

FICHE DE COURS : The demographic transition

Place dans les programmes du lycée : la transition démographique peut être abordée en classe de Seconde dans le chapitre portant sur la population mondiale, mais aussi en Première afin de décrire et d'expliquer les transformations de la société au XIX^e siècle. La Révolution Industrielle offrant un large et important objet d'étude à l'histoire en anglais, c'est cette possibilité que j'ai choisie ici.

Objectifs de contenu et linguistique : outre son propos démographique et social, ce cours de premier trimestre de Première a un objectif méthodologique et linguistique très fort : il veut apporter le lexique et les réflexes de la description d'un graphique, et plus largement de données statistiques chiffrées, autant d'outils que les élèves réemploieront jusqu'à l'épreuve du bac, et même au-delà. Plus que par le propos inter-culturel, c'est de cette façon que se justifie la présence de ce thème dans le cadre des cours de DNL en Section Européenne.

Place dans le plan du cours : une à deux heures sont nécessaires. L'étude prend place dans le chapitre "The Industrial Revolution in Great Britain", dans une partie consacrée aux transformations de la société. L'étude proposée se déroule en trois temps qui peuvent constituer trois sous-paragraphe.

• Step 1 – A table

Les questions sont très simples : elles partent toutes de la description des documents.

Doc. 1 – Table of English (and Welsh) population through time

Year	Population (in millions)
1500	3
1600	4
1700	5
1800	9.4
1830	12.5
1901	32

Q 1 – What is the nature of document 1 ?

A 1 – Document 1 is **a table**, or **a chart**. It is **a census** of the English population **through time** (including Wales).

Q 2 – Describe it precisely : how is it organised, and what can you read ?

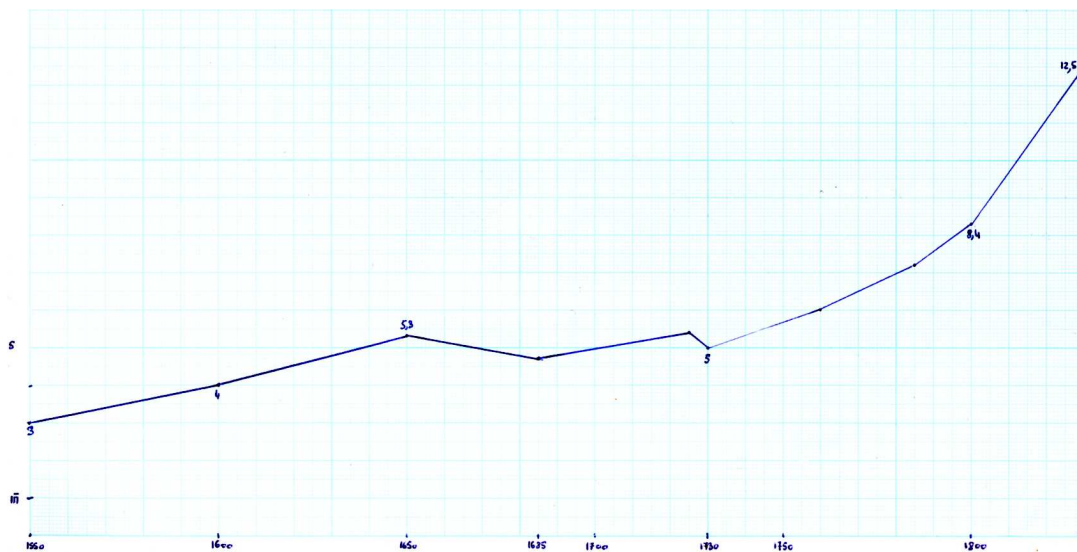
A 2 – It is **broken into two columns** / it **falls into two columns** : the **left-hand side** column is **a time-line**, **displaying** dates, from **the mid-sixteenth** century **down to** the **early 20th** century. The column on the right is **a series** of **figures** : these **data measure** the **evolution** of the population **over three centuries**.

• **Step 2 – Building a graph**

Q 1 – **Build a graph** from the chart. Give a definition of a graph.

A 1 – A graph is a **graphic representation** of some given data using two axes : the **vertical axis measures** the population in millions, and the **horizontal one is a time-line**. The **unit** is 5 centimeters for **5 million people**, and horizontally **every ten centimeters stands for one century**. The graph is built by **placing dots** as **accurately** as possible on the **graph-paper** : bound together, the dots unite into **a curve**.

Doc. 2 – The evolution of the English and Welsh population between 1550 and 1830

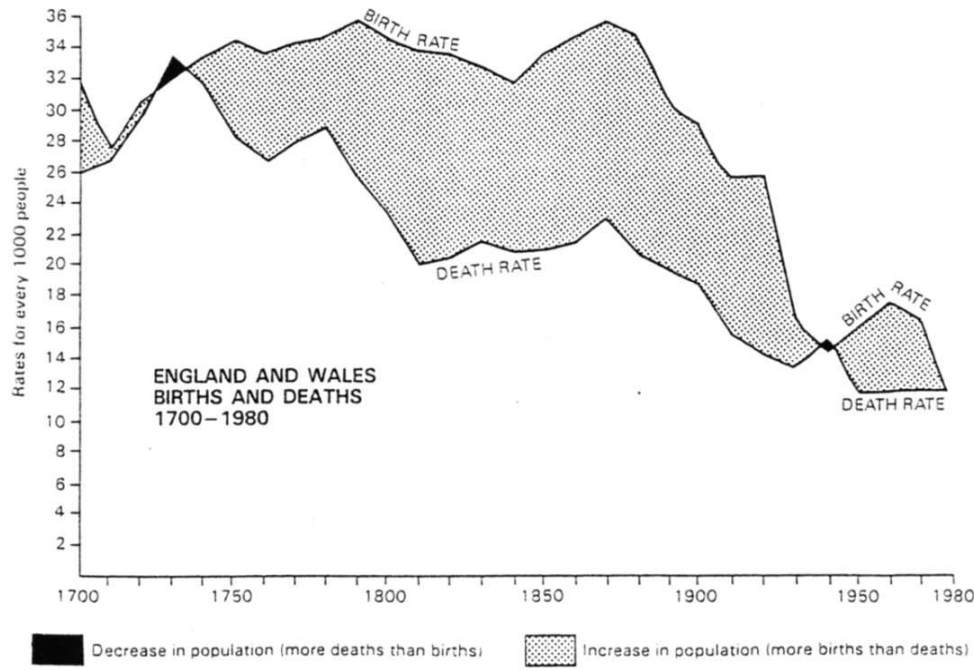


Q 2 – Describe the curve you have drawn : what does it show about the population growth ?

A 2 – The first part of it is **almost constant** and **keeps steady for several decades**, then it starts **rising gently** before **eventually booming**. In the 19th century, the curve is **skyrocketing** and **grows steeper and steeper** in an **exponential** and **spectacular outburst**. While the population has been **regularly** growing at the **rather slow pace** of **approximately one million per century**, it **grew by five** over the 18th century, and **by 20** over the 19th, **reaching an unprecedented peak** of 32 million inhabitants in 1900 : the **growth rate doubled** in the 18th century, and even **tripled** in the following one. Expressed differently, the population was **multiplied by two** between 1700 and 1800, and **increased three fold** between 1800 and 1900. In other terms, the English population in 1900 was **six to seven times as high as** it was in 1700. This **increase** is **dramatic** and **unheard-of** in the nation's past.

• **Step 3** – The demographic transition

Doc. 3 – The demographic transition in the UK



Q 1 – Describe document 3 : what does it represent ?

A 1 – It is a graph showing the evolution of the birth rate and death rate over the same period of time. The **Crude Birth Rate** and **Crude Death Rate** are the number of births / deaths in a year for every 1000 inhabitants. The **difference** between the two **gives** the **Natural Growth Rate**, that is to say the number of inhabitants by which the population increases or decreases (per thousand).

Q 2 – What explanation for the population growth does this graph provide ?

A 2 – It shows that **at some point**, the CDR started **declining** while the CBR **remained steady** : the difference between the two, i.e. the Natural Growth Rate, **got bigger and bigger**, hence the demographic explosion of the 19th century. It is worth noticing that this **expansion** of population is not due to **more numerous** births.

Q 3 – Why was the death rate so high before 1800 ? How can the decline of the death rate be explained in the 19th century ?

A 3 – In ancient times, the death rate was high : **life expectancy** was rather **poor**, and reached a meek 40 **on average**. It was so **chiefly** because of high **infant and youth mortality**. One child **out of three** or even two was not expected **to make it to 10**. **Living standards** were very low, life was tenuous and **precarious**. Along with the 18th and 19th centuries, these standards **improved** : the agrarian revolution **provided** people **with** more food, and then, along with the Industrial Revolution, **hygiene developed** and **medical progress** allowed **safer**, longer and **healthier** life.

Q 4 – Why was the birth rate so strong before 1860 ? How can the decline of the birth rate be explained at the end of the 19th century ?

A 4 – The vital need for children **maintained** the rate at a high **level**, however poor the family : in fact, **the poorer** the family (was), **the more numerous** the children (were), for they took up work at a very early age. Only was it when child labour was forbidden and school made mandatory that the rate **diminished**. Note that women's careers do not **come into account** in the 19th century : this social and economic feature only came into consideration in the 20th century. The change from high to low CDR and CBD is called the **demographic transition**. This **scheme** applies to many countries, but was **very precocious** in GB, as it accompanied economic take-off.