

Ellie's Historical Investigation: The Great Fire of London

Learning objective: To retrieve information from a non-fiction text and use inference to understand the impact of the Great Fire of London.

Read the passage carefully, then answer the questions below. Use your best handwriting and full sentences.

In September 1666, London was a city of narrow streets and wooden buildings. Ellie the elephant, who loves to study the past, explains that a small spark in a bakery on Pudding Lane ignited a catastrophe. Because the houses were built closely together using timber and pitch, the flames spread rapidly across the dry city. Strong winds fanned the blaze, making it impossible for the citizens to control the inferno. For four days, the fire raged, destroying thousands of homes and the famous St Paul's Cathedral. Many residents fled to the River Thames, hoping to escape the intense heat. Eventually, the fire was halted by creating firebreaks, where buildings were demolished to stop the flames from jumping forward. In the aftermath, London faced a massive challenge: reconstruction. The city was rebuilt using brick and stone instead of wood, and streets were widened to prevent such a disaster from repeating. While the event caused immense devastation, it ultimately led to a safer, more modern capital city that still stands today.

Word bank: catastrophe · timber · flammable · precaution · devastation · reconstruction

1. Identify two materials that the houses in London were made of before the fire. (2 marks)

2. What specific action did the citizens take to stop the fire from spreading further? (2 marks)

3. Why did the fire spread so much more easily in 1666 than it might today? (3 marks)

4. What does the text suggest about how the people of London felt during the four days of the fire? (3 marks)

5. Do you think the rebuilding of London was a success? Justify your answer using evidence from the text. (4 marks)

Draw: Draw a 'Before and After' scene of a London street: one side showing the wooden, cramped houses of 1666, and the other showing the wider, brick-built houses constructed after the fire.



Extension challenge: Greater Depth Challenge: 1. Explain why the use of stone and brick was a vital change for London's safety. 2. Compare and contrast the fire-fighting methods of 1666 to how we fight fires today. 3. Justify why historians consider the Great Fire a 'turning point' for the city. 4. What might have happened if the wind had been blowing in a different direction? 5. Imagine you are a Londoner in 1666; write a short diary entry describing your escape. 6. If you were in charge of rebuilding, what other features would you add to make the city safer?