



THE GREAT FIRE

Pre-Reading Activity

The Great Fire by Jim Murphy tells the story of the devastating fire that swept through Chicago for thirty-one hours in October 1871. Murphy uses vivid descriptions to narrate the firsthand experiences of real people who survived the fire.

Examine the images and their captions in chapters 1, 2, and 3. What do you notice about the setting, individuals, and events? Write your observations and respond to each question in the chart below.

CH.	OBSERVATIONS	INFERENCES
1.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People in the 1870s had limited access to cameras. Instead, they drew what they saw, and a few people took black-and-white pictures. • The streets and sidewalks were made of wood. • People used horses and sailboats to get around. • The founders of Chicago built the city on marshland near a major river and a Great Lake. 	<p>How might the building materials used throughout the city play a role in the fire?</p> <p>With so many structures made of wood, the city was regularly in danger of catching fire. Since so many buildings were made of flammable materials, firefighters struggled to get fires under control.</p>
2.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Horses pulled the steam engines. • The boiler in steam fire engines sent sparks and cinders flying, which increased the danger for residents and firefighters. • Firefighters used speaking trumpets to give directions over the noise of the fire. • While the firefighters attempted to extinguish the fire, people tried to save their belongings. 	<p>How might the technology of the 1870s make it difficult for firefighters to fight fires?</p> <p>The fire engines were pulled by horses, making it challenging for the fire department to respond quickly to the initial fire. This delay meant that fires became more difficult to fight.</p>
3.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Important cultural buildings, like Crosby’s Opera House, caught fire while people were nearby. • The ships caught on fire, and the grain elevators burned down. • People tried to escape the fire, but getting to safety was chaotic and challenging. • Residents were in shock when they realized the extent of the destruction in their neighborhoods. 	<p>How might the destruction of wagons impact Chicago's citizens?</p> <p>Wagons transported people’s possessions from their homes to places away from the fire. So, when wagons were destroyed, people lost possessions they thought they saved. The destruction of wagons also increased the streets’ chaos and danger.</p>

Compare the maps at the end of chapters 1, 2, and 3. What is the same? What is different? What do the maps communicate about the fire?

The maps in the first three chapters of *The Great Fire* depict the same geographic area of Chicago. The “area destroyed by Saturday night’s fire,” indicated by the dots, is consistent across the three maps. However, over the three chapters, the gray shading on the map changes, showing how the Great Fire quickly spread and how it grew bigger than the Saturday night fire. The map key also changes as more structures are added to the map.