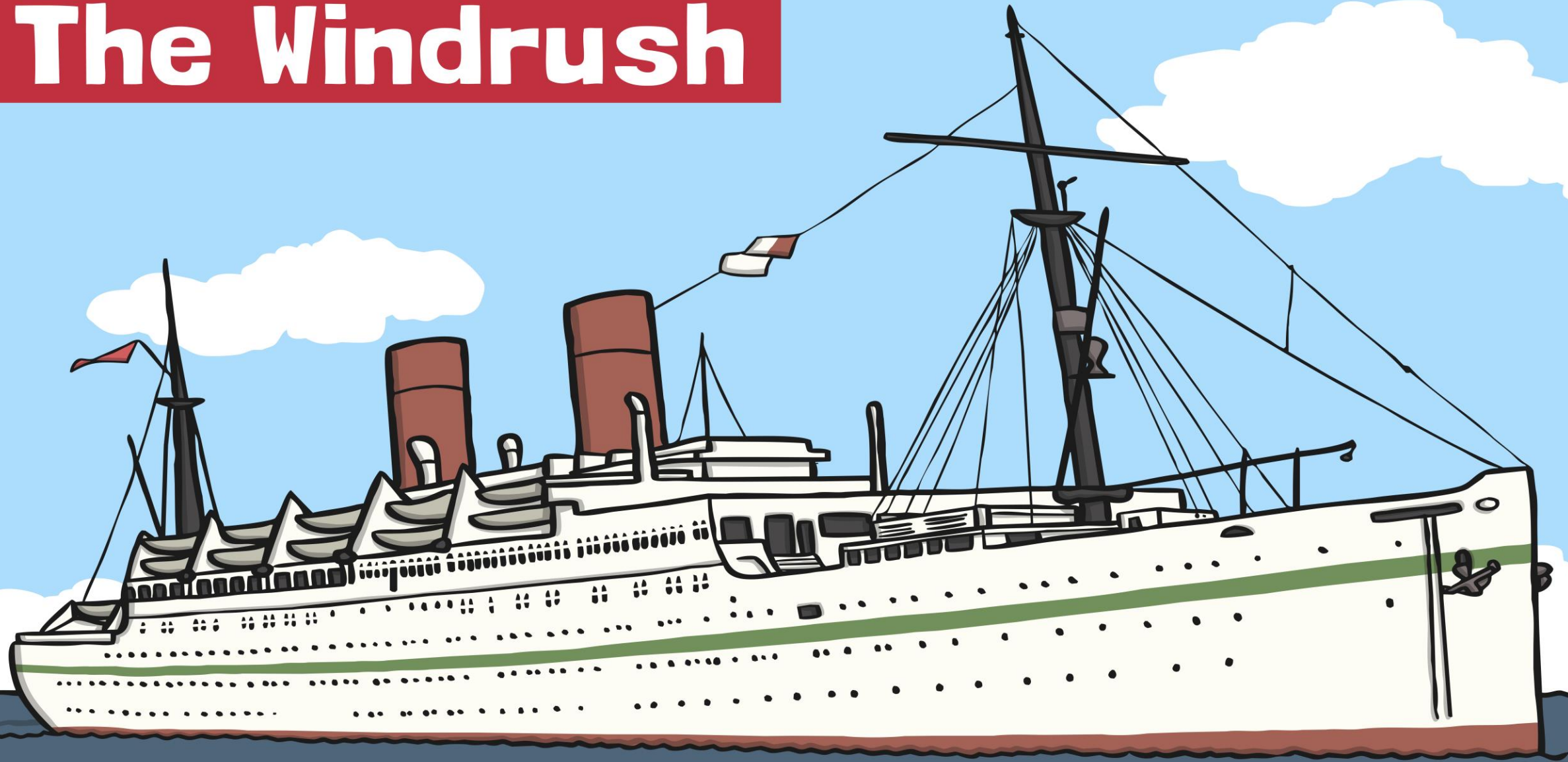
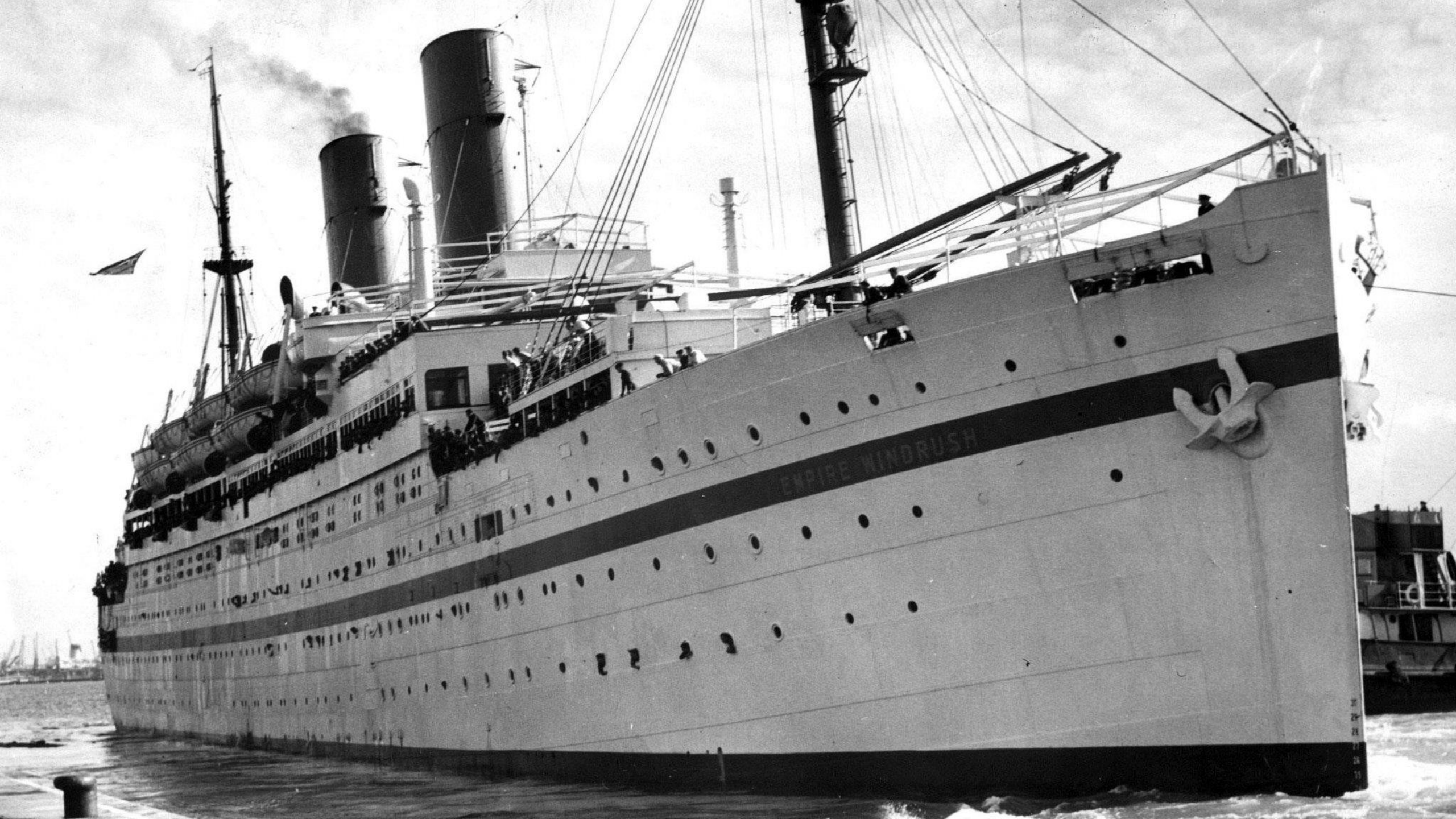


The Windrush









EMPIRE

WINDRUSH

LONDON



Britain in 1948

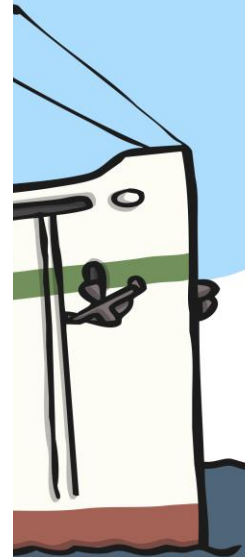
After the end of World War II in 1945, politicians talked about Britain's fight against the racist Nazi government. They said that Britain was a place where people of different ethnic backgrounds could live and work together.

Many Commonwealth citizens had fought for Britain during the war and many had lost their lives. They had shown how important they were to the British Empire.

In 1948, the British Nationality Act gave 800 million people in the Commonwealth the right to claim British Citizenship.

Britain needed workers since many men had died in World War II.

The NHS was launched in 1948 and needed labour and constantly advertised in Commonwealth countries to attract new workers.



Britain in 1948

Just after World War II ended in 1945, the first groups of Britain's post-war Caribbean immigrants settled in London.

There were an estimated 492 that were passengers on the SS Empire Windrush.

From the 1950s into the 1960s, there was a mass migration of workers from all over the English-speaking Caribbean, particularly Jamaica, who settled in Britain. These immigrants were invited to fill labour requirements in London's hospitals, transportation venues and railway development.

They are widely viewed as having been a major contributing factor to the rebuilding of the post-war London economy.



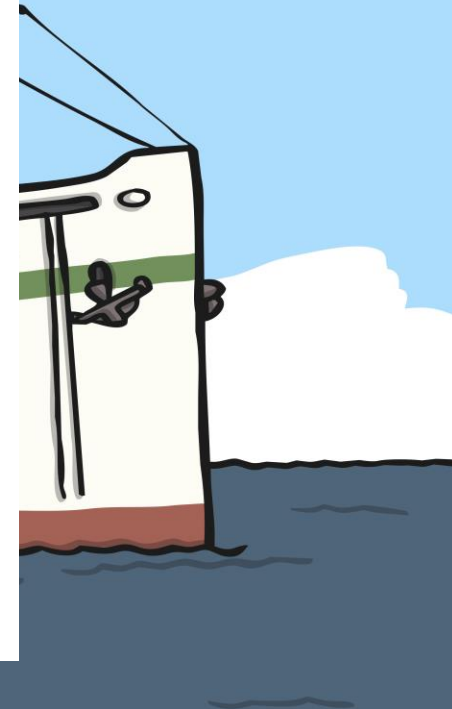
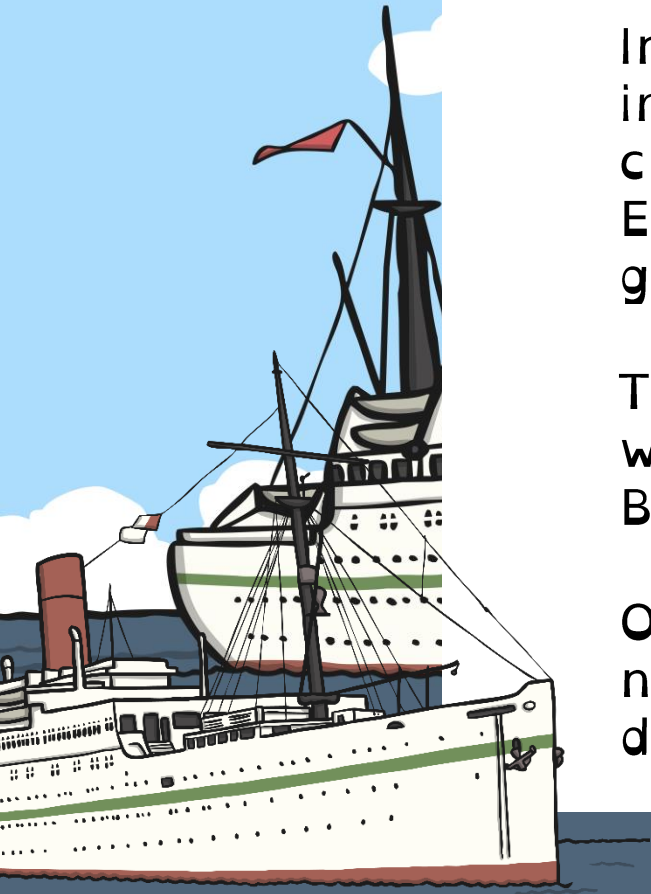
What was the Windrush?

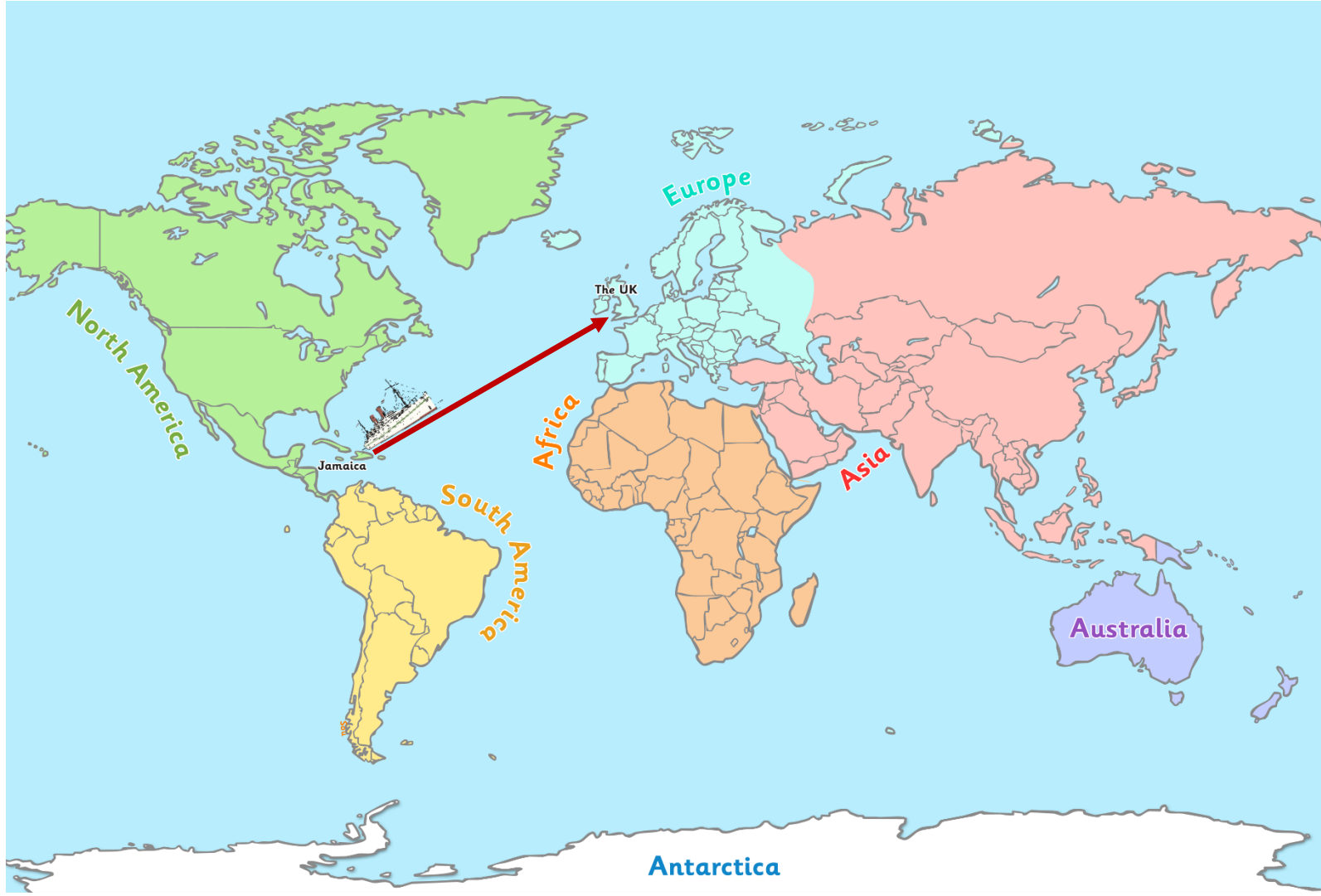
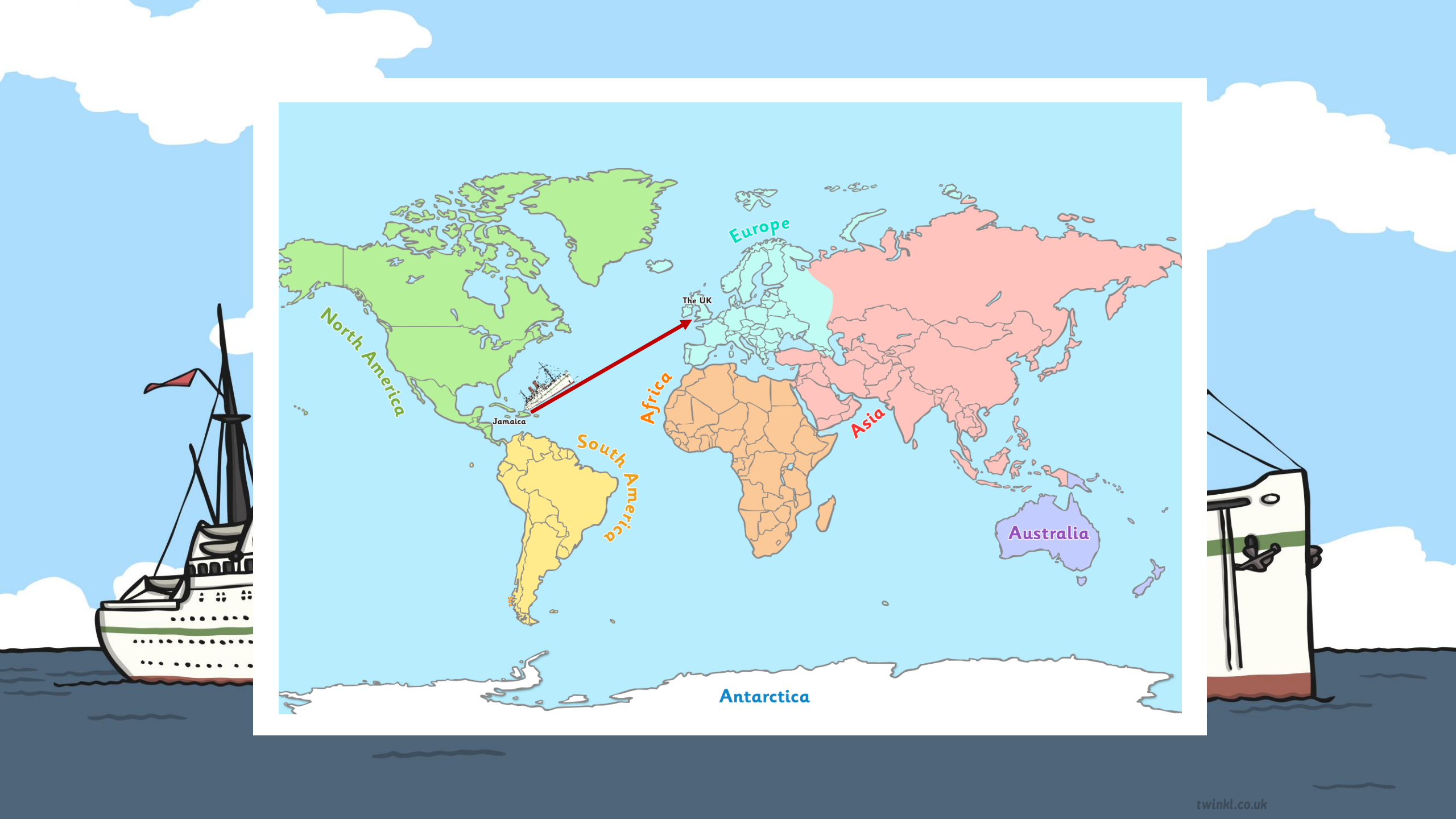
The Empire Windrush was an old German boat that was captured during World War II by the British.

In 1948, the Windrush went to Australia to pick up immigrants and then went on to Jamaica and collected almost 500 passengers bound for England. The Windrush was the first of the large groups of Caribbean migrants to come to Britain.

These passengers settled in the area of Brixton which is now a prominently black district in Britain.

On board were experienced cleaners, labourers, nurses, etc. including one stow-away who was discovered a week into the journey!





Was it only the Windrush ship that bought Caribbean migrants to Britain?

The arrival of the Windrush was the start of a period of migration from the Caribbean to Britain that did not slow down until 1962.

By 1955, 18,000 Jamaicans had moved to Britain.

This outward flow of people to settle in Britain was an important event in the history of the West Indies.

Caribbean migrants have become a vital part of British society and, in the process, transformed important aspects of British life.



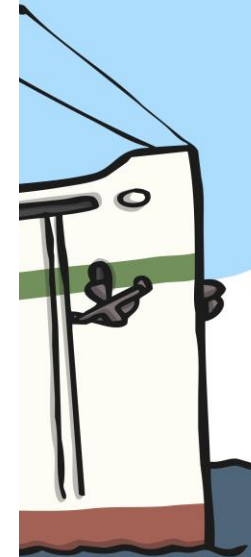
What Was it Like to be a Windrush Passenger?

Passengers on the Windrush were told that they would all be welcome in Britain, the 'mother country'. Was this their experience after arriving in Britain?

Clinton Edwards

"When we arrived, I had to find work. The first job I got was as a welder. Instead of doing welding they gave me a wheelbarrow and a shovel. After a couple of weeks my arms were sore. So I packed it in and re-enlisted in the RAF. I knew what to expect in the RAF. I spent the next 8 years with them, 3 years in Egypt and Iraq. After 8 years, I got a job as a laboratory technician.

My life in England has been very good, I enjoy my work, and my work mates treat me nice. I have been back home several times on holiday. I still call Jamaica home, although I lost my parents you know. The home is still there, my relatives live there, and I have to keep up with the repairs, but I prefer to live here. I am married, my family is here, my children, my grandchildren. I am quite happy here."





John Richards

"I knew a lot about Britain from school days but it was a different picture from that one, when you came face to face with the facts. It was two different things. They tell you it is the 'mother country', you're all welcome, you're all British. When you come here you realise you're a foreigner and that's all there is to it. The average person knows you as a colonial and that's all. You cut cane or carry bananas and that's it. Anybody wants to diddle you they say I just come off the banana boat and things like that."

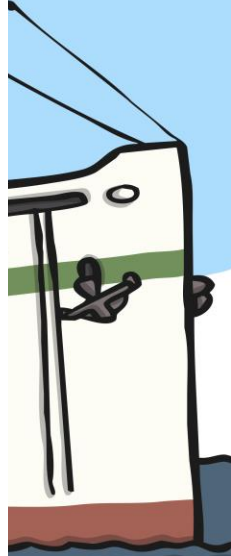
Mr. Oswald 'Columbus' Denniston

"It was common knowledge that there was work in Britain, just after the war. I had no ties. I wasn't married or anything like that. I come from Montego Bay, Jamaica. I knew no one in England, I had travelled before to America and Panama. I had no idea what I was coming to. I can remember some of the people I travelled with, if I see them, but I don't know where they are now. All in all it was a good journey to Britain for me, yeah it was."



Vince Reid

"My parents brought me on the Windrush - I had no choice in the matter. They didn't have to - they came in search of a better life, better opportunities. It was quite a devastating experience. I was thirteen when I arrived so I wasn't a man, I was a boy. Most of the people on the Windrush were men. I had never been out of Kingston so it was quite an experience. I went to school in Kings Cross. I had never associated with white people and then at school I came across real hostility. I mean to say I had no friends for several years, that wouldn't be far from the truth. I joined the Airforce when I was sixteen. By the time I came out there were more black people in this country. I am 62 years old now. I have been here 50 years . I would prefer to live here. Well, my family is here, my wife, my grandchildren are here. I have been back to Kingston several times. My circumstances were significantly different to everyone else's, but personally I like England, it's a nice place to live. It's not to say it doesn't have its problems, racism and so on."



Life As a Caribbean Immigrant in 1950's Britain

Black and Asian immigrants faced varying degrees of hostility and racial prejudice in post war Britain.

Surveys conducted in the mid 1960s, revealed that four out of five British people felt that 'too many immigrants had been let into the country'.

There was, and still is, a minority of racists, who believe in the idea of 'keeping Britain white' and banning all immigration.

This view has rarely resulted in violence. It is largely confined to poor areas where local white and black communities compete for scarce jobs and housing.





[Click here to learn about Floella Benjamin \(a famous children's author who came to Britain as part of the Windrush generation\).](#)
[She's written a book about her migration experience titled 'Coming to England'.](#)

Windrush Square

Windrush Square, Brixton

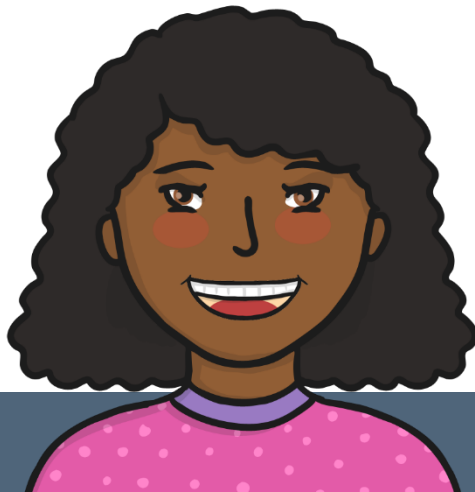


In 1998, the area in front of the Tate Library in Brixton was renamed "Windrush Square" to mark the 50th anniversary of the arrival of the Windrush.

In the 21st century, Britain is a multi-racial society.

The huge contributions made by the various immigrant communities to Britain's economic and social development since the Second World War are now widely recognised.

Their role in creating a more diverse and tolerant society is indisputable.



[Click here for some Windrush creative writing activities](#)

