

A TEACHER'S GUIDE FOR

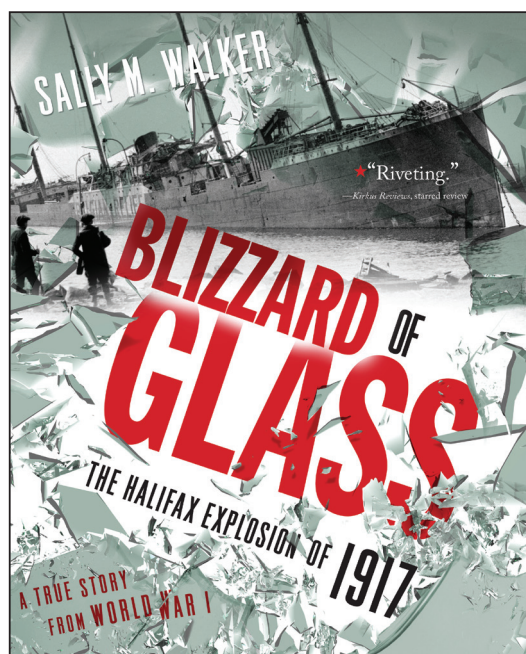
BLIZZARD OF

GLASS

THE HALIFAX EXPLOSION OF 1917

BY SALLY M. WALKER

FOR
USE WITH
COMMON CORE
STATE
STANDARDS



Grades 5 to 9: Ages 10 to 14

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ABOUT THE BOOK

December 6, 1917, started like any other day in Halifax. Women made breakfast, men went to work, children got ready for school. But everything stopped when two ships collided in Halifax Harbour. One of the ships was loaded with munitions for the troops fighting in Europe; the other was preparing to collect medical supplies for the war's victims. The resulting disaster was the largest man-made explosion until the detonation of the atomic bomb in 1945. The blast flattened most of Halifax and the town across the harbor, Dartmouth. It killed nearly two thousand people. As if that wasn't devastating enough, a blizzard hit the next day, dumping more than a foot of snow on the area and slowing much-needed relief efforts. This harrowing story of tragedy and recovery reveals the extraordinary strength and determination of a community in one of its darkest hours.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sally M. Walker is the author of *Written in Bone: Buried Lives of Jamestown and Colonial Maryland*, *Fossil Fish Found Alive*, and *Secrets of a Civil War Submarine*, which was awarded a Sibert Medal. She first learned about the Halifax Harbour explosion while she and her family were living in Nova Scotia.

Although she now lives in Illinois, the many stories she heard then have remained strong in her memory. When she isn't writing, Ms. Walker presents book-talk sessions at library and reading conferences and for a local bookstore. Visit her online at www.sallymwalker.com.



ABOUT THE COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

In the following segments, we are highlighting the key College and Career Readiness Anchor standards (CCRA), but depending on your process, others will most definitely apply. Teachers are encouraged to adapt the activities to attain specific Common Core grade level standards for their classrooms and students. You know your kids best!

QUESTIONS FOR ANALYSIS

- What steps led up to the disaster? Could any of them have been prevented? What could have been done differently?
- What role did the Mi'kmaq community play in Halifax? How were they important in day-to-day life?
- What was everyday life like for people in Halifax before and after the explosion?
- Why does Walker structure the book the way she does (i.e., at the beginning, giving detailed background about the citizens of Halifax and Dartmouth)? How does this affect the reader?
- Why do people begin to assign blame for the explosion? What makes them act this way?
- What do we learn about the people described in “Time Passes” (chapter 12)? How does that change how we “see” them?

VOCABULARY

General Vocabulary: maelstrom (5), inkling (9), war-ravaged (14), waft (19), babble (32), munitions (33), comply (34), extinguish (40), clench (42), simultaneously (49), splinter (50), debris (51), spew (52), smolder (62), devastation (73), pandemonium (75), delegate (77), astound (79), corps (83), pummel (85), hamper (85), mire (85), quirk (87), signet ring (89), hysteria (99), speculation (99), dispense (109), monies (109), presumably (120), repercussions (125), devastation (128)

Vocabulary Related to Ships: peninsula (1), hull (10), freighter (10), refitted (11), convoy (13), strait (11), stevedore (28), wharf (30), channels (34), mooring lines (55)

Science-related Vocabulary: deflect (49), energy wave (52), vacuum (53), tsunami (55), embalm (87), hydrostone (110)



PRE-READING ACTIVITIES

PERSONAL NARRATIVES

Blizzard of Glass shares the intimate stories of the victims and survivors of the Halifax explosion. To help your class empathize with those who experienced the explosion and others whose experiences have shaped them in some way, have students interview their own family members to hear their personal stories. The stories should focus on a significant family memory or experience that students feel needs to be retold and remembered. The final writing piece should include photos, drawings, or other visual representations. The students' work can be published as a class blog or through a family night celebration. See storycorps.org for more information on the importance of continuing to tell our stories.

CCSS: W.CCR.3

SCIENCE VOCABULARY VISUALS

Blizzard of Glass is an exceptional tool for connecting science to the Language Arts classroom and to real life! In order to enrich students' understanding of the text and the author's use of scientific terminology throughout the book, have student groups research the following terms: shock wave, vacuum of air, TNT, tsunami, and wood vs. hydrostone. Working in groups, students create posters that illustrate and explain these terms and then present their findings to the class. The teacher posts the finished work around the classroom as reference tools while reading *Blizzard of Glass*. (See also vocabulary words for science.)

CCSS: L.CCR.4

ACTIVITIES

JOURNAL WRITING

To try to understand how a tragic event can affect a person and a community, it is sometimes necessary to walk in their shoes. In this activity, students write journal entries (either traditional entries or blogs) from the perspective of one of the children living in Halifax at the time of the explosion. Each student should complete two entries—one at the time of the incident and one ten years later. In these journals students will explore the effects of the explosion on the child's family and on the community of Halifax and/or Dartmouth. Encourage students to use explicit and inferred information from the text in their writing and to write using first-person narration. Students may share their journals aloud in small groups.

CCSS: R.CCR.1



DRAMA

In *Blizzard of Glass*, the author creates tension in her writing when she lists where each person is at the time of the explosion. Read pages 45-46 aloud as a class. Discuss how Walker creates this tension and why she might choose to do this. Have the class explore whether they can re-create this same tension through a different medium—drama tableaux (or frozen scenes). The teacher assigns each student a role as one of the people from the pages listed above. The students take their places around the room. The entire class begins the activity in a “frozen” state. As the teacher rereads the lines of what each unsuspecting person is doing before the explosion, each student acts out his/her action and then “freezes” again as the next student performs the next action until the teacher reaches the last line of text. Students then write reflections comparing and contrasting the level of tension in the author’s writing when they first read the list (pages 45-46) with the level of tension created through their own tableaux. What mood does Walker create in her writing? How does it compare to the mood the students created in the drama activity? Do the different mediums create different effects? How and why?

CCSS: R.CCR.5

RESEARCH

When asked what she hopes readers take away from her book, Walker replied, “I think it’s very important to remember that people helping others during a time of tragedy lets survivors know that someone cares. It offers a glimmer of hope that survivors desperately need.” After the explosion, people came together to care for and assist each other in big and small ways. Explore how this idea is conveyed throughout the text. Have students research how people have helped each other in various times of crisis throughout history. The teacher divides the class into small groups and assigns a tragic event in history to each group to research (i.e., September 11th, Hurricane Katrina, Hiroshima, Pearl Harbor, Phuket tsunami). In their research, students focus on examples of people coming together to help in some way. Each group presents its findings to the class. Encourage students to use several multi-media sources along with books in their research.

CCSS: R.CCR.7

POST-READING ACTIVITY

PERSUASIVE ESSAY

The story in *Blizzard of Glass* is a harrowing true tale that affects readers deeply. Have students take an even deeper look into the story of the explosion by listening to the survivors’ real voices at <http://www.cbc.ca/archives/categories/war-conflict/first-world-war/the-halifax-explosion/surviving-the-disaster.html> as they talk about their experiences. As a class discuss how the two mediums—a nonfiction book and the interviews/voices of the survivors—compare and contrast in how they a) inform and b) affect the reader. With support from the teacher and their peers, direct students to write a persuasive essay explaining which medium they think is most effective and why. Encourage students to use specific examples and details from the text and the interviews to support their claims. Hold an oral debate during which the students use their essays as evidence for their argument!

CCSS: W.CCR.1



INTERNET RESOURCES AND SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIALS

- **Video simulation of Halifax explosion**
<http://www.cbc.ca/player/Digital+Archives/War+and+Conflict/First+World+War/ID/1786996806/>
- **Map of Halifax Harbour today**
http://www.halifax.ca/giss/documents/peninsula_halifax.pdf
- **Ways for students to help their communities**
<http://kidshealth.org/kid/feeling/thought/volunteering.html>
- **Transcript of interview of little boy who lived through the explosion**
<http://www.halifaxexplosion.org/iwasthere/jpattison.html>
- **Personal narratives, photographs and other materials**
<http://www.novascotia.ca/nsarm/virtual/explosion/personal.asp>
- **Newspaper article recalling ninety-seven-year-old survivor's story**
<http://thechronicleherald.ca/novascotia/1172401-halifax-explosion-survivor-s-memories-of-sorrow-and-joy>
- **Mi'kmaq cultural information**
<http://mikmaqculture.com/index.php>
- **Photos of the Halifax explosion and the aftermath**
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7sb8zsp0mK0&feature=player_embedded
- **Songs about commemorating the Halifax explosion**
http://www.traditionalmusic.co.uk/song-midis/Halifax_Explosion.htm
<http://www.youtube.com/embed/QqFT0bWbqew?rel=0&autoplay=1>
- **Information on shock waves and explosions**
<http://howthingsfly.si.edu/aerodynamics/shock-waves>
<http://www.physicsclassroom.com/class/sound/lesson-3/the-doppler-effect-and-shock-waves>
<http://science.howstuffworks.com/blast-resistant-clothing1.htm>
- **Poem (with video) written about the Halifax explosion**
https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_detailpage&v=YvLwBWtWsyQ
- **Information about *Titanic* crash in Halifax**
<http://www.novascotia.ca/titanic/>

This educator's guide was written by Erica Rand Silverman and Sharon Kennedy, former high school English teachers and co-founders of Room 228 Educational Consulting (www.rm228.com), along with high school English teacher Magda Adamczyk.

