The History of Teeth
The totally gross—but totally fascinating—story of dentistry

About the Story
Lexile: 1030L (combined)
For qualitative complexity factors, go to Scope Online.

Learning Objective:
to synthesize information from two nonfiction texts about dentistry

Key Skills:
figurative language, text structure, key ideas and details, text features, synthesis, tone, author’s craft, close reading, critical thinking

Essential Questions:
• How can mummies teach us about history?
• What is the state of dental care today?
• Why is access to dentists important?

Standards:
This article and lesson support these Common Core anchor standards: R.1, R.2, R.4, R.7, R.9, W.2, SL.1, SL.2, L.4, L.6
For more standards information—including TEKS—go to Scope Online.

Your Teaching Support Package
Find your full suite of materials at scope.scholastic.com.

Audio:
• The articles
• Vocabulary

Literature Connections: ideas for connecting to curricular texts

Activities to print or project:
• Vocabulary
• Synthesis
• Close Reading and Critical Thinking
• Core Skills Workout: Text Structures, Text Evidence*
• Quiz*
• Contest Entry Form
*Available on two levels
Preparing to Read

Preview vocabulary.
(3 minutes, activity sheet online)
Project or distribute the Vocabulary Words and Definitions. Review as a class. Highlighted words: abscesses, advanced, anesthetics, baffled, charlatans, hone, prone, sophisticated, superstition

Reading and Discussing “The History of Teeth”
(20 minutes, activity sheet online)
• Play the audio version of the article as students follow along in their magazines.
• For the second read, break students into small groups. As they read, they should note anything they find interesting or surprising. Discuss what they noted as a class.
• Have students respond to the following questions in their small groups.

Close-Reading Questions
Imagery is vivid language that appeals to the five senses. How does Kristin Lewis use imagery in the section “Terrible Fact of Life”? What does this imagery add to the article? (figurative language) Lewis uses imagery to describe various dental issues that people have experienced throughout history. She describes Spartan warriors charging into battle with “oozy abscesses,” 18th-century French women covering their “rotting teeth,” and American cowboys having their teeth “yanked out” to show that for most of human history, people have had to endure dreadful dental problems.

What is the main purpose of the section “Worms in Your Teeth?” (text structure) The section provides an example of a common dental problem—cavities—and explains how a lack of understanding of what causes the cavities led to useless and even harmful treatments.

What key idea of the article do the details about tooth drawers on page 16 support? (key ideas and details) The details about tooth drawers support the idea that, in the past, a lack of reliable and safe dental care led to pain and suffering for many.

How does the information in the timeline relate to the rest of the article? (text features) The timeline provides additional details to support a key idea of the article: Our understanding of teeth and how to solve dental problems has changed greatly over time.

What led to the improvement of dental health over the centuries? (key ideas and details) Our growing understanding of what causes dental problems has greatly improved our ability to both prevent and treat dental problems. The passing of laws that require dentists to be licensed has also improved dental health because it “put the con artists out of business” (16). Advances in technology have also improved dental care, and therefore dental health, over the centuries.

“Where Are All the Dentists?”
(15 minutes, activity sheet online)
Read the editorial as a class. Then discuss the following questions, some of which draw on both texts.

Close-Reading Questions
On pages 15-16, Lewis explains that in the 18th and 19th centuries, most people were never treated by a proper dentist. On page 17, she states that today, millions of Americans
are not treated by dentists. Compare the reasons people lacked access to a dentist then and now. (synthesis) In the 18th and 19th centuries, most people didn’t have access to a dentist because modern dentistry was just developing and there were very few trained dentists. Plus, writes Lewis, the dentists who were around were expensive (16). Today, cost remains a reason that many people cannot visit dentists (17). There are now many professional dentists. Most of them, though, practice in urban or suburban areas, which leaves many who live in rural areas without access to them (17).

Describe the author’s tone in the section “How to Solve the Problem.” What words and phrases help create this tone? (tone) Words that describe the tone include optimistic and concerned. Words and phrases that create the tone include “fortunately,” “hopefully,” and “more needs to be done.”

Consider the last line of the editorial. Why might the author have chosen to end the article this way? (author’s craft) The author may have ended her article in this way to inspire or urge readers to work to solve the problem of dental deserts.

According to both articles, why is it important to take good care of your teeth? (key ideas, synthesis) It is important because proper dental care, such as visiting the dentist regularly and brushing and flossing daily, can prevent or cure most serious dental problems (13). Plus, ignoring dental problems could lead to other health issues or have expensive consequences (13, 17).

Critical-Thinking Question
The editorial explains one thing that is being done to solve the problem of dental deserts. What else could be done to help bring dental care to those who don’t have it? Answers will vary. Students might suggest that the government forgive the school loans of dentists who work in dental deserts to encourage more dentists to move to those areas, or that insurance companies should make dental coverage more affordable.

Skill Building
Featured Skill: Synthesis
(15 minutes, activity sheet online)
Distribute the Synthesis activity for students to complete independently. It will prepare them to respond to the prompt on page 17. For alternate culminating tasks, see the box below.

Differentiate and Customize

For Struggling Readers
Describe one way that dental care has improved over time and one challenge that we still face today. Use evidence from both texts to support your answer.

For Advanced Readers
Use details from “The History of Teeth” and “Where Are All the Dentists?” to support the following claim: Over time, we have come very far in our treatment of dental problems—and yet we have not come far enough.

For Artists
Create a public service announcement about the importance of caring for our teeth. Your PSA can be in the form of an infographic or a short video.

For Creative Writers
Choose two to four people mentioned in the articles you just read. Write a scene in which they are interviewed for a documentary about dental care past and present. Your scene may be in the form of a written transcript or a 3- to 4-minute video.