The Great Fire of London: A Historical Inquiry

Learning objective: To retrieve, infer, and evaluate information about the causes and consequences of the Great Fire of London in 1666.

Read the text carefully and answer the questions below using evidence from the passage.

In September 1666, London was a city built of timber-framed houses packed tightly together. After a long, hot summer, the buildings were incredibly dry. On the night of 2nd September, a spark ignited in a bakery on Pudding Lane. Because the city was so crowded, the fire spread rapidly. Strong winds fanned the flames, turning small flickers into a massive inferno that consumed the city for four days. Ellie the Elephant, our history expert, notes that while the destruction was a catastrophe, the fire also cleared out the cramped, dirty streets where the Great Plague had spread just the year before. During the reconstruction, King Charles II ordered that new houses be built from brick and stone instead of wood. These new regulations helped prevent such a fire from happening again. Today, we remember the event as a turning point in urban planning. It was a tragedy that changed the face of London forever, forcing the city to evolve from a medieval maze into a safer, more modern capital.

Word bank: combustible · conflagration · timber-framed · catastrophe · reconstruction

1. Identify the exact date and location where the fire began. (2 marks)

2. What materials were the new houses built from after the fire? (1 mark)

3. Why did the fire spread so quickly across the city? Use evidence from the text to explain. (2 marks)

4. Why might the people of London have felt differently about the fire after the Great Plague? (2 marks)

5. Do you think the fire was more of a disaster or an opportunity for London? Justify your opinion. (3 marks)

Draw: Draw a 'before and after' split-screen image: one side showing the crowded, wooden houses of 1666, and the other side showing the safer, brick-built houses of the reconstruction.

Extension challenge: Research the Monument to the Great Fire of London. Write a short diary entry from the perspective of a Londoner seeing the new, taller city for the first time in 1670.