



The Great Fire

By Jim Murphy

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The Great Fire of 1871 was one of the most colossal disasters in American history--with damage so profound that few people believed the city of Chicago could ever rise again. By weaving personal accounts of actual survivors together with careful research, Jim Murphy constructs a riveting and dramatic narrative, ultimately revealing how the human spirit triumphed even in a time of deepest despair, and the people of Chicago found the courage and strength to build their city once again.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

For more than a century, poor Mrs. O'Leary and her cow have shouldered the blame for Chicago's infamous Great Fire of 1871. Now Murphy (*The Boys' War*; *Across America on an Emigrant Train*) lays bare the facts concerning one of the biggest disasters in American history, in the process exculpating the maligned bovine and her owner. Murphy demonstrates that the fire could have been contained: he unfolds a tale of botched communication, class discrimination (the fire began in a working-class section of the city and only later spread to the wealthier areas) and plain old bad luck. Strategically quoting the written accounts of witnesses—who include a 12-year-old girl and a newspaper editor—Murphy both charts the 31-hour spread of the fire and conveys the atmosphere in the streets. This volume, beautifully printed in sepia tones, contains historic photos, engravings and newspaper clippings on nearly every page. Especially helpful are maps placed at intervals throughout the book that represent the progress of the fire. Engrossing. Ages 8-12.

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From School Library Journal

Grade 5-12—Jim Murphy's primary source-based account (Scholastic, 1995) of the October 1871 conflagration that virtually wiped Chicago from the map is fully voiced by Taylor Mali. Weaving together technical details with firefighters', journalists', and ordinary citizens' accounts of their personal physical and emotional traumas as they unfolded across the 24 hours of the fire, this version of the long-mythologized event carefully repairs earlier historians' class- and gender-biased reports. Modern listeners will not be surprised to hear that some men fled and some women hauled traditionally man-sized loads in the face of the flames, but they will be fascinated by how very modern some of the responses to the disaster seem: the mayor of Chicago, for instance, called for help—and received it—from fire departments as far away as Cincinnati and Pittsburgh. Murphy carefully explains how specific mistakes led to the fire becoming so quickly out of control, as well as how political precepts of the era worked to keep these facts from public view. This is excellent social history as well as suspenseful storytelling. The diversity and multitude of personal accounts is presented in both text and voice so that there is no sense of frustration in the changes of viewpoints, but rather a better appreciation of the event as a dynamic experience from which we still have much to learn.

Francisca Goldsmith, Berkeley Public Library, CA

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From [Booklist](#)

Gr. 5⁺-9. The great Chicago fire has long been the stuff of folklore and legend. Yet separating fact from fiction in this major disaster has often appeared a secondary priority at best. Murphy sets the record straight through carefully selected documents, personal accounts, photographs, and illustrations. Beginning on that warm Sunday evening, October 8, 1871, in the O'Leary barn, Murphy traces the fire through its three horror-filled days as, fed by lusty prairie winds, cinders from a Saturday night blaze, and structures (even streets and sidewalks) built almost entirely of wood, it consumed block after block of homes, businesses, and bodies, eventually leaving 100,000 people homeless. The book's design complements the author's treatment of the subject. Six double-page spreads of Chicago street maps show the sweep of the flames from the little-known Saturday blaze until rain finally extinguished the fire on Tuesday. Photographs and illustrations of the conflagration and the damage it left behind only add fuel to the author's dramatic text, a riveting narrative that combines the details of the fire itself with personal anecdotes gleaned from newspaper accounts and books written during and immediately after the fire. *The Great Fire* will automatically draw readers with its fiery cover and illustrations of disaster, but the text will keep them reading. *Frances Bradburn*

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Joseph Felix:

Have you spare time for the day? What do you do when you have considerably more or little spare time? Yeah, you can choose the suitable activity regarding spend your time. Any person spent their spare time to take a go walking, shopping, or went to typically the Mall. How about open or perhaps read a book entitled The Great Fire? Maybe it is to get best activity for you. You realize beside you can spend your time along with your favorite's book, you can more intelligent than before. Do you agree with it is opinion or you have additional opinion?

Shannon Grant:

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Sheila Searcy:

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