

## Jim Murphy, *The Great Fire* - Grade 6

---

Scholastic, 1995

**Learning Objective:** The goal of this three day exemplar is to give students the opportunity to use the reading and writing habits they've been practicing on a regular basis to explore the historic Great Fire of Chicago. By reading and rereading the passage closely combined with classroom discussion about it, students will explore the historical truths related to poverty, city construction, and city services that led to the disaster. In this reading, students learn about historical disasters, but they may not fully comprehend causes or how human actions, nature, or even luck contributed to them, rendering history a flat subject to be memorized rather than explored. When combined with writing about the passage and teacher feedback, students will better understand the dangers inherent in cities and the government role in mitigating that danger.

**Reading Task:** *Students will silently read the passage in question on a given day—first independently and then following along with the text as the teacher and/or skillful students read aloud. Depending on the difficulties of a given text and the teacher's knowledge of the fluency abilities of students, the order of the student silent read and the teacher reading aloud with students following might be reversed. What is important is to allow all students to interact with challenging text on their own as frequently and independently as possible. Students will then reread specific passages in response to a set of concise, text-dependent questions that compel them to examine the meaning and structure of Murphy's prose. Therefore, rereading is deliberately built into the instructional unit.*

**Vocabulary Task:** *Most of the meanings of words in the exemplar text can be discovered by students from careful reading of the context in which they appear. Teachers can use discussions to model and reinforce how to learn vocabulary from contextual clues, and students must be held accountable for engaging in this practice. Where it is judged this is not possible, underlined words are defined briefly for students to the right of the text in a separate column whenever the original text is reproduced. At times, this is all the support these defined words need. At other times, particularly with abstract words, teachers will need to spend more time explaining and discussing them. In addition, in subsequent close readings of passages of the text, high value academic ('Tier Two') words have been **bolded** to draw attention to them. Given how crucial vocabulary knowledge is for academic and career success, it is essential that these high value words be discussed and lingered over during the instructional sequence.*

**Discussion Task:** *Students will discuss the exemplar text in depth with their teacher and their classmates, performing activities that result in a close reading of Murphy's prose. The goal is to foster student confidence when encountering complex text and to reinforce the skills they have acquired regarding how to build and extend their understanding of a text. A general principle is to always reread the passage that provides evidence for the question under discussion. This gives students another encounter with the text, helping them develop fluency and reinforcing their use of text evidence.*

**Writing Task:** *Students will write a persuasive paragraph on the role of government in protecting people from the sort of disaster represented by the Chicago Fire. Teachers might afford students the opportunity to revise their paragraphs after participating in classroom discussion or receiving teacher feedback, allowing them to refashion both their understanding of the text and their expression of that understanding.*

**Standards Addressed:** The following Common Core State Standards are the focus of this exemplar: RI 6-8.1, RI 6-8.3, RI 6-8.4, RI 6-8.6, RI 6-8.9 (addressed in optional homework); RL 6-8.3; W 6-8.1; RH 6-8.7.

## The Text: Murphy, Jim. *The Great Fire*

Exemplar Text	Vocabulary
<p>It was Sunday and an unusually warm evening for October eighth, so Daniel “Peg Leg” Sullivan left his stifling little house in the west side of Chicago and went to visit neighbors. One of his stops was at the <u>shingled</u> cottage of Patrick and Catherine O’Leary. The one-legged Sullivan remembered getting to the O’Learys’ house at around eight o’clock, but left after only a few minutes because the O’Leary family was already in bed. Both Patrick and Catherine had to be up very early in the morning: he to set off for his job as a laborer; she to milk their five cows and then deliver the milk to the neighbors.</p> <p>Sullivan ambled down the stretch of land between the O’ Learys’ and their neighbor, crossed the street, and sat down on the wooden sidewalk in front of Thomas White’s house. After adjusting his wooden leg to make himself comfortable, he leaned back against White’s fence to enjoy the night.</p> <p>The wind coming off the <u>prairie</u> had been strong all day, sometimes gusting wildly, and leaves scuttled along the streets; the sound of laughter and fiddle music drifted through the night. A party was going on at the McLaughlins’ to celebrate the arrival of a relative from Ireland. Another neighbor, Dennis Rogan, dropped by the O’Learys’ at eight-thirty, but he, too, left when he heard the family was in bed.</p> <p>Sullivan didn’t hesitate a second. “FIRE! FIRE! FIRE!” he shouted as loud as he could. Running clumsily across the dirt street, Sullivan made his way directly to the barn. There was no time to stop for help. The building was already burning fiercely and he knew that in addition to five cows, the O’Learys had a calf and a house in there.</p>	<p><i>materials added to the top of a house to make it water-proof</i></p> <p><i>large area of grassland that is generally flat</i></p>

The barn's loft held over three tons of timothy hay, delivered earlier that day. Flames from the burning hay pushed against the roof and beams, almost as if they were struggling to break free. A shower of burning embers greeted Sullivan as he entered the building.

He untied the ropes of the cows, but the frightened animals did not move. On the other side of the barn, another cow and the horse were tied to the wall, straining get loose. Sullivan took a step toward them, then realized that the fire had gotten around behind him and might cut off any chance of escape in a matter of seconds. The heat was fiercely intense and blinding, and in his rush to flee, Sullivan slipped on the uneven floorboards and fell with a thud.

He struggled to get up and, as he did, Sullivan discovered that his wooden leg had gotten stuck between two boards and came off. Instead of panicking, he began hopping toward where he thought the door was. Luck was with him. He had gone a few feet when the O'Learys' calf bumped into him, and Sullivan was able to throw his arms around its neck. Together, man and calf managed to find the door and safety, both frightened, both badly singed.

A shed attached to the barn was already engulfed by flames. It contained two tons of coal for the winter and a large supply of kindling wood. Fire ran along the dry grass and leaves, and took hold of a neighbor's fence. The heat from the burning barn, shed, and fence was so hot that the O'Learys' house, forty feet away, began to smolder. Neighbors rushed from their homes, many carrying buckets or pots of water. The sound of music and merrymaking stopped abruptly, replaced by the shout of "FIRE!". It would be a warning cry heard thousands of times during the next thirty-one hours.

*area above the main barn*

*small pieces of easy to burn  
wood used to start a fire*

*being happy (typically during a  
celebration or party)*

Chicago in 1871 was a city ready to burn. The city boasted having 59,500 buildings, many of them—such as the Courthouse and the Tribune Building—large and ornately decorated. The trouble was that about two-thirds of all these structures were made entirely of wood. Many of the remaining buildings (even the ones proclaimed to be “fireproof”) looked solid, but were actually jerrybuilt affairs; the stone or brick exteriors hid wooden frames and floors, all topped with highly flammable tar or shingle roofs. It was also a common practice to disguise wood as another kind of building material. The fancy exterior decorations on just about every building were carved from wood, then painted to look like stone or marble. Most churches had steeples that appeared to be solid from the street, but a closer inspection would reveal a wooden framework covered with cleverly painted copper or tin.

The situation was worst in the middle-class and poorer districts. Lot sizes were small, and owners usually filled them up with cottages, barns, sheds, and outhouses—all made of fast-burning wood, naturally. Because both Patrick and Catherine O’Leary worked, they were able to put a large addition on their cottage despite a lot size of just 25 by 100 feet. Interspersed in these residential areas were a variety of businesses—paint factories, lumberyards, distilleries, gasworks, mills, furniture manufacturers, warehouses, and coal distributors.

Wealthier districts were by no means free of fire hazards. Stately stone and brick homes had wood interiors, and stood side by side with smaller wood-frame houses. Wooden stables and other storage buildings were common, and trees lined the streets and filled the yards.

The links between richer and poorer sections went beyond the materials used for construction or the way buildings were crammed together. Chicago had been built largely on soggy marshland that flooded every time it rained. As the years passed and the town developed, a quick solution to the water and mud problem was needed. The answer was to make the roads and sidewalks out of wood and elevate them above the waterline, in some places by several feet. On the day the fire started, over 55 miles of pine-block streets and 600 miles of wooden sidewalks bound the 23,000 acres of the city in a highly combustible knot.

*fancy or elaborate*

*built poorly or quickly, especially to save money*

*able to burn*

*outside*

*a tall structure on the top of a church*

*a shed-like building that covers a deep hole used for going to the bathroom*

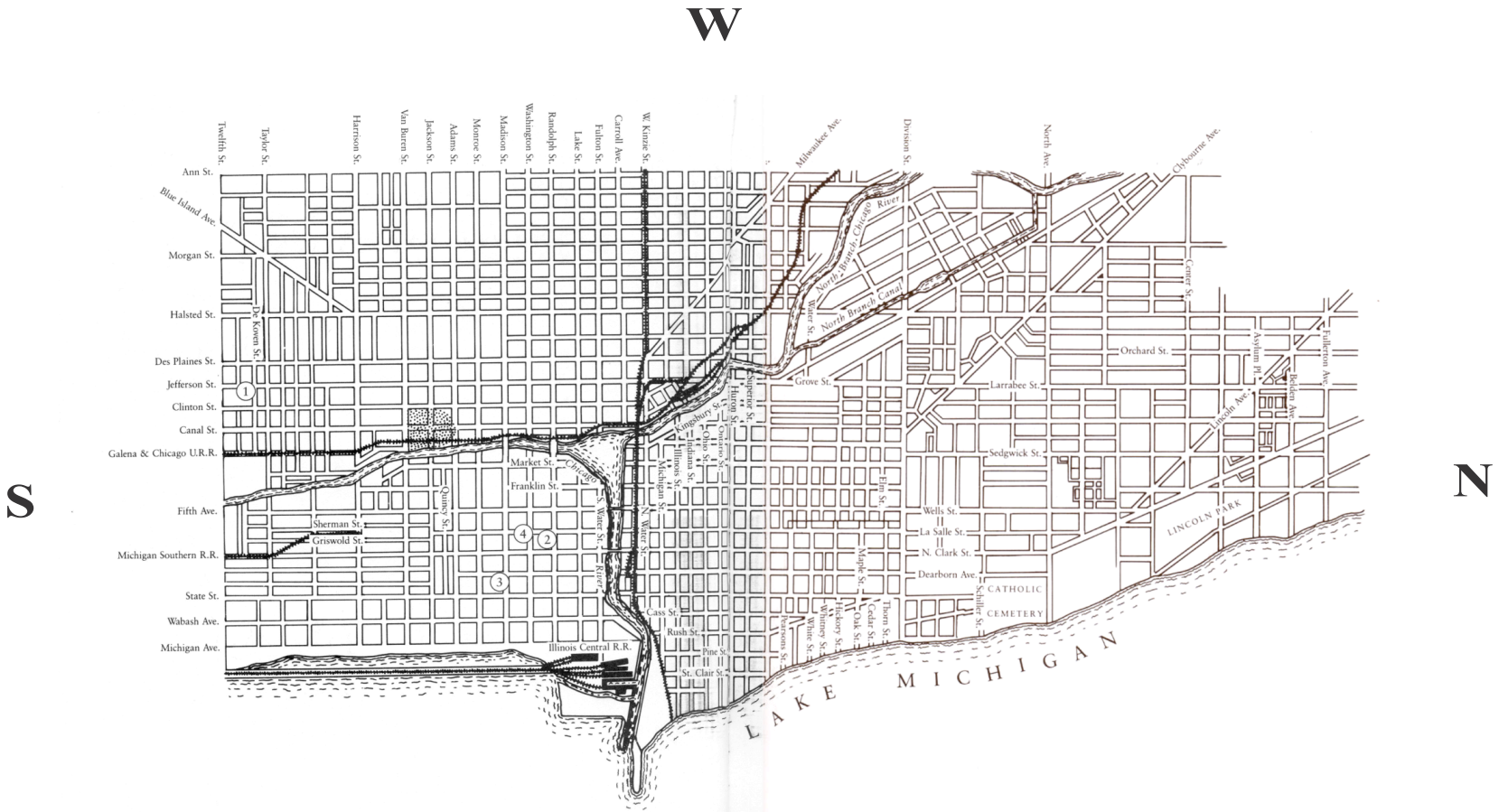
*where alcohol is made; where flour is made*


*majestic or elegant*

Fires were common in all cities back then, and Chicago was no exception. In 1863 there had been 186 reported fires in Chicago; the number had risen to 515 by 1868. Records for 1870 indicate that fire-fighting companies responded to nearly 600 alarms. The next year saw even more fires spring up, mainly because the summer had been unusually dry. Between July and October only a few scattered showers had taken place and these did not produce much water at all. Trees drooped in the unrelenting summer sun; grass and leaves dried out. By October, as many as six fires were breaking out every day. On Saturday the seventh, the night before the Great Fire, a blaze destroyed four blocks and took over sixteen hours to control. What made Sunday the eighth different and particularly dangerous was the steady wind blowing in from the southwest.

It was this gusting, swirling wind that drove the flames from the O'Learys' barn into neighboring yards. To the east, a fence and shed of James Dalton's went up in flames; to the west, a barn smoldered for a few minutes, then flared up into a thousand yellow-orange fingers. Dennis Rogan had heard Sullivan's initial shouts about a fire and returned. He forced open the door to the O'Learys' house and called for them to wake up.

*Used by permission of Scholastic Inc.*



-  AREA DESTROYED BY SATURDAY NIGHT'S FIRE  
 1. Home of Patrick and Catherine O'Leary  
 2. Courthouse  
 3. Tribune Building  
 4. Chamber of Commerce Building

Street map of sections destroyed by the fire. While the map shows only a small portion of the actual city of Chicago, this area was the chief business and cultural center, and housed nearly one third of its citizens.

W

N

S

E

## Day 1: Instructional Exemplar for Murphy’s *The Great Fire*

### Summary of Activities

1. Teacher introduces the day’s passage with minimal commentary and students read it independently (5 minutes)
2. Teacher or a skillful reader then reads the passage out loud to the class as students follow along in the text (5 minutes)
3. Teacher asks the class to discuss the first set of text-dependent questions and perform targeted tasks about the passage, with answers in the form of notes, annotations to the text, or more formal responses as appropriate (40 minutes)

Text Passage under Discussion	Directions for Teachers/Guiding Questions For Students
<p>It was Sunday and an <b>unusually</b> warm evening for October eighth, so Daniel “Peg Leg” Sullivan left his <b>stifling</b> little house in the west side of Chicago and went to visit neighbors. One of his stops was at the <u>shingled</u> cottage of Patrick and Catherine O’Leary. The one-legged Sullivan remembered getting to the O’Learys’ house at around eight o’clock, but left after only a few minutes because the O’Leary family was already in bed. Both Patrick and Catherine had to be up very early in the morning: he to set off for his job as a laborer; she to milk their five cows and then deliver the milk to the neighbors.</p> <p>[read the intervening paragraphs]</p> <p>He struggled to get up and, as he did, Sullivan discovered that his wooden leg had gotten stuck between two boards and came off. Instead of panicking, he began hopping toward where he thought the door was. Luck was with him. He had gone a few feet when the O’Learys’ calf bumped into him, and Sullivan was able to throw his arms around its neck. Together, man and calf managed to find the door and safety, both frightened, both badly singed.</p>	<p><b>1. Introduce the passage and students read independently.</b></p> <p>Other than giving the brief definitions offered to words students would likely not be able to define from context (underlined in the text), avoid giving any background context or instructional guidance at the outset of the lesson while students are reading the text silently. This close reading approach forces students to rely exclusively on the text instead of privileging background knowledge and levels the playing field for all students as they seek to comprehend Murphy’s prose. It is critical to cultivating independence and creating a culture of close reading that students initially grapple with rich texts like Murphy’s text without the aid of prefatory material, extensive notes, or even teacher explanations.</p> <p><b>2. Read the passage out loud to the class as students follow along in the text.</b></p> <p>Asking students to listen to <i>The Great Fire</i> exposes them a second time to the rhythms and meaning of Murphy’s language before they begin their own close reading of the passage. Speaking clearly and carefully will allow students to follow Murphy’s narrative, and reading out loud with students following along improves fluency while offering all students access to this complex text. Accurate and skillful modeling of the reading provides students who may be dysfluent with accurate pronunciations and syntactic patterns of English.</p>



Text Under Discussion	Directions for Teachers/Guiding Questions For Students
<p>It was Sunday and an <b>unusually</b> warm evening for October eighth, so Daniel “Peg Leg” Sullivan left his <b>stifling</b> little house in the west side of Chicago and went to visit neighbors. One of his stops was at the <u>shingled</u> cottage of Patrick and Catherine O’Leary. The one-legged Sullivan remembered getting to the O’Learys’ house at around eight o’clock, but left after only a few minutes because the O’Leary family was already in bed. Both Patrick and Catherine had to be up very early in the morning: he to set off for his job as a laborer; she to milk their five cows and then deliver the milk to the neighbors.</p> <p>Sullivan <b>ambled</b> down the stretch of land between the O’ Learys’ and their neighbor, crossed the street, and sat down on the wooden sidewalk in front of Thomas Whites house. After adjusting his wooden leg to make himself comfortable, he leaned back against White’s fence to enjoy the night.</p>	<p><i>materials added to the top of a house to make it water-proof</i></p> <p><b>3. Ask the class to answer a small set of text-dependent guided questions and perform targeted tasks about the passage, with answers in the form of notes, annotations to the text, or more formal responses as appropriate.</b></p> <p>As students move through these questions and reread Murphy’s <i>The Great Fire</i>, be sure to check for and reinforce their understanding of academic vocabulary in the corresponding text (which will be <b>boldfaced</b> the first time it appears in the text). At times, the questions themselves may focus on academic vocabulary.</p> <p><b>(Q1) Why does the author start with this description of Daniel and Patrick and Catherine if he plans to describe a famous fire?</b></p> <p>Students should recognize that the author hopes to personalize the disaster. The people who lived through it were hard-working, normal people. By showing this before the fire, students can see who was really affected instead of just looking at the fire.</p> <p><b>(Q2) What tone is the author creating by choosing “amble” and “stretch” and “leaned back”? Why does the author create this feeling or mood when the main story is about the disaster?</b></p> <p>All these verbs have a sense of relaxation and a tranquil tone which contrasts against the disaster that is coming. The author is emphasizing that disasters strike when people are not expecting it.</p>

Text Under Discussion	Directions for Teachers/Guiding Questions For Students
<p>The wind coming off the <u>prairie</u> had been strong all day, sometimes <b>gusting</b> wildly, and leaves scuttled along the streets; the sound of laughter and fiddle music drifted through the night. A party was going on at the McLaughlins' to celebrate the arrival of a relative from Ireland. Another neighbor, Dennis Rogan, dropped by the O'Learys' at eight-thirty, but he, too, left when he heard the family was in bed.</p> <p>Sullivan didn't hesitate a second. "FIRE! FIRE! FIRE!" he shouted as loud as he could. Running clumsily across the dirt street, Sullivan made his way directly to the barn. There was no time to stop for help. The building was already burning fiercely and he knew that in addition to five cows, the O'Learys had a calf and a house in there.</p> <p>The barn's <u>loft</u> held over three tons of timothy hay, delivered earlier that day. Flames from the burning hay pushed against the roof and beams, almost as if they were struggling to break free. A shower of burning <b>embers</b> greeted Sullivan as he entered the building.</p>	<p><i>large area of grassland that is generally flat</i></p> <p><b>Students should find details about the families who lived in this middle-class/lower-class neighborhood to explain what the author is trying to show.</b></p> <p>Using details like having neighbors stop by to talk to each other, a party to celebrate a recently arrived relative, and the neighbors trying to save the O'Leary animals, Murphy presents a picture of an area where people are friendly and care about each other. (Note: in the optional homework this is contrasted against the POV of a reporter at the time of the fire.)</p> <p><b>(Q3) Sullivan has to shout, "FIRE!" What does this tell you about the technology in Chicago at the time?</b></p> <p>They had no telephones or automatic fire alarms that would allow someone to quickly get ahold of the fire department.</p> <p><b>(Q4) What is the significance of the hay in the top of the barn? Why would the author want to draw attention to that detail?</b></p> <p>Straw burns easily, and it's light enough to blow in the wind that Murphy describes, carrying the fire to any nearby structures.</p> <p><i>area above the main barn</i></p>

Text Under Discussion	Directions for Teachers/Guiding Questions For Students
<p>He untied the ropes of the cows, but the frightened animals did not move. On the other side of the barn, another cow and the horse were tied to the wall, <b>straining</b> get loose. Sullivan took a step toward them, then realized that the fire had gotten around behind him and might cut off any chance of escape in a matter of seconds. The heat was fiercely intense and blinding, and in his rush to <b>flee</b>, Sullivan slipped on the uneven floorboards and fell with a thud.</p> <p>He struggled to get up and, as he did, Sullivan discovered that his wooden leg had gotten stuck between two boards and came off. Instead of panicking, he began hopping toward where he thought the door was. Luck was with him. He had gone a few feet when the O'Learys' calf bumped into him, and Sullivan was able to throw his arms around its neck. Together, man and calf managed to find the door and safety, both frightened, both badly singed.</p>	<p><b>(Q5) The author includes a number of details about how Sullivan acts. Look at each action. What does the author want you to understand about Sullivan?</b></p> <p>He goes into the fire, unties the animals, falls and gets his leg caught, and still hops to the door. The details together suggest that Sullivan is a very strong, stubborn man and that he's concerned about doing the right thing.</p> <p><b>(Q6) What happened to the O'Leary animals?</b></p> <p>The animals were in a building that burned, and the author's last reference to them said that the animals were too frightened to leave the building. The implication is that the animals burned.</p>

## Day 2: Instructional Exemplar for Murphy's *The Great Fire*

### Summary of Activities

1. Teacher introduces the day's passage with minimal commentary and students read it independently (5 minutes)
2. Teacher or a skillful reader then reads the passage out loud to the class as students follow along in the text (5 minutes)
3. Teacher asks the class to discuss text-dependent questions and perform targeted tasks about the passage, with answers in the form of notes, annotations to the text, or more formal responses as appropriate (40 minutes)

Text Passage under Discussion	Directions for Teachers/Guiding Questions For Students
<p>A shed attached to the barn was already engulfed by flames. It contained two tons of coal for the winter and a large supply of <u>kindling</u> wood. Fire ran along the dry grass and leaves, and took hold of a neighbor's fence. The heat from the burning barn, shed, and fence was so hot that O'Leary's house, forty feet away, began to smolder. Neighbors rushed from their homes, many carrying buckets or pots of water. The sound of music and <u>merrymaking</u> stopped abruptly, replaced by the shout of "FIRE!". It would be a warning cry heard thousands of times during the next thirty-one hours.</p> <p>[read the intervening paragraphs]</p> <p>The links between richer and poorer sections went beyond the materials used for construction or the way buildings were crammed together. Chicago had been built largely on soggy marshland that flooded every time it rained. As the years passed and the town developed, a quick solution to the water and mud problem was needed. The answer was to make the roads and sidewalks out of wood and elevate them above the waterline, in some places by several feet. On the day the fire started, over 55 miles of pine-block streets and 600 miles of wooden sidewalks bound the 23,000 acres of the city in a highly <b>combustible</b> knot.</p>	<p><b>1. Introduce the passage and students read independently.</b></p> <p>Other than giving the brief definitions offered to words students would likely not be able to define from context (underlined in the text), avoid giving any background context or instructional guidance at the outset of the lesson while students are reading the text silently. This close reading approach forces students to rely exclusively on the text instead of privileging background knowledge and levels the playing field for all students as they seek to comprehend Murphy's prose. It is critical to cultivating independence and creating a culture of close reading that students initially grapple with rich texts like Murphy's text without the aid of prefatory material, extensive notes, or even teacher explanations.</p> <p><b>2. Read the passage out loud to the class as students follow along in the text.</b></p> <p>Asking students to listen to <i>The Great Fire</i> exposes them a second time to the rhythms and meaning of Murphy's language before they begin their own close reading of the passage. Speaking clearly and carefully will allow students to follow Murphy's narrative, and reading out loud with students following along improves fluency while offering all students access to this complex text. Accurate and skillful modeling of the reading provides students who may be dysfluent with accurate pronunciations and syntactic patterns of English.</p>

Text Under Discussion		Directions for Teachers/Guiding Questions For Students
<p>A shed attached to the barn was already <b>engulfed</b> by flames. It contained two tons of coal for the winter and a large supply of <u>kindling</u> wood. Fire ran along the dry grass and leaves, and took hold of a neighbor’s fence. The heat from the burning barn, shed, and fence was so hot that O’Learys’ house, forty feet away, began to smolder. Neighbors rushed from their homes, many carrying buckets or pots of water. The sound of music and <u>merrymaking</u> stopped abruptly, replaced by the shout of “FIRE!”. It would be a warning cry heard thousands of times during the next thirty-one hours.</p> <p>Chicago in 1871 was a city ready to burn. The city <b>boasted</b> having 59,500 buildings, many of them—such as the Courthouse and the Tribune Building—large and <u>ornately</u> decorated. The trouble was that about two-thirds of all these structures were made entirely of wood. Many of the remaining buildings (even the ones <b>proclaimed</b> to be “fireproof”) looked solid, but were actually <u>jerrybuilt</u> affairs; the stone or brick exteriors hid wooden frames and floors, all topped with highly <u>flammable</u> tar or shingle roofs. It was also a common practice to disguise wood as another kind of building material. The fancy <u>exterior</u> decorations on just about every building were carved from wood, then painted to look like stone or marble. Most churches had <u>steeple</u>s that appeared to be solid from the street, but a closer inspection would reveal a wooden framework covered with cleverly painted copper or tin.</p>	<p><i>small pieces of easy to burn wood used to start a fire</i></p> <p><i>being happy (typically during a celebration or party)</i></p> <p><i>fancy or elaborate</i></p> <p><i>built poorly or quickly, especially to save money; able to burn outside</i></p> <p><i>a tall structure on the top of a church</i></p>	<p><b>3. Ask the class to answer a small set of text-dependent guided questions and perform targeted tasks about the passage, with answers in the form of notes, annotations to the text, or more formal responses as appropriate.</b></p> <p>As students move through these questions and reread Murphy’s <i>The Great Fire</i>, be sure to check for and reinforce their understanding of academic vocabulary in the corresponding text (which will be <b>boldfaced</b> the first time it appears in the text). At times, the questions themselves may focus on academic vocabulary.</p> <p><b>(Q7) The author describes a number of specific items in the setting (coal, the fence, dry grass, leaves, kindling wood). Why does he reference these specific objects?</b></p> <p>The author is showing how many flammable items are near the fire. This is a major reason why the city burned so quickly.</p> <p><b>(Q8) What evidence does the author give to back up his description of Chicago as a city “ready to burn”?</b></p> <p>Many of the structures in the city were constructed of wood—even those that didn’t appear to be.</p> <p><b>Sidebar: Image of Chicago</b></p> <p>If students are intrigued to see what Chicago looked like at the time of the fire, teachers can direct them to Appendix A and/or the following image:  <a href="http://www.press.uchicago.edu/books/pacyga/gallery/index.html">http://www.press.uchicago.edu/books/pacyga/gallery/index.html</a></p>

Text Under Discussion	Directions for Teachers/Guiding Questions For Students
<p>The situation was worst in the middle-class and poorer districts. Lot sizes were small, and owners usually filled them up with cottages, barns, sheds, and <u>outhouses</u>—all made of fast-burning wood, naturally. Because both Patrick and Catherine O’Leary worked, they were able to put a large addition on their cottage despite a lot size of just 25 by 100 feet. Interspersed in these residential areas were a variety of businesses—paint factories, lumberyards, <u>distilleries</u>, gasworks, <u>mills</u>, furniture manufacturers, warehouses, and coal distributors.</p> <p>Wealthier districts were by no means free of fire <b>hazards</b>. <u>Stately</u> stone and brick homes had wood interiors, and stood side by side with smaller wood-frame houses. Wooden stables and other storage buildings were common, and trees lined the streets and filled the yards.</p> <p>The links between richer and poorer sections went beyond the materials used for construction or the way buildings were crammed together. Chicago had been built largely on soggy marshland that flooded every time it rained. As the years passed and the town developed, a quick solution to the water and mud problem was needed. The answer was to make the roads and sidewalks out of wood and elevate them above the waterline, in some places by several feet. On the day the fire started, over 55 miles of pine-block streets and 600 miles of wooden sidewalks bound the 23,000 acres of the city in a highly <b>combustible</b> knot.</p>	<p><i>a shed-like building that covers a deep hole used for going to the bathroom</i></p> <p><i>where alcohol is made; where flour is made</i></p> <p><i>proud and impressive</i></p> <p><b>(Q9) The author provides a list of businesses. What do these businesses have in common?</b></p> <p>All of these businesses are “fire hazards” and burn both quickly and dangerously. Lumber, gas, furniture, and coal are all primary sources of fuel for a fire. Flour burns, paint gives off fumes as it burns, and warehouses might have more flammable material in them.</p> <p><b>(Q10) How is the location of these businesses important?</b></p> <p>All these businesses with dangerous materials are in the same area with houses where people live and sleep.</p> <p><b>(Q11) How are the dangers in the wealthier neighborhoods different or similar to the fire risks for those who lived in poorer areas?</b></p> <p>The wealthy areas did not have dangerous businesses, and the buildings were more likely to be built out of stone or brick. However, buildings still had wood interiors, are still standing close together and are surrounded by other flammable structures.</p> <p><b>(Q12) Why does the author make a point of saying that the wooden roads were a “quick” solution?</b></p> <p>He’s implying that one of the reasons that the wooden sidewalks and roads were produced is because the decision to make them was made too quickly, and if the city builders had thought about the consequences of having so much wood around, they might have made a different choice in terms of how to handle the mud.</p> <p><b>Sidebar: Students often disregard numbers or have no way to understand them in their own context. Teachers might consider translating these numbers for students into easily understood references to local landmarks.</b></p>

## Day 3: Instructional Exemplar for Murphy's *The Great Fire*

### Summary Activities

1. Teacher introduces the day's passage with minimal commentary and students read it independently (5 minutes)
2. Teacher or a skillful reader then reads the passage out loud to the class as students follow along in the text (5 minutes)
3. Teacher asks the class to discuss text-dependent questions and perform targeted tasks about the passage, with answers in the form of notes, annotations to the text, or more formal responses as appropriate (40 minutes)

Text Passage under Discussion	Directions for Teachers/Guiding Questions For Students
<p>Fires were common in all cities back then, and Chicago was no exception. In 1863 there had been 186 reported fires in Chicago; the number had risen to 515 by 1868. Records for 1870 indicate that fire-fighting companies responded to nearly 600 alarms. The next year saw even more fires spring up, mainly because the summer had been unusually dry...</p> <p>[read the intervening paragraphs]</p> <p>It was this gusting, swirling wind that drove the flames from the O'Learys' barn into neighboring yards. To the east, a fence and shed of James Dalton's went up in flames; to the west, a barn <b>smoldered</b> for a few minutes, then flared up into a thousand yellow-orange fingers. Dennis Rogan had heard Sullivan's <b>initial</b> shouts about a fire and returned. He forced open the door to the O'Leary's house and called for them to wake up.</p> <p>[included is the map of the area destroyed by Saturday night's fire]</p>	<p><b>1. Introduce the passage and students read independently.</b></p> <p>Other than giving the brief definitions offered to words students would likely not be able to define from context (underlined in the text), avoid giving any background context or instructional guidance at the outset of the lesson while students are reading the text silently. This close reading approach forces students to rely exclusively on the text instead of privileging background knowledge and levels the playing field for all students as they seek to comprehend Murphy's prose. It is critical to cultivating independence and creating a culture of close reading that students initially grapple with rich texts like Murphy's text without the aid of prefatory material, extensive notes, or even teacher explanations.</p> <p><b>2. Read the passage out loud to the class as students follow along in the text.</b></p> <p>Asking students to listen to <i>The Great Fire</i> exposes them a second time to the rhythms and meaning of Murphy's language before they begin their own close reading of the passage. Speaking clearly and carefully will allow students to follow Murphy's narrative, and reading out loud with students following along improves fluency while offering all students access to this complex text. Accurate and skillful modeling of the reading provides students who may be dysfluent with accurate pronunciations and syntactic patterns of English.</p>

### Text Under Discussion

Fires were common in all cities back then, and Chicago was no exception. In 1863 there had been 186 reported fires in Chicago; the number had risen to 515 by 1868. Records for 1870 indicate that fire-fighting companies responded to nearly 600 alarms. The next year saw even more fires spring up, mainly because the summer had been unusually dry. Between July and October only a few scattered showers had taken place and these did not produce much water at all. Trees drooped in the **unrelenting** summer sun; grass and leaves dried out. By October, as many as six fires were breaking out every day. On Saturday the seventh, the night before the Great Fire, a blaze destroyed four blocks and took over sixteen hours to control. What made Sunday the eighth different and particularly dangerous was the steady wind blowing in from the southwest.

### Directions for Teachers/Guiding Questions For Students

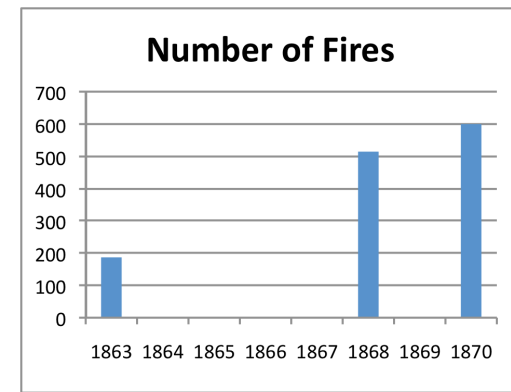
**3. Ask the class to answer a small set of text-dependent guided questions and perform targeted tasks about the passage, with answers in the form of notes, annotations to the text, or more formal responses as appropriate.**

As students move through these questions and reread Murphy's *The Great Fire*, be sure to check for and reinforce their understanding of academic vocabulary in the corresponding text (which will be **boldfaced** the first time it appears in the text). At times, the questions themselves may focus on academic vocabulary.

**(Q13) What pattern is starting to emerge when you look at how many fires break out each year from 1863 to 1870? What does this suggest about what people should have known in 1871?**

The number of fires is growing at an alarming rate. The people in the city should have seen that with the number of fires growing so fast that the chances of a truly large fire were growing every day. Teachers might want to share the graph below with students to help them grasp the pattern between 1863 and 1871.

**Sidebar: Today's text contains numbers which students may ignore, particularly if they are inexperienced readers who fail to understand the importance of numbers to scientific and historical texts. In this case, a graph would allow them to quickly identify the pattern.**





Text Under Discussion	Directions for Teachers/Guiding Questions For Students
<p>It was this gusting, swirling wind that drove the flames from the O’Learys’ barn into neighboring yards. To the east, a fence and shed of James Dalton’s went up in flames; to the west, a barn <b>smoldered</b> for a few minutes, then flared up into a thousand yellow-orange fingers. Dennis Rogan had heard Sullivan’s <b>initial</b> shouts about a fire and returned. He forced open the door to the O’Learys’ house and called for them to wake up.</p> <p>[included in the reading is the map above]</p>	<p><b>(Q14) The author previously had personified the fire, describing it as “struggling to break free” and “greet[ing] Sullivan”, and now as having “a thousand yellow-orange fingers.” What is the author’s purpose in using this language?</b></p> <p>The author wants to suggest that the fire has a life of its own, and the people caught in the fire feel almost as if the fire is chasing them. The fire has become not just a physical force but an enemy to fight.</p> <p><i>If students struggle, the teacher might ask more guided questions. What human trait or traits might the fire have? Or, for students who continue to struggle, the question could be this explicit: Does the fire have the personality of a human, the power of a human or the shape of a human? Why do you say that, what text supports your answer?</i></p> <p><b>Ask students to note the spread of the fire from Saturday to Sunday.</b></p> <p>The area destroyed from Saturday’s fire is already shaded on the map. On Sunday the fire spread east to Michigan Avenue and north to Fullerton Avenue, but not west of Jefferson Street or south of DeKoven. Ask students to mark the extent of the Great Fire on the map using a highlighter or colored pencil.</p> <p><b>(Q15) Looking at the map and reading the text, what conditions and geographic limitations prevented the fire from spreading farther than it did? What could have made this fire even worse?</b></p> <p>The wind coming from the southwest pushed the fire toward Lake Michigan, so south and west were largely protected by the winds, and the fire was stopped on the east by the lake itself. If the wind had changed direction and pushed the fire west, there wouldn’t have been a lake to help contain the flames.</p> <p><b>(Q16) Despite the fact that it was in the middle of the fire, Lincoln Park never burned. Using the map and reading the text, what inferences can you draw as to reasons why it might not have burned?</b></p> <p>The city burned because streets and houses were pushed close together. Looking at the map, few streets exist in the park. The park also would have lacked the houses and sheds that made the rest of the city burn so quickly.</p>

### **Rationale for Day Three Activities - shifting to the final writing assignment:**

Students have now gone through the text multiple times. Now they all share the same background information required for writing, and no students are privileged due to having richer background knowledge. Guided practice in learning to read and use a map is provided above for the same reason. When students are asked to write in reference to a text before they have a firm understanding of it, less fluent readers are at a disadvantage. Under those conditions, inadequate written responses may reflect a lack of *reading* skills rather than any deficiency in *writing* skills. But it would be almost impossible for a teacher to diagnose what is causing the problem. Students who have moved through this piece and then move on to the writing activities that follow here should have a firm grasp on the text and the ideas the author intended to communicate.

#### **Homework (an optional writing/thinking activity)**

Elias Colbert and Everett Chamberlin in their article referred to the people in the crowded neighborhood where the fire started as “human rats”. However, another article in *The Tribune* described the same neighborhood in the following way:

They were nearly all poor people, the savings of whose lifetime were represented in the little mass of furniture which blocked the streets, and impeded the firemen. They were principally laborers, most of them Germans or Scandinavians. Though the gaunt phantom of starvation and homelessness, for the night, at least, passed over them, it was singular to observe the cheerfulness, not to say merriment, that prevailed. Though mothers hugged their little ones to their breasts and shivered with alarm, yet, strange to say, they talked freely and laughed as if realizing the utter uselessness of expressing more dolefully their consciousness of ruin.

Why might people describe the same neighborhood in such different ways? Which point of view does Murphy (our author) agree with?

**(Note: The full text of both these articles are included in Appendix B.)**

### Argumentative Writing Assignment: Directions for Teachers and Students / Guidance for Teachers

Today, cities have taken a number of actions to prevent fires, including city codes. Building codes require that anyone building a structure use materials that won't catch on fire easily, leave space between buildings, have roofs that can withstand having sparks land on them without catching fire and include "fire walls" built of something that won't burn inside large buildings so that if a fire breaks out in one part, it won't travel to other parts.

Take a few moments to brainstorm the benefits of requiring people who are building to use stronger, more durable building materials (beyond the obvious advantage of having buildings that do not catch fire as easily). How do these laws make life more difficult for some people? Who might dislike the government making rules about how houses and businesses have to be built? How would more rules have negatively affected the O'Learys?

#### **Final Writing Prompt:**

How would building codes have changed events in 1871? Could building codes have prevented the fire? How much responsibility should the government take to make sure that people are safe from disasters such as fire? Write an essay with a clear beginning, middle, and end in which you present your ideas. Use facts or quotes from the article or descriptions of the map to support your conclusions.

#### **Guidance regarding an essay about the author's point of view:**

Students should recognize that government action in the form of building codes or laws would have mitigated the effects of the fire. The crowded buildings, wood streets and walks, and cheap houses all contributed to the fire spreading faster than the firefighters could handle. However, students should also see that the government could not have prevented the fire totally. A number of factors including the dry weather, heavy winds, and the lack of telephones at the time all made the fire worse, and building codes could not have prevented those items.

Students may have a variety of answers as to the responsibility of the government, but the objective is for students to recognize that the government has the difficult task of protecting people without making laws that are so restrictive that they make houses too expensive for people to buy.

## Appendix A: Photograph of Chicago

Historic Photographs from Chicago: A Biography by Dominic A. Pacyga

<http://www.press.uchicago.edu/books/pacyga/gallery/index.html>

The University of Chicago Press

Caption from website: *Chicago Tribune Building, late 1850s. The Tribune evolved as an early supporter of the Republican Party. Notice the McVickers Theater to the left of the building. (Chicago Public Library, Special Collections and Preservation.)*



## Appendix B: Contemporary Articles

From the Chicago History Society and the Trustees of Northwestern University

<http://www.chicagohistory.org/fire/ruin/losses.html>

### The Losses by the Fire

From Elias Colbert and Everett Chamberlin, Chicago and the Great Conflagration (1871)

(800 words)

Amid such a general wreck, the attempt to gather correct statistics of the losses entailed by the great conflagration, may well seem a hopeless one. So many records were destroyed; so many people driven from the city, who could alone give accurate information on some essential point; such a universal scattering and destruction among those who remained, that it is practically impossible to cover every item in the immense aggregate of loss.

We essay the task with diffidence, notwithstanding the fact that we have taken all possible pains in the investigation of loss. The following statements are probably very near the truth in the aggregate--made up of details obtained by personal inquiry from many hundreds of the parties most interested in the sad exhibit . . .

In the West Division about 194 acres were burned over, including 16 acres swept by the fire of the previous evening. This district contained several lumber-yards and planing-mills, the Union Depot of the St. Louis and Pittsburg & Fort Wayne Railroads, with a few minor hotels and factories, several boarding-houses, and a host of saloons. The buildings burned--about 500 in number--were nearly all frame structures, and not of much value, but were closely packed together. About 2250 persons were rendered homeless in this division.

In the South Division the burned area comprised about 460 acres. The southern boundary line was a diagonal, running from the corner of Michigan Avenue and Congress Street, west-south-west to the intersection of Fifth Avenue (Wells) and Polk Street. On the other three sides the bounding lines were the lake and the river--only one block (the Lind) being left in all that area. This district contained the great majority of the most expensive structures in the city, all the wholesale stores, all the newspaper offices, all the principal banks, and insurance and law offices, many coal-yards, nearly all the hotels, and many factories, the Court-house, Custom-house, Chamber of Commerce, etc.--as stated more at length in our chapter descriptive of Chicago in 1871. The number of buildings destroyed in this division was about 3650, which included 1600 stores, 28 hotels, and 60 manufacturing establishments. About 21,800 persons were rendered homeless, very many of whom were residents in the upper stories of the palatial structures devoted, below, to commerce. There were, however, many poor families, and a great many human rats, resident in the western part of this territory.

In the North Division the devastation was the most wide-spread, fully 1470 acres being burned over, out of the 2533 acres in that division. And even this statement fails to convey an idea of the wholesale destruction wrought there, because the territory unburned was unoccupied. Had there been any except widely-scattered structures in the unburned portion, they, too, would have been destroyed as the fire licked up all in its path, and paused only when there was no more food whereon to whet its insatiable appetite. Of the 13,800 buildings in that division, not more than 500 were left standing, leaving 13,300 in ruins, and rendering 74,450 persons homeless. The buildings burned included more than 600 stores and 100 manufacturing establishments, the latter being principally grouped in the south-western part of this division. That part next to the lake, as far north as Chicago Avenue, was occupied by first-class residences, of which only one was left standing--that of Mahlon D. Ogden. Next north of these was the Water-works, and this was the initial point of a line of breweries that stretched out almost to the cemetery. The river banks were piled high with lumber and coal, which was all destroyed, except a portion near

the bend of the river, at Kinzie Street. The space between the burned district and the river, to the westward, contained but little improved property. Lincoln Park lay to the northward, on the lake-shore. The fire burned up the southern part of this park--the old City Cemetery--but left the improved part untouched, except a portion of the fencing. One of the saddest among the many sad scenes that met the eye after the conflagration had done its work, was that in the old cemetery--the flames had even made havoc among the dead, burning down the wooden monuments, and shattering stone vaults to fragments, leaving exposed many scores of the remnants of mortality that had smoldered for years in oblivion.

The total area burned over in the city, including streets, was 2124 acres, or very nearly 3 1/3 square miles. The number of buildings destroyed was 17,450; of persons rendered homeless, 98,500. Of the latter, more than 250 paid the last debt of nature amid the carnage--fell victims to the Moloch of our modern civilization.

From the Chicago History Society and the Trustees of Northwestern University

<http://www.chicagohistory.org/fire/conflag/tribune.html>

### **The Tribune Reports to Chicago on Its Own Destruction**

From the Chicago Tribune, October 11, 1871

(1400 words)

During Sunday night, Monday, and Tuesday, this city has been swept by a conflagration which has no parallel in the annals of history, for the quantity of property destroyed, and the utter and almost irremediable ruin which it wrought. A fire in a barn on the West Side was the insignificant cause of a conflagration which has swept out of existence hundreds of millions of property, has reduced to poverty thousands who, the day before, were in a state of opulence, has covered the prairies, now swept by the cold southwest wind, with thousands of homeless unfortunates, which has stripped 2,600 acres of buildings, which has destroyed public improvements that it has taken years of patient labor to build up, and which has set back for years the progress of the city, diminished her population, and crushed her resources. But to a blow, no matter how terrible, Chicago will not succumb. Late as it is in the season, general as the ruin is, the spirit of her citizens has not given way, and before the smoke has cleared away, and the ruins are cold, they are beginning to plan for the future. Though so many have been deprived of homes and sustenance, aid in money and provisions is flowing in from all quarters, and much of the present distress will be alleviated before another day has gone by.

It is at this moment impossible to give a full account of the losses by the fire, or to state the number of fatal accidents which have occurred. So much confusion prevails, and people are so widely scattered, that we are unable for a day to give absolutely accurate information concerning them. We have, however, given a full account of the fire, from the time of its beginning, reserving for a future day a detailed statement of losses. We would be exceedingly obliged if all persons having any knowledge of accidents, or the names of persons who died during the fire, would report them at this office. We also hope that all will leave with, or at No. 15 South Canal Street, a memorandum of their losses and their insurance, giving the names of the companies.

#### **THE WEST SIDE.**

At 9:30 a small cow barn attached to a house on the corner of DeKoven and Jefferson streets, one block north of Twelfth street, emitted a bright light, followed by a blaze, and in a moment the building was hopelessly on fire. Before any aid could be extended the fire had communicated to a number of adjoining sheds, barns and dwellings, and was rapidly carried north and east, despite the efforts of the firemen. The fire seemed to leap over the engines, and

commence far beyond them, and, working to the east and west, either surrounded the apparatus or compelled it to move away. In less than ten minutes the fire embraced the area between Jefferson and Clinton for two blocks north, and rapidly pushed eastward to Canal street.

When the fire first engulfed the two blocks, and the efforts of the undaunted engineers became palpably abortive to quench a single building, an effort was made to head it off from the north, but so great was the area that it already covered at 10:30 o'clock, and so rapidly did it march forward, that by the time the engines were at work the flames were ahead of them, and again they moved on north. From the west side of Jefferson street, as far as the eye could reach, in an easterly direction--and that space was bounded by the river--a perfect sea of leaping flames covered the ground. The wind increased in fierceness as the flames rose, and the flames wailed more hungrily for their prey as the angry gusts impelled them onward. Successively the wooden buildings on Taylor, Forquer, Ewing, and Polk streets became the northern boundary, and then fell back to the second place. Meanwhile, the people in the more southern localities bent all their energies to the recovery of such property as they could. With ample time to move all that was movable, and with a foreboding of what was coming, in their neighborhood at least, they were out and in safety long before the flames reached their dwellings. They were nearly all poor people, the savings of whose lifetime were represented in the little mass of furniture which blocked the streets, and impeded the firemen. They were principally laborers, most of them Germans or Scandinavians. Though the gaunt phantom of starvation and homelessness, for the night, at least, passed over them, it was singular to observe the cheerfulness, not to say merriment, that prevailed. Though mothers hugged their little ones to their breasts and shivered with alarm, yet, strange to say, they talked freely and laughed as if realizing the utter uselessness of expressing more dolefully their consciousness of ruin. There were many owners of the building who gave themselves up to the consolation of insurance. But even that appeared to weaken as the flames spread, and they gave themselves up to their fate. Many of the victims were stowed away in the houses on the west side of Jefferson street, while there on Clinton, caught between two fires, had rushed away, losing all but their lives and little ones. How many of these latter ones were abandoned, either from terror or in the confusion, it is impossible to guess, but every now and then a woman wild with grief would run in and out among the alleys and cry aloud her loss.

The firemen were working with extraordinary perseverance. When it seemed impossible for a man to stand without suffocation they carried their hose, sprinkling the houses opposite and endeavoring to stop its spread in a westerly direction. But it was evident by midnight that human ingenuity could not stem that fiery tide. At the same time, so burdened were the minds of the citizens with the conflagration that the question of where it would end never entered their minds. Engine No. 14, which had retreated gradually north on Canal Street to Foes' lumber yard, or rather where that yard had been two days before, was suddenly surrounded in a belt of flame, and abandoned to its fate . . .

But, while it seemed as if the demon of flame had reached a desert and needs must die, a new danger appeared to threaten the city. From the South Side, in the neighborhood of Adams street, whereabouts no one on the West Side could guess with any degree of certainty, rose a column of fire, not large, but horribly suggestive. Such engines as could be moved were called from the West to protect the South Side property, and the flames left to die of inanition.

#### THE FIRE AS SEEN FROM THE WINDWARD

The fire of Saturday burned the region in the West Division from Van Buren street northward to Adams, and all east on Clinton street to the river, Murry Nelson's elevator alone standing. The light from the burning remnants of these eighteen acres of ruins illuminated the heavens on Sunday evening. Precisely at half-past 9 o'clock the fire bells sounded an alarm, and a fresh light, distinct from the other only to those living west of the fire, sprung up. The wind at the time, as it had been for the preceding forty-eight hours, was strong from the southwest. This fire commenced on DeKoven Street, at the corner of Jefferson, and one block north of Twelfth Street. The wind carried this fire straight before it, through the block to the next block, and so on northward, until it reached Van Buren Street, where it struck the south line of the district burnt the night before. Here this fire ought to have stopped, and here, under ordinary circumstances, it would have stopped. But the wind though fierce and direct, carried the flames before it, cutting as clean and well defined a swath as does the reaper in the fold, the fire gradually but rapidly extended laterally, and in the very teeth of the wind, worked backward nearly to Twelfth Street, and

thence extended east to the river. It worked against the wind along the west line of Jefferson Street to Van Buren. North of Twelfth street it cast its burning brands across the river, firing the tan yard of the Chicago Hide and Leather Company. As the fire widened at its base its direct line to the northeast was also widened, and thus many hours after the first sheet of flame had reached Van Buren street, other lines coming from the base would reach the same point . . .

The route of the fire was distinctly visible. In five minutes after the first flame had reached Van Buren Street from the southeast, we could see the incipient fire in the South Division as a point three blocks to the north. The blazing brands borne before it had fallen into the sheds and shanties near the Armory, and at once the blaze mounted high.... From the river to Market street, thence to Franklin and Wells, in a northeast direction, it made its way as if directed by an engineer, in an air line, striking Madison street east of Wells, and near LaSalle. But, preceeding the actual blaze was the shower of brands, falling upon roofs, breaking through windows, falling into yards, and each brand starting a new fire. The fire was in full blast in the rear of the Union Bank and Oriental Buildings, before the actual fire had reached Wells street, three blocks to the southwest. In like manner the Chamber of Commerce building was in flames, the roof of the Court House was ablaze, the old TRIBUNE office was half destroyed, as distinct conflagrations. For a long time the Sherman House resisted destruction, and before it was abandoned the fire had commenced in a dozen places on the North Division. Any one who will take a map will see that the line from the point where the fire began, to the Water Works, was the exact line of the southwest wind. The fire was not continuous. Standing to the windward we could see the fire raging at various points along this line at the same time. The intervening gaps were rapidly overwhelmed by the flames, and shortly after Lill's brewery and the Water Works were ablaze . . . No obstacle seemed to interrupt the progress of the fire. Stone walls crumbled before it. It reached the highest roofs, and swept the earth of everything combustible. The gale was intense in its severity. Having reached the lake, we on the west had high hopes that the destructive work would be confined to the distinct path thus mown through the very heart of the city . . .

The hope that, as the fire had extended to the lake at Chicago avenue, and the wind was blowing fiercely from the west and south, that part of the North Division westward of the line of the fire would escape, was an idle one. Gradually all Clark Street was included, and thence to the west until the coal beds at the river were reached. The scene about daylight was terrific. The entire North Division, from the river to the lake, and as far north as North Avenue, was one seething mass of blaze. The roar of this fire was appalling . . . Just before daylight there was one continuous sheet of flame . . . making a semicircle the inner line of which was about seven miles long. All east of this was a perfect ocean of blaze.