

# Memories of England

**Here are some different memories that people have of the 1970s.**

## **Memory 1**

I went to a boarding school and we were restricted to two inches of water in our baths. I also remember Concorde flying over the school and everyone stopped what they were doing to watch. The power cuts were a drag with everyone huddled around a candle or lamp. Nothing could really be done as the light was so feeble in the evenings. I do remember the Punks. I first noticed the Stranglers on Top of the Pops and thought they were OK. I never got to hear The Sex Pistols until many years later. 8-track tapes came and were superseded by cassette tapes!

## **Memory 2**

Years of unemployment as the Japanese undercut British heavy industry, sadly the financial wizards in the west have no idea how to fight an economic war. Miners trying to run the country by blackmail. Government who didn't care about anyone. My mother desperately saving every penny so she could feed us. The long hot summer of 1976 and the huge thunderstorms that ended it. One night we stood at the windows and watched the flashes to the north as Edinburgh, 100 miles away, got theirs. The next night it was our turn, it went on for so long we eventually got bored and went to bed. Late in the '70s my parents could finally afford to get central heating, as it neared completion (cobbled together from fire sales and salvaged parts by my father) I used to stick my hand through the letter box when I came home from school. One night it was actually warmer inside than out. Factories closing. Walking miles and miles, no money to do anything else.

## **Memory 3**

A very exciting and inventive time. I was at art school. It could not have been better. I know nostalgia is not what it used to be, but the 70s showed all that was good about Britain: individuality, in essence. Once everyone discovered money, it was over. I lived in a squat in Battersea, paid 50 pence a week and, when it got cold, threw the odd chair into the fire. Now London has swallowed New York wholesale, everyone's a millionaire and is desperate to wear the same clothes and buy the same car ... or rather, a more expensive model.

## **Memory 4**

I was teaching in the 1970s in Southampton. During the 'three-day week', I remember getting up in the dark, no electricity, cycling to school and finding no electricity at school either. Four years later, after graduating with an honours degree, the only work I could find in London was part-time teaching. I couldn't find anywhere passable to live either, so ended up squatting in a Victorian house in East London, in a street with about fifty or sixty other squatters. The Asian supermarket down the street was always being attacked by neo-Nazis and swastikas adorned bridges and walls everywhere. I participated in several big anti-Nazi marches and rallies, including one where Joe Strummer of The Clash told some of his skinhead fans, "Take off your swastikas!" That was a pivotal moment. But London was grim and frightening. I left England in 1978 and emigrated to Canada in 1979.

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### Age range

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

### Resources

Copies of the worksheet.

### Using the worksheet

These are actual memories of people who grew up in the 1970s. Students can see that there is no single experience of the 1970s. Some people have good memories, while others have bad memories. However, most of these people remember that life was hard in the 1970s.

You may like to have the students discuss or make a list of good things and bad things that each person remembers. Person number 3 has the most positive experience of the 1970s and students may like to discuss why they think this is. This person clearly enjoyed the freedom of not having much money and living with other people who didn't have much money either. Students may like to contrast that person's positive experience of squatting and having no money, with the next person's unhappy memories of squatting and having no money.

It may also be interesting to point out that of these four people, three of them now live abroad (only the first person still lives in the UK).

You may like to use this activity in conjunction with worksheets 2C–2H and 3C–3E and compare memories from the different decades. Although these memories are all subjective (they all come from a BBC website), they are chosen as a representative sample and show that in general people tended to find life tough in the 1970s.

### Younger students

The students may need some help with the reading and the meaning of words such as 'emigrated', 'skinhead' and 'Nazi', and phrases such as "Now London has swallowed New York wholesale".

### Outcomes

The students can:

- Get information from a text.
- Learn a little of what England was like in the 1970s.
- Read and understand some personal experiences from the 1970s.

### Older students

The students may want to discuss the readings and whether they think these people generally had a good experience or a bad experience in the 1970s.

### Outcomes

The students can:

- Get information from a text.
- Learn a little of what England was like in the 1970s.
- Read and understand some personal experiences from the 1970s.