

# THE GREAT FIRE

## Discussion Guide #2

Encourage critical thinking and support your students' literacy development by asking questions during reading. Here are some questions you can ask your readers to engage them in a discussion.

<p><b>CHAPTER 3</b> "The Dogs of Hell Were Upon The Housetops"</p>	<p><b>CHAPTER 4</b> "A Surging Ocean of Flame"</p>	<p><b>CHAPTER 5</b> "Chicago Is in Flames"</p>
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## Comprehension

- How did the fire cross the river?

The steeple of St. Paul's church caught on fire, and wind gusts sent sparks across the river. The flying embers set structures ablaze, allowing the fire to spread on that side of the Chicago River.

- What was Alexander Frear's initial response to the fire, and what changed his mind?

At first, Frear was unbothered by the fire's glow. However, he quickly became concerned when he overheard a conversation about the increased wind speed and saw cinders falling. Frear realized the fire was very dangerous and might harm his family.

- What happened to Claire during her family's initial escape from the fire?

As Claire and her family began to journey toward safety, a man tried to grab Claire's bundle of belongings out of her hands. Another man stepped in and stopped the thief. After the struggle, Claire realized she was separated from her family and couldn't find them.

- Describe the impact of the wind during the fire.

The strong wind formed a dangerous column of hot air that mimicked hurricane-like speeds. It was so powerful that it could sweep objects large and small into the sky. Anything the wind column grabbed came crashing to the ground, and if the items were on fire, they could start a new fire where they landed. As a result, new fires quickly and unexpectedly popped up, surprising people who thought they were in a protected part of the city.

- Why did Horace White think the Tribune Building was fireproof? What was its fatal flaw?

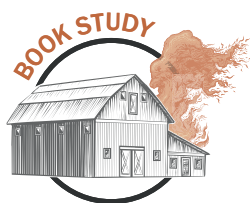
Horace White thought the Tribune Building was fireproof because it was mainly constructed with fireproof material. It had a granite-block exterior, corrugated iron interior ceilings, and brick partition walls. However, its fatal flaw was the flammable tar-over-wood roof, which eventually caught on fire.

- Why did White refuse to believe that people behaved unkindly or illegally during the fire?

Since White had economic interests in the city, he wrote in his articles that no one rioted, panicked, or committed illegal acts during the fire. He maintained this perspective in a strategic attempt to encourage investors' confidence in the city because they were essential to Chicago's recovery and growth.

- Name three things that helped Claire survive the fire at the construction site.

Student answers will vary but may include that Claire hid behind a pile of bricks at the construction site, which protected her from fire. Luckily, the walls didn't collapse, and the buildings around the construction site had few windows, so the buildings absorbed the worst heat. Claire was able to escape the area and continue searching for her family.



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### Comprehension (continued)

- What news did Alexander Frear receive that allowed him to rest?  
*Alexander Frear learned that his nieces and nephews were safe from the fire.*
- The author stated that the Great Fire could have continued destroying the city. What eventually stopped the blaze?  
*Rain began to fall, which helped put out fires.*

### Analysis

- Contrast Alexander Frear's assumptions about how different social classes would act during an emergency to what he witnessed during the fire. Why do you think Frear made those assumptions?  
*Like many people at this time, Frear held prejudiced assumptions about poor people, which is apparent in his belief that they would panic, riot, and loot during emergencies. Conversely, Frear thought rich people would abide by the law and remain calm and civil. However, Frear's assumptions about the wealthier residents' behavior proved entirely wrong when he witnessed disorder and terror from everyone, regardless of their social class.*
- What happened to Chicago's Waterworks, and how did it impact the response to the fire?  
*Chicago's Waterworks had a wooden roof that caught fire, and the building burned down. This was a problem because Chicago's Waterworks housed four engines that pumped water around the city. So, when the Waterworks burned down, the pumps stopped working. As a result, there was no water supply for drinking water or fighting fires, making it even more challenging for the firefighters to gain control over the fire.*

### Personal Connection

- Alexander Frear demonstrated perseverance while searching for his family members during the fire. What does perseverance mean to you? Describe a time in your life when you've had to use this trait.  
*Student answers will vary.*