A Molasses Mess

In “The Boston Molasses Flood of 1919,” you read about a terrible disaster. In this activity, you’ll identify what caused the disaster to happen and what effects it had on the people of Boston.

Directions: Fill in the boxes below to identify the causes and effects of the molasses flood. Use our clues to help you.

**Event:** A huge molasses storage tank broke apart, spilling 2.7 million gallons of molasses into the streets of a Boston neighborhood.

**Cause 1**

How did USIA construct the molasses tank?

**Cause 2**

Why wasn’t the tank repaired when people suspected it was dangerous?

**Cause 3**

Think of one more cause on your own.

**Effect 1**

What happened to people who were in the path of the molasses wave?

**Effect 2**

What happened to houses and buildings?

**Effect 3**

Think of one more effect on your own.
In this activity, you will preview some challenging vocabulary words from the article “The Boston Molasses Flood of 1919.”

**Directions:** Use the words and definitions in the left column to complete the tasks in the right column. (Hint: If you need help, find the words in the story to see them used in context.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vocabulary</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Task</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>cargo:</td>
<td>goods that are transported</td>
<td>What kind of vehicle might carry cargo? Answer: __________________________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>debris:</td>
<td>pieces remaining after something has been destroyed</td>
<td>In what situation might you find debris? Answer: __________________________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>epidemic:</td>
<td>a widespread outbreak of sickness</td>
<td>Complete the sentence: Officials are trying to stop the flu epidemic by __________________________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>explosives:</td>
<td>bombs or other materials that explode</td>
<td>How might explosives be used in the construction business? Answer: __________________________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>grim:</td>
<td>unpleasant and gloomy</td>
<td>Write a sentence describing something that is grim. Sentence: __________________________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>prejudice:</td>
<td>an unfair opinion or judgment about a person or group</td>
<td>How could prejudice hurt someone? Answer: __________________________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shoddily:</td>
<td>carelessly, with poor quality</td>
<td>Complete the sentence: I could tell my shirt was made shoddily because __________________________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>unconscious:</td>
<td>not awake; unable to see, hear, or think</td>
<td>Write one synonym and one antonym for unconscious. Synonym: __________________________ Antonym: __________________________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>unleashing:</td>
<td>letting loose</td>
<td>Write a sentence about unleashing an emotion. Sentence: __________________________</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Find the Evidence

This month’s nonfiction article “The Boston Molasses Flood of 1919” tells the story of a disaster that took place almost 100 years ago. In this activity, you’ll explore information and details in the article.

Directions: Read each question below carefully. Some will ask you to select text evidence—or details in the story—to support a statement. Others will ask you to respond in your own words, supporting your ideas with text evidence.

1. At the beginning of the story, the author states that the people of Boston’s North End had good reason to believe that better times were just ahead. Circle the letter of the piece of text evidence that best supports this statement:
   a. “Anthony’s father worked long hours on the waterfront.”
   b. “Twenty million people died, including 500,000 Americans.”
   c. “But now the war and the epidemic were over.”
   d. “It was not a German bomb or a deadly disease.”

2. In your own words, explain what molasses is, where it comes from, and why it is no longer America’s most popular sweetener.

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_____________________________________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________________________________

3. The section “From Pies to Bombs” describes some signs that showed the molasses tank might be dangerous. Circle the letter of the piece of text evidence that best explains why the tank was not fixed:
   a. “Heated up in a process called distillation, molasses can be turned into a liquid called industrial alcohol.”
   b. “But it wasn’t only the tank’s ugliness that upset the residents of the North End.”
   c. “Some people living near the tank worried it was unsafe.”
   d. “USIA was a big company, and the people in the North End were poor and powerless.”

Continued on next page >
4. In your own words, describe the danger signs that people living near the molasses tank noticed.

_____________________________________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________________________________

5. Circle the letter of the piece of text evidence that best explains why the firefighter thought Anthony was dead:
   a. “A firefighter saw Anthony pinned against the lamppost.”
   b. “Rushing through waist-deep molasses, the man grabbed Anthony just before he was swept away.”
   c. “The firefighter held Anthony’s limp body and looked at his molasses-coated face.”
   d. “But his mouth was filled with molasses.”

6. Explain how experts concluded that the disaster was USIA’s fault.

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_____________________________________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________________________________

7. Which of the following is a conclusion you could draw from the article?
   a. Most Americans prefer the taste of molasses to the taste of white sugar.
   b. The leaders at USIA were more concerned about their company than about the people of the North End.
   c. After the disaster, molasses was no longer used to make industrial alcohol.
   d. After winning the lawsuit, the victims of the disaster never had to work again.

8. The author calls Anthony’s story “incredible.” In your own words, explain what makes Anthony’s experience surprising and hard to imagine.

_____________________________________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________________________________
Writing a Summary

A summary is a short retelling of the most important parts of an article. It should include the information that someone would need to know to understand the article, without small details or your own opinion.

Directions: Complete the summary below, using the prompts in the margins to help you.

Summary of “The Boston Molasses Flood of 1919”

“The Boston Molasses Flood of 1919” is about __________________________

___________________________________________________________________________________

The neighborhood was home to __________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________

A company called United States Industrial Alcohol (USIA) had built __________
___________________________________________________________________________________

Molasses was used __________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________

One day in January 1919, Anthony was walking home when _____________
_______________________________________________________________________________

As the molasses swept through the streets, _____________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________________

Luckily, however, Anthony survived. In the end, USIA had to ___________________
_______________________________________________________________________________

because ____________________________________________________________
Writing a Summary

A summary is a short retelling of the most important parts of an article. It should include the information that someone would need to know to understand the article, without small details or your own opinion.

Directions: Complete the summary below with the most important details from the article.

Summary of “The Boston Molasses Flood of 1919”

“The Boston Molasses Flood of 1919” is about __________________________

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Luckily, however, Anthony survived. In the end, USIA had to ___________________

___________________________________________________________________________________

because ________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________________
“The Boston Molasses Flood of 1919” Quiz

Directions: Read the article “The Boston Molasses Flood of 1919” in the January 2014 issue of Storyworks. Then fill in the bubble next to the best answer for each question below.

1. The author mentions “motorcars” and “horse-drawn wagons” in the first paragraph. This is probably to show that _____.
   A the events in the story took place long ago
   B the story is mainly about transportation
   C the people in Boston’s North End liked to travel
   D Anthony di Stasio liked cars and wagons

2. The tone of the words “They were wrong” in the first section could best be described as _____.
   A hopeful
   B humorous
   C gloomy
   D dark

3. Which word is a synonym for “grim” in the phrase “As if the North End weren’t grim enough already . . .”??
   A cheerful
   B gloomy
   C poor
   D cold

4. What can you infer was the reason USIA built its molasses tank quickly?
   A The company was known for completing projects quickly.
   B A lot of molasses was needed for making bombs once World War I started.
   C Boston residents wanted it built quickly.
   D Molasses was spoiling aboard ships.

5. Which of the following statements is NOT supported by the text?
   A Anthony’s family was from Italy.
   B Molasses can be used to make alcohol.
   C After the disaster, USIA went out of business.
   D USIA lost the lawsuit.

6. The phrase “. . . some claim that the sweet scent of molasses rises up, like a ghost” contains _____.
   A a metaphor
   B hyperbole
   C irony
   D a simile

7. USIA’s actions in this story can best be described as _____.
   A planned
   B wise
   C irresponsible
   D responsible

8. The author’s purpose in writing this story was most likely to _____.
   A inform readers about a little-known event in history
   B warn readers against using molasses
   C persuade readers to visit Boston’s North End
   D instruct readers in the proper storage of molasses

9. List three examples from the article that show that Anthony’s family was poor.

10. The author calls the disaster “strange.” In what ways was it strange?

Constructed Response

Directions: On a separate piece of paper, write your answer to each question in a well-organized paragraph. Make sure you support your answers with information and details from the article.
**Making Inferences**

An *inference* is something you can figure out from clues in a story, even though the story doesn’t say it directly.

**Directions:** The chart below lists clues from “The Boston Molasses Flood of 1919” on the left and inferences you can make from them on the right. Complete the blanks on the chart with clues or inferences from the article.

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<td><strong>What can you infer about life in America for Anthony di Stasio’s family?</strong></td>
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<td>• “Anthony’s tattered wool coat flapped open as he hurried toward the tiny apartment where he lived with his parents and three sisters.”</td>
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<td>• “Anthony’s mother struggled to make their dingy two-room apartment into a decent home—to chase away cockroaches, to cover up the stink of garbage and horse manure that wafted up from the streets.”</td>
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<td><strong>Write two lines from the article that support the inference on the right.</strong></td>
<td><strong>You can infer that there were clear signs of problems with the molasses tank from the moment it was built.</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Consider these lines from the article:</strong></td>
<td><strong>What can you infer about how the immigrants in the North End felt about the molasses tank?</strong></td>
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<td>• “Some people living near the tank worried it was unsafe.”</td>
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<td>• “USIA was a big company, and the people in the North End were poor and powerless.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>• “It was a time when many Americans viewed immigrants with deep suspicion and prejudice.”</td>
<td></td>
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<td><strong>Write two lines from the article that support the inference on the right.</strong></td>
<td><strong>You can infer that Anthony was very lucky to have survived the great molasses flood.</strong></td>
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1. Write two lines from the article that support the inference on the right.

2. You can infer that there were clear signs of problems with the molasses tank from the moment it was built.

3. Consider this line from the article:  
   • “Some people living near the tank worried it was unsafe.”

4. Write one more line from the article that supports the inference on the right.

5. What can you infer about how the immigrants in the North End felt about the molasses tank?

6. Write two lines from the article that support the inference on the right.

7. Write your own inference from “The Boston Molasses Flood of 1919.”
Close-Reading Questions

An active reader always looks for ideas and details in a story. In this activity, you’ll answer questions about the nonfiction article “The Boston Molasses Flood.”

Directions: After reading the article “The Boston Molasses Flood,” go back and reread sections to answer the questions below.

1. Reread the three paragraphs following the large type, starting with “It was a bright January day . . .” What details do you learn about the people of Boston’s North End in 1919?

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2. Which two events described in the article had shaken up most Americans?

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3. On page 6, why does the author call the new use of molasses “surprising”?

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________________________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________________________
4. In what ways did the giant molasses tank bother residents of the North End? Why didn’t they complain about it?

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________________________________________________________________________________________________________
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5. What happened to people and property immediately after the molasses tank exploded? What lasting effects did the explosion have?

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6. What did experts conclude was the cause of the disaster? Do you think it could have been prevented? Explain.

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7. Referring to the trial, on page 8, the article says, “For the poor immigrants of the North End, it was a big victory.” Why was it a big victory?

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________________________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________________________

Continued on next page >
Critical-Thinking Questions, p. 3

Directions: Answer the questions below, using information and details from the articles to back up your ideas. Use a separate piece of paper if you need more room.

8. How did the fact that poor immigrants were the main residents of the North End affect what happened there?

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________________________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________________________

9. Why do you think the author tells the story of what happened to Anthony di Stasio?

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________________________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________________________