

Britain's benefit

The contribution of ethnic minorities to Britain is immense. Research shows that one in seven UK companies was set up by immigrant entrepreneurs, e.g. New Look, which was set up by Tom Singh.

And people from ethnic minorities have contributed in all walks of life. These include politicians such as Diane Abbott and Keith Vaz, TV newsreaders such as Zena Badhawi and Clive Myrie, writers such as Zadie Smith and Hanish Kureshi, actors such as Lenny Henry and Chiwetel Ejiofor and Olympic stars, such as Mo Farah and Jessica Ennis-Hill.

Immigration into Britain: the last 65 years

1948 The first West Indian immigrants come to Britain, invited by the British government to help address the shortage of unskilled workers.

1960 India and Pakistan begin to issue passports to allow economic migration to Britain. In 1961, 48,850 people arrive from these countries.

1968–76 Thousands of African Asians come from East Africa, many to escape the persecution of the dictator Idi Amin. Many bring useful business and professional skills.

1976 The Race Relations Act is passed to promote racial equality and tackle discrimination. The Commission for Racial Equality is set up.

1979 The first of 22,000 Vietnamese refugees arrive, fleeing Communism in Vietnam.

1992 The Maastricht Treaty is passed, allowing citizens of the European Union states to live and work in Britain.

2003 Asylum seekers continue to seek a haven in Britain from persecution and war in countries such as Sri Lanka, Iraq and Afghanistan.

2004–13 The expansion of the European Union brings in immigrants from central and eastern Europe – an estimated 1.9 million by 2013.

- 1) Study the timeline – what do you learn from it about the main groups of immigrants that have come to Britain in the last 65 years?
- 2) Use the information and the internet to extend the timeline backwards as far as you can. Call it 'The making of Britain'.
- 3) Choose one of the immigrant groups and find out more about their history. What reason did they have for coming, and what have they contributed to Britain's culture?

CULTURE CLUB

The English nation has been made as a result of migration – and is all the better for it, says Dinah Starkey

The English are the product of centuries of migration, some peaceful, some forcible. John Bull, the typical Englishman, may in fact be two parts Germanic Saxon to one part Celt, with a chunk of Scandinavian, a smattering of French and a dash of West Indian, Asian, Jewish or Irish. The asylum seekers who enter our country today are only the latest immigrants.

Scotland and Wales have had their newcomers too, but England has always been a bigger melting pot. The Scots and the Welsh kept their native languages and culture for much longer, and even now they have a separate identity.

Go back 40,000 years and the original ancient Britons were arriving from continental Europe. They were followed, much later, by the Beaker people, who brought with them skills in working the mysterious new metal – bronze.

The Celts arrived about 700BC, and with them came the Iron Age. Next were the Romans in AD43. They stayed for nearly 400 years, transforming the landscape with road systems, farming methods and new crops. Many of the towns they established still survive.

By AD410 the Roman empire was crumbling, and the Angles and Saxons began to raid across the sea from what is now Germany. It was the Saxons who named the shires and villages, and the English language began to take shape.

The Normans, themselves the descendants of the Vikings, held all things

Saxon in contempt and invaded in 1066. They ignored the native language and continued to speak Norman French for generations. But the locals went on using Saxon, and gradually the two languages began to merge.

As trade routes opened in Tudor times, African boys were brought to Britain to satisfy the fashionable demand for black servants called blackamoors. By the end of Queen Elizabeth I's reign in 1603, an estimated 20,000 'blackamoors' were living and working in London.

The Huguenots, a French Protestant group, flooded into Britain in the 17th century to escape persecution by Catholic France. Many were cloth workers and they brought with them techniques which revitalised the British textile industry. In the 19th century, tens of thousands of Irish immigrants came to England after the potato famine, and from 1881 mounting persecution in Eastern Europe and Russia led to the arrival of thousands of Jews.

The evolution of the British national identity has been slow and painful. The struggle for success that has faced each generation of immigrants continues today. Perhaps we can help to make the process of assimilation a little easier by teaching young people about their past. That way they may come to understand what incomers have brought to our country and what they might contribute in the centuries to come.

Source: TES

- 1) Why could England be described as a 'melting pot'?
- 2) Identify three different reasons why immigrant groups have come to Britain in the last 40,000 years. Are these the same reasons why different people are still coming to Britain today?
- 3) Why is the ethnic immigration described as 'Britain's benefit'?
- 4) Why you think people coming to Britain are often met with hostility and resentment?

