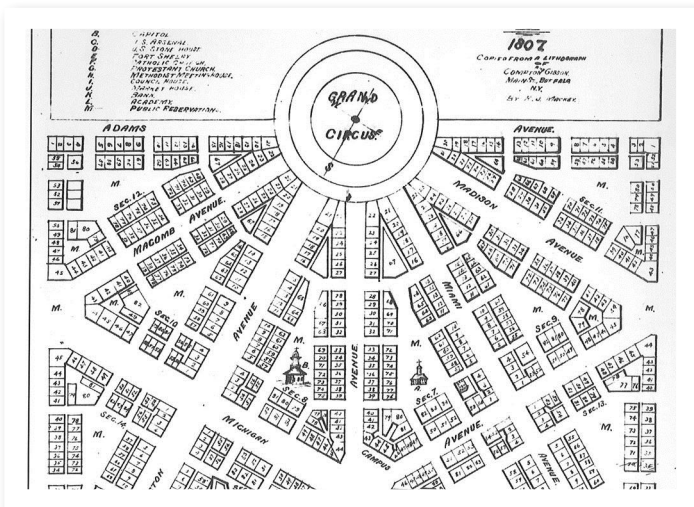


Where  
the past  
is present

# DETROIT HISTORICAL SOCIETY

## TEACHER RESOURCE LESSON PLAN

### THE GREAT FIRE OF 1805



#### INTRODUCTION

This lesson helps third grade students understand the life and culture in Detroit after the Americans took control of the settlement in 1796, through its involvement in the War of 1812. The lesson includes a comprehensive background essay, a list of additional resources, and copies of worksheets and primary sources.

#### ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

What can we learn about the Great Fire of 1805 through a structured study of primary sources?

#### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Students will:

- Learn the definition of a primary source.
- Use observation skills to study and learn from primary sources.
- Develop research questions and search for answers about the Great Fire of 1805.

#### MI GLCES – GRADE THREE SOCIAL STUDIES

##### H3 – History of Michigan Through Statehood

- 3-H3.0.1 – Identify questions historians ask in examining the past in Michigan.
- 3-H.3.0.7 - Use a variety of primary and secondary sources to construct a historical narrative about daily life in the early settlements of Michigan.
- 3-H3.0.8 – Use case studies or stories to describe how the ideas or actions of individuals affected the history of Michigan.

#### COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS - ELA

##### Reading

- 1 - Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.
- 9 - Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take.

##### Speaking and Listening

- 1 - Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.
- 2 - Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.

# LESSON PLAN: THE GREAT FIRE OF 1805

## BACKGROUND ESSAY

### The Great Fire of 1805

The community of traders, farmers, tradesmen, and families at the edge of the Detroit River grew to almost 500 people during the 1700s. In 1802, Territorial Governor St. Clair incorporated Detroit as a town with five Trustees to make laws, levy taxes, and keep order. John Askin, a successful fur trader who owned a vast shipping fleet, was one of the first trustees. Detroit was scheduled to become the capital city of the newly formed Michigan Territory on July 1, 1805.

Just as Detroit's future looked promising, a terrible disaster occurred – the Great Fire of 1805.

A baker was in his stable and he knocked ashes from his pipe. It was a hot, windy day at the river's edge, and the wind blew the hot ashes into a pile of hay and fanned the flames until both the barn and the bakery were ablaze. The alarm sounded and Detroit's only fire engine arrived. Townspeople formed bucket brigades, but they could not stop the brisk wind from spreading the fire.

Many citizens frantically gathered their animals, loaded up their most prized possessions, and fled through the gates of the town. In just six hours nothing was left where the houses once stood but a blanket of ashes, with black chimneys rising up through the smoke. Only Fort Lernoult, on the hill above the city, and one warehouse at the river was spared. A century of community growth was destroyed.

Some people moved across the river to Sandwich (Windsor), Ontario or to other nearby towns. But almost two thirds stayed nearby. In just three weeks William Hull, the new Michigan Territorial governor, planned to arrive. Many townspeople decided to wait for his advice and make plans to

rebuild the city.

One of the Governor's officials, Judge Augustus Woodward, argued that the old city was badly planned, and should not be rebuilt again. He had just come from Washington, D.C., a city with a street plan based on Paris, France. He offered to create a new city design based on the hexagon with diagonal roads radiating out from the city's center. He promised property to the townspeople if they agreed to wait for a survey to design the new plan. They agreed to the plan. Among these citizens were the first African American property owners in the city.

As the new city was constructed, the complete

hexagonal design of Woodward's survey became too complex. The City was still designed around three main diagonal spokes - Gratiot, Michigan and Grand River Avenue - which remain major thoroughfares of Detroit today. Grand Circus Park, in downtown Detroit, is another piece of



Woodward's plan.

In just 14 years, the population of Detroit doubled and the city was rebuilt, with broader streets and more brick buildings. New industries – fishing, lumber, textiles, gristmills, and breweries began to do business. Steamboats transported passengers all over the Great Lakes. The new City of Detroit would become very important to the history of Michigan.

# LESSON PLAN: THE GREAT FIRE OF 1805

## MATERIALS USED:

### Data Elements

- *Painting: 1805 Detroit Fire*
- *Newspaper Account of the 1805 Fire*
- *Letter: General William Hull*
- *Detroit Street Plan, 1807*

### Worksheet

- *Learning from Primary Sources*

### Pencils and paper

## LESSON SEQUENCE

1. Explain to the students that they will be using primary sources to learn about the Great Fire of 1805. A primary source is a document or image that was created during the time that an event occurred. Examples of primary sources include newspapers, photographs, paintings, letters and diaries.
2. Tell the students that today they will be studying primary sources about the Great Fire of 1805. Give an overview of the fire and its consequences. You can read or summarize the background essay on the fire.
3. Divide the class into pairs, and give each pair one of the primary source *Data Elements* and a copy of *Learning from Primary Sources* worksheet. (NOTE: the newspaper account and the letter include difficult vocabulary words and unconventional sentence structure. Students with these documents may require additional help.)
4. Ask students to closely observe each primary source and write down their observations in the OBSERVE box of the worksheet. Ask them leading questions to help them see key details: What do you notice first? Find something small but interesting. What do you notice that you didn't expect? What do you notice that you can't explain? What do you notice now that you didn't earlier?
5. Encourage students to think about the source and write down their ideas to the following questions in the REFLECT box of the worksheet: Where do you think this came from? Why do you think somebody made this? What do you think was happening when this was made? Who do you think was the audience for this item? What tool was used to create this? Why do you think this item is important? If someone made this today, what would be different? What can you learn from examining this?
6. Have students write down questions that they can't find answers to by looking at their primary source in the QUESTION box. Encourage them to use the 5 Ws and an H to form their questions. For example: What do you wonder about... who? what? when? where? why? how?
7. Have the student pairs trade primary sources with other groups to see if they can find answers to their questions in a different document. Explain that historians have to look at many different primary sources to understand an event in the past.
8. If time and resources permit, have the students look for more answers in secondary sources, like textbooks and library books.



# LESSON PLAN: THE GREAT FIRE OF 1805

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Bald, F. Clever. *Detroit's First American Decade: 1796 to 1805*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1983.

Bald, F. Clever. *The Great Fire of 1805*. Detroit: Wayne University Press, 1951.

Brill, Marlene Targ. *Michigan*. New York: Marshall Cavendish Benchmark, 2007.

Burton, Clarence Monroe, William Stocking, and Gordon K. Miller. *The City of Detroit Michigan 1701-1922. Volume 1*. Charleston, SC: Nabu Press, 2010.

Gavrilovich, Peter, and Bill McGraw. *The Detroit Almanac: 300 Years of Life in the Motor City*. Detroit, Mich: Detroit Free Press, 2000.

Gilpin, Alec R. *The Territory of Michigan, 1805-1837*. East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1970.

Grimm, Joe. *Michigan Voices: Our State's History in the Words of the People Who Lived It*. Detroit, Mich: Detroit Free Press, 1987.

Henrickson, Wilma Wood. *Detroit Perspectives: Crossroads and Turning Points*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1991.

Hull, William. *Memoirs of the Campaign of the North Western Army of the United States, A.D. 1812, in a Series of Letters Addressed to the Citizens of the United States, with an Appendix Containing a Brief Sketch of the Revolutionary Services of the Author*. Boston: True & Greene, 1824.

Ketenbaum, Justin L., ed. *The Making of Michigan, 1820 – 1860: A Pioneer Anthology*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1990.

Woodford, Arthur M. *This Is Detroit, 1701-2001*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2001.

History Detroit, 1701-2001. 22 November 2011. <http://www.historydetroit.com/>

"I Arrived at Detroit..." Clarke Historical Library. Central Michigan University. 22 November 2011. [http://clarke.cmich.edu/resource\\_tab/information\\_and\\_exhibits/i\\_arrived\\_at\\_detroit/i\\_arrived\\_at\\_detroit\\_index.html](http://clarke.cmich.edu/resource_tab/information_and_exhibits/i_arrived_at_detroit/i_arrived_at_detroit_index.html)

Michigan History: The Detroit News. 22 November 2011. <http://detnews.com/history/>

For more information about the **Detroit Historical Society**, or to schedule a field trip to the **Detroit Historical Museum** or **Dossin Great Lakes Museum**, visit [detroithistorical.org](http://detroithistorical.org)

## LINKS

1802 Map of Michigan. May-Journal Website. 22 November 2011. <http://bay-journal.com/maps/1802-mi.html>

# LEARNING FROM PRIMARY SOURCES



## PRIMARY SOURCE ANALYSIS TOOL

**OBSERVE**

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**FURTHER INVESTIGATION**



PAINTING: 1805 DETROIT FIRE





## NEWSPAPER ACCOUNT OF THE 1805 FIRE

### Baltimore Intelligencer of September 6, 1805 "THE CONFLAGRATION OF DETROIT"

This event happened on the 11th of June last. The flames commenced about 9 o'clock in the morning and within four hours the whole town was laid in ashes. Only two or three buildings, of little value, situated in the borders, were preserved. About three hundred edifices, of all kinds, were consumed, among which were nearly an hundred dwelling houses, the church, several stores, the citadel, with officers' and soldiers' barracks, contractors' stores, United States store, etc. The new fort and barracks, called Fort Lernoult, a little back of the town, were not greatly endangered, and the old Block house, at the south end, escaped. In a word, all the space enclosed within picquets, and denominated the town, presents nothing but a heap of ruins, consisting of naked chimnies and cinders. The rapidity of the destruction was perhaps unprecedented, but will not appear surprising to anyone previously acquainted with the place. The buildings were mostly old, all of wood, and dry as tinder—extremely crowded together on an area of about three acres—the streets very narrow (the widest not exceeding twenty feet), intersecting rectangularly at small distances—and every square completely covered with combustibles. This mode of building the town originated, not merely for want of taste in the ancient settlers, but from the necessity of defense in war, and this settlement has for a long time been a frontier particularly exposed to danger from the natives, and far removed from the means of external succor. It has been found necessary, till very lately, to keep the picquets enclosing the town in repair, besides being under the protection of the common of an adjoining fort and block house. The town was furnished with but one fire engine, which, with the prompt assistance of the troops formerly stationed here, has been sufficient to extinguish occasional fires upon their first appearance; but

at present the troops at this station are few and want of aid from that source was severely felt on the late occasion. By what means the fire was kindled, whether by accident or design, is uncertain — there are various conjectures, but no decided opinion. It began in a stable near the United States store, on the southwest quarter, a light breeze blowing from the south. Its progress against and athwart the wind was astonishing, but in the direction of it the blaze darted with nearly the celerity of lightning, and reached the opposite extremity of the town in a very few moments. The fire in no part had diminished till the whole was in a blaze, and one immense mass of flame was presented to the eye, having the appearance of proceeding from one building of vast extent. The streets became impassable as the fire progressed, being filled from side to side with an impenetrable column of smoke and flame, which, wafted by the current of air through the north and south streets, streamed to a great distance beyond the limits of the houses. To the distant spectator, and to the wretched inhabitants, who after a short lapse of time could be no more than spectators, the sense was at once sublime and painful, exceeding in awful grandeur perhaps almost any spectacle of the kind which has happened since the world began. It was fortunate that the catastrophe did not take place in the night, as there must have been a greater destruction of goods and effects and unquestionably of some lives. No lives were lost, but one person (a poor woman) was badly injured. Means have been taken to ascertain correctly the amount of losses in property, and progress has been made so far as to place it beyond a doubt that they exceed one hundred and thirty thousand dollars, probably reaching near one hundred and fifty thousand dollars. The conflagration took place at a time of day that the inhabitants were generally near their homes, and were enabled to save more of their moveable effects than could have been expected in so short

a time as was allowed them; great quantities, however, fell a sacrifice, and individuals whose estates consisted in buildings, were in one day reduced from eligible circumstances to poverty. There is no citizen but who has suffered more or less. At present the people are scattered up and down the settlement, crowding the houses even to overflowing, occupying hovels and everything having the shape of an edifice, and several families are encamped in booths upon the public common and the highways. The sufferings of the people in the ensuing winter must inevitably be great. We tremble to anticipate them. Hemmed in on every side by the wilderness, in some directions interminable, and in others extending too great a distance to admit of being passed by an impoverished people, they are restricted to the settlement, narrow in its extent, with indifferent cultivations, and the houses in bad repair. Not a farm is cultivated one mile from the river bank, nor a building erected. There the wilderness commences and extends to the western ocean. The settlement up and down the back of the river is but a few miles in extent, and taken up by farmers, who have no room to spare in their dwellings and raise barely a sufficiency for the supply of their own wants. The houseless sufferers have little time, and still less means, to provide new accommodations for themselves before the approach of the cold season. Provisions of every kind are at an excessively high price. Thus circumstanced, what can be before these miserable people but a winter of rigorous suffering! If credit and charity should furnish them with food, yet there cannot be shelter and covering sufficient for their comfort. Applications for relief are sent and are sending to various parts of the United States and Canada, which it is hoped and believed with not be sent in vain.

## LETTER: GENERAL WILLIAM HULL

Detroit, October 10, 1805.

The governor of the territory of Michigan and the presiding judge thereof; in compliance with the wishes of the government and the people of the territory, have the honor to make the following report relative to the affairs of the territory.

By the act of the congress of the United States establishing the territory, the government thereof was to commence from and after the thirtieth day of June, one thousand eight hundred five. The presiding judge arrived at Detroit, the seat of the government, on Saturday the 29th day of June, and the governor on Monday the first day of July. The associate judge who was previously a resident of the territory, was already there. On Tuesday the 2d July, the governor, in pursuance of the ordinance of congress, administered to the several officers their respective oaths of office, and on the same day the operations of the government commenced.

It was the unfortunate fate of the new government to commence its operations in a scene of deepest public and private calamity. By the conflagration of Detroit, which took place on the morning of the 11th of June, all the buildings of that place, both public and private, were entirely consumed; and the most valuable part of the personal property of the inhabitants, was lost. On the arrival of the new government, a part of the people were found encamped on the public grounds, in the vicinity of the town, and the remainder were dispersed through the neighboring settlements of the country; both on the British and the American side of the boundary.

The place which bore the appellation of the town of Detroit, was the spot of about 2 acres of ground, completely covered with buildings, and combustible materials, the narrow intervals of fourteen or fifteen feet, used as streets or lanes, only excepted; and the whole was environed with a very strong and secure defence of tall and solid picquets. The circumjacent ground, the bank of the river alone excepted, was a wide commons; and though assertions are made respecting the existence, among the records of Quebec, of a charter from the king of France, confirming this commons as an appurtenance to the town, it was either the property of the United States, or at least such as individual claims did not pretend to cover. The folly of attempting to rebuild the town in the original mode was obvious to every mind; yet there existed no authority, either in the country, or in the officers of the new government, to dispose of the adjacent ground. Hence had already arisen a state of dissention which urgently required the interposition of some authority to quiet. Some of the inhabitants, destitute of shelter, and hopeless of any prompt arrangements of government, had reoccupied their former ground, and a few buildings had already been erected in the midst of the old ruins. Another portion of the inhabitants had determined to take possession of the adjacent public ground, and to throw themselves on the liberality of the government of the United States, either to make them a donation of the ground as compensation for their sufferings, or to accept of a very moderate price for it. . . .

A town was accordingly surveyed and laid out, and the want of authority to impart any regular title, without the subsequent sanction of congress, being first impressed, and clearly understood, the lots were exposed to sale under that reservation. Where the purchaser of a lot was a proprietor in the old town, he was at liberty to extinguish his former property in his new acquisition, foot for foot, and was expected to pay only for the surplus, at the rate expressed in his bid. . . .

Strongly impressed with a sense of the worth of the people, and deeply commiserating their sufferings, of a great part of which they were eye witnesses, the officers of their local government cannot refrain from adding their warmest degree of recommendation to forward the liberality the congress of the United States will unquestionably be inclined to exercise towards them; and the disposition which will doubtless prevail towards attaching their affections, promoting their interests and relieving their distress. . . .

(Signed) William Hull, Governor of the Territory of Michigan

(Signed) A.B. Woodward, Presiding Judge of the Territory of Michigan.



# DETROIT STREET PLAN, 1807

