



City on Fire, Chicago 1871 – Smoldering 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 a 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 “Smoldering City” introduces what happened in the immediate aftermath of the fire and the ways people remembered the Great Chicago Fire through collecting and saving objects, making photographs, and creating paintings. 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 aftermath of the Great Chicago Fire
- ◆ Discuss how people use art to understand events
- ◆ 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

- ◆ This video is recommended for students in grades 3–5.
- ◆ The running time of *City on Fire – The Smoldering City* is 06:17
- ◆ The video is divided into four sections, three with corresponding activities:
 - Introduction – 00:09
 - What Is It? – 00:33
 - Understanding the Fire through Art – 02:42
 - Meet Julia Lemos– 04:30
- ◆ Preview the video and review activities to plan your instruction.
- ◆ Pause video as needed to give students time to complete the activities.
- ◆ 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 and improve future videos.

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>

- ◆ Inquiry – SS.3-5.IS.1; SS.3-5.IS.5
- ◆ Grade 3 – SS.3.H.2; SS.3.H.3
- ◆ Grade 4 – SS.4.H.2; SS.4.H.3;
- ◆ Grade 5 – SS.5.H.2; SS.5.H.3

Common Core, Anchor Standards:
<http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/CCRA/>

- ◆ Reading: 1 and 7
- ◆ Writing: 3 and 7
- ◆ Speaking & Listening: 1, 2, and 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.Geo.3.3-5
- ◆ D2.His.2.3-5; D2.His.10.3-5; D2.His.12.3-5; D2.His.14.3-5
- ◆ D4.3.3-5; D4.4.3-5

Suggested Pre-Viewing Activities -

Watch one or both of these videos, recommended for grades 3-5

“City on Fire: Chicago 1871, The Wooden City” (The first video in this series)

This video helps students consider the combustible materials from which the city was constructed, how social divisions shaped life in Chicago in 1871, and introduces the O’Leary family. Embedded activities encourage close looking and critical thinking. Running time: 7 min, 44 sec.

The “City on Fire: Burning City” video introduces students to firefighting in 1871, the geography of the blaze, and a real couple, the Hudlins, who survived the fire and, by their actions, had a positive impact on their community.

Activities associated with both videos can be used independently of each other, enabling educators to customize their classroom experiences. Both videos and learning guides are available at <https://www.chicagohistory.org/education/field-trips/virtual-field-trips/#gallery-tour-videos>

Suggested Post-Viewing Activities

Journaling

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

Artifact Detective:

If you want more practice looking closely at artifacts, use your observation skills to guess what these melted objects were before the fire! Recommended for ages 6 and up. *Three pages, but only the last page will need to be printed for each child.*

https://www.chicagohistory.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/CHM_ChicagoFire_ActivityKit_ArtifactDetective.pdf

What Is It?

Activity Outline

Summary:

The destruction the Great Chicago Fire left behind was not just buildings, but also the everyday things people used. The intense heat of the fire melted, reshaped, discolored, and damaged metal, ceramics, glass, and paper. People collected these items as souvenirs and mementos of the fire. Over the years, many of these items have become artifacts in the Museum's collection.

Activity Directions:

- ◆ Watch the first part of the "What Is It?" section starting at 00:33.
- ◆ When the video displays a "pause" message, invite students to make observations about the artifacts. You can also use the "What Is It?" worksheet. The images will appear both on the video and on the worksheet.
- ◆ If using the worksheet, students can write their observations in the chart and then write down their guess as to what that item is.
- ◆ When students are ready, un-pause the video and the narrator will go over what each item is.

Materials:

- ◆ "What Is It?" worksheet
- ◆ Writing utensil
- ◆ Optional: project larger versions of the mystery artifacts from the image packet on a screen.
 - ◇ Mystery Artifact 1 – Plate
 - ◇ Mystery Artifact 2 – Dolls heads
 - ◇ Mystery Artifact 3– Brick with toy tea set melted to it
 - ◇ Mystery Artifact 4 – Boxes of small nails

Post-Activity Discussion Questions:

- ◆ What do these objects tell us about everyday life in 1871? Do we use any similar items today?
- ◆ Why do you think people collected or saved items that were melted or damaged by the fire?
- ◆ Do you or your family members have souvenirs from an important moment in your lives?
- ◆ What can we learn from the fire by studying these objects?

Vocabulary

Scorched: burned and discolored typically by fire or intense heat

Artifact: an object made and used by people in the past.

Vocabulario

Chamuscado: quemado y descolorido, normalmente por el fuego o el calor intenso

Artefacto: objeto fabricado y utilizado por personas en el pasado


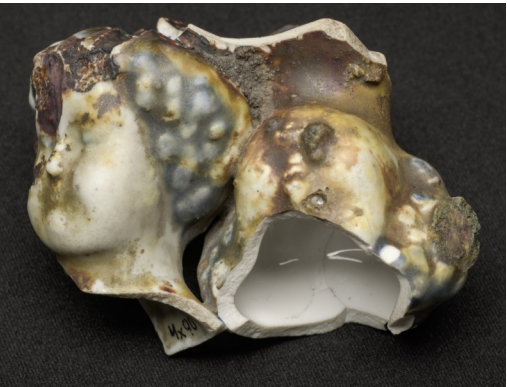
What is it? | ¿Qué es?



In addition to burning businesses and homes, the things inside those places burned as well. Objects made out of wood, books, paper, and cloth were in many cases destroyed. Things made out of metal, glass, and ceramic (a type of clay) were often scorched or melted into new shapes by the intense heat of the fire.

Look closely at the following image of artifacts. Make notes about what you see (colors, shapes, marks). Guess what you think it is and explain what clues helped you come to that idea.

Además de quemar los negocios y las casas, también ardieron las cosas que había dentro de esos lugares. Los objetos de madera, libros, papel y telas fueron en muchos casos destruidos. Los objetos de metal, vidrio y cerámica (un tipo de arcilla) se chamuscaron o se fundían en nuevas formas por el intenso calor del fuego.

Observa atentamente la siguiente imagen de artefactos. Anota lo que ves (colores, formas, marcas). Adivina qué crees que es y explica qué pistas te han ayudado a llegar a esa idea.

Artifact: Artefacto:	What I see is... Lo que se ve es...	I think it is... Why? Creo que es...¿Por qué?
		
		

Artifact: Artefacto:	What I see is... Lo que se ve es...	I think it is... Why? Creo que es...¿Por qué?
		
		

What artifact surprised you the most? Why? | ¿Qué artefacto le ha sorprendido más? ¿Por qué?

What artifact was the most interesting? Why? | ¿Qué artefacto fue el más interesante? ¿Por qué?

Understanding the Fire Through Art

Activity Outline

Summary:

Cameras in 1871 took a long time to set up, which made photographing the Great Chicago Fire impossible. Artists like Julia Lemos, Alfred Waud, and others used their skills to create sketches and drawings of the events. Other artists used those drawings to create lithographs and eventually the cyclorama of the fire. Cycloramas were like the IMAX or Virtual Reality of the late 1800s. The cyclorama study at CHM is 4 feet tall and 40 feet long and was made as a practice for a larger cyclorama. The final cyclorama went on display in 1893 in downtown Chicago. The final cyclorama was 40 feet tall and nearly 400 feet long! It was hung in a circle so visitors could stand inside it and feel like they were at the fire.

A digitized and interactive version of the cyclorama is available through CHM's Chicago00 project. To view the cyclorama, visit <https://1871.chicago00.org/>

Activity Directions:

- ◆ Before watching the Understanding the Fire through Art section (02:42), hand out the student worksheet. Students can follow along the video and answer the questions.
- ◆ Pause the video as needed to give students time to answer the questions. A "pause" message will show on screen indicating when to stop.
- ◆ If possible, project the image of the Rush Street Bridge or have students work with printed copies of it.
- ◆ Discuss student responses and then move on to the next portion of the video and associated question.

Materials:

- ◆ "Rush Street Bridge" worksheet
- ◆ Writing utensil
- ◆ Optional: project larger version of the scene from image packet or make copies for the students

Post-Activity Discussion Questions:

- ◆ How can art show us what past events were like, especially when we don't have photographs?



Cyclorama Section — Rush Street Bridge

Understanding the Fire Through Art

Entender el fuego a través del arte

1. People were feeling the fire. Find three ways people are escaping the fire.

La gente huye del incendio. Encuentra tres formas en las que la gente está escapando del fuego.

2. People are carrying things. What are some items you notice?

La gente lleva cosas. ¿En qué objetos te fijas?

3. The fire and crowd are loud. What noises might you hear?

El fuego y esta multitud son ruidosos. ¿Qué ruidos podrías escuchar?

4. What words would you use to describe this scene?

¿Qué palabras utilizarías para describir esta escena?



Meet Julia Lemos Activity Outline

Summary:

Students are asked to draw, write, and make inferences about the thoughts, hopes, and dreams of Julia Lemos using the worksheet. Prior to this activity, reviewing what inferences are and how to make them will be helpful. The Julia Lemos narrative is adapted from Julia Lemos's own written account following the fire. To read the original transcript visit, <https://greatchicagofire.org/anthology-of-fire-narratives/julia-lemos/>

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:

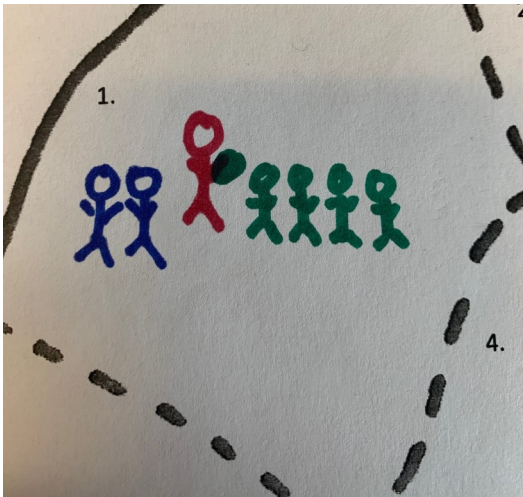
- ◆ Distribute and read the biography of Julia Lemos.
- ◆ Watch the silhouette video portraying their experience during the fire, time stamp 04:30.
- ◆ Give students time to complete their historical head worksheet. Have students share out their completed sheets.

Materials:

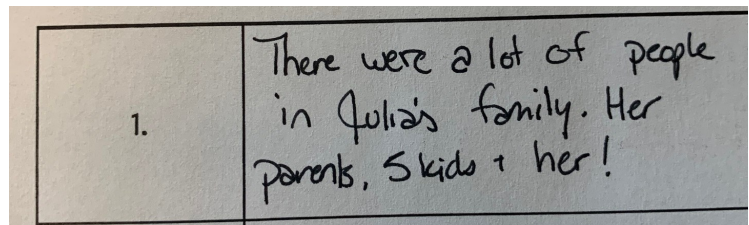
- ◆ Historical Heads worksheet
- ◆ Writing utensil
- ◆ Meet Julia Lemos biography
- ◆ Optional: colored pencils, crayons, or markers for student drawings.

Post-Activity Discussion Questions:

- ◆ What challenges did the family face before the fire?
- ◆ What challenges do you think the family faced after the fire?
- ◆ How would you describe Julia's painting? (Included in image packet)
- ◆ What words could you use to describe Julia Lemos?



Example of student drawing.



Example of student writing on reverse.

Historical Head | Cabeza Histórica

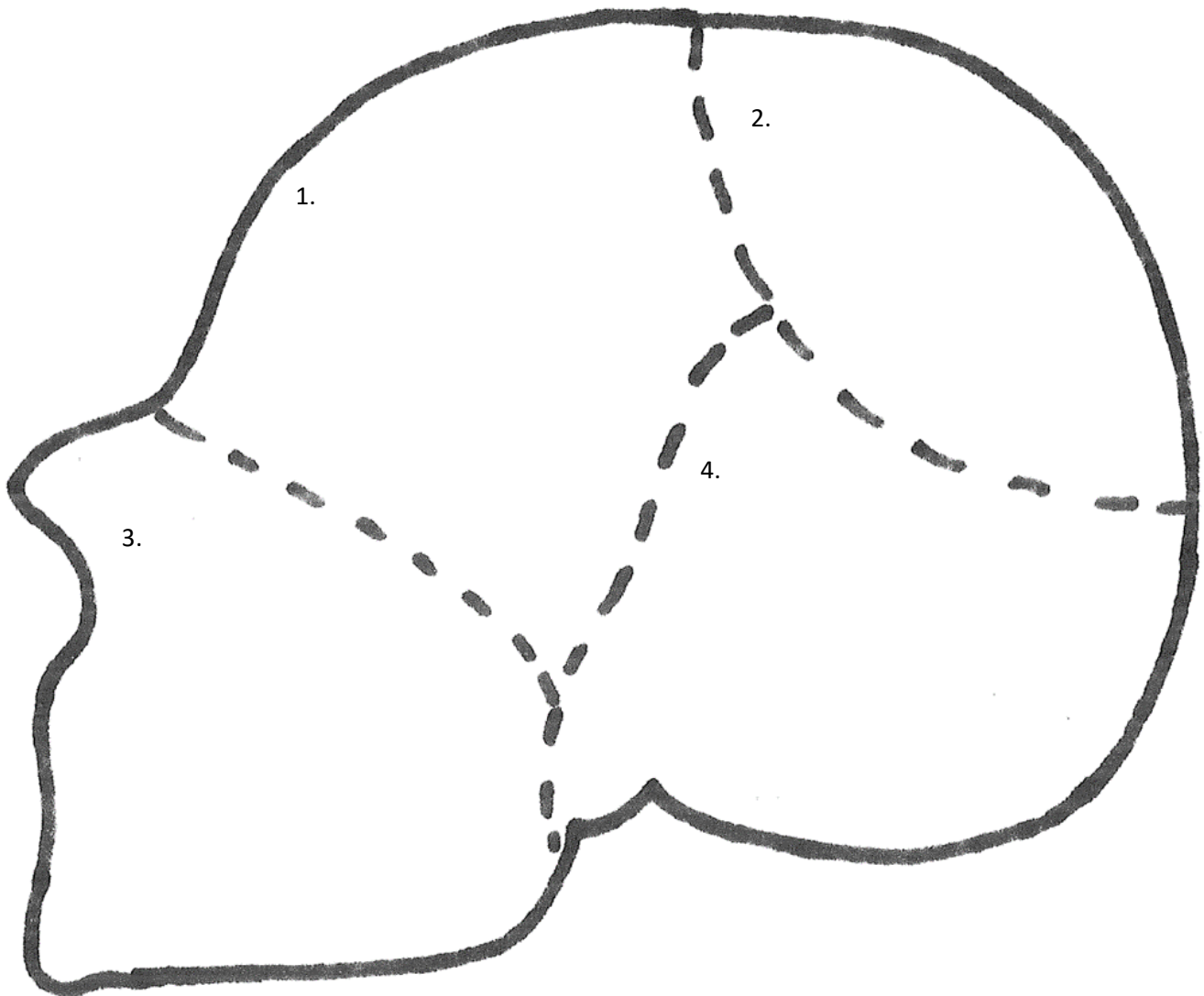
Julia Lemos

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

Think about the Julia Lemos video and the "Meet Julia Lemos" biography. Make inferences about her using the head below. Use symbols and drawings to show your ideas about the thoughts, challenges, hopes, and dreams of Anna Elizabeth and Joseph Hudlin .

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 vídeo de Julia Lemos y en la biografía "Conoce a Julia Lemos". Haz inferencias sobre ella y utiliza la cabeza de abajo. Utiliza símbolos y dibujos para representar tus ideas sobre los pensamientos, desafíos, esperanzas y sueños de Julia Lemos.



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 her? ¿Cuál es la pregunta que le harías?	

How do you think Julia and her family felt after The fire?

¿Cómo crees que se sintieron Julia y su familia 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?

Meet Julia Lemos

This biography is adapted from Julia Lemos's own written account following the fire.



About 9:00 that evening, my baby was asleep, and I began to get ready for bed. I pulled the **shutters** closed, but the wind made it very hard to do. I thought, “what a wind, it would be bad if there was a fire.” I did not know it, but the fire had already started on the West Side. About 5:00 in the morning, I woke up to a rumbling noise outside my window. I opened the shutters and the whole street was crowded with people.

My neighbor told me the city burned all night, and the fire was coming to the North Side. I woke my father and mother up. They got the baby ready, and I went to get my other four children from where they were staying. We got back, and I packed up some of our belongings into **trunks**. My **landlord** offered to take some of our belongings to safety.

We started walking north with the crowd and found the belongings that our landlord took. The wind pushed the fire closer to us. We started to run again and left everything behind. My father thought we were safe, so we stopped again. We laid the children down to go to sleep, and it began to rain. My father went to find some place we could take shelter. He found a shed nearby, and all eight of us crammed inside it.

In the morning, my father went to the farmhouse and asked for some food or water. They kindly sent back a pitcher of milk and a cup to drink out of. Luckily, my mother had packed some bread we could eat.

My father and mother went back to find our belongings. A policeman saw my father and asked what he was looking for. My father told him there were two trunks with our names on them. The policeman responded, "Here they are," and pointed to a mound of dirt. "I buried them last night to keep them safe." My father returned with our trunks, and we left the small shed to find shelter.

A nearby church opened up for **refugees**. The church was crowded with people, rich and poor alike. One woman even wore a silk dress and diamond earrings!

The government worked to help people whose homes burned. They sent coffee and food, but it did not taste very good. They also offered free train tickets so people could get away from Chicago. We had family in New York City and decided to get the train tickets. Not everyone on the train was from Chicago like us. We told them about the fire, and many people were kind to us and the children. Some even bought them cake and candy! We arrived in New York, and shortly after my aunt and her cousin met us at the train station. Their carriage took us to their home, and we were finally safe.

Julia Lemos and her family returned to Chicago about a year and half after the fire. She was able to get her old job back at printing company called Carqueville & Shober Lithograph. In 1912, about 40 years after the fire, she wrote her account and painted "Memories of the Chicago Fire in 1871."

Vocabulary:

Shutter: moveable cover outside of a window

Trunk: a box or chest for holding clothes or other articles especially for travelling

Landlord: a person who owns land or houses and rents them to other people

Refugee: a person who seeks shelter or protection from danger or distress, including fires, like the Great Chicago Fire, natural disasters, or war.

Conozca a Julia Lemos

Esta biografía es una adaptación del relato escrito por la propia Julia Lemos tras el incendio.



A eso de las nueve de la noche, mi bebé estaba dormido y empecé a prepararme para ir a la cama. Cerré las **persianas**, pero el viento lo hacía muy difícil. Pensé: "qué viento, sería malo que hubiera un incendio". No lo sabía, pero el fuego ya había comenzado en el lado oeste. A eso de las 5 de la mañana, me desperté con un ruido sordo fuera de mi ventana. Abrí las persianas y toda la calle estaba llena de gente.

Mi vecino me dijo que la ciudad había ardido toda la noche y que el fuego estaba llegando al lado norte. Desperté a mi padre y a mi madre. Ellos prepararon al bebé y yo fui a buscar a mis otros cuatro hijos a donde se encontraban. Volvimos y empaqué algunas de nuestras pertenencias en **baúles**. Mi **casero** se ofreció a llevar algunas de nuestras pertenencias a un lugar seguro.

Empezamos a caminar hacia el norte con la multitud y encontramos las pertenencias que se llevó nuestro casero. El viento empujó el fuego más cerca de nosotros. Empezamos a correr de nuevo y dejamos todo atrás. Mi padre pensó que estábamos a salvo, así que nos detuvimos de nuevo. Acostamos a los niños para que se durmieran y empezó a llover. Mi padre fue a buscar un lugar donde pudiéramos refugiarnos. Encontró un cobertizo cercano y los ocho nos metimos dentro.

Por la mañana, mi padre fue a la granja y pidió algo de comida o agua. Le enviaron amablemente una jarra de leche y una taza para beber. Por suerte, mi madre había empacado algo de pan que podíamos comer.

Mi padre y mi madre volvieron a buscar nuestras pertenencias. Un policía vio a mi padre y le preguntó qué estaba buscando. Mi padre le dijo que había dos baúles con nuestros nombres. El policía respondió: "Aquí están", y señaló un montículo de tierra. "Los enterré anoche para mantenerlos a salvo". Mi padre volvió con nuestros baúles y salimos del pequeño cobertizo para buscar refugio.

Una iglesia cercana se abrió para **los refugiados**. La iglesia estaba abarrotada de gente, ricos y pobres por igual. Una mujer llevaba incluso un vestido de seda y pendientes de diamantes.

El gobierno trabajó para ayudar a las personas cuyos hogares se quemaron. Enviaron café y comida, pero no tenía muy buen sabor. También ofrecieron billetes de tren gratuitos para que la gente pudiera salir de Chicago. Teníamos familia en Nueva York y decidimos comprar los billetes de tren. No todos los que iban en el tren eran de Chicago como nosotros. Les contamos lo del incendio y mucha gente fue amable con nosotros y con los niños. Mucha gente fue amable con nosotros y con los niños. Algunos incluso les compraron pasteles y caramelos. Llegamos a Nueva York, y poco después mi tía y su primo nos recibieron en la estación de tren. Su carruaje nos llevó a su casa, y por fin estábamos a salvo.

Julia Lemos y su familia regresaron a Chicago aproximadamente un año y medio después del incendio. Pudo recuperar su antiguo trabajo en la imprenta Carqueville & Shober Lithograph. En 1912, unos 40 años después del incendio, escribió su relato y pintó "Recuerdos del incendio de Chicago de 1871".

Vocabulario:

Persiana: cubierta móvil en el exterior de una ventana

Baúl: caja o cofre para guardar la ropa u otros artículos, especialmente para viajar

Casero(a): persona que posee terrenos o casas y los alquila a otras personas

Refugiado: persona que busca refugio o protección ante un peligro o una situación de peligro, incluidos los incendios, como el Gran Incendio de Chicago, las catástrofes naturales o la guerra.

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

Videos

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