

Before You Read

The Story of an Eyewitness

Connect to the Article

Think about how people come together during times of need. During emergencies, such as natural disasters, how do people help each other?

Partner Talk With a partner, discuss your family's or school's emergency plans. For what emergencies has your family or school prepared?

Build Background

In "The Story of an Eyewitness," Jack London describes the devastating effects of an earthquake on the city of San Francisco, California, in 1906. London, who lived near San Francisco, was able to travel quickly to the city to give a firsthand report of the events.

- The earthquake started along the San Andreas Fault. The fault is a significant break in Earth's crust that runs from the northern end of the Gulf of California to the San Francisco area.
- As many as 3,000 people may have died as a result of the 1906 earthquake, and 225,000 were left homeless.

Vocabulary

wrought (rôt) *v.* worked; made; created (p. 250).

A solution was wrought by the village leaders.

residential (rez'ə den'shəl) *adj.* related to homes (p. 250).

Local homeowners objected to plans for a hotel in the town's residential area.

debris (də brē') *n.* remains of something destroyed (p. 251).

The volunteers cleared the debris from the park after the windstorm.

disrupted (dis rupt'ed) *v.* interrupted (p. 251).

A knock on the door disrupted our conversation.

hysteria (his ter'ē ə) *n.* overwhelming fear or emotion (p. 253). *The fire alarm caused hysteria in the auditorium.*

Meet Jack London



Life of Adventure Jack London lived a life as exciting as his adventure novels. Forced to earn a living at an early age, London made his way as a pirate, a sailor, and a coal shoveler before venturing into Alaska to search for gold. Finding none, he returned to California and began to write stories and novels based on his adventures. In 1906 a newspaper asked the author to write an account of a deadly earthquake in San Francisco.

Famous Works London's novels include *Call of the Wild* and *The Sea Wolf*.

Jack London was born in 1876 and died in 1916.



Literature Online

Author Search For more about Jack London, go to glencoe.com and enter QuickPass code GL29763u2.

Set Purposes for Reading

BQ BIG Question

As you read, ask yourself, how do people react to natural disasters?
What can I learn from this eyewitness report of an earthquake?

Literary Element Diction

Diction refers to an author's choice and arrangement of words. Authors choose words carefully depending on their purpose for writing. In "The Story of an Eyewitness," London uses language that helps readers see, feel, and hear the settings and events that he observes. He wants readers to understand exactly what he is witnessing.

As you read, think about the words London chooses. Ask yourself, are the words appropriate and effective? Does the diction create vivid images in my mind? How might the diction be different if the events were described in a reference book?

Reading Strategy Monitor Comprehension

When you **monitor comprehension**, you check to see how well you understand what you are reading. Understanding what you read is your most important task as a reader.

As you read, ask yourself questions about main ideas and events. When you can't answer a question, use one or more of these techniques: reread a section you did not understand, look up unfamiliar words, review photographs or illustrations, or reread footnotes to clarify information.

Use a chart like the one below to help monitor your comprehension. Begin by writing down what you already know about the San Francisco earthquake. Then write down what you would like to know. When you are finished reading, write down what you have learned. Reread, review, and clarify any information you don't understand.

What I Know	What I Want to Know	What I Learned

Learning Objectives

For pages 248–261

In studying this text, you will focus on the following objectives:

Literary Study: Analyzing diction.

Reading: Monitoring comprehension.

TRY IT

Monitor Comprehension When you read a difficult book or complicated instructions or study a foreign language, you should monitor your comprehension by slowing down when you read, going back to reread certain parts, and using a dictionary to look up unfamiliar words.

don

Jack London
ing as his
forced to earn
age, London
pirate, a
hoveler before
ka to search
one, he
nia and began
d novels
tures. In 1906
d the author to
f a deadly
Francisco.

London's novels
Wild and *The*

born in 1876

e Online

more about
glencoe.com
ss code

THE STORY OF an Eyewitness

Jack London

The earthquake shook down in San Francisco hundreds of thousands of dollars' worth of walls and chimneys. But the conflagration¹ that followed burned up hundreds of millions of dollars' worth of property. There is no estimating within hundreds of millions the actual damage **wrought**. Not in history has a modern imperial city been so completely destroyed. San Francisco is gone. Nothing remains of it but memories and a fringe of dwelling houses on its outskirts. Its industrial section is wiped out. Its business section is wiped out. Its social and **residential** section is wiped out. The factories and warehouses, the great stores and newspaper strolling, the hotels and the palaces of the nabobs,² are all gone. Remains only the fringe of dwelling houses on the outskirts of what was once San Francisco.

Within an hour after the earthquake shock the smoke of San Francisco's burning was a lurid tower visible a hundred miles away. And for three days and nights this lurid tower swayed in the sky, reddening the sun, darkening the day, and filling the land with smoke.

On Wednesday morning at a quarter past five came the earthquake. A minute later the flames were leaping

Diction How does London's use of the words *wiped out* help you imagine the scene?

1 A **conflagration** is a very large, destructive fire.

2 **Nabobs** are well-known persons of great wealth.

Vocabulary

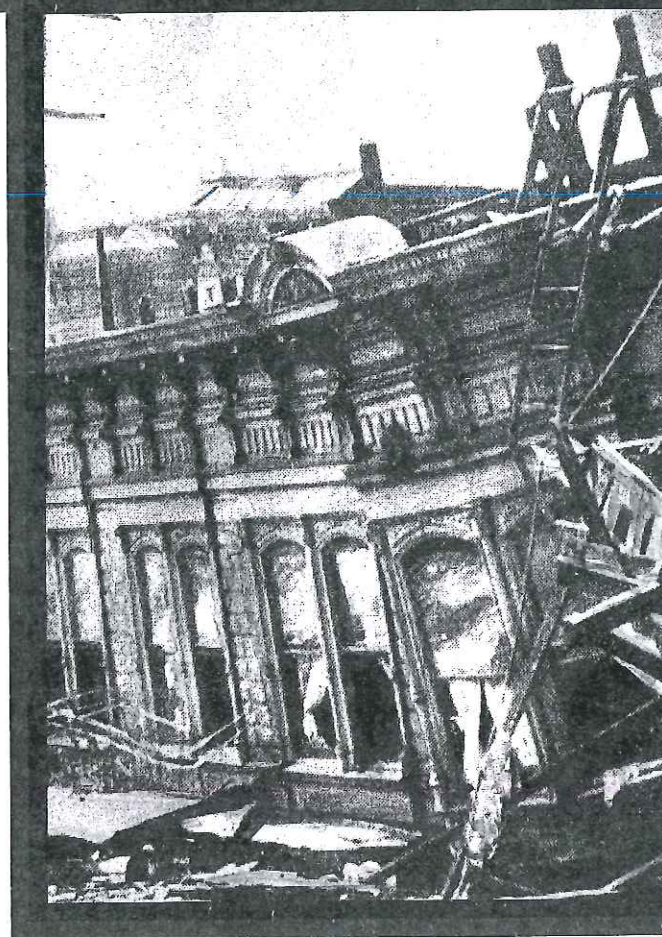
wrought (rôt) *v.* worked; made; created

residential (rez'ə den'shəl) *adj.* related to homes



The Valencia Hotel where 75 people were killed in the San Francisco earthquake of 1906.

upward. In a dozen different quarters south of Market Street, in the working-class ghetto, and in the factories, fires started. There was no opposing the flames. There was no organization, no communication. All the cunning adjustments of a twentieth century city had been smashed by the earthquake. The streets were humped into ridges and depressions, and piled with the **debris** of fallen walls. The steel rails were twisted into perpendicular and horizontal angles. The telephone and telegraph systems were **disrupted**. And the great water-mains had burst. All the shrewd contrivances and safeguards of man had been thrown out of gear by thirty seconds' twitching of the earth-crust.



Vo

ly

debris (də brē') *n.* remains of something destroyed

disrupted (dis rupt'ed) *v.* interrupted

THE FIRE MADE ITS OWN DRAFT

By Wednesday afternoon, inside of twelve hours, half the heart of the city was gone. At that time I watched the vast conflagration from out on the bay. It was dead calm. Not a flicker of wind stirred. Yet from every side wind was pouring in upon the city. East, west, north, and south, strong winds were blowing upon the doomed city. The heated air rising made an enormous vacuum. Thus did the fire of itself build its own colossal³ chimney through the atmosphere. Day and night this dead calm continued, and yet, near to the flames, the wind was often half a gale, so mighty was the vacuum.

Wednesday night saw the destruction of the very heart of the city. Dynamite was lavishly used, and many of San Francisco's proudest structures were crumbled by man himself into ruins, but there was no withstanding the onrush of the flames. Time and again successful stands were made by the fire-fighters, and every time the flames flanked around on either side or came up from the rear, and turned to defeat the hard-won victory. An enumeration⁴ of the buildings destroyed would be a directory of San Francisco. An enumeration of the buildings undestroyed would be a line and several addresses. An enumeration of the deeds of heroism would stock a library and bankrupt the Carnegie medal fund.⁵ An enumeration of the dead will never be made. All vestiges of them were destroyed by the flames. The number of the victims of the earthquake will never be known. South of Market Street, where the loss of life was particularly heavy, was the first to catch fire.

Remarkable as it may seem, Wednesday night while the whole city crashed and roared into ruin, was a quiet night. There were no crowds. There was no shouting

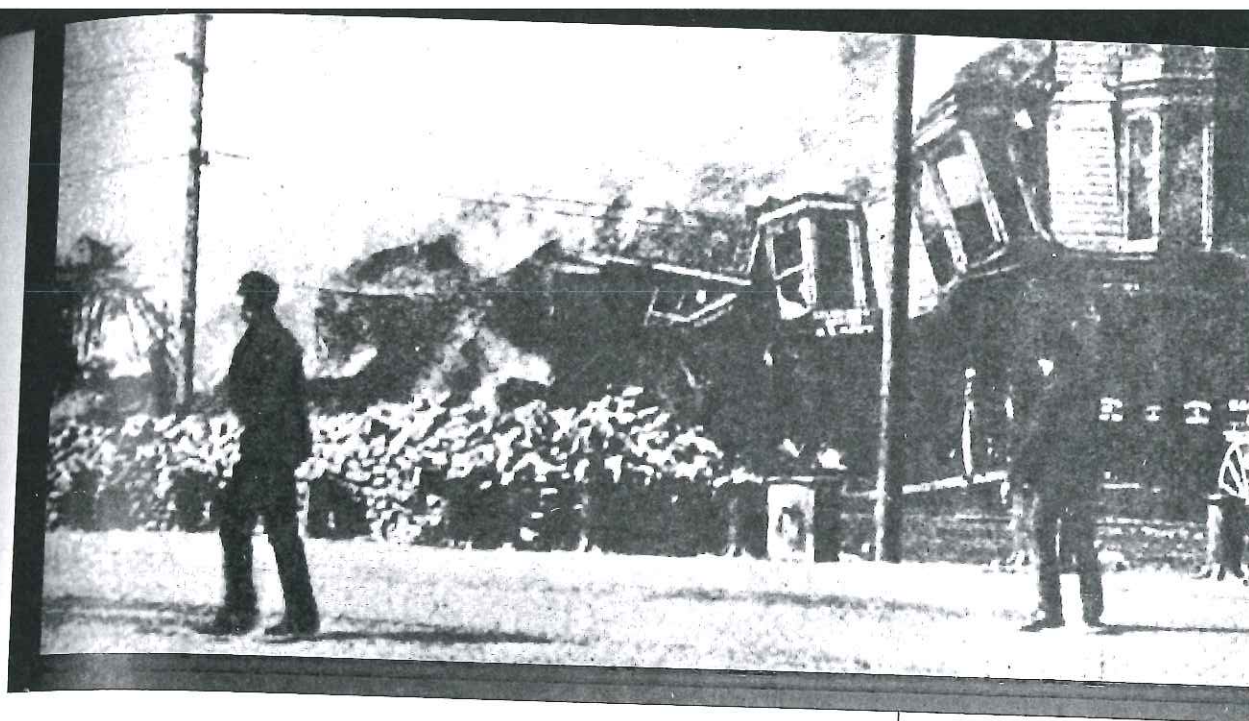
Monitor Comprehension
Why do you think dynamite was used to try to save the city?

3 Something **colossal** is immense or gigantic.

4 **Enumeration** is the act of naming, or listing, of items one by one.

5 The **Carnegie medal fund** was created in 1904 by American Andrew Carnegie (1835-1919) to honor persons who have performed heroic deeds.

comprehension
think dynamite
try to save



and yelling. There was no **hysteria**, no disorder. I passed Wednesday night in the path of the advancing flames, and in all those terrible hours I saw not one woman who wept, not one man who was excited, not one person who was in the slightest degree panic stricken.

Before the flames, throughout the night, fled tens of thousands of homeless ones. Some were wrapped in blankets. Others carried bundles of bedding and dear household treasures. Sometimes a whole family was harnessed to a carriage or delivery wagon that was weighted down with their possessions. Baby buggies, toy wagons, and go-carts were used as trucks, while every other person was dragging a **trunk**. Yet everybody was gracious. The most perfect courtesy obtained. Never in all San Francisco's history, were her people so kind and courteous as on this night of terror.

A CARAVAN OF TRUNKS

All night these tens of thousands fled before the flames. Many of them, the poor people from the labor ghetto, had fled all day as well. They had left their homes burdened

Vocabulary

hysteria (his ter'ē ə) *n.* overwhelming fear or emotion

Easy Street, San Francisco, 15 minutes after the fire began, during the 1906 earthquake.

Diction What does London's use of the word *harnessed* suggest about the people fleeing the fire?

Visual Vocabulary

A **trunk** is a large solid piece of luggage with a hinged lid that is used for transporting clothing and personal items.



with possessions. Now and again they lightened up, flinging out upon the street clothing and treasures they had dragged for miles.

They held on longest to their trunks, and over these trunks many a strong man broke his heart that night. The hills of San Francisco are steep, and up these hills, mile after mile, were the trunks dragged. Everywhere were trunks with across them lying their exhausted owners, men and women. Before the march of the flames were flung picket lines of soldiers. And a block at a time, as the flames advanced, these pickets retreated. One of their tasks was to keep the trunk-pullers moving. The exhausted creatures, stirred on by the menace of bayonets, would arise and struggle up the steep pavements, pausing from weakness every five or ten feet.

Often, after surmounting a heart-breaking hill, they would find another wall of flame advancing upon them at right angles and be compelled to change anew the line of their retreat. In the end, completely played out, after toiling for a dozen hours like giants, thousands of them were compelled to abandon their trunks. Here the shopkeepers and soft members of the middle class were at a disadvantage. But the working-men dug holes in vacant lots and backyards and buried their trunks.

THE DOOMED CITY

At nine o'clock Wednesday evening I walked down through the very heart of the city. I walked through miles and miles of magnificent buildings and towering skyscrapers. Here was no fire. All was in perfect order. The police patrolled the streets. Every building had its watchman at the door. And yet it was doomed, all of it. There was no water. The dynamite was giving out. And at right angles two different conflagrations were sweeping down upon it.

At one o'clock in the morning I walked down through the same section. Everything still stood intact. There was no fire. And yet there was a change. A rain of ashes was falling. The watchmen at the doors were gone. The police had been withdrawn. There were no firemen, no fire-engines, no men fighting with dynamite. The district had

Monitor Comprehension

What does London mean when he writes, "many a strong man broke his heart that night"?

Diction What effect do these short sentences create?

nsion
mean
any a
is heart

been absolutely abandoned. I stood at the corner of Kearney and Market, in the very innermost heart of San Francisco. Kearney Street was deserted. Half a dozen blocks away it was burning on both sides. The street was a wall of flame. And against this wall of flame, silhouetted sharply, were two United States cavalrymen sitting on their horses, calmly watching. That was all. Not another person was in sight. In the intact heart of the city, two troopers sat their horses and watched.

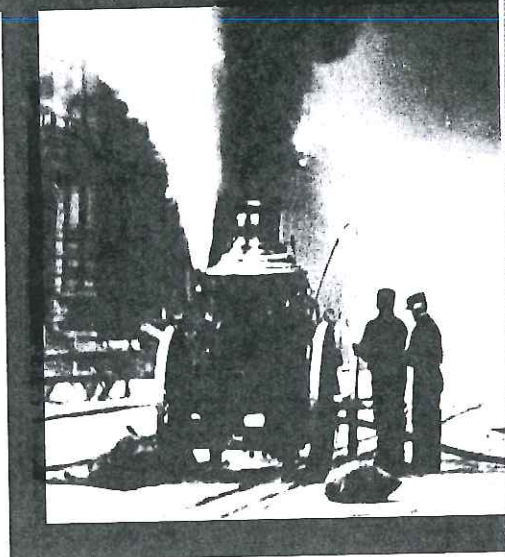
SPREAD OF THE CONFLAGRATION

Surrender was complete. There was no water. The sewers had long since been pumped dry. There was no dynamite. Another fire had broken out further uptown, and now from three sides conflagrations were sweeping down. The fourth side had been burned earlier in the day. In that direction stood the tottering walls of the Examiner Building, the burned-out Call Building,⁶ the smoldering ruins of the Grand Hotel, and the gutted, devastated, dynamited Palace Hotel.

The following will illustrate the sweep of the flames and the inability of men to calculate their spread. At eight o'clock Wednesday evening I passed through Union Square.⁷ It was packed with refugees.

Thousands of them had gone to bed on the grass. Government tents had been set up, supper was being cooked, and the refugees were lining up for free meals.

At half past one in the morning three sides of Union Square were in flames. The fourth side, where stood the



A fire engine responds to the crisis following the San Francisco earthquake.

View the Photograph. In what way is firefighting equipment different today?

⁶ The *Examiner* and the *Call* were San Francisco daily newspapers.

⁷ *Union Square* is a block in downtown San Francisco, which at the time of the fire was the location of the city's central hotel and shopping district.



The road outside the main post office in San Francisco, which has been ripped up by the force of an earthquake.

great St. Francis Hotel, was still holding out. An hour later, ignited from top and sides the St. Francis was flaming heavenward. Union Square, heaped high with mountains of trunks, was deserted. Troops, refugees, and all had retreated.


A FORTUNE FOR A HORSE!

It was at Union Square that I saw a man offering a thousand dollars for a team of horses. He was in charge of a truck piled high with trunks from some hotel. It had been hauled here into what was considered safety, and the horses had been taken out. The flames were on three sides of the Square and there were no horses.

Also, at this time, standing beside the truck, I urged a man to seek safety in flight. He was all but hemmed in by several conflagrations. He was an old man and he was on crutches. Said he: "Today is my birthday. Last night I was worth thirty thousand dollars. I bought some delicate fish and other things for my birthday dinner. I have had no dinner, and all I own are these crutches."



What does this description say about how San Francisco's citizens felt at the time?



I convinced him of his danger and started him limping on his way. An hour later, from a distance, I saw the truckload of trunks burning merrily in the middle of the street.

On Thursday morning at a quarter past five, just twenty-four hours after the earthquake, I sat on the steps of a small residence on Nob Hill. With me sat Japanese, Italians, Chinese, and negroes—a bit of the cosmopolitan flotsam⁸ of the wreck of the city. All about were the palaces of the nabob pioneers of Forty-nine.⁹ To the east and south at right angles, were advancing two mighty walls of flame.

I went inside with the owner of the house on the steps of which I sat. He was cool and cheerful and hospitable. "Yesterday morning," he said, "I was worth six hundred thousand dollars. This morning this house is all I have left. It will go in fifteen minutes." He pointed to a large cabinet. "That is my wife's collection of china. This rug upon which we stand is a present. It cost fifteen hundred dollars. Try that piano. Listen to its tone. There are few like it. There are no horses. The flames will be here in fifteen minutes."

Outside the old Mark Hopkins residence a palace was just catching fire. The troops were falling back and driving the refugees before them. From every side came the roaring of flames, the crashing of walls, and the detonations of dynamite.

THE DAWN OF THE SECOND DAY

I passed out of the house. Day was trying to dawn through the smoke-pall. A sickly light was creeping over the face of things. Once only the sun broke through the smoke-pall, blood-red, and showing a quarter its usual size. The smoke-pall itself, viewed from beneath, was a rose color that pulsed and fluttered with lavender shades.

⁸ **Nob Hill** is a residential area of San Francisco with many mansions. Something that is **cosmopolitan** is composed of people, qualities, or elements from many different countries. Here, **flotsam** refers to homeless people who wander about from place to place.

⁹ The **pioneers of Forty-nine** are people who became wealthy during the California gold rush of 1849.

Diction London chooses the words *sickly*, *creeping*, *face*, *smoke-pall*, and *blood-red* to describe the city. What image do his words create?



City buildings burning during the San Francisco fire in April 1906. Smoke billows out of several buildings, filling the sky.

View the Photograph In what ways does this photograph help illustrate London's descriptions?

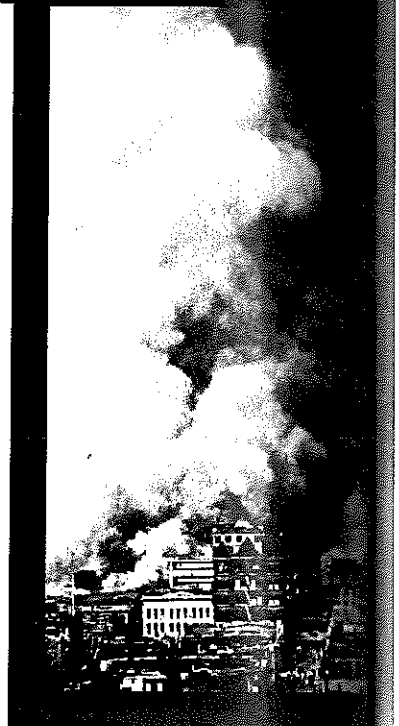
Then it turned to mauve and yellow and dun.¹⁰ There was no sun. And so dawned the second day on stricken San Francisco.

An hour later I was creeping past the shattered dome of the City Hall. Than it there was no better exhibit of the destructive force of the earthquake. Most of the stone had been shaken from the great dome, leaving standing the naked framework of steel. Market Street was piled high with the wreckage, and across the wreckage lay the overthrown pillars of the City Hall shattered into short crosswise sections.

This section of the city with the exception of the Mint¹¹ and the Post-Office, was already a waste of smoking ruins. Here and there through the smoke, creeping warily under the shadows of tottering walls, emerged occasional men and women. It was like the meeting of the handful of survivors after the day of the end of the world.

BEEVES SLAUGHTERED AND ROASTED


On Mission Street lay a dozen steers, in a neat row stretching across the street just as they had been struck down by the flying ruins of the earthquake. The fire had passed through afterward and roasted them. The human dead had been carried away before the fire came. At another place on Mission Street I saw a milk wagon. A



Monitor Comprehension
In what way does this description help you make sense of the word *beeves* in the subhead?

¹⁰ *Mauve* is a purplish-blue or rose color. *Dun* is a dull grayish-brown color.

¹¹ The *Mint* is a building at which money is coined by the government.



steel telegraph pole had smashed down sheer through the driver's seat and crushed the front wheels. The milk cans lay scattered around.

All day Thursday and all Thursday night, all day Friday and Friday night, the flames still raged on.

Friday night saw the flames finally conquered, though not until Russian Hill and Telegraph Hill¹² had been swept and three-quarters of a mile of wharves and docks had been licked up.

THE LAST STAND

The great stand of the fire-fighters was made Thursday night on Van Ness Avenue. Had they failed here, the comparatively few remaining houses of the city would have been swept. Here were the magnificent residences of the second generation of San Francisco nabobs, and these, in a solid zone, were dynamited down across the path of the fire. Here and there the flames leaped the zone, but these fires were beaten out, principally by the use of wet blankets and rugs.

San Francisco, at the present time, is like the crater of a volcano, around which are camped tens of thousands of refugees. At the Presidio¹³ alone are at least twenty thousand. All the surrounding cities and towns are jammed with the homeless ones, where they are being cared for by the relief committees. The refugees were carried free by the railroads to any point they wished to go, and it is estimated that over one hundred thousand people have left the peninsula on which San Francisco stood. The government has the situation in hand, and, thanks to the immediate relief given by the whole United States, there is not the slightest possibility of a famine. The bankers and business men have already set about making preparations to rebuild San Francisco. 🐼

BQ BIG Question

Why was it important for people to rebuild the city?

¹² **Russian Hill** is an area in San Francisco where, at the time of the fire, many large houses were located. **Telegraph Hill** is an area in San Francisco that, at the time of the fire, was a popular residential neighborhood.

¹³ The **Presidio** is a San Francisco district at the northernmost tip of the city. It is the site of many military buildings.

After You Read

Respond and Think Critically

1. What two events occur Wednesday morning within minutes of each other? Explain. [Identify]
2. What is unusual about the behavior of the city's residents on Wednesday night? Explain. [Recall]
3. In what ways are "the cosmopolitan flotsam" and "the nabob pioneers" on Nob Hill different? What do they have in common? Support your answer with details from the article. [Compare]
4. In what way do London's word choice and writing style contribute to your understanding of the article? Explain. [Analyze]
5. Based on the ending of the selection, do you think San Francisco was successfully rebuilt? Support your conclusion. [Conclude]
6. **BQ** **BIG Question** How could the information in this article help people prepare for disasters? [Connect]

Vocabulary

Respond to these questions.

1. Who would be more likely to have **wrought** a ceramic vase—a potter or a cashier?
2. What would you expect to see in a **residential** area—mostly houses or businesses?
3. Where would you be more likely to find **debris**—in a library or at a construction site?
4. Which person would be more likely to have **disrupted** a movie—someone talking loudly or someone eating popcorn?
5. How would people experiencing **hysteria** behave—calmly or emotionally?

Academic Vocabulary

The 1906 earthquake in San Francisco **dramatically** changed the landscape of the city. In the preceding sentence, *dramatically* means "noticeably." *Dramatically* also has another meaning. For example: When the actress arrived on the scene, she was dressed **dramatically** in a long, rustling black gown with a velvet cape trailing from her shoulders. What do you think *dramatically* means in the preceding sentence? What is the difference between the two meanings?


TIP

Analyzing

To answer question 4, look for words and phrases in the article that caught your attention or made you react in a certain way.

- List words and phrases that London uses to describe the earthquake, fire, and overall crisis. What do his descriptions remind you of?
- How do London's descriptions of individuals during the crisis affect your understanding of the whole population of San Francisco during the crisis? Use specific examples.

FOLDABLES Study Organizer Keep track of your ideas about the **BIG Question** in your unit Foldable.

LOG ON  Literature Online

Selection Resources

For Selection Quizzes, eFlashcards, and Reading-Writing Connection activities, go to glencoe.com and enter QuickPass code GL29763u2.

