



City on Fire, Chicago 1871 – Wooden City
Virtual Visit Learning Guide
Recommended for students in grades 3-5

About the Exhibition

A rapidly growing city built of wood. A summer-long heat wave. An exhausted and misdirected team of firefighters. Racial, social, and economic tensions bubbling just below the surface. All Chicago needed was a spark. The *City on Fire: Chicago 1871* exhibition is divided into four parts: pre-fire Chicago in the “Wooden City,” the three days of the fire in the “Burning City,” the immediate aftermath in the “Smoldering City,” and the recovery and rebuilding efforts in the “Rebuilt City.”

About this Video

This video is part of series designed as a companion to the exhibition. The video series examines each section of the exhibition through closer looks at key sections and includes activities that can be done in the classroom. The “Wooden City” introduces factors that enabled the fire to spread rapidly through the city and the social tensions that influenced recovery efforts following the fire. Activities are set up to be used independently of each other enabling educators to customize their classroom experiences.

By watching this video, students will:

- ◆ Increase their content knowledge about the events and conditions surrounding the Great Chicago Fire
- ◆ Think critically about how building materials used within the city contributed to the spread of the fire
- ◆ Understand the geographic and social divisions within the city at the time
- ◆ Develop empathy for people from the past
- ◆ Analyze and interpret primary source materials from the collection of the Chicago History Museum

How to Use This Video

- ◆ The video is divided into four sections each with corresponding activities:
 - Introduction – 00:05
 - Will it burn? – 00:30
 - Living in Chicago in 1871 – 02:45
 - Meet the O’Learys – 05:25
- ◆ Preview the video and review activities to plan your instruction.
- ◆ Pause video as needed to give students time to complete the activities.
- ◆ The running time of *City on Fire – The Wooden City* is 07:44
- ◆ 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.

This learning guide includes:

- ◆ Standards Alignment
- ◆ Pre-Viewing Activities
- ◆ Post-Viewing Activities
- ◆ Activity Summaries and Corresponding Student Handouts
- ◆ Additional Resources
- ◆ Image Packet (Separate Download)

The video and learning guide align to these learning standards:

Illinois Social Science Standards:

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

- ◆ SS.3-5.IS.4
- ◆ SS.3-5.IS.6
- ◆ SS.3.H.2, SS.4.H.2, SS.5.H.2
- ◆ SS.3.H.3, SS.4.H.3, SS.5.H.3

Common Core, Anchor Standards:

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

- ◆ Reading: 1 and 7
- ◆ Writing: 3 and 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.6.3-5
- ◆ D2.His.2.3-5; D2.His.10.3-5; D2.His.12.3-5; D2.His.14.3-5
- ◆ D3.4.3-5
- ◆ D4.6.3-5; D4.7.3-5

Suggested Pre-Viewing Activity -

Lessons from the Great Chicago Fire

Watch Chicago History Museum's virtual gallery tour that features artifacts, documents, and images from the Museum's vast collection. It covers the events of the fire and recovery following the blaze. Students are invited to share their ideas through a series of close looking prompts and essential questions. Classroom use is supported by a learning guide with activity ideas, student handouts and images. Recommended for grades 3-5. Running time 11 mins 20 secs

<https://www.chicagohistory.org/education/field-trips/virtual-field-trips/>

Suggested Post-Viewing Activities

Journaling

Invite students to begin a journal. After each sub section of the video series, invite them to reflect on the circumstances that helped the fire spread and how the fire impacted Chicagoans.

Connecting Past and Present

Discuss how cities are built and organized.

- ◆ What kinds of places exist in a city? *Places to live, places to work, places to learn, places for public health/safety, community centers/religious orgs, parks, etc.*
- ◆ What materials do we use to build? *Wood, metal (steel, iron), glass, concrete*
- ◆ How are cities organized? What kinds of buildings should be near each? *Homes near parks, and schools, etc.*

Build a city. Use the following to help you construct your own city. <https://www.fosterandpartners.com/news/archive/2020/04/architecturefromhome/>

Discuss the differences between planning a city today versus Chicago in 1871 which was hastily built and growing faster than planning could account for.

Will It Burn?

Activity Outline

Materials:

- ◆ Blank sheet of paper
- ◆ writing utensil

Summary:

Students are asked to consider building and other materials found in and around Chicago at the time of the fire.

Activity Directions:

The video will guide the students through the process.

- ◆ On a blank sheet of paper, students should write the numbers 1–8.
- ◆ The video will show 8 materials, and students write yes or no.
- ◆ Answers are given during video narration.

Post-Activity Discussion Questions:

- ◆ Why would so many things be made out of wood?
Possible answers include:
Wood was a cheap and easy to build with
Forests in Wisconsin and Michigan were close
Transporting lumber via the lake or railroads was easy
- ◆ What flammable material surprised you the most?
- ◆ What do we use today instead of some of these materials?
Possible answers include:
Glass, steel, concrete
Metal pipes
Drywall and fire-resistant materials are used in wooden buildings

Vocabulary

Balloon Frame Construction: a type of wood frame construction using nails to hold wooden boards together. Over time, fire safety features have been added to slow a fire's spread. (To see an image of this, visit

https://collections.carli.illinois.edu/digital/collection/chm_museum/id/1676/rec/5)

Coal: a mineral mined for use as fuel

Drought: a long period of time during which there is very little or no rain

Construcción de armazón: en forma de globo: un tipo de construcción de armazón de madera que utiliza clavos para mantener unidas las tablas de madera. Con el tiempo, se han añadido elementos de seguridad contra incendios para frenar su expansión.

Carbón: un mineral extraído para su uso como combustible

Sequía: un largo período de tiempo durante el cual llueve muy poco o nada



Image of objects featured in the “Will it burn?” Activity with answers.

Living In Chicago in 1871

Activity Outline

Summary:

Students are asked to consider building and other materials found in and around Chicago at the time of the fire.

Activity Directions:

People lived in different kinds of homes, depending on the kind of work they did and the neighborhood they lived in. Worksheet side one shows photographs of pre-fire homes. The second side invites student to use the triangle shaped Venn diagram to record similarities all the homes share in the middle and the differences in the three other triangles.

Materials:

- ♦ Living in Chicago worksheet (consider printing as two separate sheets so students can see images as they work)
- ♦ writing utensil
- ♦ Optional: use photo packet, project one home image at a time, and map of Chicago with locations marked

Post-Activity Discussion Questions:

- ♦ What was life like for immigrants at the time of the fire?
- ♦ Many people lost homes in the fire. What challenges do you think these families faced?
- ♦ Find the places highlighted on the video on a present-day map. Discuss what is there today vs. what was there during the O'Learys' time.
 - ◇ Home of Patrick and Catherine O'Leary – Jefferson and DeKoven Streets
Note: the O'Leary home did not burn down. Neighbors helped pour water on it, to keep the fire from spreading onto it.
 - ◇ Church of the Holy Family – Racine and 12th Streets (now Roosevelt Road)
 - ◇ Courthouse and City Hall – Randolph, Clark, Washington and LaSalle Streets
 - ◇ Palmer House Hotel – State and Quincy Streets (present day Palmer House is nearby)
 - ◇ Field, Leiter, & Co. – State and Washington Streets
 - ◇ Rush Street Bridge
 - ◇ Water Tower and Pumping Station – Pine Street (now Michigan Avenue) and Chicago Avenue
 - ◇ Chicago Historical Society – Dearborn and Ontario (initially rebuilt on that site, but moved to North and Clark in the 1930s)
- ♦ Find your school on a map. Use the 1871 map of Chicago and determine if your school would have been in the city limits at the time. If it was, determine if the school would have been in the path of the fire.

Vocabulary

Boardinghouse: a building where many different people lived. A person could rent a bedroom, and spaces like living rooms and bathrooms would be shared by renters. Often the owner of the boardinghouse would provide the meals

Suspicious: showing distrust

Casa de huéspedes: edificio donde vivían muchas personas diferentes. Una persona podría alquilar un dormitorio, y los inquilinos compartirían espacios como salas de estar y baños. A menudo, el dueño de la pensión proporcionaba las comidas

Sospechoso(a): mostrando desconfianza

Life in Chicago in 1871

La vida en Chicago en 1871

Names/Nombres:

People lived in different kinds of homes, depending on the kind of work they did and the neighborhood they lived in. Look at these homes, notice the building materials used, their features, and landscapes. Then, write their similarities and differences on the graphic organizer.

Las personas vivían en diferentes tipos de hogares, según el tipo de trabajo que hacían y el barrio en el que vivían. Mire estas casas, observe los materiales de construcción utilizados, sus características y paisajes. Luego, escribe sus similitudes y diferencias en el organizador gráfico.

1. O'Leary Home – Jefferson and DeKoven Streets

Patrick and Catherine O'Leary lived in the back half with their five children. They rented the front half to the McLaughlin family.



1. Casa O'Leary - Calles Jefferson y DeKoven

Patrick y Catherine O'Leary vivían en la parte trasera con sus cinco hijos. Alquilaban la mitad delantera a la familia McLaughlin.

2. Boardinghouse – 42 Monroe Street (now 19 E. Monroe)

This building was a boardinghouse. A few years before the fire, some of the boarders included a clerk at a dry goods store and a watch repair person.



2. Casa de huéspedes - Calle 42 Monroe (ahora 19 E. Monroe)

Este edificio era una casa de huéspedes. Unos años antes del incendio, algunas de los huéspedes incluían un empleado en una tienda de productos secos y un reparador de relojes.

3. Rumsey Mansion – Huron and Rush Streets

George Rumsey was one of the wealthiest men in Chicago. He made his fortune buying and selling grain, then storing it for the buyers.

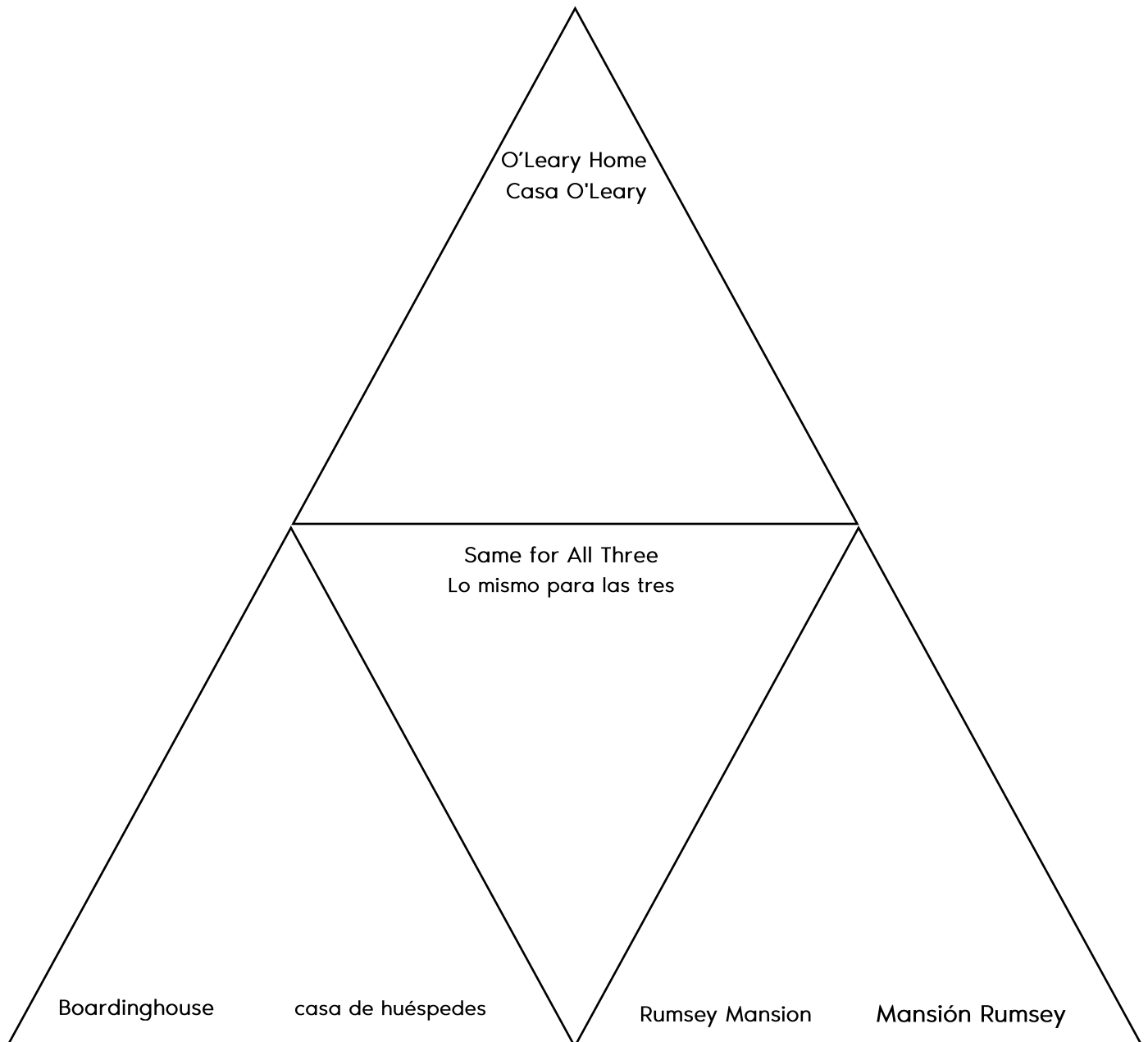


3. Mansión Rumsey - Calles Huron y Rush

George Rumsey era uno de los hombres más ricos de Chicago. Hizo su fortuna comprando y vendiendo granos, y luego almacenándolos para los compradores.

In the outside triangles, write what is different about each home. In the center triangle write what features they all share.

En los triángulos exteriores, escribe qué tiene de diferente cada casa. En el triángulo central escribe qué características comparten todos.



Many people lost homes in the fire. What challenges do you think these families faced?

Muchas personas perdieron sus hogares en el incendio. ¿Qué retos crees que enfrentaron estas familias?

Meet the O'Learys

Activity Outline

Summary:

Students are asked to draw, write, and make inferences about the thoughts, hopes, and dreams of the O'Leary family using the worksheet. Prior to this activity, reviewing how to make inferences will be helpful.

Note: The video was created by Manual Cinema, which specializes in silhouette videos. They have created numerous videos for the *City on Fire: Chicago 1871* exhibition.

Activity Directions:

Many people across Chicago were impacted by the Great Chicago Fire. Throughout the exhibition, some of their stories are told. Read the biography about Patrick and Catherine O'Leary, then watch the "Meet the O'Leary" segment of the video (5:25 minute mark). Hand out the worksheets and have students make inferences about the O'Leary family using symbols and drawings to represent their ideas about the thoughts, challenges, hopes, and dreams of Catherine and Patrick O'Leary.

Materials:

- ◆ Historical Heads worksheet
- ◆ Writing utensil
- ◆ Meet the O'Learys biography
- ◆ Optional: colored pencils, crayons, or markers for student drawings.

Post-Activity Discussion Questions:

- ◆ What challenges did the family face before the fire?
- ◆ What challenges do you think the family faced after the fire?
- ◆ Why is it unfair to blame Catherine O'Leary for the fire?



Example of student drawing.

Use the numbered lines to write explanations for each of your drawings.

1.	
2.	
3.	The O'Leary family lived near the corner of Jefferson + DeKoven Streets.

Example of student writing on reverse.

Historical Head | Cabeza Histórica

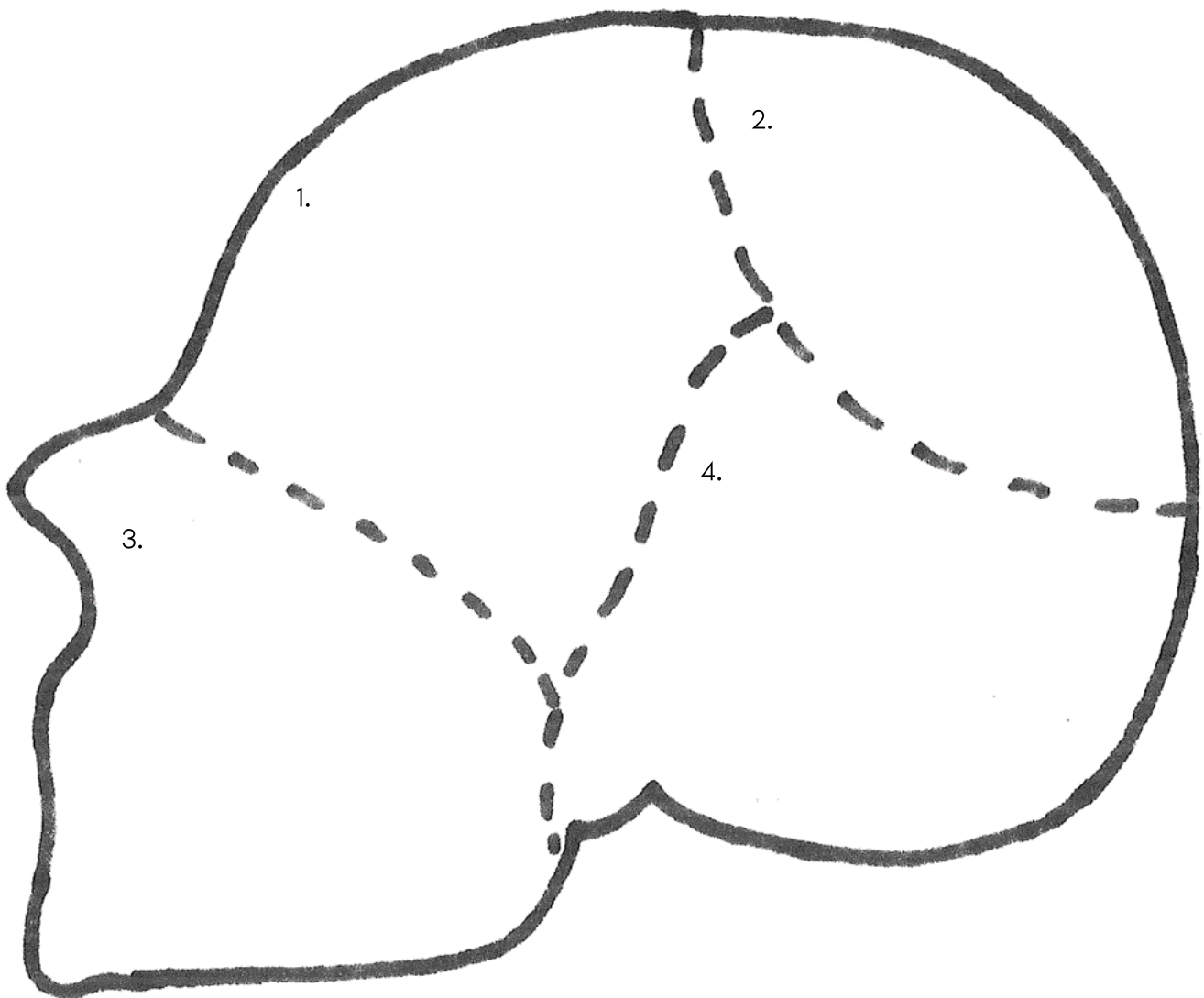
Catherine and Patrick O'Leary

Many people across Chicago were impacted by the Great Chicago Fire. Throughout the exhibition, some of their stories are told.

Think about the video about the O'Learys and the "Meet the O'Learys" biography. Make inferences about the O'Leary family using the head below. Use symbols and drawings to represent your ideas about the thoughts, challenges, hopes, and dreams of Catherine and Patrick O'Leary.

Muchas personas en todo Chicago se vieron afectadas por el Gran Incendio de Chicago. A lo largo de la exposición se cuentan algunas de sus historias.

Piensa en el video sobre los O'Leary y la biografía "Conoce a los O'Leary". Haz inferencias sobre la familia O'Leary usando el encabezado de abajo. Utiliza símbolos y dibujos para representar tus ideas sobre los pensamientos, desafíos, esperanzas y sueños de Catherine y Patrick O'Leary.



Use the numbered lines to write explanations for each of your drawings.

Usa las líneas numeradas para escribir explicaciones para cada uno de tus dibujos.

1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
What is one question you would ask them? ¿Cuál es una pregunta que les harías?	

How do you think the O’Learys felt after the fire?

¿Cómo crees que se sentían los O’Learys después del incendio?

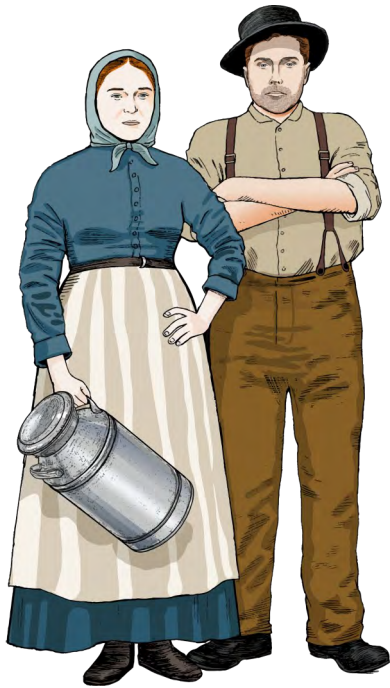
How does learning the stories of the people affected by the Great Chicago Fire change your understanding of it?

¿Cómo cambia tu comprensión al aprender las historias de las personas afectadas por el Gran Incendio de Chicago?

This activity has been adapted from James Percoco’s “Historical Head” activity, for more information on this activity see page 31 of his book A Passion for the Past: Creative Teaching of U.S. History (Portsmouth, N.H.: Heinemann, 1998).

Esta actividad ha sido adaptada de la actividad “Cabeza histórica” de James Percoco, para obtener más información sobre esta actividad, consulte la página 31 de su libro Una pasión por el pasado: Enseñanza creativa de la historia de EE. UU. (Portsmouth, N.H.: Heinemann, 1998).

Meet the O'Learys Biography



Catherine O'Leary is best known for something she did not do. So, who was she? She and her husband, Patrick, were born in Ireland near the city of Cork. They married in 1845. Ireland was in the middle of a famine, which is an extreme shortage of food. Many Irish people immigrated to the United States to find new opportunities. The O'Learys decided to leave too. The couple first settled in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. Patrick enlisted in the Union Army during the Civil War.

After the Civil War, the O'Leary family moved west to Chicago. By 1871, they had five children and owned a small home. Patrick worked as a day laborer and Catherine had her own milk business. She owned five cows. Each day, Catherine milked the cows. She saved some milk for her family and sold the rest to neighbors. The O'Learys rented half of their small house to another Irish family. The rent money also helped them make ends meet.

The fall months of 1871 were hot, dry, and windy in Chicago. Fires were a problem throughout the city and in the O'Leary's neighborhood on the south side. Joseph Chamberlain was a newspaper reporter. He described the area as having "one story homes, cow stables, corn cribs, sheds. Every building within four feet of its neighbor and everything [made] of wood."

The night of October 8, 1871, the O’Leary’s’ lives changed forever. They were in bed asleep and a fire started in their barn. Neighbors woke them up. They worked hard to keep the fire from spreading to nearby buildings. There was no stopping it. The strong winds pushed the fire throughout the city. By the end of the Great Chicago Fire, 100,000 people lost their homes, and three miles of the city had burned.

Newspaper stories said Catherine O’Leary started the fire. Fire Department investigations into the cause of the fire proved she did not start it. People still blamed her because of who she was – an Irish immigrant, a Catholic, a woman. Reporters tried to talk to her and Patrick about the Fire, but they would not answer. The did not trust reporters to tell the truth. To get a fresh start, she and her family moved to a house in the Bridgeport neighborhood. She was never able to escape the blame for the fire. Patrick died in 1894 and she died about a year later. Sadly, the legend of Mrs. O’Leary and her cow starting the Great Chicago Fire is still told today. We can change that by telling the truth about them.

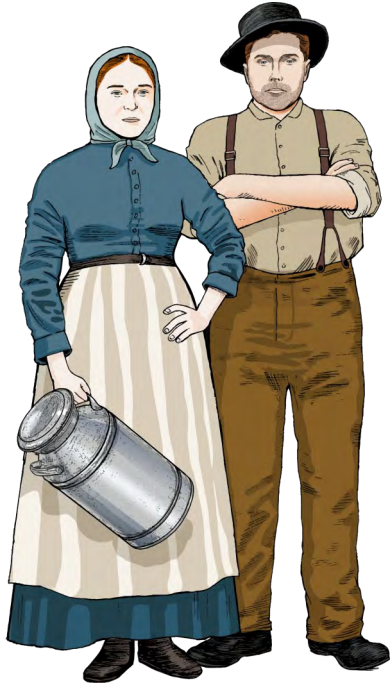
Vocabulary:

Immigrated: when a person has moved from one country to live in another

Enlisted: when a person has joined the military

Day Laborer: a person hired for a day or more to do physical work that did not require any specialized knowledge.

Conoce la biografía de los O'Leary



Catherine O'Leary es mejor conocida por algo que no hizo.

Entonces, ¿quién era ella? Ella y su esposo, Patrick, nacieron en Irlanda, cerca de la ciudad de Cork. Se casaron en 1845. Irlanda estaba en medio de una hambruna, que es una escasez extrema de alimentos. Muchos irlandeses **emigraron** a los Estados Unidos para encontrar nuevas oportunidades. Los O'Learys decidieron irse también. La pareja se instaló por primera vez en Harrisburg, Pensilvania. Patrick se **alistó** en el Ejército de la Unión durante la Guerra Civil.

Después de la Guerra Civil, la familia O'Leary se mudó al oeste, a Chicago. Para 1871, tenían cinco hijos y eran dueños de una pequeña casa. Patrick trabajaba como **jornalero** y Catherine tenía su propio negocio de leche. Ella era dueña de cinco vacas. Cada día, Catherine ordeñaba las vacas. Guardaba un poco de leche para su familia y vendía el resto a los vecinos. Los O'Leary alquilaban la mitad de su pequeña casa a otra familia irlandesa. El dinero del alquiler también les ayudó a llegar a fin de mes.

Los meses de otoño de 1871 fueron calurosos, secos y ventosos en Chicago. Los incendios fueron un problema en toda la ciudad y en el vecindario de O'Leary en lo que hoy se consideraría South Loop. Joseph Chamberlain era un reportero de un periódico. Describió el área como “casas de un piso, establos de vacas, graneros, cobertizos. Cada edificio a menos de cuatro pies de su vecino y todo [hecho] de madera”.

La noche del 8 de octubre de 1871, la vida de los O'Leary cambió para siempre. Estaban durmiendo en la cama y se inició un incendio en su granero. Los vecinos los despertaron. Trabajaron duro para evitar que el fuego se extendiera a los edificios cercanos. No había forma de detenerlo. Los fuertes vientos empujaron el fuego por toda la ciudad. Al final del Gran Incendio de Chicago, 100,000 personas perdieron sus hogares y tres millas de la ciudad se habían quemado.

Las historias de los periódicos dijeron que Catherine O'Leary inició el incendio. Las investigaciones del Departamento de Bomberos sobre la causa del incendio demostraron que ella no lo inició. People still blamed her because of who she was—an Irish immigrant, a Catholic, a woman. La gente todavía la culpaba por lo que era: una inmigrante irlandesa, una católica, una mujer. Los reporteros trataron de hablar con ella y con Patrick sobre el incendio, pero no respondieron. No confiaban en que los reporteros dijeran la verdad. Para empezar de nuevo, ella y su familia se mudaron a una casa en el vecindario de Bridgeport. Ella nunca pudo escapar de la culpa por el incendio. Patrick murió en 1894 y Catherine murió aproximadamente un año después. Lamentablemente, la leyenda de la Sra. O'Leary y su vaca iniciando el Gran Incendio de Chicago todavía se cuenta hoy. Podemos cambiar eso diciendo la verdad sobre ellos. Podemos cambiar eso diciendo la verdad sobre ellos.

Palabras de vocabulario

Jornalero: persona contratada por un día o más para realizar un trabajo físico que no requiere conocimientos especializados

Alistado: cuando una persona se ha inscrito en el ejército

Inmigrado: cuando una persona se ha mudado de un país para vivir en otro

Additional Resources about the Great Chicago Fire

CHM Resources

Painted Memories Virtual Student Workshop:

There are no known photographs of the Great Chicago Fire of 1871, but artists' vivid depictions of it help us understand this important event and its lasting impact. Via videoconferencing, this workshop engages students in a close reading experience with Julia Lemos's painting *Memories of the Chicago Fire* and her written account of the disaster. Students share their responses to the painting and the artist's words through writing, drawing, discussion, and movement. The workshop wraps up with a discussion around the effects of disasters and the lessons we can learn from the Great Chicago Fire to help us manage similar situations today. The session concludes with time for student questions.

<https://www.chicagohistory.org/education/field-trips/virtual-field-trips/>

City on Fire: Chicago 1871 Exhibition and Website

Learn more about the exhibition, programming at the Chicago History Museum and around the city. Access free resources, which will grow over time. www.Chicago1871.org

The Great Chicago Fire and the Web of Memory Website

This site includes many artifacts and documents from the Chicago History Museum that kids will enjoy seeing, but best navigated with an adult, as the site is very dense. www.greatchicagofire.org

Books

For Young People

- *I Survived the Great Chicago Fire, 1871* by Lauren Tarshis; ages 7 to 10
- *Fiery Night: A Boy, His Goat, and the Great Chicago Fire* by Sally M. Walker; ages 8 to 11
- *Children of the Fire* by Harriette Gillem Robinet; ages 8 to 12
- *Emmi in the City: A Great Chicago Fire Survival Story* by Salima Alikhan; ages 8 to 12
- *The Great Chicago Fire: Rising from the Ashes* by Katherine Hannigan; ages 8 to 12
- *The Great Chicago Fire of 1871* by Kay Melchisedech Olson; ages 9 to 12
- *The Great Fire* by Jim Murphy; ages 9 to 12

For Adults

- *The Great Chicago Fire and the Myth of Mrs. O'Leary's Cow* by Richard F. Bales
- *Chicago's Great Fire: The Destruction and Resurrection of an Iconic America City*, by Carl Smith
- *Urban Disorder and the Shape of Belief: The Great Chicago Fire, the Haymarket Bomb and the Model Town of Pullman*, by Carl Smith
- *The Great Peshtigo Fire: An Eyewitness Account* by Reverend Peter Pernin

Websites

Lessons from History: The Chicago Fire of 1871

Featuring Casey Grant from the National Fire Protection Association and best-selling author Lauren Tarshis of the *I Survived* book series. Running time 7:09. Recommended for ages 8 and up. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VZhvbmqYniA>

The Great Chicago Fire: A Chicago Stories Special

PBS special that includes animations, recreations, and interviews with historians and with descendants of eyewitnesses. Running Time: 56:24. Recommended for ages 11 and up. www.pbs.org/video/the-great-chicago-fire-i17jer