

## London riots: Tottenham residents seek answers

### Level 2 • Intermediate

#### 1 Warmer

Tottenham and Hackney are ...

- ... top football clubs.
- ... areas of London.
- ... well-known brands of sports clothes.

#### 2 Key words

Write the key words from the article next to the definitions below. The paragraph numbers are given to help you find the words in context.

poverty      arsonists      morality      atheism      deprivation      looting

- stealing from houses or shops after a disaster or disturbance \_\_\_\_\_ (subtitle)
- people who deliberately start fires \_\_\_\_\_ (para 3)
- a situation in which someone does not have enough money to pay for their basic needs \_\_\_\_\_ (para 5)
- a situation in which people do not have basic things that they need to live a comfortable life \_\_\_\_\_ (para 8)
- the belief or theory that God does not exist \_\_\_\_\_ (para 8)
- principles of right or wrong behaviour \_\_\_\_\_ (para 8)

dismisses      stop and search      criminalize      opportunistic      demolished      consumerism

- when a building is deliberately destroyed (often because it is old or unsafe) \_\_\_\_\_ (para 9)
- refuses to accept that something might be true or important \_\_\_\_\_ (para 10)
- a procedure carried out by the UK police if they think that you have committed a crime \_\_\_\_\_ (para 10)
- buying lots of things \_\_\_\_\_ (para 10)
- used to describe something that is done in a way that takes advantage of a situation \_\_\_\_\_ (para 11)
- say that someone is guilty of a crime \_\_\_\_\_ (para 11)

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#### London riots: frightened and angry, Tottenham residents seek answers

*The reasons behind the violence and looting in London are complex and deep-rooted*

**Peter Beaumont**

**13 August, 2011**

- 1 Night. The smell of smoke, and angry young men moving with weapons. There are cars and buildings on fire and the threat of violence. For years, I have seen scenes like this abroad: in Africa, the Middle East and the Balkans. But this was on my own high street in Tottenham, a seven-minute walk from where I live.
- 2 Two days later, there is more violence in Hackney, 100 metres from the place where, until a few weeks ago, my son went to school.
- 3 Then, I discovered what it feels like to run from where you live because you are afraid – when arsonists set fire to the council depot behind my house, and my wife and I were woken by the sound of gas canisters exploding. Dark smoke and orange flames rose above our home.
- 4 It would be easy to write that I know these areas in north and east London where I have lived for more than 20 years. But that would not be true. There is another London I don't know, a place more familiar to my teenage children who know its rules – places that are dangerous, streets to avoid.
- 5 I have read reports about families living in urban poverty and gang membership. But being white, middle-aged and middle class, this has never been my London. Now, after what has happened, it is a London that I cannot ignore.
- 6 It is easy to describe the events of the riots: the high street on fire; the line of police with blue lights flashing on riot shields; people burning police cars because they are angry at the killing of Mark Duggan by police.
- 7 But even as I watched on that first night, the protesters in Tottenham who were angry at Duggan's killing were replaced by those with a different plan. It was a group, some of whom had been part of the protest, who were not angry but self-interested.
- 8 What happened in the next few hours would set the pattern for the days that followed. More and more people came to join the violence which then spread to other cities in the UK. It is hard to understand why. No explanation is good enough. Social deprivation has been blamed, but there are other poor areas of the country that didn't riot. Others blame atheism and the lack of morality, but in my part of London lots of my neighbours go to church. Conservative ministers say that people who riot are simply "criminals", but that has no meaning.
- 9 I meet Lorna Reith, my local councillor. Her area covers half of the High Road most affected by the rioting. She is also responsible for children's services. We are on a corner not far from Bruce Grove station. Ahead of us the road is still closed as a burned-out building is demolished. There was a jeweller's once on the ground floor and flats above.
- 10 Reith has met many residents, people both frightened and angry. She dismisses the easy answers that some have given to explain what happened first in Tottenham. "It is complex. There were different groups of people with different levels of involvement. There's the 13-year-old kid who heard about something happening on the High Road, who wouldn't usually get involved with criminal gangs. There were those with more clear political ideas, including those angry about police stop and searches. But the looting was not about politics, it was about consumerism – about people taking what they think they wanted."
- 11 She believes that is why they chose shops that were familiar, shops where they usually go shopping, such as Aldi and JD Sports, the places where some of them might work. Although she says that the people responsible for the looting should be punished, she is also worried that

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others who were caught up in a moment of opportunistic looting will be criminalized.

playground. When you have anger and then add looting it all gets so much worse.”

12 But there is something else, in addition to all the social and political issues. “It was exciting for some of these kids. It turned into a giant

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### 3 Comprehension check

Are these statements true (T) or false (F) according to the text? Correct any sentences that are false.

1. People in Tottenham came together to protest after the police shot a young man, Mark Duggan.
2. The protests were followed by riots, which involved arson and looting.
3. The author feels personally involved because his son was hurt in the riots.
4. He says that urban poverty and social deprivation have nothing to do with the riots.
5. Looters probably stole from Aldi and JD Sports because the stores are owned by the government.
6. The riots quickly spread around the UK.
7. A local councillor says that all the looters should be sent to prison.
8. She says that the local kids are frightened and angry and would rather be in a playground.

### 4 Collocations

Match the words so that they make collocations from the article. Decide what they mean (your answers from task 2 will help you) and use them to talk about the article.

- |                  |                |
|------------------|----------------|
| 1. serious       | a. membership  |
| 2. high          | b. playground  |
| 3. urban         | c. shields     |
| 4. gang          | d. street      |
| 5. riot          | e. looting     |
| 6. social        | f. crimes      |
| 7. giant         | g. poverty     |
| 8. opportunistic | h. deprivation |

### 5 Discussion

- How and why do you think the rioting spread across the UK so quickly?
- Do you think rioting like this could happen where you live? Why? Why not?

### 6 Webquest

Research these companies on the internet and talk about why you think they were targeted by looters.

JD Sports

Currys

PC World

Dixons

Sony

Aldi

Tesco

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#### KEY

**Teacher's note:** This newspaper editorial provides an overview of what happened in the UK riots:

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2011/aug/12/urban-riots-seven-days-britain>

#### 1 Warmer

b

#### 2 Key words

1. looting
2. arsonists
3. poverty
4. deprivation
5. atheism
6. morality
7. demolished
8. dismisses
9. stop and search
10. consumerism
11. opportunistic
12. criminalize

#### 3 Comprehension check

1. T
2. T
3. F – The author feels personally involved because he lives near where the riots took place.
4. F – He says that urban poverty and social deprivation cannot be the only reason for the riots.
5. F – Looters probably stole from Aldi and JD Sports because they know and maybe even work in these stores.
6. T
7. F – A local councillor says that all the looters should be punished.
8. F – She says that the local residents are frightened and angry and that the excitement of the rioting and looting made the kids feel like they were in a giant playground.

#### 4 Collocations

1. f
2. d
3. g
4. a
5. c
6. h
7. b
8. e

#### 6 Webquest

**Teacher's note:** Divide the companies up between students who then research and give short presentations on each of the companies.