

Enquiry question 2	Why has Brick Lane meant so much to British Bangladeshis?
Rationale	<p>The story of migration is central to UK history, most visibly in our eating – the restaurants, cafés and food stores we all use. These have formed a vital part of the identity not only of British Bangladeshis, but of many communities whose histories are ones of migration. The restaurant trade is central to how so many families have established themselves, survived and thrived.</p> <p>However, the story of how communities have had to fight to belong, facing racism and exclusion, and to defend their spaces, is seldom told. The Brick Lane story – both the anti-racist struggle and the business boom – has been repeated all over the country. It's a story fundamental to modern Britain, affecting all our lives.</p> <p>It is also a story of how identity becomes connected with a particular place, through a history of shared experience. This is universal, and students can move on to look at how local histories have created places with strong senses of identity. This is a story not of people having things done to them, but of agency, of them making their own history.</p> <p>It is not always easy to tackle the concept of significance with students, especially if the scale is too big and the possible factors too many. This offers an enquiry at manageable scale, looking at significance for a community of people, several of whose views students can watch and hear. It is possible for students to reach informed conclusions based on the material on the website.</p>
Second order focus	Significance
Builds on knowledge of ...	Migration and empire Post-war history of the UK Civil rights and citizenship
Would support future learning of ...	Local history: the importance of a street to a community History of racism and anti-racism in the UK Histories of South Asian and other migrant communities in the UK Social change and urban environments
Points to emphasise	<p>For the Bangladeshi community, 'Brick Lane' is not only a street. It is an idea, an identity, a place of reference, a 'character' with meaning. This enquiry explores this idea.</p> <p>Lesson 1: The first Bengali migrants were primarily seafarers who settled near London's docks. Some of these men then found work as cooks in Brick Lane's earliest curry cafes. Migration grew in the 1950s and 1960s and many of these migrants worked in the clothing industry, which had been dominated by the Jewish community. Over time, the restaurant trade became more significant in Brick Lane.</p> <p>Lesson 2: Altab Ali's murder in 1978 was a watershed moment and is remembered as such by older people who were young at the time. Brick Lane became important as a focus of British Bangladeshi identity through a history of successful anti-racist direct action in the 1970s, alongside political struggles that achieved affordable local housing for Bangladeshi families.</p>

	<p>Lesson 3: Brick Lane's location, near the docks and with cheap housing close to the wealth of the City, enabled the growth of a migrant community based around work and where they also lived. As the garment trade declined, it was replaced by the restaurant trade, which reached a peak in the 1990s and early 2000s. 'Indian' dishes that are in fact Bangladeshi transformed British eating habits.</p> <p>Lesson 4: The 'Banglatown' initiative came originally from a desire to celebrate all aspects of Bengali culture and the special Bangladeshi identity of Brick Lane. However, what emerged in the 1990s was focused only on the restaurants, alongside plans for a more general arts and entertainment cultural hub.</p> <p>Lesson 5: There are reasons why Brick Lane has been very significant for British Bangladeshis. As the area undergoes fast change, whether that will be lost (and whether that would matter) is a matter of deep debate.</p>
Things to avoid	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Telling one story of Brick Lane.</i> The community is not homogenous. - <i>Telling a story of uniform poverty.</i> The restaurant trade picked up an area that had been impoverished previously, while a contributing factor to restaurant decline is the academic and career success of the younger generation. - <i>Presenting the views and experiences on this website as a full story of the area.</i> This project focuses very specifically on the restaurant trade, and the interviews are with male Bangladeshi entrepreneurs and non-Bangladeshi residents and visitors. Other voices are absent: notably, those of Bangladeshi women and younger Bangladeshis who grew up in Brick Lane but have left the area. - <i>Giving the impression that British Bangladeshi culture is only about 'curry houses'.</i> Art, music, fashion, journalism, business, politics and the sciences are all part of contemporary British Bangladeshi life in East London, which in turn feeds into the area's hybrid cultural identity and the intersectionalities of lives lived there.
Suggested number of lessons	5
Lesson suggestions with links to supporting website resources	<p>Start the enquiry with these clips suggesting the place of Brick Lane in the British Bangladeshi imagination:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Video from 0.00 to 0.20 and 6.19 to 6.33. <p>Lesson 1: The Bengali community Showing students Brick Lane as it now is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Street section shows all the businesses on the street. <p>Why Bengalis initially moved to Brick Lane:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • See the Empire, Trade, Seafarers and Spice section. Our Migration Story provides information on the experiences of lascars. • Independence, Partition and Post-1947 Migrations. • The video (0.40–2.12) focuses on reasons why Bengalis moved to the area. <p>Lesson 2. Why does Brick Lane remember Altab Ali? The following links can help students to understand how struggles against racism and for affordable housing created a place of belonging for the Bangladeshi community, and to consider how far that history is important to the community.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Video (2.10–3.37). • Politics, Racism and Resistance.

- For more information about housing campaigns, see the [OCR Spitalfields pack](#), Chapters 9 and 10.
- The restaurants [Café Grill](#), [Amar Gaon](#), [Jasmine](#), [Aladin](#) were all meeting places for activists.
- [City Data](#) provides details on the changing population of Spitalfields and Banglatown

Lesson 3. How has the restaurant trade shaped Brick Lane?

These links tell the story of the transition from garment sweatshops to restaurants that served a mixed clientele of city workers, tourists and local people. Students can consider how closely Bangladeshi identity on Brick Lane is (or is not) tied to the survival of the restaurants.

- [Video](#) (3.37–4.21 and 5.57–6.19).
- [Working Lives: From Clothing to Catering](#).
- [Cookbooks, Cafes and Curry](#).
- [Dark Sugars](#) and the story of The Famous Clifton restaurant
- [Shiraz](#): 'We want Brick Lane to stay here, we don't want it to change. It's my childhood, living here. If you take off all these shops and restaurants it won't be Brick Lane any more.'
- [Joan](#): 'keep the history ... preserve it, engaging local people'.
- [Graam Bangla](#) and [Café Grill](#): Bangladeshi home cooking. 'This is not restaurant food, this is like the food you would have at home'.
- [Street Data](#): land uses (food) and employment.

Lesson 4. Can 'Banglatown' be described as a success story?

The links show how 'Banglatown' started as one thing and ended up as another, raising the question of whether it ended up being positive or negative for the community.

- [Video](#) (4.22–5.18).
- [The Rise of 'Banglatown'](#).
- [The Decline of 'Banglatown'](#).
- [The Standard Balti House](#): one of only a few Bangladeshi freeholders in Brick Lane.
- [Taj Stores](#): video interview with Abdul Quayum.

Lesson 5. Conclusion: Why is Brick Lane so important to the British Bangladeshi community and what has it meant to them?

The previous three lessons have opened up questions about Brick Lane's importance to the community. Is it based on struggles fought in the past, on lives centred round the restaurants and their popularity, or on other factors?

As students reflect on this and create their outcome (see suggestions below), they can ask themselves whether or not they think it is important for the Bangladeshi identity of Brick Lane to be preserved. A hundred years ago, Brick Lane and Wentworth Street were the heart of an East End Jewish identity which has now gone: if the same happens to Bangladeshi Spitalfields, will that matter?

Possible outcome tasks	<p>Exhibition Students design a four-panel exhibition, corresponding to the four questions heading each lesson. For each panel they choose a visual image (a photo or screenshot from the site, or separately researched) and a quotation from the site and write a paragraph of explanatory text in their own words. The final panel includes a paragraph giving their own conclusions.</p> <p>Installation Students prepare a pitch for their design of an artwork to be installed on Brick Lane, reflecting why the street matters so much to the community. The artwork could be a street mural, a statue, a photo essay, an audio experience or something else. The pitch must explain how the artwork addresses the four questions in this enquiry.</p> <p>Guide Students design a leaflet for visitors to Brick Lane, telling the story of the restaurant trade and why the street matters to its Bangladeshi community.</p> <p>Further research In order to fully answer the enquiry question, what other questions need to be asked that are not covered on the site? How could students go about researching these? (Areas that could be covered include housing campaigns, the views of women and young people, Brick Lane residents who are not Bangladeshi).</p> <p>Discussion 'It is important to know where you come from, celebrate your histories' (Julia King). How far do you agree, and why?</p>
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