

# From Nero to Hero: History of firefighting

## Objectives:

- Learn about the history of the fire service
- Learn about what the fire service does today
- Stimulate creativity

## STEP BY STEP

### Before starting

The teacher asks the pupils what comes to their minds when they hear the word "fire" and notes the answers on the blackboard. After collecting the children's thoughts, the teacher addresses the topic of fire, starting with its discovery, its uses in early civilizations and its cultural and symbolic significance.

Next, on the blackboard, the teacher writes the word "firefighter" (if it has not already been mentioned by some children) and provides a brief overview of historical firefighting, starting with Nero's fire in Rome. To guide the overview of firefighting through the centuries, the teacher can use the "Famous Fires in History" worksheet (see attachment "From Nero to Hero - Famous Fires in History" below).

### History of Firefighters

The teacher describes to the class how and when the Fire Department was born and how the Fire Department has evolved over the years.

These major milestones can be used to guide the discussion:

- **Ancient Rome:** In 6 AD, after a major fire in Rome, Emperor Caesar Augustus created the Vigiles, the first firefighters. These were special groups composed of ex-slaves who performed specific tasks, such as "ganciere" and "fireman supervising water pumps." The Vigiles became very important in the Roman Empire and had 7190 members!
- **Expansion and Growth:** The Vigiles did not remain only in Rome; they spread to other Roman cities, making sure to protect people from fires. This laid the foundation for today's firefighting.
- **Large fires and urban development:** Rome had large fires, especially in 64 AD, and London faced large ones in 798, 982, and 989. The Great Fire of London in 1666 led insurance companies to create their own firefighting teams.
- **Innovations in the world:** In 1725, a man named Richard Newsham built the first fire engine in London. Benjamin Franklin founded the Union Fire Company in Philadelphia in 1736, making volunteer firefighting a reality in America. Napoleon Bonaparte in France created the first professionals (professional firefighters) in 1810.
- **Progress in the 19th century:** In 1824 and 1832, fire fighting was organized in Edinburgh and London. The first steam fire engine was made in 1829, but it took until 1860 for people to appreciate its usefulness. Gas fire engines arrived in 1907, and steam engines slowly disappeared in 1925.

### Firefighters nowadays

The teacher proceeds to explain that today's firefighters do much more than just put out fires. After dividing the children into groups, the teacher asks each

group to represent all the tasks they associate with the work of modern firefighters. Each group should create a silhouette of a firefighter and draw on the silhouette a feature for each task (for example, they can draw a fire extinguisher to symbolize the task of putting out a fire).

At the end of the time allowed, each group shows their firefighter drawing to the class and explains the meaning of the symbols they drew in their drawing. When finished, the teacher can create a new outline on the board or on a card and write inside it all the words (characteristics or tasks of the firefighter) that the children suggested.

## Concluding thoughts

At the end of the activity, the teacher can discuss with the children any additional tasks related to the work of firefighters.

To lead the discussion, the teacher can use the "The Work of Firefighters" sheet (see attachment "From Nero to Hero - The Work of Firefighters" below).

The class can reflect together on real events that happened in their municipality where one or more of the above tasks were implemented by the National Fire Department.

### ATTACHMENTS



From Nero to Hero - History of firefighting

PDF



From Nero to Hero - The Work of Firefighters

PDF