

ACTIVITY 3

CALLING PAPA HOME

In Chapter 3 of *Wisconsin Forest Tales*, students learn about the Great Peshtigo Fire through the main character, Susanna. In this activity, students study maps to enhance their understanding of the extent of the fire.

BACKGROUND

**One dark night, when people were in bed,
Mrs. O’Leary lit a lantern in her shed,
The cow kicked it over, winked its eye and said,
There’ll be a hot time in the old town tonight.**

LESSON OBJECTIVES

Upon completion of this activity, students will be able to:

- Locate Peshtigo on a map of Wisconsin.
- Describe the effects of the Great Peshtigo Fire on people and property.
- List at least three counties effected by the Great Peshtigo Fire.
- Explain how to prevent forest fires.

TIME

Introduction.....5 minutes
Activity.....30 minutes
Conclusion.....20 minutes

MATERIALS

- Drawing paper and crayons, markers, or colored pencils
- Overhead projector
- Overhead transparencies of Road Map of Wisconsin and Peshtigo Fire Map
- One Road Map of Wisconsin and one Peshtigo Fire Map per student
- Wisconsin road map(s)

SUBJECT AREAS ADDRESSED

Social Studies
Visual Arts

Many Americans have heard the old story, whether real or not, about the cow that kicked over a lantern and started the Great Chicago Fire on October 8, 1871. What many Americans haven’t heard is that on the very same night as the Chicago fire, another more severe fire took place in eastern Wisconsin: the Great Peshtigo Fire.

Although the Chicago fire and the Peshtigo fire occurred on the same night, the fire in Chicago got a greater amount of attention and press coverage. Thus, it may be surprising to find out that about 1,400 people died in the Peshtigo fire, while about 300 people died in the Chicago fire. In addition, 2,400 square miles of land burned in the Peshtigo fire, while 4 square miles of land burned in the Chicago fire. When news of the Peshtigo fire reached Wisconsin’s capital on October 10, 1871, the governor and other state officials were in Chicago, helping the victims of that fire.

Peshtigo is now called the city reborn from the ashes of America’s greatest fire. On October 8 each year, the Peshtigo historical society marks the anniversary of the fire with a special candlelight service that is open to the public. It is an event worth remembering. Hopefully this lesson will help your students place Peshtigo on the map.



INTRODUCTION

Explain to your students that wildfires can be destructive. Wildlife can die and valuable

habitat is lost. Wildfires can take human lives as well. Remind students that when the Peshtigo fire took place, people were not educated about the risks and dangers of wildfire. Many people stayed in their houses because they were more afraid of someone stealing their silver than they were of losing their lives. Some people who tried to escape were not able to and they also died in the flames. Tell students that there were about 1,400 people who died in the Peshtigo fire. Help students understand the magnitude of this number by comparing it to an example they are familiar with. (For example, the number of people in your school or town.)

Explain to students that even though the fire was tragic, there were survivors. Remind them that the story in the chapter gives an idea of what it would have been like to live through the Great Peshtigo Fire. Ask students to describe how Susanna and her family survived the fire. (*They ran to the river and covered their heads with wet blankets.*) Tell students that they will have a chance to find this river on the map as well as other important landmarks related to this enormous fire.



ACTIVITY

1) Give each student a copy of the Road Map of Wisconsin and the Peshtigo Fire Map. Project a transparency of the Peshtigo Fire Map on an overhead projector. Ask your students to look at the Peshtigo Fire Map first and direct their attention to the lower left corner where the entire state of Wisconsin is shown. Explain that in this image, the areas affected by the fire are highlighted. Then explain that the larger image is a blowup of the burned area showing more detail.

2) Begin a discussion to help orient students to the area burned by the fire. Invite a student to come up to the front and point to the city of Peshtigo on the projected map. Once the volunteer has done so, ask your students to put a red star on Peshtigo on their copies of both the Road Map of Wisconsin and the Peshtigo Fire Map. Ask your students to locate the Peshtigo River on the Peshtigo Fire Map and outline the

river in blue. Now point out the dotted line on the Peshtigo Fire Map. Explain that this line shows the extent of the fire. The fire burned over 2,400 square miles of land. This would be equal to two times the size of Dane County, Wisconsin or eleven times the size of Lake Winnebago. (Show these areas to your students on a map.) Now ask your students to raise their hands if they can list one of the counties affected by the fire. As your students list the counties, highlight the names of the counties on your overhead and ask your students to circle the names of the counties on their Peshtigo Fire Maps in black. (*Counties affected were: Marinette, Oconto, Brown, Kewaunee, Door, and Menominee.*) Ask your students which one of the counties affected is actually in Michigan. (*Menominee County is in Michigan.*)

3) Next, have students use their Road Map of Wisconsin to find 10 current towns that exist within the area that was burned. Ask students to raise their hands when they have found one. As your students list towns, have the rest of the class underline the names of those towns on their Road Maps of Wisconsin in blue. Obviously, there are more than ten current towns that exist within the boundaries of the fire. Finding at least 10 will help connect your students to the area that was burned. Discuss how the area has been rebuilt and repopulated since the Peshtigo fire. It is probably very difficult to tell that there was ever such a great fire in the area. If any of your students have been to the area, have them describe what it looks like.

4) Although many towns have been built in this area, there are some towns that never got rebuilt. Have your students look at the Peshtigo Fire Map and compare it to the Road Map of Wisconsin. Ask them to look for towns on the Peshtigo Fire Map that are not listed on the Road Map of Wisconsin. Ask your students to raise their hands when they have found one. As your students list them, have the rest of the class underline the names of those towns on their Peshtigo Fire Maps in blue. (*Peshtigo Harbor, Upper Sugar Bush, Middle Sugar Bush, Lower Sugar Bush, Menekaune, Tobinville, and Williamsonville were never rebuilt.*)

5) Finally, have your students plot a route on a state road map from their town to Peshtigo.

You can do this as a group or divide the students into multiple groups if you have enough maps. Begin by helping your students locate your town on the Road Map of Wisconsin. Ask your students to put a blue star on your town. Give your students time to look at the roads on the map and identify a route that would get them from their town to Peshtigo. Ask your students to outline that route in black on the Road Map of Wisconsin.



CONCLUSION

Explain to your students that a fire as large as the Great Peshtigo Fire has not taken place in Wisconsin since 1871. Ask your students why a fire this large is not likely to happen today. *(Possible answers include: Smokey Bear has helped educate people about wildfires; today we have local fire stations with firefighters always on duty to help put out fires; communication is faster so firefighters can get to fires when they are smaller than they could in the past, fire trucks are equipped with hoses and other helpful tools to put out fires as quickly as possible.)* Ask your students what they can do to help prevent fires. *(Never play with matches or fireworks. Always keep a bucket of water and a shovel near a campfire. Have an adult put out your campfire before leaving the forest. Never leave a fire unwatched. Carry a fire extinguisher in your car. Always check with fire officials in your area before burning.)* Finally, have your students make posters showing ways they can help prevent forest fires. When the posters are complete display them in the hallway of your school to help teach other students about fire safety.



ASSESSMENT

Explain to your students that it is important to have a plan of what to do in case of an emergency happens, such as a fire. This is why fire drills occur in schools, so everyone has an opportunity to practice the plan. Talk about what happens during a fire drill at school. *(Do not panic. Walk to the nearest exit. Do not gather your backpack or items in your desk. Do not go back inside until an adult tells you to do so.)* Have students write a plan of what they would do if there was a fire in or near their home. Have them consider what door they would exit, if there is a window they could crawl out, how far they would go from the house, where they would meet with their family, etc. Encourage students to work on this with their family or share it once it is complete.



ROAD MAP OF WISCONSIN



PESHTIGO FIRE MAP

