

Poetry on Fire

Teachers Guide

The skills, content and activities for this session work well with upper KS1 and KS2.

History Curriculum Links	English Links	RE Links
<p>KS1</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Significant historical events, people and places in their own locality. Lives of significant people in the past who have contributed to national/international achievements. <p>KS2</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A study of an aspect of history or a site dating from a period beyond 1066 that is significant in the locality. 	<p>KS1</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reading aloud their writing clearly. Composing a sentence orally before writing it. Writing poetry. <p>KS2</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Effective composition forming, articulating and communicating ideas and organising them coherently for a reader. Perform their own compositions. 	<p>KS1</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What makes a building 'holy' and 'sacred'? <p>KS2</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The spiritual significance of York Minster. Sights, sounds, practices and beliefs.

The Aims

Pupils will follow a fire tour around York Minster and enter the world of arson, accident and an act of nature. They will collect fiery vocabulary to compose a collaborative class composition, step into the shoes of key characters and roleplay the fearless firefighters before reciting their rhythmic rhymes.

This session consists of an hour's tour where the guide will focus on the three major fires at York Minster, in 1829 in the Quire, 1840 in the Nave and 1984 in the South Transept. During the tour pupils can carry a clipboard and note down any descriptive 'fiery' words that they might find useful for their workshop.

The workshop takes place in St Stephen's Chapel where pupils will work in small groups to create their poetry. Each group will focus on one of four themes: Finding the fire, Describing the fire, Fighting the fire and Time to rebuild. They can first role play their theme before drafting their ideas, and then those who want to can perform their poetry to the group. The lines of poetry can be collated for the teacher to take back to the classroom.

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Background information

York Minster is a fragile building and has been damaged by at least 3 major fires. Each time it has been re-built and brought back to life, usually within a four-year period.

In 1829 there was an arson attack by a man called Jonathan Martin. He suffered from what we would now call a mental health disorder and possibly PTSD. He had dreams of God speaking to him and one night he had a dream of smoke coming out of the Minster. He interpreted that to mean God wanted him to set the Minster on fire. Jonathan acted on this belief for many reasons. He didn't like the liturgy of the Cathedral; he thought the Clergy were self-indulgent and lazy and he believed people would be better off without the Minster. He hid in the Cathedral after Evensong on the 1st of February 1829 and then set the Quire on fire before escaping out of a window. The whole of the Quire and organ and pews were destroyed in the fire and it took four years to rebuild. Jonathan Martin was caught, and he happily admitted to the fire. He was put on trial and found guilty but in the end the Judge deemed he was in fact not guilty because he hadn't been aware of what was right and what was wrong at the time. He was therefore detained in a Mental Health institution for the rest of his life.

The second fire came shortly afterwards in 1840 when a clock mender called William Groves left an unguarded candle burning in the south west tower. There were birds' nests and grease from the bells and so the tower quickly caught alight. This fire completely destroyed the roof and ceiling of the Nave. A year prior to the fire an artist and historian called John Browne had made illustrations of many ceiling bosses and statues in the Minster and so we were lucky that these could be used to re-create the ceiling decoration after the fire. Incidentally, William Groves was a bell ringer and when he later asked to return to York Minster to ring the bells, his request was not surprisingly refused!

The third major fire was in 1984 and due to a lightning strike. This affected the South Transept which again lost its roof. By flooding the roof with water and causing it to collapse, the fire was prevented from spreading further. The beautiful rose window was fortunately protected from destruction because ten years previously it had been re-leaded and so although the glass cracked into around 40,000 pieces, it could be taken down and 'glued' back together. Following this fire, Blue Peter launched a competition for children to design some new roof bosses. With around 32,000 entries, six were chosen and the winning designs can be seen on the ceiling today.

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Resources

[Poetry on Fire Lesson Plan](#), [A1 Word Cards](#), [A1 Minster Fire Images](#), [Fiery Activity Sheets](#), clipboards and pencils.

Question prompts to help pupils engage with the session.

- How did the fire affect the Minster?
- What might people have smelt at the time?
- How did people feel when they saw the Minster on fire?
- What sounds might people have heard during the fire?
- What are some adjectives to describe finding the Minster on fire?
- What might the Minster have looked like on the morning after the fire?
- Who do you think was involved in re-building the Minster after the fire?
- Should William Groves have been punished for his mistake that led to the fire?
- What should have happened to Jonathan Martin for setting the Minster on fire?

Suggested follow up Activities

- Create a piece of art inspired by the fires at the York Minster
- Design a roof boss for York Minster to remember the fires.
- Design a stained-glass panel to commemorate one of the fires.
- Write a song about the fires of York Minster.
- Create a model of the Minster on fire.
- Research the Blue Peter Bosses Competition.
- Research the fire at Notre Dame and compare this to the York fires.

Outcomes

Please feel free to email learning@yorkminster.org with examples of creative work that are inspired by this resource.

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