



0. Great Fire of 1871 - Story Preface

1. FIRE!
2. 19TH CENTURY FIREFIGHTING
3. WAS IT REALLY THE COW?
4. FIRE IN PESHTIGO: A COINCIDENCE?
5. DEATH IN PESHTIGO
6. PESHTIGO SURVIVORS
7. CHICAGO IN 1871
8. CAUSE AND ORIGIN
9. CHICAGO BURNS
10. A DEVASTATED CITY
11. SHOCKED CITIZENS
12. CIVIL RESTRICTIONS
13. HOLLAND BURNS

This drawing, illustrating the October 1871 fire which devastated Chicago, was originally published by Currier & Ives in 1871. It was later reprinted for use on vintage postcards. Click on the image for a better view.

*One dark night when we were all 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.*

Popular Rhyme
Concerning the Great Chicago Fire
October 8-9, 1871

From the very beginning Catherine O'Leary and Daisy, her cow, were blamed for starting the Great Chicago Fire.

Mrs. O'Leary swore she was in bed when the fire started, but her testimony didn't change people's opinions. She'd made too many statements earlier - when she told her neighbors it was an accident. At least ... that's what her neighbors remembered.

Ironically, although 17,450 buildings were destroyed, the O'Leary's house survived. The cow (and the barn) didn't.

See [Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:](http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/Great-Fire-of-1871)
<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/Great-Fire-of-1871>

See [Learning Tasks for this story online at:](http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/Great-Fire-of-1871)
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Questions 2 Ponder

How Can We Undo the Negative Impact of Unfair Accusations?

At the time of the Great Chicago Fire, in 1871, the press widely blamed the blaze on Catherine O'Leary and her cow, Daisy. It seemed not to matter that Mrs. O'Leary denied she had anything to do with the fire's ignition.

When people "jump to a quick conclusion," they often use speculation instead of facts to accuse someone. That is what happened to Catherine O'Leary who was never able to clear her name. Do you think Mrs. O'Leary was fairly treated? Why, or why not?

What can a person do to clear his or her name, once it has been “dragged through the mud” of public condemnation?

What Makes People Act on Speculation Instead of on Actual Evidence?

It takes time for fire investigators to conduct a cause-and-origin analysis, so how could it be that blame for the Great Chicago Fire of 1871 was spread by the newspapers before the investigation was completed?

Does the need for answers, which purportedly explain a bad event, ever replace the need to conduct a careful investigation? Explain your answer.

Does it ever make sense to ascribe blame before blame can be reasonably evaluated?

Media Stream



Great Fire of 1871 - O'Leary Home

Stereograph by J. H. Abbott, of the O'Leary home, online courtesy Chicago Historical Society.

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