

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS ANSWER KEY

SCENE 1 – THE LAWS OF FIRE

1. What is the Law of Fire Behavior?

It is the fire triangle. The fire triangle describes the three elements that fire needs to exist – fuel, oxygen, and heat.

2. Explain the fire triangle using the example of a campfire.

A campfire gets its oxygen from the air, its fuel from firewood, and its heat from the kindling and matches/lighter that are used to light it. If you want to put a campfire out, you just remove one of the elements. You can take away the fuel (stop adding and spread out the wood in the fire pit). You can pour water on the fire (remove the heat). You can smother a fire with dirt (removing the oxygen). To best put out a campfire, you should do all three!

3. What was Prometheus trying to say before he was escorted off of the stage?

He was trying to say that fire can be both dangerous and useful.

4. What do you think the Law of Responsible Use is?

It is the law that states that all people must use fire responsibly, using it carefully and only for useful purposes, not destructive ones.

SCENE 2 – FIRE AND THE FIRST PEOPLE

1. Why could one of the aspen trees remember what happened so long in the past?

Most aspen tree grows from a very large root system. The root system produces many different trees and can survive for very long periods of time. In the story, one of the aspen trees can remember very far in the past because it is growing from a root system that has been alive for that long.

2. Who were The First People?

The First People were the Native American Tribes that lived in Wisconsin before the European Settlers arrived.

3. How did The First People use fire?

They used it to clear fields for farming. They used it to help the growth of plants and shrubs that were good wild food and good for wildlife. They used fire to move and corral wildlife for hunting.

4. How did their use of fire change the landscape?

The fires set by Native Americans killed trees and plants that didn't like fire (like maple and basswood trees) and helped trees that survive or reproduce after fire (like oak and aspen trees). Fires also kept many grasslands and prairies from growing into forests. The fires were mostly small and created a patchwork landscape with different trees where fires burned and where they didn't burn.

5. How is the use of fire different now?

Fire is not used across the landscape because many different people own land. Mostly, fires are prevented and suppressed to protect property and human life.

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SCENE 3 – THE CUTOVER AND DEADLY FIRES

1. What happened in the city of Peshtigo in 1871?

A wildfire passed through the town. It destroyed buildings, forests, farms and killed nearly 1,000 people.

2. How did the destructive Peshtigo fire start?

It is unknown exactly how the fire started. It is known that people were not careful with fire, and under such dry conditions, cooking fires, disposed ashes, and even machine sparks could have started the fire.

3. What human and natural events caused the fire to be so destructive?

Logging and construction activities around Peshtigo left piles of branches and leaves on the forest floor. In addition, a very dry year set the stage for the deadly fire. The forests and fields were so dry that wetlands dried up and were very flammable. Very dry leaves, needles, and branches covered the forest floor. In spite of these conditions, people were not more careful with fire.

4. Was Peshtigo the only place where big, destructive fire happened?

Fires similar to Peshtigo occurred in countries around the globe where settlements and logging were expanding into new areas. Fires occurred in Minnesota, Michigan, Northern Europe, Russia and Southeast Asia.

SCENE 4 – AFTER THE CUTOVER

1. What happened to many of the trees in northern Wisconsin during the 1800s?

They were cut down. The wood was used to build many Midwestern cities.

2. What happened to the lumber mills in northern Wisconsin after all of the trees were cut down?

The lumber mills closed. The towns that supported the mill workers also failed.

3. What happened to the landscape after all of the trees were cut down?

Many of the lands were just stumps, tree limbs, and rocks. Some of the lands were farmed, some were left untouched, and some were burned by wildfires.

4. Why did people want to farm the land after the trees were gone?

After the lumber mills closed there were no jobs. Trees would take too long to grow back. Many of the immigrants who came to work in the lumber mills were farmers, and the land was already cleared of trees.

5. What do you think happened to many of the farms in northern Wisconsin?

The climate and soils of northern Wisconsin were more suitable to trees than to crops. Much of the soil was full of boulders and tree stumps. Because of the hardships, many of the farms did not survive. Only one quarter of the farms started after the Cutover still remain. The majority of the area that was once farmed is now forested.

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SCENE 5 – NO MORE WILDFIRES

1. What is Smokey Bear’s message?

“Only you can prevent wildfires.” His message is designed to make people aware that their actions can cause deadly fires.

2. Why did Smokey Bear want to tell people about this message?

Smokey’s story is that he was saved by forest rangers in a deadly wildfire that killed his parents. The character of Smokey was created by the U.S Forest Service to protect forests and property from accidental fires.

3. How do you think people reacted to this message? Do you think that the number of forest fires increased or decreased?

People took Smokey’s message to heart. Nearly everyone has heard of Smokey Bear. His message, as well as a nationwide policy to stop all wildfires, greatly decreased the area burned by wildfires in the U.S.

4. How do you think this affected the environment?

The environment changed because there were fewer and fewer fires. Trees and plants that could not survive fire or did not grow well after fire began to dominate the landscape. The plants and trees that took advantage of fire and depended on fire to survive began to diminish. The forests grew very thick because fire was not there to thin the stands of trees. The suppression of fires also allowed individuals and business to build in areas that were prone to fire.

SCENE 6 – A CHANGING LANDSCAPE

1. What is the issue that the news report is dealing with?

The issue is wildfire – more specifically wildfires that occur in the Wildland/Urban Interface. The Wildland/Urban Interface is any area where homes and/or business are being built in areas that are prone to wildfires. The areas are found in landscapes that have had wildfires throughout history. In many cases, fire suppression has just postponed the fires. The fires, when they come, will be more intense because there is much more to burn.

2. How do the different people in the program feel about fire?

The realtor is excited about how many houses are selling. The fire warden is very concerned and states that it is only a matter of time. The homeowners know about the risk, but are willing to take their chances.

3. What can people do to protect themselves from wildfires?

They can make the choice to not build a home in a fire-prone area. If they do build, they can construct their house of fire-resistant materials and be sure that flammable materials are away from the building at all times. They can follow the restriction on the use of fire and always be careful with potential sources of ignition.

4. Do you think that the threat that wildfire poses to people and their homes is increasing or decreasing? Why?

Increasing. Many people are building new homes in rural areas. Cities and towns are growing and expanding into undeveloped areas. Wildfires that destroy homes are now commonplace in many areas and are often featured on news programs.