

Disasters!

Eyewitness accounts of the 1906 SF Earthquake

Source A: *Destruction in the City!*

Businessman Jerome B. Clark lived in Berkeley across the bay from San Francisco. He experienced a minor shake-up at his home in the early morning but this did not stop him from making his regular trip to the city. He describes what he saw as he disembarked from the ferry:

"In every direction from the ferry building flames were seething, and as I stood there, a five story building half a block away fell with a crash, and the flames swept clear across Market Street and caught a new fireproof building recently erected. The streets in places had sunk three or four feet, in others great humps had appeared four or five feet high. The street car tracks were bent and twisted out of shape. Electric wires lay in every direction. Streets on all sides were filled with brick and mortar, buildings either completely collapsed or brick fronts had just dropped completely off. Wagons with horses hitched to them, drivers and all, lying on the streets, all dead, struck and killed by the falling bricks, these mostly the wagons of the produce dealers, who do the greater part of their work at that hour of the morning. Warehouses and large wholesale houses of all descriptions either down, or walls bulging, or else twisted, buildings moved bodily two or three feet out of line and still standing with walls all cracked. 5 10

Fires were blazing in all directions, and all of the finest and best of the office and business buildings were either burning or surrounded. They pumped water from the bay, but the fire was soon too far away from the water front to make efforts in this direction of much avail. The water mains had been broken by the earthquake, and so there was no supply for the fire engines and they were helpless. The only way out was to dynamite, and I saw some of the finest and most beautiful buildings in the city, new modern palaces, blown to atoms. First they blew up one or two buildings at a time. Finding that of no avail, they took half a block; that was no use; then they took a block; but in spite of them all the fire kept on spreading." 15 20

Source B: A Narrow Escape

The quake awoke G.A. Raymond as he slept in his room at the Palace Hotel. He describes his escape:

"I awoke as I was thrown out of bed. Attempting to walk, the floor shook so that I fell. I grabbed my clothing and rushed down into the office, where dozens were already congregated. Suddenly the lights went out, and every one rushed for the door.

Outside I witnessed a sight I never want to see again. It was dawn and light. I looked up. The air was filled with falling stones. People around me were crushed to death on all sides. All around the huge buildings were shaking and waving. Every moment there were reports like 100 cannons going off at one time. Then streams of fire would shoot out, and other reports followed.

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I asked a man standing next to me what happened. Before he could answer a thousand bricks fell on him and he was killed. A woman threw her arms around my neck. I pushed her away and fled. All around me buildings were rocking and flames shooting. As I ran people on all sides were crying, praying and calling for help. I thought the end of the world had come.

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I met a Catholic priest, and he said: 'We must get to the ferry.' He knew the way, and we rushed down Market Street. Men, women and children were crawling from the debris. Hundreds were rushing down the street and every minute people were felled by debris.

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At places the streets had cracked and opened. Chasms extended in all directions. I saw a drove of cattle, wild with fright, rushing up Market Street. I crouched beside a swaying building. As they came nearer they disappeared, seeming to drop out into the earth. When the last had gone I went nearer and found they had indeed been precipitated into the earth, a wide fissure having swallowed them. I was crazy with fear and the horrible sights.

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How I reached the ferry I cannot say. It was bedlam, pandemonium and hell rolled into one. There must have been 10,000 people trying to get on that boat. Men and women fought like wildcats to push their way aboard. Clothes were torn from the backs of men and women and children indiscriminately. Women fainted, and there was no water at hand with which to revive them. Men lost their reason at those awful moments. One big, strong man, beat his head against one of the iron pillars on the dock, and cried out in a loud voice: 'This fire must be put out! The city must be saved!' It was awful."

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Q1: Read lines 1 to 12 of Source A.

Choose four statements below which are TRUE.

- The fire burned slowly across the city
- Residents were killed by collapsing brickwork
- The earthquake caused the ground to sink
- Water was pumped from the bay
- The fire was put out easily by firefighters
- Even a 'fireproof building' caught fire
- Electricity cables were undamaged in the quake

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Q2: Refer to Source A and Source B. Write a summary of the differences between the two eye-witness accounts. Aim to write 100 – 150 words.

Q3: Re-read this extract from Source B.

“Outside I witnessed a sight I never want to see again. It was dawn and light. I looked up. The air was filled with falling stones. People around me were crushed to death on all sides. All around the huge buildings were shaking and waving. Every moment there were reports like 100 cannons going off at one time. Then streams of fire would shoot out, and other reports followed.

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How does the writer use language to convey a sense of terror to the reader?