

Fire on the Moor

Understanding wildfire risk in the UK, and why it's rising

When people picture a wildfire, they usually picture somewhere hot and far away. But fires like this are becoming more common on UK moorland and heathland too, from the Peak District to the Scottish Highlands. In this activity you'll explore what makes a wildfire start and spread, and what people can do to help prevent one.

1

What do you already know?
5 min · On your own, no right or wrong answers

Statement	True	False	Not sure
Wildfires only happen in hot countries like Australia or the USA.	☐	☐	☐
Most UK wildfires are started by people, not by lightning.	☐	☐	☐
Wildfires can happen on moorland and grassland, not just in forests.	☐	☐	☐
The number of wildfires in the UK has been increasing in recent years.	☐	☐	☐
Wildfires are always started on purpose.	☐	☐	☐
Once a wildfire starts, nothing can be done to stop it spreading.	☐	☐	☐

2

Build the picture
10 min · With a partner, cut out or number these cards in the right order

These steps describe how a wildfire builds and spreads, but they're jumbled up. Number them 1-6 in the correct order.

A Firefighters try to contain the fire, but the dry conditions make it hard to put out.	B A long spell of hot, dry weather with little or no rainfall begins.	C The fire burns through moorland, releasing stored carbon and destroying wildlife habitats.
D Strong winds help the fire spread quickly across the land.	E Vegetation like grass and heather dries out after weeks without rain.	F An ignition source, a cigarette, a barbecue, or a spark, meets the dry vegetation.

3

The 'but...' moment
10 min · With your partner, talk through each prompt, then share one with the group

Each sentence starts with something true. Your job is to complete the "but..." part.

True part	But... (complete this)
Most UK wildfires are started by people, not lightning...	
Wildfires have always happened in the UK...	
Firefighters can hold back a wildfire...	
Moorland fires might look like "just grass burning"...	

4

So what?
10 min · As a group discussion

If someone had never heard about UK wildfires, what's the ONE thing you'd want them to understand? Write it here:	What's one thing people could do differently to help prevent wildfires? Write it here:
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Guidance for teachers and climate educators

30–40 mins · KS3 (ages 11–13) · Individual → Pairs → Group

Before you start

Print one pupil sheet per person. Stage 2 works best if pupils can cut out the cards, scissors optional but recommended. No prior knowledge needed from pupils. Background for you: wildfires need three things to start and spread, fuel (dry vegetation), heat (hot weather or a spark), and oxygen (wind feeds the flames and helps them spread). This is sometimes called the fire triangle.

Answers to Stage 1: 1 False · 2 True · 3 True · 4 True · 5 False · 6 False

Stage 2 order: B → E → F → D → A → C

1 What do you already know? · 5 min · Individual

Hand out the pupil sheet. Give pupils a moment to read it before starting.

“Take your time with this, there are no wrong answers. Just circle what feels right to you right now.”

Let pupils work quietly. Don't comment on their choices at this stage, the reveal comes later.

 **If needed:** If a pupil looks stuck: *“Just go with your gut, we're going to explore all of these together.”*

2 Build the picture · 10 min · Pairs

Ask pupils to find a partner. They should work through the six cards together.

“With your partner, put the cards in the order you think they happen, step 1 through to step 6.”

After 5-6 minutes, go through the answer (B → E → F → D → A → C) together as a group. Pause at card F to emphasise that this is the moment human action usually enters the story.

“Notice that card F, the ignition source, is very often a person: a cigarette, an unextinguished barbecue, a spark. The weather sets the conditions, but people usually strike the match.”

If needed: If a pair is struggling to agree: *“It's fine to disagree, just pick an order and we'll talk it through.”*

If needed: For pupils who finish early: *“Can you explain in one sentence why card F changes everything?”*

3 The 'but...' moment · 10 min · Pairs → Group

Keep the same pairs. Read the first prompt aloud as a model before they start.

“Wildfires have always happened in the UK, but... what's the 'but' here? Talk to your partner.”

Give pairs 4-5 minutes to work through all four prompts, then open each one to the room. Suggested responses below, accept any thoughtful answer.

Suggested 'but...' responses:

Most UK wildfires are started by people, not lightning... but often without meaning to, one dropped cigarette or an unextinguished barbecue is enough.

Wildfires have always happened in the UK... but hotter, drier summers mean they're starting more easily and spreading further than before.

Firefighters can hold back a wildfire... but dry ground and strong wind can make some fires very hard to control quickly.

Moorland fires might look like "just grass burning"... but peat soils store huge amounts of carbon, and burning releases it straight into the atmosphere.

If needed: If discussion is quiet: *“Which one surprised you most?”*, lower stakes than asking for a full answer.

4 So what? · 10 min · Whole group

Ask pupils to complete both boxes on the pupil sheet individually first (2-3 minutes), then share.

“Take a moment to write, then we'll hear a few from around the room.”

Collect the 'one thing' responses, read a few aloud. Then move to prevention: most UK wildfires are avoidable, so this is a genuinely hopeful note to end on.

“Ninety percent of UK wildfires are started by people. That's a difficult fact, but it's also a hopeful one, it means most of them are preventable.”

 **If needed:** If a pupil doesn't want to speak aloud: let them write their answer for a class display instead.

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