

PESHTIGO FIRE: BEFORE AND AFTER

Historical Literacy Guide: *Geography*



Wisconsin Historical
MUSEUM

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Object Literacy: *Learning from Objects*

The Wisconsin Historical Museum, as part of the Wisconsin Historical Society, has developed the following guide to assist in the teaching of standards for social studies. By focusing on objects, artifacts, maps, photographs and other primary sources from its collection, students will be able to redefine how they learn from objects and from history.

Object-based learning is

- Using a variety of objects as central to the development of lesson concepts
- Utilizing objects through posing and investigating questions
- Utilizing well-thought-out initial questions to stimulate further critical thinking
- Using students' natural interest and inclination for question-posing to guide instruction in all subjects
- Leading students to their own answers by responding to open ended questions and/or returning the students' focus to the object
- Student-directed learning following paths created by the students

Thinking Like a Historian: Rethinking History Instruction and Common Core State Standards Initiative

Thinking Like a Historian: Rethinking History Instruction by Nikki Mandell and Bobbie Malone is a teaching and learning framework that explains the essential elements of history and provides “how-to” examples for building historical literacy in classrooms at all grade levels. With practical examples, engaging and effective lessons and classroom activities that tie to essential questions, *Thinking Like a Historian* provides a framework to enhance and improve teaching and learning history.

Thinking Like a Historian: Rethinking History Instruction

(TLH) **inquiry-based educational theory** provides a common language for educators and students. The theory allows for the educational process to be combined with categories of inquiry which promote historical literacy.

It is the intent of the Wisconsin Historical Museum that this guide serves educators and students in providing object-based lessons to be used after visiting and experiencing the museum on a field trip. Our field trips support *Common Core English Language Arts Standards* for Reading: Informational Text and Speaking & Listening standards as well as CCSS for English Language Arts & Literacy in History/Social Studies.

Educators should use this guide as a post-museum visit activity. It will continue to challenge students to “Think Like a Historian” by encouraging them to think critically, make personal connections with history, and to evaluate information by asking “why”, “how”, and most importantly, “How do you know?”

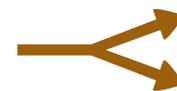
TLH CATEGORIES



CAUSE AND EFFECT



CHANGE AND CONTINUITY



TURNING POINTS



USING THE PAST



THROUGH THEIR EYES

Background Information

On the night of October 8th, 1871, the Peshtigo Fire destroyed a swath of forest 10 miles wide and 40 miles long in two hours. It remains the deadliest recorded forest fire in American history.

Long overshadowed by the Great Chicago Fire (and the colorful story of Mrs. O'Leary's cow tipping over the lantern) that occurred the same day in 1871, the fire in Peshtigo consumed more than a million acres of land and claimed more than 1,200 lives.

Although the fire burned 17 towns, the damage in Peshtigo was the worst, killing more than 800 people and destroying most of the town.

The night of October 8th seemed like any other to residents of the area. A long summer drought had provided some benefit to settlers and loggers who took the opportunity to clear more land. Lumbering practices of the time created large piles of sawdust and waste in the forests that loggers and settlers removed by setting small fires. Unfortunately, the fires this night proved far different as hot blasts of wind from a storm the previous evening laid the foundation for the inferno that resulted.

Often described as a "tornado of fire," the Peshtigo Fire consumed all available oxygen, creating internal winds of more than 80 miles per hour that ripped the roofs off houses, knocked down barns, and uprooted trees. The speed of the flames left many people surrounded with no means of escape. A considerable portion of the survivors huddled in a low, marshy piece of ground on the east side of the river. The number of dead in the blaze in the town of Peshtigo has been variously estimated at from 500 to 800.

In all, the fire burned more than 280,000 acres in Oconto, Marinette, Shawano, Brown, Kewaunee, Door, Manitowoc and Outagamie counties. The human toll was 1,152 known dead and another 350 believed dead. Another 1,500 were seriously injured and at least 3,000 left homeless. The property loss was estimated conservatively at \$5 million and this did not include 2 million valuable trees and saplings and scores of animals.

Images for the Classroom



Bird's-eye Map of Peshtigo, 1871 (WHi Image ID: 2209).

Images for the Classroom



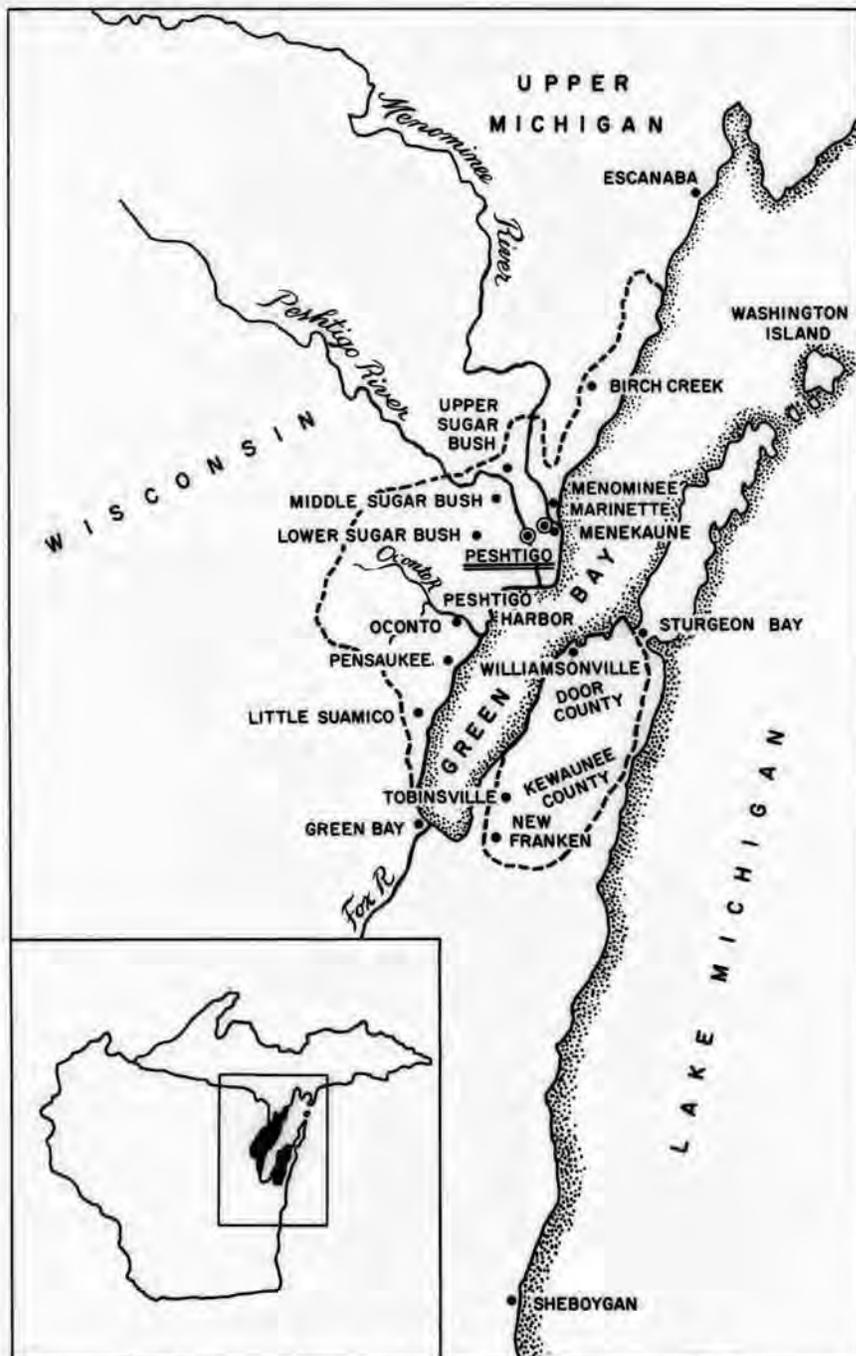
Bird's-eye Map of Peshtigo, 1881 (WHi Image ID: 22656).

Images for the Classroom



Aftermath of Peshtigo Fire (WHi Image ID: 1859). Aftermath of Peshtigo fire on October 8, 1871. Devastated landscape with deer carcass in foreground. The Peshtigo fire razed the small town of approximately 2000 people. More than 1,200 people perished in the conflagration that consumed more than 1.25 million acres of forest in what was, at the time, a booming lumber town.

Images for the Classroom



The district of the fire in Wisconsin and Upper Michigan, 1871. Broken lines indicate the approximate area devastated—some 1,280,000 acres. The insert map outlines Wisconsin and Upper Michigan and shows the estimated burned-over portions of the two states.

Map of Peshtigo Fire (WHi Image ID: 6783). Map of the district of the Peshtigo fire, approximately 1,280,000 acres, in Wisconsin and Upper Michigan.

Student Activity

Ask students to tell what they know about the fire and have them review the account of the Peshtigo Fire from the October 8th, 1871 article in the *Daily Democrat*. Divide students into groups of four and pass out or share on a projection screen the other images. Give students plenty of time to consider the images and the discussion questions.

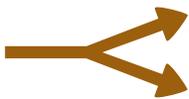
Teacher-led Student Inquiry and Analysis Questions



1. Look at the photos and maps of Peshtigo. Describe how those and the headline from the *Daily Democrat* from help you understand the immediate impact of the fire on the citizens of Peshtigo.



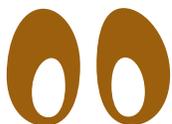
2. Locate a present-day map of Peshtigo, at an online site (Google Earth). Does Peshtigo look the same as it did in 1871? 1881? What physical features does the city still retain from the rebuilding period after the fire?



3. In what way was the fire a likely turning point in this community? Beyond this community?



4. From looking at the birds-eye map of Peshtigo, describe the community as it existed in September 1871 before the Great Fire. Be sure to name prominent buildings and give as accurate a physical description as you can. What questions do you have about the community? List those separately.



5. If time allows, have students participate in a shared reading of *The Great Peshtigo Fire: An Eyewitness Account, Second Edition*. How was the experience of the Peshtigo Fire remembered by Reverend Peter Pernin?

Bibliography and Additional Resources

Images and objects shared in this document can be found on the following Wisconsin Historical Society webpages:

Wisconsin Historical Images www.wisconsinhistory.org/whi/

Curators' Favorites www.wisconsinhistory.org/museum/artifacts/

Additional information can be found at:

The Great Peshtigo Fire: An Eyewitness Account, Second Edition

Reflection

The Wisconsin Historical Museum is interested in hearing memories of favorite experiences or exhibits. Have students use the next page to illustrate and describe what they enjoyed most. Please return to:

Museum Education

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