






Population changes in Britain

Here is some data about the way that British population changed from 1961 to 2001. Use this data to make a graph and answer the questions below.

Year	Population
1961	52,807,000
1971	55,928,000
1981	56,352,000
1991	57,808,000
2001	59,009,000

Questions

1. How many more people were there in 1971 than in 1961? 
2. How many more people were there in 1981 than in 1971? 
3. How many more people were there in 1991 than in 1981? 
And in 2001 than in 1991? 
4. In which decade did the population grow by the smallest amount? 
5. Make a graph of this data.

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Age range

- Years 3/4 (SP4/5).
- Years 5/6 (SP6/7).

Resources

Copies of the worksheet, graph paper, coloured pencils or pens for making graphs.

Using the worksheet

Although these numbers do not look very exciting, once students graph them they will see that the population of the UK barely grew in the 1970s, compared to other decades. Although many immigrants arrived in the UK in the 1970s, a large number of British people emigrated in the 1970s.

After students make their calculations and draw their graphs, you may want to have them discuss why they think there was a smaller population increase in the 1970s than at other times. They will probably not mention emigration, but after they have come up with some ideas you can discuss emigration and ask the students why they think a lot of people might have wanted to leave the UK in the 1970s.

The other reason for the lower population increase in the 1970s is that fertility rates plummeted during the decade. In the 1970s, there was an average of just over 2.4 children per woman. In 1976, the rate was 1.7. The birth rate did recover a bit from this low point, but has never achieved as high a rate again. The 1970s marked the beginning of this downturn.

The reasons for this are complex, but one of the main reasons why the downturn began in the 1970s was probably that people felt they could not afford to have too many children; this was coupled with a feeling of doom and gloom that made them reluctant to have more children. As the economy worsened, people also put off marriage until later, which also lowered the fertility rate.

It was this combination of lower fertility and greater emigration which caused the population increase to slow during the 1970s.

Younger students

The students may need some help in choosing what type of graph to make. Bar graphs work well with this data. You may like the students to have a class discussion about why they think the population growth was slower in the 1970s.

Answers

1. **3,121,000**
2. **424,000**
3. **1,456,000 and 1,201,000**
4. **1970s**
5. **A bar graph is a good choice here.**

Outcomes

The students can:

- Make a graph from data.
- Understand that the population grew more slowly in the 1970s than in other decades.
- Draw a conclusion from their studies about why people had fewer children during the 1970s.

Older students

The students may like to try making different types of graphs.

Outcomes

The students can:

- Make a graph from data.
- Understand that the population grew more slowly in the 1970s than in other decades.
- Draw a conclusion from their studies about why people had fewer children during the 1970s.