1. This book is about wildfires. Write what you already **know** about fires, wildfires, and forest fires in the **K** column.

2. What do you **want** to know about wildfires? Write your questions in the **W** column.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What I <strong>K</strong>now</th>
<th>What I <strong>W</strong>ant to <strong>K</strong>now</th>
<th>What I Have <strong>L</strong>earned</th>
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3. Now, work with a partner or small group to discuss your notes. Can your partner(s) answer any of your questions? Does your partner know other facts about wildfires? Write any new information in the **L** column. You can add to this chart as you study *Wildfires*.

4. The vocabulary words on the left appear in Unit 1. Match them to the correct definitions on the right. The first one has been done for you as an example.

- bare: a factory for cutting wood
- surrounded: trash, material that is not needed
- miraculously: a person who cuts down trees
- logger: covered on all sides
- sawmill: empty
- debris: amazingly, almost impossibly
Terrance Kelly saw the flames race toward his house on the night of October 8, 1871. The air was thick with smoke, and the wind was making things worse. Terrance Kelly and his family knew they had to run for their lives. They ran toward a field near the house. Since the field was bare with nothing there to burn, Terrance Kelly thought he and his family would be safe. But soon, the family was surrounded by fire. Trees crashed around them. Everywhere they looked, there was fire.

Afterward, Mrs. Kelly, who had survived somehow, returned to the house that had burned to the ground. She saw nothing but ashes. Miraculously, she found two of her children against the garden wall. They were still wrapped in each other’s arms, unhurt. Somehow the flames had raced over the garden wall without touching the tiny bodies huddled there.

Mrs. Kelly and her children had survived one of the worst natural disasters ever to strike in the United States—the Peshtigo fire. Because this fire burned on the same day as the Great Chicago Fire, there was little news available about it. However, the Peshtigo fire was a horrifying inferno that took more than a thousand lives. The best estimates say that between 1,200 and 2,500 people around Peshtigo died in the fire. In the Chicago fire at the same time, 270 people died and 17,000 buildings were destroyed. The Chicago tragedy captured much more attention. For decades, few people heard about the Peshtigo disaster unless they lived near Wisconsin.

The town of Peshtigo is in northeastern Wisconsin a short distance from the Michigan border. It was a town of loggers and sawmills in the 1870s. Peshtigo (which is a Chippewa word meaning “River of the Wild Goose”) stood at the edge of a huge forest of pine trees to its west and north. About ten miles away to the east was Green Bay, leading to Lake Michigan. To the south was farmland. The Peshtigo River ran through the town.

The fall of 1871 was extremely dry. After July 8, there was no more rain, so the swamps dried up. The tall pine forests were easy prey for lightning strikes. Then, on September 5, there was a brief rain, and people hoped there would be more.

Naturally, the logging camps had a lot of wood debris lying around. The loggers often burned the pieces of wood in small fires. They thought it was safe to do this because it had rained on September 5. But embers from these fires blew into the dry forests, and soon fires started and sent smoke into nearby towns. It was the beginning of the disaster for Peshtigo.

People in the nearby towns complained about the smoke. It seemed more smoke than usual was coming from the forests. Since there were often small fires in the forests, no one was alarmed. At first the smoke was just an irritation. As days passed and the smoke grew thicker, flakes of white ash began to fall like snow.
Free-Writing

In your notebook or journal, free-write your answer to some or all of the questions.

Have you or anyone you know ever been trapped by a fire? Or, have you ever read about a fire? What happened? What should you do if you see a fire?

TIP! Free-writing means writing all your ideas without stopping and without worrying about spelling, punctuation, or grammar. Keep your pen moving! Free-writing means thinking on paper and will help you become a better writer.

Understanding the Reading

Answer the questions about the reading passage. Choose the best answer from the answers following each question.

1. What is the main topic of this unit?
   a. the Chicago fire of 1871
   b. the Peshtigo fire of 1871
   c. the Kelly family
   d. logging camps in Wisconsin

2. How did the Kelly children survive?
   a. They hid in a field.
   b. Their house was not destroyed.
   c. They stayed with Mrs. Kelly.
   d. They were protected by a garden wall.

TIP! If you don't know the answer to a question, write a star next to it and go on to the next question. At the end, read the passage again, and try to find the answers to the questions you starred.
3. Why didn’t people know about the Peshtigo fire?
   a. The fire in Chicago was a bigger news story.
   b. Fewer people died in Peshtigo than in Chicago.
   c. There were no newspapers in Peshtigo.
   d. No one survived the Peshtigo fire.

4. What was the main industry in Peshtigo in 1871?
   a. farming
   b. textiles
   c. producing wood
   d. building automobiles

5. Which of the following was NOT a cause of the Peshtigo fire of 1871?
   a. The fall had been very dry.
   b. A pine tree was hit by lightening.
   c. The loggers used to burn unneeded wood.
   d. A spark from a fire blew into the forest.

6. Why were local residents not worried at first?
   a. They couldn’t smell any smoke.
   b. Nobody complained about the smoke.
   c. They were used to small fires in the forest.
   d. There was ash falling from the sky.
Study Strategy: Maps

To help you understand the geography of the reading, label the towns and cities from the list on the map. Use the information in the reading to help you.

Chicago       Michigan
Green Bay     Peshtigo
Lake Michigan Peshtigo River

TIP! Most maps have a compass showing North or all four directions.
Language in Use: Shifting Verb Tenses

We use tenses to mark when a verb happened—in the past, in the present, or in the future. For example:

Wildfires are very dangerous. (present tense)
The Peshtigo fire was very destructive. (past tense)
Tomorrow, there will be a high risk of forest fires. (future tense)

Usually, good writers do not change tenses in the middle of a paragraph or story. Sometimes, though, it is useful to change tense. The present tense can show that something is still true today or is always true. The past tense can describe an event in the past or show a difference between the past and present.

1. In each sentence from the reading, the verbs appear in bold. Write past or present above each verb.

(1) The town of Peshtigo is in northeastern Wisconsin, a short distance from the Michigan border. (2) It was a town of loggers and sawmills in the 1870s. (3) Peshtigo (which is a Chippewa word meaning “River of the Wild Goose”) stood at the edge of a huge forest of pine trees to its west and north.

Why does the writer change tense between sentences 1 and 2?

________________________________________________________________

Do you think that there is still a pine forest to the west and north of Peshtigo? Why or why not?

________________________________________________________________

2. Circle the best verb from the choices in parentheses to complete the paragraph. Watch out for changes in tense!

Wisconsin (is/was) a state in the Midwest of the United States. It (is/was) first settled by Native Americans thousands of years ago. It (becomes/became) a state in 1848. In the 19th century, Wisconsin (is/was) an important source of wood, but today the state (is/was) more famous for its dairy products, especially cheese.
Writing in Response

TASK: Imagine you lived in Peshtigo in October 1871. You notice that there is a lot of smoke, but the town officials aren’t doing anything about it. Write a letter to the mayor of Peshtigo to complain about the situation.

Stage 1: Role-play a conversation between a citizen of Peshtigo and the mayor. Take turns playing the citizen. Explain to the mayor why you are worried about the smoke, and say what you want the town officials to do. The mayor should reassure you that there is no danger.

Stage 2: Make a list of complaints and a list of actions you want the mayor to take.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasons for Complaining</th>
<th>Actions the Mayor Should Take</th>
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Stage 3: Complete the letter.

123 S. Main Street
Peshtigo, Wisconsin

October 4, 1871

The Mayor
City Hall
Peshtigo, Wisconsin

Dear Mayor of Peshtigo:

I am writing to complain about the smoke that is coming from the forest.

Explain why you are complaining and what you want the mayor to do.

Thank you for your attention.

Sincerely,

Sign and print your name.