



City in Crisis: Lessons from the Great Chicago Fire

Gallery Video Learning Guide

Recommended for students in grades 3–5

About This Video

We hope you will use this video as a virtual field trip to the Chicago History Museum or, when possible, in conjunction with a visit to the Museum. This series of short videos explores stories featured in our *Chicago: Crossroads of America* exhibition. The gallery examines Chicago's changing economy, challenging crises, diverse neighborhoods, and groundbreaking innovations. This video, "City in Crisis: Lessons from the Great Chicago Fire," examines the causes of the fire, how the event progressed, and decisions made during recovery. It asks students to compare disaster preparation and recovery of 1871 to contemporary life and what the fire can teach us as we make choices today.

By watching this video, students will:

- ◆ Increase their content knowledge of Chicago in 1871. They will learn who lived in the city, how the fire unfolded, the sometimes-unfair choices made during recovery, and the lasting impacts of the blaze.
- ◆ Think critically about making choices for a more just and inclusive Chicago.
- ◆ Analyze and interpret primary source materials from the Chicago History Museum's collection.

How to Use This Video

- ◆ Critical thinking prompts and questions are embedded throughout the video. See below for a list of questions and the time stamp for when they occur. You can stop the video at each question to give students time to respond verbally or in writing to the questions. Questions are formatted into a student response sheet at the end of this packet. You can also prompt them to formulate their own questions in response to the video.
- ◆ PDF transcripts of the video script are available to download in Spanish and English.
<https://www.chicagohistory.org/education/field-trips/virtual-field-trips/>
- ◆ A PDF of selected images and close looking prompts is available for additional study.
<https://www.chicagohistory.org/education/field-trips/virtual-field-trips/>
- ◆ The running time of "City in Crisis: Lessons from the Great Chicago Fire" is 11 minutes 20 seconds.
- ◆ This video is recommended for students in grades 3–5.
- ◆ To access the video, you will be asked to complete a short survey. This will help us understand how you intend to use the video, improve future videos, and learn what topics you would like to see added to the series.

The video and learning guide align to these learning standards:

Illinois Social Science Standards:

<https://www.isbe.net/socialsciences>

- ◆ SS.IS.1.3-5
- ◆ SS.IS.7.3-5
- ◆ SS.CV.2.3; SS.CV.2.4; SS.CV.4.5
- ◆ SS.H.2.3; SS.H.3.4; SS.H.3.5
- ◆ SS.H.3.3; SS.H.2.4; SS.H.2.5

Common Core, Anchor Standards:

<http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/CCRA/>

- ◆ Reading: 1 and 7
- ◆ Writing: 3, 7
- ◆ Speaking and Listening: 1, 2, 4

National Council for the Social Studies, College, Career, and Civic Life (C3):

<https://www.socialstudies.org/standards/c3>

- ◆ D1.3.3-5
- ◆ D2.Civ.1.3-5; D2.Civ.6.3-5
- ◆ D2.His.2.3-5; D2.His.10.3-5; D2.His.12.3-5; D2.His.14.3-5
- ◆ D4.6.3-5; D4.7.3-5

This learning guide includes:

- ◆ Vocabulary
- ◆ Critical Thinking Prompts and Questions
- ◆ Pre-Viewing Activities
- ◆ Post-Viewing Activities
- ◆ Additional Great Chicago Fire Resources
- ◆ Student Materials
 - ◇ Video Questions
 - ◇ My T-Chart



Vocabulary

Barracks: a building or group of buildings used to house groups of people

City Officials: an employee or elected official of the city

Committee: a group of people working together for a specific purpose

Diverse: people from a range of different social, ethnic, and racial backgrounds

Immigrants: a person who comes to live in another country

Mayor: the elected head of the city

Rubble: pieces of stone, brick, and other building materials left after a disaster

Settlers: a person who moves with a group of others to live in a new country or area

Skilled Worker: a worker who has specialized training and knowledge

Symbol: a thing that represents or stands for something else

Critical Thinking Prompts and Questions

Questions are formatted into a student response sheet at the end of this packet.

- ◆ Time: 00:55
Prompt: Write down what you know about the Great Chicago Fire and any questions you have. As you watch the video you can check off things already on your list and add new information.
- ◆ Time: 03:48
Image: Drawing depicting the myth of Mrs. O'Leary's cow kicking over a lantern to start the fire.
Prompt: Find the details in this drawing that show that story.
- ◆ Time: 04:57
Image: *Memories of the Chicago Fire* painting by Julia Lemos.
Question: What words would you use to describe the mood of this painting? What makes you say that?
- ◆ Time: 06:28
Image: Letter and drawing by Justin Butterfield, survivor of the Great Chicago Fire. Question: Take a look at the picture he drew of his family. What do you think people needed when the fire was over?
- ◆ Time: 08:15
Prompt: What can we learn from the recovery efforts after the Great Chicago Fire to help us when we have disasters today? How can we ensure everyone gets the help they need?
- ◆ Time: 09:30
Image: Photographs of contemporary Chicagoans.
Question: How can we respect and celebrate our differences so that Chicago is a welcoming place for all people.
- ◆ Time: 10:30
Question: How do you think the fire changed Chicago? What kinds of choices should we make in the future if we find ourselves in a similar situation?
- ◆ Time: 11:10
Image: Model and photograph of the Water Tower.
Question: What symbol would you choose to show your own strength?



Pre-Viewing Activities

Choose any one or a combination of activities that work best for your students.

Vocabulary My Way: For each word on the list, ask students to choose one way to express their understanding of the meaning: use it in a sentence, draw it, act it out, or define it in their own words

Great Chicago Fire T-Chart: Use the T-Chart included in this guide or ask students to make their own (they should label one side “What I Know” and the other side “Questions I Have”). Have students complete the T-Chart with the information they know and questions they have about the Great Chicago Fire. While watching the video, they can check off things on their list and jot down answers to any of their questions. Alternatively, this could be completed in small groups or as a class.

Post-Viewing Activities

Choose any one or a combination of activities that work best for your students.

Discussion and Inquiry: Use the T-Chart (below) and seven embedded prompts (below) for small group or whole class discussion. Are there any student questions unanswered by the video? Where could students research to find more information? Did the video raise new questions? How were student’s responses to the embedded prompts similar and different?

Documenting Memories: Justin Butterfield and Julia Lemos shared their experiences living through the fire through images and words. They were ordinary people who took the time to make a record of what happened, which helped future generations learn. Encourage students to document their own lives in a similar fashion. They can choose a school memory or a personal milestone or family event. They can document through drawing, painting, collaging, or writing or in a digital format. Some prompts to help them get started include: Why is this a special memory? When I close my eyes, what do I picture about that time? What did I see, touch, smell, hear? Who was with me? How does this memory inspire me today?

Visualizing Resilience: Ask students to make a visual representation of the symbol they chose for their own strength. This can be a drawing, collage, or created digitally. Share symbols and meanings in small or large groups. Discuss what makes your class special. Design a classroom symbol for strength and perseverance.

Compare a Contemporary Crises: Unfortunately, the Great Chicago Fire was not the last disaster Chicago or the world experienced. Ask students to choose a more recent crises to research. They can write about the cause and impacts and then compare it to the Great Chicago Fire. What do they have in common? What is different? Connect this research to taking informed action. What ideas does the student have to solve the problem or respond better in the future? Who can the student share their ideas with to make a difference?

Additional Great Chicago Fire Resources

Books for Young People

The Great Fire by Jim Murphy

This award-winning informational text weaves personal accounts with compelling history of Chicago and the disaster. It is illustrated with a variety of primary source materials including photographs and illustrations.

Emmi in the City: A Great Chicago Fire Survival Story (Girls Survive) by Salima Alikhan

This fictional work follows Emmi, a recent immigrant, her father, and schoolmates through their experiences surviving the fire. The story touches on tensions between immigrants from Ireland and Germany, adjusting to life in a new place, and finding common ground and new understandings during crises. Nonfiction back matter includes a glossary, fire facts, discussion questions, and writing prompts.

Online Resources

[Chicago History @Home | Families: Great Chicago Fire Artifact Detective](#)

In this activity, students analyze artifacts from the Chicago History Museum’s collection of items that melted during the Great Chicago Fire. Students use their observation and close looking skills to make inferences and draw conclusions about what the objects were. Students can create their own melted fire artifact with play dough or salt dough (recipe included).

[The Great Chicago Fire and the Web of Memory](#)

Perfect for increasing your own content knowledge, this site includes a history of the Great Chicago Fire by Carl Smith. The second part of the site, The Web of Memory, explores the way in which the fire has been remembered, through eyewitness accounts, contemporary journalism and illustrations, literature and art, the legend of Mrs. O’Leary and her cow, fire souvenirs, and formal commemorations. There are many ways to use these primary source materials in your classroom instruction.



Lessons from the Great Chicago Fire Questions in the Video

1. What details in this drawing show the myth of Mrs. O'Leary's cow kicking over a lantern to start the fire?
2. What words would you use to describe the mood of this painting (*Memories of the Chicago Fire* by Julia Lemos)? What makes you say that?
3. Take a look at the picture Justin drew of his family. What do you think people needed when the fire was over?
4. What can we learn from the recovery efforts after the Great Chicago Fire to help us when we have disasters today? How can we ensure everyone gets the help they need?
5. How can we respect and celebrate our differences, so that Chicago is a welcoming place for all people?
6. How do you think the fire changed Chicago? What kinds of choices should we make in the future if we find ourselves in a similar situation?
7. What symbol would you choose to show your own strength?



Lessons from the Great Chicago Fire My T-Chart

What I know about the Great Chicago Fire	Questions I have about the Great Chicago Fire
<i>Example: It started on October 8, 1871</i>	<i>Example: How did the Great Chicago Fire start?</i>