Unit 3

Title: “The Story of an Eyewitness” by Jack London

Suggested Time: 5 days (45 minutes per day)

Common Core ELA Standards: RI.8.1, RI.8.2, RI.8.3, RI.8.4, RI.8.6, RI.8.9; W.8.2, W.8.4, W.8.9; SL.8.1; L.8.1, L.8.2, L.8.4, L.8.5

Teacher Instructions

**Preparing for Teaching**

1. Read the Big Ideas and Key Understandings and the Synopsis. Please do **not** read this to the students. This is a description for teachers about the big ideas and key understanding that students should take away **after** completing this task.

Big Ideas and Key Understandings

Natural disasters, like earthquakes, can set off a chain of destructive events capable of destroying even a great modern city. When events such as natural disasters, crimes, and war occur, it is important that a witness describes what happened so that others can learn from these events.

Synopsis

In the magazine article, “The Story of an Eyewitness,” Jack London describes the effects of the San Francisco Earthquake of 1906. His account describes its immediate aftermath, especially the utter destruction of the city by the ensuing fire. The National Archives article provides a brief third-person account of the San Francisco Earthquake of 1906 that can be used to compare and contrast first- versus third-person accounts of the same event.

1. Read the entire selection, keeping in mind the Big Ideas and Key Understandings.
2. Re-read the text while noting the stopping points for the Text Dependent Questions and teaching Tier II/academic vocabulary.

**During Teaching**

1. Students read the entire selection independently, listing or using a Vocabulary Self-Selection and Verification chart to identify, define and verify the denotation of new, challenging vocabulary words.
2. Teacher reads the text aloud while students follow along or students take turns reading aloud to each other. Depending on the text length and student need, the teacher may choose to read the full text or a passage aloud. For a particularly complex text, the teacher may choose to reverse the order of steps 1 and 2. \*Due to the complexity of this text, students may benefit from reversing the order of steps 1 & 2 and reading by subsections while identifying & defining challenging vocabulary!
3. Students and teacher re-read the text while stopping to respond to and discuss the questions, continually returning to the text. A variety of methods can be used to structure the reading and discussion (i.e., whole class discussion, think-pair-share, independent written response, group work, etc.)

Text Dependent Questions

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| **Text-dependent Questions** | **Evidence-based Answers** |
| Who was Jack London and why did he go to San Francisco? | Jack London was a writer and *Collier’s Magazine* telegraphed him “to go to the scene of the disaster and write the story of what he saw”. |
| What does the word ‘conflagration’ mean? What evidence from the text supports your answer? What effect does using ‘conflagration’ have? | Conflagration means fire. The passage states that, “the conflagration that followed burned up hundreds of millions of dollars’ worth of property”. Conflagration has the same meaning as fire, but the connotation is stronger; it ‘feels’ like a massive blaze, not just a small fire. London uses this word to paint the image of a raging blaze for the reader. Note: This question presents the perfect opportunity to discuss impact of word choice on meaning and tone with your students. |
| Why didn’t the fire department respond right away? What particular challenges did they face? Point to specific examples in the text. | The fire department could not respond to the fires right away because they did not know where to go and they couldn’t get there. The passage states, “there was no organization, no communication”. Further, the article states that the streets of San Francisco were “humped into ridges and depressions, and piled high with the debris of fallen walls … The telephone and telegraph systems were disrupted”. |
| Explain how dynamite was used to contain the fire. | The article states, “Dynamite was lavishly used, and many of San Francisco’s proudest structures were crumbled by man himself into ruins, but there was no withstanding the onrush of flames”. The dynamite was used to interrupt the fuel source of the fire and attempt to stop the fire from spreading further across the city. |
| London uses a specific word in his description of the destruction he sees. What word does he use and what is the effect of the author’s repetition of this word? | London repeats the word ‘enumeration’ used as the subject of several consecutive sentences. The passage states, “An enumeration of the buildings destroyed would be a directory of San Francisco. An enumeration of the buildings undestroyed would be a line and several addresses. An enumeration of the deeds of heroism would stock a library and bankrupt the Carnegie medal fund. An enumeration of the dead will never be made”. His repetition of this word emphasizes that the amount of destruction was indescribable and immeasurable. |
| Reread the section titled, “A Caravan of Trunks”. Why were the shopkeepers and members of the middle class at a disadvantage during the fire? Cite evidence to support your response. | The evacuating citizens “held on longest to their trunks, and over those trunks many a strong man broke his heart that night”. Once the evacuees realized that they could no longer carry their trunks and avoid the fires, they abandoned them. The shopkeepers were at a disadvantage here, since “the working-men dug holes in vacant lots and backyards and buried their trunks”. |
| Why does London use the subheading “The Doomed City” to describe the same section of downtown San Francisco? What specific details from the text support this answer? | London uses the subheading “The Doomed City” because in a matter of four hours from 9 o’clock Wednesday evening to 1 o’clock Thursday morning there was a major change. At nine, there was no fire, and “all was in perfect order … And yet it was doomed, all of it. There was no water. The dynamite was giving out. And at right angles two different conflagrations were sweeping down upon it”. At one o’clock “there was no fire. And yet there was a change. A rain of ashes was falling…The street was a wall of flame”. |
| Why do you think London chose to use the image of the cavalry men in this section of the passage? Use evidence from the text to support your conclusions. | London writes, “The street was a wall of flame. And against this wall of flame, silhouetted sharply, were two United States cavalrymen sitting on their horses, calmly watching. That was all. Not another person was in sight. In the intact heart of the city, two troopers sat [on] their horses and watched”. London chose this image to symbolize the helplessness of the government and citizens in the face of the massive conflagration. London uses this image in this section to serve as a contrast to the previous paragraph, which describes that section of the city just four hours earlier. Where the street “was in perfect order” at nine o’clock, by one o’clock, “the street was a wall of flames”. |
| How did the conflagration affect the victims’ perceptions of what things were worth? Give examples from the text that support your answers. | None of the old standards of worth applied after the fires. London writes, “I saw a man offering a thousand dollars for a team of horses” and recounts speaking to a man who said, “’Last night I was worth thirty thousand dollars. I bought some delicate fish and other things for my birthday dinner. I have had no dinner, and all I own are these crutches’”. |
| What mood does London create using imagery in the section subheaded “The Dawn of the Second Day”? Create a chart listing specific details and images for the mood(s) you selected! | Examples of moods (will vary): doom, hopelessness, dark , dreary  Examples of Imagery used in the article: “smoke-pall”, “blood-red”, “a sickly light was creeping over the face of things”, “shattered dome of the city hall”, “most of the stone had been shaken”, “naked framework of steel”, “piled high with wreckage”, “waste of smoking ruins”, “shadows of tottering walls”, “emerged occasional men and women”, “It was like the meeting of the handful of survivors after the day of the end of the world.” |
| In your collaborative groups, create a timeline of at least five events London recounts in “The Story of an Eyewitness”. Use specific details from the text in your timeline. | Student responses will vary, but should include five of the following examples from the text in chronological order:   * “On Wednesday morning at a quarter past five came the earthquake. A minute later the flames were leaping upward”. * “In a dozen different quarters south of Market Street, in the working-class ghetto, and in the factories, fires started”. * “By Wednesday afternoon, inside of twelve hours, half the heart of the city was gone”. * “Wednesday night saw the destruction of the very heart of the city”. * “All night these tens of thousands fled before the flames”. * “At nine o’clock Wednesday evening I walked through the very heart of the city. I walked through miles and miles of magnificent buildings and towering skyscrapers. Here was no fire. All was in perfect order”. * “At one o’clock in the morning I walked down through the same section. Everything still stood intact. There was no fire. And yet there was a change…” * “Surrender was complete. There was no water. The sewers had long since been pumped dry. There was no dynamite. Another fire had broken out further uptown, and now from three sides conflagrations were sweeping”. * “At half past one in the morning three sides of Union Square were in flames… An hour later, ignited from top and sides the St. Francis was flaming heavenward. Union Square, heaped high with mountains of trunks, was deserted”. * “On Thursday morning at a quarter past five, just twenty-four hours after the earthquake, I sat on the steps of a small residence on Nob Hill… To the east and south at right angles, were advancing two mighty walls of flame”. * “Day was trying to dawn through the smoke-pall… And so dawned the second day on a stricken San Francisco”. * “An hour later I was creeping past the shattered dome of City Hall”. * “All day Thursday and all Thursday night, all day Friday and Friday night, the flames still raged on”. * “The great stand of the fire-fighters was made Thursday night on Van Ness Avenue”. * “Friday night saw the flames finally conquered…” * San Francisco, at the present time, is like the crater of a volcano, around which are camped tens of thousands of refugees”. |

Tier II/Academic Vocabulary

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|  | **These words require less time to learn**  (They are concrete or describe an object/event/  process/characteristic that is familiar to students) | **These words require more time to learn**  (They are abstract, have multiple meanings, are a part  of a word family, or are likely to appear again in future texts) |
| **Meaning can be learned from context** | conflagration  fringe  colossal  opposing  heroism  gracious  pickets  debris | wrought  cunning  shrewd  safeguards  flanked  hysteria  menace |
| **Meaning needs to be provided** | nabobs  ghetto  gale  bayonets  refugees  cosmopolitan  flotsam  smoke-pall | lurid  contrivances  lavishly  enumeration  vestiges  compelled  toiling |

Culminating Writing Task

* *Read the following excerpt from* The National Archives *regarding the San Francisco Earthquake of 1906:*

**San Francisco Earthquake, 1906**

**(Excerpt from the National Archives)**

**On the morning of April 18, 1906, a massive earthquake shook San Francisco, California. Though the quake lasted less than a minute, its immediate impact was disastrous. The earthquake also ignited several fires around the city that burned for three days and destroyed nearly 500 city blocks.**

**Despite a quick response from San Francisco's large military population, the city was devastated. The earthquake and fires killed an estimated 3,000 people and left half of the city's 400,000 residents homeless. Aid poured in from around the country and the world, but those who survived faced weeks of difficulty and hardship.**

**The survivors slept in tents in city parks and the Presidio, stood in long lines for food, and were required to do their cooking in the street to minimize the threat of additional fires. The San Francisco earthquake is considered one of the worst natural disasters in U.S. history.**

**Congress responded to the disaster in several ways. The House and the Senate Appropriations Committees enacted emergency appropriations for the city to pay for food, water, tents, blankets, and medical supplies in the weeks following the earthquake and fire. They also appropriated funds to reconstruct many of the public buildings that were damaged or destroyed.**

**Source: National Archives.** [**http://www.archives.gov/legislative/features/sf/**](http://www.archives.gov/legislative/features/sf/)

*Jack London’s* “The Story of an Eyewitness” *is written from a first-person point of view. The excerpt from* The National Archives *(above) is a third-person account of the same event. What does an eyewitness account reveal that a third-person account might not convey to the reader? Using specific examples from the texts, explain how London’s first-person account of the San Francisco Earthquake differs from the third-person account above.*

* Teacher Instructions

1. Students identify their writing task from the prompt provided. (Comparing and contrasting first-person versus third-person accounts of the same event)
2. Students complete an evidence chart as a pre-writing activity. Teachers should guide students in gathering and using any relevant notes they compiled while reading and answering the text-dependent questions earlier. Some students will need a good deal of help gathering this evidence, especially when this process is new and/or the text is challenging!

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| ***Evidence***  ***Quote or paraphrase*** | ***Elaboration / explanation of how this evidence supports ideas or argument*** |
| “The earthquake shook down in San Francisco hundreds of thousands of dollars’ worth of walls and chimneys. But the conflagration that followed burned up hundreds of millions of dollars’ worth of property.” | Eyewitness accounts provide more details than third-person accounts. |
| “Within an hour after the earthquake shock the smoke of San Francisco’s burning was a lurid tower visible a hundred miles away. And for three days and nights this lurid tower swayed in the sky, reddening the sun, darkening the day, and filling the land with smoke.”” | Eyewitness accounts provide more details than third-person accounts. |
| “There was no opposing the flames. There was no organization, no communication.” | Eyewitness accounts provide more details than third-person accounts. |
| “The streets were humped into ridges and depressions, and piled with the debris of fallen walls. The steel rails were twisted into perpendicular and horizontal angles.” | Eyewitness accounts provide more details than third-person accounts. |
| “By Wednesday afternoon, inside of twelve hours, half the heart of the city was gone. At that time, I watched the vast conflagration from out on the bay. It was dead calm. Not a flicker of wind stirred. Yet from every side wind was pouring in upon the city. East, west, north, and south, winds were blowing upon the doomed city.” | Eyewitness accounts provide more details than third-person accounts. |
| “On the morning of April 18, 1906, a massive earthquake shook San Francisco, California. Though the quake lasted less than a minute, its immediate impact was disastrous. The earthquake also ignited several fires around the city that burned for three days and destroyed nearly 500 city blocks.” | Eyewitness accounts provide more details than third-person accounts. |
| “The earthquake and fires killed an estimated 3,000 people and left half of the city's 400,000 residents homeless.” | Third-person accounts are sometimes more objective than eyewitness accounts and provide less biased information. |
| “An enumeration of the building destroyed would be a directory of San Francisco. An enumeration of the buildings undestroyed would be a line and several addresses. An enumeration of the deeds of heroism would stock a library and bankrupt the Carnegie medal fund. An enumeration of the dead will never be made.” | Eyewitness accounts often provide more subjective details and information is sometimes more biased. |
| “It was at Union Square that I saw a man offering a thousand dollars for a team of horses.” | Eyewitness accounts provide more personal stories of the people who experienced the event than third-person accounts do. |
| “Also, at this time, standing beside the truck, I urged a man to seek safety in flight. He was all but hemmed in by conflagrations. He was an old man and he was on crutches. Said he: ‘Today is my birthday. Last night I was worth thirty thousand dollars. I bought some delicate fish and other things for my birthday dinner. I have had no dinner and all I own are these crutches.’” | Eyewitness accounts provide more personal stories of the people who experienced the event than third-person accounts do. |
| “I went inside with the owner of the house on the steps of which I sat. He was cool and cheerful and hospitable. ‘Yesterday morning,’ he said, ‘I was worth six hundred thousand dollars. This morning this house is all I have left. It will go in fifteen minutes.’” | Eyewitness accounts provide more personal stories of the people who experienced the event than third-person accounts do. |
| “The survivors slept in tents in city parks and the Presidio, stood in long lines for food, and were required to do their cooking in the street to minimize the threat of additional fires.” | Eyewitness accounts provide more personal stories of the people who experienced the event than third-person accounts do. |
| “The street was a wall of flame. And against this wall of flame, silhouetted sharply, were two United States cavalrymen sitting on their horses, calmly watching. That was all. Not another person was in sight. In the intact heart of the city, two troopers sat [on] their horses and watched.” | Eyewitness accounts often rely on more literary techniques, like imagery, to tell the story of an event than third-person accounts do. |
| “Despite a quick response from San Francisco's large military population, the city was devastated. The earthquake and fires killed an estimated 3,000 people and left half of the city's 400,000 residents homeless.” | Third-person accounts use facts, rather than using literary techniques like imagery, to tell the story of an event. |

1. Once students have completed the evidence chart, they should look back at the writing prompt in order to remind themselves what kind of response they are writing (i.e. expository, analytical, argumentative) and think about the evidence they found. (Depending on the grade level, teachers may want to review students’ evidence charts in some way to ensure accuracy.) From here, students should develop a specific thesis statement. This could be done independently, with a partner, small group, or the entire class. Consider directing students to the following sites to learn more about thesis statements: http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/545/01/ OR http://www.indiana.edu/~wts/pamphlets/ thesis\_statement.shtml.
2. Students compose a rough draft. With regard to grade level and student ability, teachers should decide how much scaffolding they will provide during this process (i.e. modeling, showing example pieces, sharing work as students go).
3. Students conference with peers and teacher regarding their rough drafts. Peers and teacher should provide feedback allowing students to strengthen writing and address grammar, mechanics and usage issues.
4. Students complete final draft.

* Sample Answer

Jack London’s “The Story of an Eyewitness” is a first-person account of the San Francisco Earthquake of 1906 and the massive destruction caused by the fires that consumed the city on the aftermath of the earthquake. The National Archives article detailing the same event is a third-person account and differs from London’s account in several ways. London’s eyewitness article provides more details, uses subjective experiences and personal stories of the individuals who experienced the event, and uses literary techniques like imagery to tell the story of the San Francisco Earthquake of 1906 and the complete destruction of the city in the raging fires that followed. In contrast, the National Archives article describing the San Francisco Earthquake of 1906 uses fewer details, relies more heavily on facts and objective information, and does not use literary techniques like imagery in its accounting of the event.

First-person accounts often provide more details than third-person accounts of events. In the National Archives article about the San Francisco Earthquake of 1906, the event is summed up concisely. The article states, “On the morning of April 18, 1906, a massive earthquake shook San Francisco, California. Though the quake lasted less than a minute, its immediate impact was disastrous. The earthquake also ignited several fires around the city that burned for three days and destroyed nearly 500 city blocks”. In contrast, London’s “The Story of an Eyewitness” uses many more details in the telling of the events. London writes, “The earthquake shook down in San Francisco hundreds of thousands of dollars’ worth of walls and chimneys. But the conflagration that followed burned up hundreds of millions of dollars’ worth of property,” and “Within an hour after the earthquake shock the smoke of San Francisco’s burning was a lurid tower visible a hundred miles away. And for three days and nights this lurid tower swayed in the sky, reddening the sun, darkening the day, and filling the land with smoke” (p. 399). Since an eyewitness account is written by a person who actually experienced the event, the account often provides a deeper perspective and offers more details than a brief, third-person account can provide.

Another way in which eyewitness and third-person accounts differ is in their use of objective and subjective information. Third-person accounts typically rely more heavily on verifiable facts, while eyewitness accounts are usually written at the time or shortly after an event and may not have an accurate tally of the facts involved. This can make eyewitness accounts slightly more biased than third-person accounts. For example, the National Archives article provides the following information: “The earthquake and fires killed an estimated 3,000 people and left half of the city's 400,000 residents homeless”, while London’s eyewitness accounts states, “An enumeration of the buildings destroyed would be a directory of San Francisco. An enumeration of the buildings undestroyed would be a line and several addresses. An enumeration of the deeds of heroism would stock a library and bankrupt the Carnegie medal fund. An enumeration of the dead will never be made”. While London’s account is the more moving of the two, the National Archives account is a more accurate description of the total damage.

A third way in which these types of accounts differ is in their use of personal details. An eyewitness account is based on what the author sees and hears during an event, and uses the author’s personal experience to describe an event. The author also uses the personal stories of others experiencing the same event to provide a connection with the reader. For example, London uses the following details to tell the story though the eyes of others experiencing the San Francisco Earthquake of 1906: “Also, at this time, standing beside the truck, I urged a man to seek safety in flight. He was all but hemmed in by conflagrations. He was an old man and he was on crutches. Said he: ‘Today is my birthday. Last night I was worth thirty thousand dollars. I bought some delicate fish and other things for my birthday dinner. I have had no dinner and all I own are these crutches’” and “I went inside with the owner of the house on the steps of which I sat. He was cool and cheerful and hospitable. ‘Yesterday morning,’ he said, ‘I was worth six hundred thousand dollars. This morning this house is all I have left. It will go in fifteen minutes’”. Third-person accounts, on the other hand, do not use the personal experiences of others, but rely on the facts of the situation. The National Archives article sums up the situation as experienced by the people by stating, “The survivors slept in tents in city parks and the Presidio, stood in long lines for food, and were required to do their cooking in the street to minimize the threat of additional fires”.

Finally, eyewitness accounts more frequently rely on literary techniques like imagery to provide the reader with first-hand evidence of the experience, while third-person accounts are often more concise and report facts. For example, London uses imagery quite frequently in his description of the San Francisco Earthquake of 1906, as demonstrated in his description of the heart of San Francisco less than twenty-four hours after the earthquake: “The street was a wall of flame. And against this wall of flame, silhouetted sharply, were two United States cavalrymen sitting on their horses, calmly watching. That was all. Not another person was in sight. In the intact heart of the city, two troopers sat [on] their horses and watched”. Compared to the National Archives article, which simply states, “Despite a quick response from San Francisco's large military population, the city was devastated”, London’s description paints a much more vivid image of the city in the midst of the destruction for the reader.

In conclusion, there are many differences between eyewitness and third-person accounts of the same event. Eyewitness accounts, which are told from the first-person point of view, provide more details, use subjective and personal experiences of the author and others he or she encounters, and relies on literary techniques like imagery to provide a description of the event at the time. Third-person accounts, on the other hand, are brief, concise, rely primarily upon verifiable facts and rarely use literary techniques to tell the story. Jack London’s “The Story of an Eyewitness” and the National Archives article provide examples of how these types of nonfiction articles differ.

Additional Tasks

* *Imagery / Mood Focus: In collaborative groups, select one passage from Jack London’s “*The Story of an Eyewitness” *and re-create (draw, sketch, paint, collage, etc.) the image he evokes with his words.* 
  + Answer: Responses will vary. Variations: assign each group a specific passage and ‘score’ their work by whether or not they recreate specific details, use specific colors, etc.
* *Syntax and Language Focus: Have pairs of students rewrite sections of the account in modern-day English, taking care to keep the original meaning while updating the syntax and language used. Then have students put the story together again, publishing in a modern format.* 
  + Answer: Responses will vary due to student skill with language and syntax. End product should be a culmination of the story, as told in modern English that can be used to support struggling students (particularly English Language Learners).
* *Creative Writing Focus: Have students write an eyewitness account of one hour of their day, using chronological order and providing enough details to keep the reader engaged. Bonus points for use of imagery!*
  + Answer: Final product will be a short eyewitness essay detailing a specific hour of the student’s life arranged chronologically, with adequate details and adhering to the conventions of Standard English.

Note to Teacher

* While the text may be challenging, this passage provides ample opportunities for teaching multiple skills in regard to grammar, literary technique, author’s purpose / word choice, vocabulary development and strategies, and writing. The guideline of 5 days (at 45 minutes each day), may be extended to accommodate any/all of these skill strands.

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**“The Story of an Eyewitness”**

1. Who was Jack London and why did he go to San Francisco?
2. What does the word ‘conflagration’ mean? What evidence from the text supports your answer? What effect does using ‘conflagration’ have?
3. Why didn’t the fire department respond right away? What particular challenges did they face? Point to specific examples in the text.
4. Explain how dynamite was used to contain the fire.
5. In paragraph 5, London uses a specific word in his description of the destruction he sees. What word does he use and what is the effect of the author’s repetition of this word?
6. Reread the section titled, “A Caravan of Trunks”. Why were the shopkeepers and members of the middle class at a disadvantage during the fire? Cite evidence to support your response.
7. Why does London use the subheading “The Doomed City” to describe the same section of downtown San Francisco? What specific details from the text support this answer?
8. Why do you think London chose to use the image of the cavalry men in this section of the passage? Use evidence from the text to support your conclusions.
9. How did the conflagration affect the victims’ perceptions of what things were worth? Give examples from the text that support your answers.
10. What mood does London create using imagery in the section subheaded “The Dawn of the Second Day”? Create a chart listing specific details and images for the mood(s) you selected!
11. In your collaborative groups, create a timeline of at least five events London recounts in “The Story of an Eyewitness”. Use specific details from the text in your timeline.