Formative assessment opportunities

- Post-its at the beginning of the unit show what the pupils would like to know about the Great Fire of London (and therefore what they do not yet know).
- Pupils must sequence the events of the Great Fire of London mid-unit in simple terms, using given statements, pictures or blank timelines.
- Set pupils a hot-seating task in which they question characters from the Great Fire of London. Teaching assistants (or you if you are not in the hot seat) should note the knowledge behind the questions from the pupils and the quality of the questioning (open or closed questions).
- At the end of the mini-topic, pupils must write on post-its what they have learned about the Great Fire of London for their 'Working Wall'.



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### Reflection

To finally conclude the topic, ask pupils to think about what they haven't learned about the Great Fire of London. What questions do they still have? What do they suppose that historians will never be able to know? What might have happened if the circumstances had been different? What might have happened if it had been raining for a week before? What might have happened if people had listened to the Lord Mayor? Does anyone know what happened the year before the Great Fire of London?

### Appendix: Paintings of the Great Fire of London





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# **The Great Fire of London, 1666**

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