

GREAT LONDON FIRE OF 1666



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Description

Students in this lesson will identify, understand and be able to explain the Great London Fire of 1666, how it started, what it destroyed and how the government responded, and finally how Christopher Wren and others responded by remaking London in stone, changing the old capital into the modern city it is today.

Subjects

European History, World History, Engineering, Urban Planning

Grade Level

11-12

Duration

90 minutes

Tour Links

- Westminster Abbey
- London Bridge
- St Paul's Cathedral

Essential Questions

- What was the Great London Fire of 1666? What were its causes?
- How did Londoners see the Great Fire of 1666?
- How did the Great London Fire of 1666 lead to the establishment of modern London?
- Were there any benefits from the Great London Fire of 1666?

Academic Summary

Having stayed, and in an hour's time seen the fire rage every way, and nobody to my sight endeavouring to quench it, but to remove their goods and leave all to the fire; and having seen it get as far as the Steeleyard, and the wind mighty high and driving it into the city, and everything, after so long a drough, proving combustible, even the very stones of churches, and among other things, the poor steeple by which pretty Mrs Horsley lives, and whereof my old school-fellow Elborough is parson, taken fire in the very top and there burned till it fall down - I to Whitehall with a gentleman with me who desired to go off from the Tower to see the fire in my boat - to Whitehall, and there up to the King's closet in the chapel, where people came about me and I did give them an account dismayed them all; and word was carried in to the King, so I was called for and did tell the King and Duke of York what I saw, and that unless his Majesty did command houses to be pulled down, nothing could stop the fire.

Diary of Samuel Pepys, September 1666

“London Bridge is falling down, falling down, falling down; London Bridge is falling down, My fair Lady”... a nursery rhyme sung by children for generations. Most kids today sing it cheerfully and as part of a simple toddler’s game, but the lyrics may have much darker beginnings. The Great London Fire of 1666 devastated the old wooden city, including London Bridge and the old St. Paul’s Cathedral. The rebuilding of modern London in stone by architects such as Christopher Wren (who redesigned St. Paul’s) helped create many of the iconic symbols of identity modern Londoners take for granted today. Through an in-depth analysis of primary and secondary sources, students in this lesson will identify, understand and be able to explain the Great London Fire of 1666, how it started, what it destroyed and how the government responded, and finally how Wren and others responded by remaking London in stone, changing the old capital into the modern city it is today.

Objectives

1. Students will identify, understand and be able to explain the Great London Fire of 1666.
2. Students will identify, understand and be able to explain how the Great London Fire of 1666 “remade” the city of London itself by destroying two of its landmark institutions, Old St. Paul’s Cathedral and London Bridge, along with most of the old city.
3. Students will identify, understand and be able to explain theories behind how the Great London Fire of 1666 actually saved lives by wiping out the black plague in the city.
4. Students will identify, understand and be able to explain how contemporaries described the fire, analyzing and assessing the validity of such sources.

Procedure

I. Anticipatory Set

- Writing / Question: How might great disasters both harm and help an urban population? (5 min)
- Handouts – Copies of Samuel Pepys Diary on the Great London Fire of 1666 and copies of readings from the websites listed below. (5 min)

II. Body of Lesson

- Lecture / PPT – the Great London Fire of 1666 (20 min)
- Video – Great London Fire (5 min)
- Independent Activity – Students read the articles on the Great London Fire of 1666 and the primary sources on the fire from Samuel Pepys, taking notes as appropriate. (30 min)
- Suggestion: Have the students read some of these articles for homework the night before class.
- Group Activity – Discussion on the Great London Fire of 1666, its causes, its effects and the rebuilding of St. Paul's under Christopher Wren. (15 min)

III. Closure

- Assessment – Short Essay: How did the Great London Fire of 1666 both hurt and help the citizens of London? How did the fire lead to the establishment of modern London, centered on the new St. Paul's Cathedral? Be sure to give examples from the texts.
- Homework Assignment: Identify natural or man-made disasters (such as 9/11, the Boston bombings, Hurricane Katrina, the San Francisco earthquake of 1906 and others) that have affected US cities over the last century or so. How have these disasters changed the cities? Be prepared to give examples and to compare these disasters to the Great London Fire of 1666.

Extension

On tour: St. Paul's Cathedral

While on tour, students visit St. Paul's Cathedral, rebuilt by Christopher Wren after the Great London Fire of 1666. The rebuilt church, now an iconic symbol of London, is the home of memorials to Lord Nelson, Florence Nightingale, TE Lawrence and the Duke of Wellington.

Web Links

Lesson Plan Websites

- britainexpress.com/History/christopher_wren.htm
Christopher Wren (article)
- helium.com/items/1836433-about-the-great-fire-of-london-of-1666
“All about the Great Fire of London” by Dr. D. Vogt. Helium article, 2010.
- eyewitnesstohistory.com/londonfire.htm
“The Great Fire of London, 1666.” Eyewitness to History article, 2004.
- pepys.info/fire.html
Excerpts from Samuel Pepys’ Diary on the Great Fire.
- www.fireoflondon.org.uk
The Great Fire of London website – created by the Museum of London, in partnership with the UK National Archives, the London Fire Brigade Museum, the National Portrait Gallery and the London Metropolitan Archives. Contains a great deal of valuable educational resources as well as an online game about the fire for students. This website is used heavily by British educators when they teach about the Great Fire – it also has great links to fire resources around the city of London itself.
- www.teachingchannel.org/videos/choosing-primary-source-documents?fd=1
Reading Like a Historian: Primary Source Documents (video) – great 2 minute video on how to incorporate primary sources into the Common Core and history classes – from Shilpa Duvor of Summit Preparatory Charter High School in Redwood City, CA – highly recommended for teachers.
- stpauls.co.uk/Cathedral-History/Cathedral-History/15601711
St. Paul’s Cathedral official website – Cathedral history – Reformation to Conflagration. Contains an informative article on Christopher Wren, who designed the new cathedral after the fire.
- youtube.com/watch?v=CNAjlxhi0Yk&list=TLJ3lAsB4uM9qfwRMwXsTn6QVytZDN0f-r
“The Great Fire’s Great Column: A History of the Great Fire of London” – Monumental with Pete Walter History.

Background Information

- en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_fire_of_1666
“Great Fire of London” – Wikipedia article.
- en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christopher_Wren
“Christopher Wren” – Wikipedia article. Architect of the new St. Paul’s Cathedral after the Great London Fire of 1666.
- passports.com/group_leaders/on_the_road/the_united_kingdom/london
On the Road: London – city facts on London from Passports Educational Travel

Key Terms

Black plague

Christopher Wren

Fire brigade

Great London Fire of 1666

London Bridge

Museum of London

Natural disaster

Samuel Pepys

St. Paul's Cathedral

UK National Archives

Urban planning

