



## THE GREAT FIRE OF LONDON AT KS1

### Approach 5

*This is one of series of alternative approaches to the Great Fire of London which you can download from [www.primaryhistory.org](http://www.primaryhistory.org).*

We were finding that more and more time in Year 2 was taken up with literacy, especially in the Spring term, with SATs writing looming. Usually all three Year 2 classes in our school follow the QCA unit about the Great Fire. However, the school had recently been awarded Arts Fund money, and there were opportunities to use professional artists, a writer and a specialist drama teacher during the Spring term.

The infant school was on a separate site from the junior school. At the end of the Spring term we were leaving our old building and joining our junior colleagues on one site. We had to plan for an open week, to be held before we left the infant site. During that week, every afternoon we were to return to our Victorian roots (in the process revisiting Autumn term work on the Victorian seaside). Our leaving of the infant site during the Easter break also meant our SATs writing had to be completed in April.

On top of this, a Celebration Play was planned for the end of June. This was to showcase our creative curriculum, our use of the arts experts and also reflect our joy in being on one site at last.

So a busy Spring term lay ahead!

Our initial thoughts were to abandon the Great Fire unit, but on reflection we decided we could fit it in if we adapted the QCA unit and integrated history with literacy (particularly story-writing and poetry), drama and art. In that way we could make full use of the arts experts available to us.

### Year group/class and Teaching time

Year 2, mixed ability and gender. Three classes. Eight sessions of varying length.

### Learning objectives

For the children to:

- learn where and when the Great fire broke out
- place the event on a time line
- understand why the Fire broke out, what the main events were, and what the results of the Fire were
- understand why the Fire spread so far for so long, and why this would not happen now

- learn about evidence: how we know about the Fire
- represent the Fire in words, art and drama
- extend their literacy in the context of learning about a historical topic.

## Key questions

What was London of 1666 like?

How do we know about the Fire?

What happened in the Fire?

Given how little people had, how well did they do?

What did it feel like to be in the Fire?

What changed after the Fire?

## Resources

Photos of London today, and of timber-framed houses still in existence

Extracts from Samuel Pepys' diary. Available from: [www.pepys.info/](http://www.pepys.info/)

Pictures of Charles II, Samuel Pepys, St Paul's Cathedral. Also paintings of the Fire. Wikipedia has the pictures, together with excellent, detailed information

Selection of topic books about the Great Fire

Jill Atkins: *The Great Fire of London* (Historical Storybooks)

'Now' and 'Then' fire fighting equipment worksheet.

## The teaching

Below is a summary of the eight teaching sessions with all three Year 2 classes.

Visiting professionals stimulated and extended the children – and the staff too.

### Session 1

We read the children a short novel by Jill Atkins, which is based on known facts about the Great Fire. We discussed what the period was like, then used a 'step back' time line.

Key question: *What was the London of 1666 like?*

The visiting artists created buildings of that time with the children, using photos of timber-framed buildings still in existence.

### Session 2

Key question: *What happened in the Fire?*

Joint literacy and history focus: we looked at information books with the children and wrote key events on the easel as shared writing.

### Session 3

Key question: *How do we know about the Fire?*

The main activity was the examination of sources. We discussed with the children paintings of the time and Samuel Pepys' diary. Using these sources, the children worked with the artists recreating pictures of scenes during the Fire.

**Session 4**

A visiting theatre group dramatised Samuel Pepys' experiences during the Fire. The children returned to class and wrote diaries about the Fire.

**Session 5**

We invited the Fire Brigade into school. Two engines and crew arrived and talked to the children about the equipment used on the fire engine, and about what to do in case of fire.

The children completed a worksheet to compare fire-fighting equipment 'Now' and 'Then'.

Key question: *Given how little they had, how well did they do?*

The children wrote their responses using Word on the computer.

**Session 6**

Key question: *What did it feel like to be in the Fire?*

A professional storyteller told the children a story based on a character involved in the Fire.

Afterwards, she shared writing poetry with the children. Together she and the children wrote a poem based on the senses, using the children's knowledge. The children then wrote their own poems.

**Session 7**

Literacy focus: Story-writing about a character with an unfortunate character trait. Then we moved to extended writing, of a story set in the Fire of London, to include such a character, events based on their behaviour, and with a resolution that changes that behaviour.

**Session 8**

Key question: *What changed after the Fire?*

Class discussion, again using shared writing. Made class zig-zag book to record the events of the Fire chronologically.

During the following week the specialist drama teacher did drama about the Fire with the children.

**Learning outcomes**

From a historical point of view, I feel the children met all the learning objectives.

From a literacy perspective, the topic gave opportunity for:

- speaking and listening (interviewing firefighters)
- poetry work with the writer, which developed understanding and use of adjectives and adverbs
- story-writing about the Fire using description (preparation for SATs piece)
- drama work, from which assessment of historical learning could be done.
- Plenty of art was produced too! And we have a wonderful piece for our Celebration Play.

## Reflection

Obviously, the extra professional involvement we had is not always available. However, as teachers we have learnt so much that we can do most of it independently next year.

We used questioning, challenged the children, went into depth on the subject, and made the curriculum accessible and fun. We managed to integrate it again!

### **Nuffield Primary History project**

**General editor:** Jacqui Dean

**Author of this unit:** Linda Ainsworth

© in this format Nuffield Primary History 2008

downloaded from [www.primaryhistory.org](http://www.primaryhistory.org)