

Suggested responses: *Rainbow City*

1. The opening scenes feature several interactions between non-White people and White people living alongside each other in the city of Birmingham. How do these interactions contrast with each other?

In some scenes, White and non-White people interact positively and peacefully. For example, the church choir sees everyone singing together on an equal footing. However, the marketplace sees more negative interactions, as two White men mock a non-White seller, wolf whistle at a non-White lady and knock over the trolley of another. This sequence ends with the men physically assaulting another non-White man. He is helped up by two White women, demonstrating contrasting attitudes.

2. *Rainbow City* was considered ground-breaking, as it was the first television programme to feature an inter-racial marriage. The main character, John Steele, was also depicted as a professional lawyer. What do you think would be the intention and impact of this?

That this was the first television programme to feature an inter-racial marriage is important, as it depicts this as normal, rather than it being a problematic plot point to be solved. Also, the fact that John Steele has a highly regarded job demonstrates the attitude that non-White people should have equal opportunities to White people.

3. In what ways does the depiction of non-White immigrants to Britain differ to other television programmes of this period? You could consider programmes such as *Till Death Us Do Part* or *The Black and White Minstrel Show*.

There are a large number of non-White cast members, indicating that Black actors have not been used only when the plot demands it. This is an important step on the road to representation in the media. This contrasts with other programmes of this period, such as those mentioned, both of which only include non-White characters when required but also use White actors with a blackened face to portray these characters.

4. In what ways could *Rainbow City* be considered to show progressive attitudes towards race?

The programme shows that immigrants to Britain lived lives similar to non-immigrants. The sitcom primarily focuses on this idea, using a non-White cast, rather than a White cast. This gave opportunities to non-White actors, while also promoting the idea of equality and similarity. The non-White characters are not portrayed to be mocked or demonised, showing a more progressive attitude than those seen before. Furthermore, the programme highlights fundamental progressive attitudes such as the acceptance of inter-racial marriage and the elevation of immigrants to highly paid and highly regarded professions.

5. Using your knowledge of 1960s culture and society, write down three ways in which this programme reflected or challenged society's attitudes.

The negative responses of some characters towards non-White people mirrors the inherent racism that still existed in society: something that the government tried to address in the Race Relations Acts of the 1960s and '70s. The gang fight echoes the attacks on non-White people by subcultures like Teddy Boys and skinheads in the period.

6. What does the programme highlight as the main issues facing immigrants in Britain?

When John Steele speaks to the uncle of the hospitalised boy, they discuss the idealistic expectations that immigrants have when coming to Britain. John Steele is persuaded to try to prevent others from moving to Britain because of the chilly welcome that they often received. This suggests that the main problem is the contrast between expectation and reality when moving to Britain: that the attitudes with which they are faced are much worse than feared.

7. *Rainbow City* was considered ground-breaking, as it included many non-White characters and actors throughout, rather than introducing them only when it was important to the plot. How does this suggest that the BBC saw its role in shaping social attitudes?

This suggests that the BBC saw itself as a pioneering force in representing non-White actors and communities in the media. In so doing, it could be possible to influence people's attitudes towards immigration by portraying these communities as similar to their own. Therefore, the BBC saw itself as having an important role in shaping social attitudes.

8. To discuss in class: How does the fact that this is a BBC drama affect its usefulness to you in analysing 1960s society?

The source is useful for highlighting the limited representation of immigrant communities before 1967, considering that this was a pioneering programme. It is also useful for conveying some of the varied attitudes towards immigrants that were experienced in inner-city communities; however, the fictional status of this means that it is limited.