

## The San Francisco Earthquake

### Jack London

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 dollars' worth of property. There is no estimating within hundreds of millions the actual damage wrought. Not in history has a modern imperial city been so completely destroyed. San Francisco is gone. Nothing remains of it but memories and a fringe of dwelling houses on its outskirts. Its industrial section is wiped out. Its business section is wiped out. The factories and warehouses, the great stores and newspaper buildings, the hotels and the palaces of the nabobs are all gone. There remains only the fringe of dwelling houses on the outskirts of what was once San Francisco.

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.

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. There was no opposing the flames. There was no organization, no communication. All the cunning adjustments of a twentieth century city had been smashed by the earthquake. 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. The telephone and telegraph systems were disrupted. And the great water mains had burst. All the shrewd contrivances and safeguards of man had been thrown out of gear by thirty seconds' twitching of the earth's crust.

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, strong winds were blowing upon the doomed city. The heated air rising made an enormous suck. Thus did the fire of itself build its own colossal chimney through the atmosphere. Day and night this dead calm continued, and yet, near to the flames, the wind was often half a gale, so mighty was the suck.

Wednesday night saw the destruction of the very heart of the city. 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 the flames. Time and again successful stands were made by the fire fighters, and every time the flames flanked around on either side, or came up from the rear, and turned to defeat the hard-won victory.<sup>1</sup>

## **Rhetorical Analysis Journal #1: Tone**

**Passage:**

**Tone word one:**

Supporting Diction (at least 5)

Supporting choices of details (3)

**Tone Word two:**

Support Diction (at least 5)

Supporting choice of details (3)

## **Structured Journals: Reading Comprehension and Test Preparation**

### **Quarter One: Rhetorical Analysis**

#### **Journal #2**

They carried all the emotional baggage of men who might die, Grief, terror, love, longing-these were intangibles, but the intangibles had their own mass and specific gravity, they had tangible weight. They carried shameful memories. They carried the common secret of cowardice barely restrained, the instinct to run or freeze or hide, and in many respects this was the heaviest burden of all, for it could never be put down, it required perfect balance and perfect posture. They carried their reputations. They carried the soldier's greatest fear, which was the fear of blushing. Men killed, and died, because they were embarrassed not to. It was what had brought them to the war in the first place, nothing positive, no dream of glory or honor, just to avoid the blush of dishonor. They died so as not to die of embarrassment. . . . It was not courage, exactly; the object was not valor. Rather, they were too frightened to be cowards.

What is the meaning of “restrained”? Why did he use the word restrained instead of a word like held or hidden? What effect does the diction choice have on the tone?

During which situations do people usually blush? What is the meaning of “blushing” here?

What contradictions are created in this paragraph and how are they created?

## **Structured Journals: Reading Comprehension and Test Preparation**

### **Quarter One: Rhetorical Analysis**

#### **Journal #3**

I remember Norman Bowker and Henry Dobbins playing checkers every evening before dark. It was a ritual for them. They would dig a foxhole and get the board out and play long, silent games as the sky went from pink to purple. The rest of us would sometimes stop by to watch. There was something restful about it, something orderly and reassuring. There were red checkers and black checkers. The playing field was laid out in a strict grid, no tunnels or mountains or jungles. You know where you stood. You knew the score. The pieces were out on the board, the enemy was visible, you could watch the tactics unfolding into larger strategy. There was a winner and a loser. There were rules.

What is the purpose of O'Brien's use of checkers in this paragraph?

Describe his use of syntax. What patterns does he have in his sentence structure, and what effect is created by these patterns?

## Structured Journals: Reading Comprehension and Test Preparation

### Quarter One: Rhetorical Analysis

#### Journal #4

**If it had been possible, which it wasn't, he would have explained how his friend Kiowa slipped away that night beneath the dark, swampy field. He was folded in with the war; he was part of the waste.**

What are all of the different possible meanings of the word waste? Use a dictionary if necessary.

Replace the word **waste** in the last sentence with different synonyms for the word. Write three of your attempts here. Use a thesaurus if necessary. How does each word replacement change the meaning and power of the sentence?

How is this night with Kiowa symbolic of what happens to all of the men in the war?

## Structured Journals: Reading Comprehension and Test Preparation

### Quarter One: Rhetorical Analysis

#### Journal #5

“Most men wear their belts low here, there being so many outstanding bellies, some big enough to have names of their own, and be formally introduced. These men don't suck their guts in or hide them in loose shirts; they let them hang free, they pat them, they stroke them as they stand around and talk.”

Garrison Keillor: "Home"

What is the usual meaning of *outstanding*? What is the meaning here? What does this pun reveal about the attitude of the author toward the subject?

Read the second sentence again. How would the level of formality change if we changed *suck* to *pull* and *let them hang free* to *accept them*?

What is the tone of this piece?