

Unit 5 How do we know about the Great Fire of London?

ABOUT THE UNIT

This unit links an important event beyond living memory in British history, the Great Fire of London, with a famous person, Samuel Pepys. Children develop their sense of chronology and consider why the Great Fire happened; its results; and the different ways it is represented.

The approach could also suit the study of other famous events, *eg defeat of the Spanish Armada, the Gunpowder Plot, Coronation Day, Armistice Day.*

WHERE THE UNIT FITS IN

This unit complements Unit 4, which looks at Florence Nightingale, another famous person from the past. It focuses on developing children's understanding of the passing of time, and develops what they learnt in Units 1 and 3 by placing a specific event in a chronological framework.

This unit could contribute to cross-curricular work on fire.

PRIOR LEARNING

It is helpful if the children have:

- experience of recalling stories about the past
- sequenced events on a time line
- used everyday words relating to the passing of time
- used pictures to find out about the past

VOCABULARY

In this unit, children will have opportunities to use:

- words associated with buildings, *eg timber-framed, plaster, thatch, church, abbey, cathedral, rebuilt*
- words associated with fire, *eg flames, roaring, sparks, smoke, belching, rampaging, charred, burned, ruined, destroyed, saved*
- expressions describing reasons and results, *eg because, reason, result, effect*
- words associated with the passing of time, *eg a very long time ago, began, first, next, then, after, at last, finally*
- words associated with sources of information, *eg eyewitness, diary, first-hand, woodcut*

RESOURCES

- photographs of London today
- portraits of Charles II, Samuel Pepys, Sir Christopher Wren, seventeenth-century citizens and the main characters in the Great Fire
- a class time line
- a video telling the story of the Great Fire
- pictures of seventeenth-century street scenes and buildings
- short edited extracts from Pepys' diary describing the Great Fire and the rebuilding of London
- sets of 'heads and tails' giving reasons for the spread of the fire
- a map of Britain today, showing London and the locality of the school

EXPECTATIONS

at the end of this unit

most children will:

be able to place the Great Fire on a class time line and sequence the main events of the fire correctly; know why the fire started and what happened; understand why it ended and some of the results; know that the fire was represented in different ways; understand what information about the fire contemporary pictures and Pepys' diary can provide; communicate their understanding in a variety of ways

some children will not have made so much progress and will:

recognise that the Great Fire happened a long time ago; sequence some of the events of the fire correctly; select some relevant information from pictures of the fire

some children will have progressed further and will:

know that the fire took place over 300 years ago (in 1666); show understanding of the causes and effects of the fire; show understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of eyewitness accounts of the fire; understand why there are different representations of the event; begin to compare different sources of information about the fire

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

POSSIBLE TEACHING ACTIVITIES

LEARNING OUTCOMES

POINTS TO NOTE

CHILDREN SHOULD LEARN

- where the Great Fire broke out
- when the fire happened
- to place the event on a time line showing periods in the history of England

Where and when did the Great Fire begin?

Provide a context for the story. Show the children a picture of central London today. Encourage them to work out the name of the city and show them the monument commemorating the Great Fire.

Show the children portraits of Charles II, Samuel Pepys, and a citizen from mid-seventeenth-century England. Ask the children to describe the clothes and appearance of each. Use the information to establish that the fire began a 'very long time ago' in the period known as 'the Stuarts'. Ask the children to locate 'a very long time ago' on a simple time line. Explain who Charles II was, and introduce Samuel Pepys as someone who saw the fire and wrote about it.

CHILDREN

- locate the event on a time line and recognise that it took place in London
- describe the hairstyle and clothes of Charles II and Samuel Pepys, and recognise that they lived 'a very long time ago'
- place 'a very long time ago' and the Stuarts on a time line

The National Portrait Gallery is a useful source of postcards of key historical figures. A class display including a map and pictures of London would be a useful point of reference throughout this unit.

- why the fire broke out
- about the main events of the fire
- about the results of the fire
- to sequence the events correctly

What happened in the Great Fire?

Read or tell the story of the fire in as much detail as possible, illustrating it with pictures, including those of the main characters. Discuss with the children the story of the fire. Ask questions to check how much they have understood, using pictures to reinforce the story. *Why did the fire start? Where did it start? What happened? Why did it end? What were the results of the fire? Why was it called the Great Fire?*

List the main events in chronological order. Give the children a time line and ask them to record the events of the fire.

- talk about what happened in the story
- sequence events correctly on a prepared time line

A taped version of the story could be used.

Expectations in history (SCAA, 1997, page 7) shows a completed time line of the Great Fire.

Children could produce their own record of the fire as an alternative to the time line task.

This activity could reinforce work on using the language of time to link sentences, eg *after, during, next*.

- why the fire spread so far for so long
- what makes cities safer from great fires today

Why did the fire spread so far and stay alight for so long?

Show the children pictures of typical seventeenth-century houses, churches and street scenes. Encourage them to describe the street scene and what the houses are made from. Discuss with the children the reasons why the fire spread rapidly and why people took refuge in churches and in boats on the river.

Encourage the children to think about who helps to fight fires today. Explain that there was no fire brigade at the time.

Ask the children to match 'heads' and 'tails' of sentences about the fire, eg *'The fire spread because...of the direction of the wind.'* *'The people escaped to the churches because...these were built of stone.'* *'The fire went out because... the wind stopped.'*

- describe the key features of houses and streets in the seventeenth century
- give one or more reasons why the fire spread quickly, and why it stopped
- know where people went for safety

Teachers should point out that the loss of property was extensive, but not the loss of life.

Children could use the 'heads and tails' activity as a starting point for making their own explanations.

- what an eyewitness is
- about the part played by artists in recording the events of the Great Fire

How do we know what happened in the Great Fire?

Discuss with the children what an eyewitness is, and how an eyewitness can help us to know what happened in the past. Show children some pictures of the fire produced at the time. Help them to recognise those things an eyewitness would see, eg *people in boats on the river, the direction of the fire's smoke*.

Show them the portrait of Samuel Pepys again. Help them to remember who he was, and tell them about him, his work and his diary.

Discuss what a diary is, whether it is fact or fiction, and the sort of information people keep in diaries. *Why might diaries from the past be useful to us today?*

Read short, edited extracts from Pepys' diary about the fire and what happened in London afterwards. *What do the diary's extracts tell us about the Great Fire that we knew/didn't know before?*

- show in discussion, an understanding of what an 'eyewitness' is
- recognise aspects of the fire that eyewitnesses saw
- know that Pepys saw the fire and that he wrote about it in his diary

Children could be told that people started to take out fire insurance after the fire.

Teachers could make links with personal, social and health education and citizenship education by talking more generally about fire safety and the work of the fire brigade.

There are opportunities to develop this activity further by looking at the rebuilding of London and the work of Sir Christopher Wren. This would be particularly suitable for children who know London and schools that have ready access to the city.

- to use their knowledge and understanding of the Great Fire to make a representation of it

What have we learnt about the Great Fire?

Help the children to recall all they have found out about the fire and how they found out about it, eg *from the story, pictures, Pepys' diary*. Ask them to draw or paint a picture showing something important they have learnt about the fire.

Ask the children to talk about their own pictures and then to consider the differences between them.

- recall correctly some of the events of the fire
- know the main sources of information about the fire
- draw a picture of the fire that reflects their knowledge about it
- identify similarities and differences between the pictures

The children could look at pictures showing fires today and compare these fires with what they have learnt about the Great Fire.

