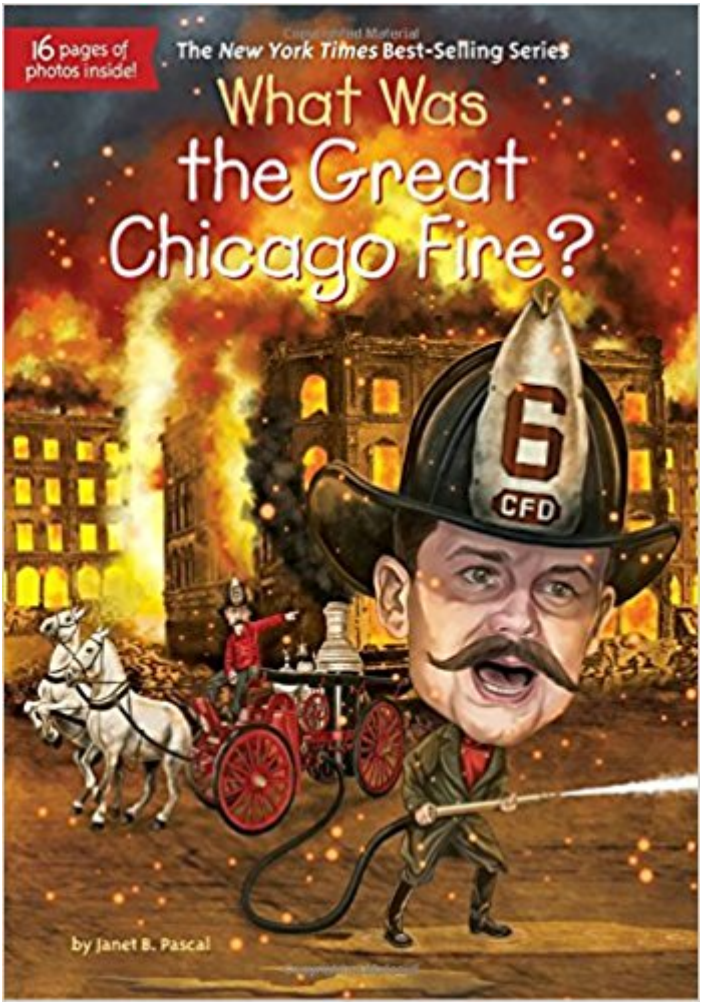
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What Was The Great Chicago Fire?



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Synopsis

Did the Great Chicago Fire really start after a cow kicked over a lantern in a barn? Find out the truth in this addition to the What Was? series.On Sunday, October 8, 1871, a fire started on the south side of Chicago. A long drought made the neighborhood go up in flames. And practically everything that could go wrong did. Firemen first went to the wrong location. Fierce winds helped the blaze jump the Chicago River twice. The Chicago Waterworks burned down, making it impossible to fight the fire. Finally after two days, Mother Nature took over, with rain smothering the flames. This overview of a stupendous disaster not only covers the fire but explores the whole history of fire fighting.

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Customer Reviews

Janet Pascal is the Executive Production Editor at Viking Children's Books and the author of Who Was Dr. Seuss?,Ã Â Who Was Abraham Lincoln?, What Is the Panama Canal?, and What Was the Hindenburg?

What Was the Great Chicago Fire? Ã Â Ã Â One dark night when we were all in bed, Ã Â Old Mrs. OÃ¢â ¬â„¢Leary took the lantern to the shed. Ã Â And when the cow kicked it over she winked her eye and said, Ã Â Ã¢â ¬Å“ThereÃ¢â ¬â„¢ll be a hot time in the old town

tonight.Ã¢â ¬Â• Ã Â Ã Â Ã Â For 125 years, children have been singing different versions of this rhyme. Many kids think itÃ¢â ¬â„¢s just a funny song. But it tells the story of a terrible tragedyÃ¢â ¬â •the Great Chicago Fire of 1871. Ã Â In 1871, Chicago was a rich and thriving city. Soon it might even pass New York as the most important city in the United States. Ã Â Chicago leaders knew that fire was one of the main risks to a large city. So they had planned ahead. They had a top firefighting force with modern equipment. No matter how big a fire was, they were sure they could stop it. Ã Â Sadly, they were wrong. Ã Â On a hot, windy October night, a fire broke out in the barn of a woman named Catherine OÃ¢â ¬â„¢Leary. The fire spread and spread for thirty hours. It jumped over two rivers. Nothing seemed to slow it down. By the time it was finally put out, most of the city was destroyed. Thousands of people, rich and poor, had lost everything. Ã Â One of the few houses that was left standing belonged to Catherine OÃ¢â ¬â„¢Leary. She and her family also survived the fire. But her cows did not. Did one of them really cause all this destruction? Ã Â Ã Â Ã Â Chapter 1:Ã Â Buckets, Hoses, and Horses Ã Â Ever since people started living in houses, fire has been one of the greatest dangers they faced. For centuries most huts and cottages were made of wood or mud. Many of them had straw roofs. Inside, people used open fireplaces, candles, torches, and oil lamps for heat, light, and cooking. All this meant fires could break out at any time. And once they had started, it was easy for them to spread. Ã Â Firefighting was everyoneÃ¢â ¬â„¢s business. If one house caught fire, all its neighbors were in danger. As soon as anyone saw a fire, they would sound the alarm. Then everyone in the village grabbed a bucket and rushed outside. They formed a double line from the fire to the nearest pond, river, or well. They filled buckets and passed them up the line to the fire. When the bucket was empty it was passed back down the line to get filled again. This was called a bucket brigade. Ã Â As cities rose up, buildings were packed close together. Fires could spread with even greater speed. Most cities had night watchmen. They kept guard against enemies. But they also watched out for fires. They could give the alarm right away by ringing a bell. The sooner a fire was reported, the more quickly it could be put out. The main way to fight a fire was still with buckets of water. Firefighters also chopped away wood that had not yet started burning. This took fuel away from the fire so it would die down. Ã Â Sometimes a fire was too hot to go near, or too high to reach. Then buckets and axes were not enough. In the sixteenth century, in Europe, people started to use pumps that could shoot water longer distances. The first pumps were like giant squirt guns. They were better than nothing, but they couldnÃ¢â ¬â„¢t spray very far. Then around 1672, a Dutch inventor created the first fire hose. It was hand-sewn out of leather. With a hose, firefighters could aim at a blaze many feet away, and then force water through the hose at it. Ã Â Machines for fighting fires began to appear about the

same time. These each had a container full of water and a pump to force it through the hose to the fire. The first ones were called hand tubs, because they had to be filled by hand and then carried to the fire. After that the water was pumped through the hose by hand. Ã Â A big improvement came with the invention of a machine that pulled water directly from a well or pond or other source of water. Then, in 1829, a steam pump for fighting fire was invented. Now people didnÃ¢â ¬â„¢t have to pump the water by hand. Ã Â At first the heavy pumps had to be carried. Soon they were put on wheels and pulled to the fire by firefighters. It may seem odd that the men would bother dragging it themselves. Why not use a horse? Ã Â There were problems with making horses pull the engines. It took time to lead horses from their stable and harness them. And only a very special kind of horse could be used. It had to be strong and fast. Most important, it had to be brave enough to run toward a fire instead of away from it. And it had to stand still, right next to the fire while it was being put out. Most firemen didnÃ¢â ¬â„¢t trust horses to do this. Ã Â Engines grew bigger and heavier, however, in the nineteenth century. Finally there was no choice. Horses were necessary. In New York City, a horse was first used to pull fire engines in 1832. It took almost thirty more years for fire horses to become common. They were carefully chosen and trained. The city of Detroit actually established a Ã¢â ¬Å“horse collegeÃ¢â ¬Â• with report cards for each horse. The firemen worked closely with their horses, and they became very attached to each other. Ã Â Horses got so good at their job that it was sometimes hard for them to stop. After they were too old to pull fire engines, some were sold to pull wagons on city streets. At times when a fire alarm sounded, a former firehorse would try to go back to its old life. It would take off for the fire, dragging its driver along. Ã Â

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