LESSON 1

Narrative Nonfiction, pages 4-10

FEATURED SKILL: author’s craft

The Shattered Sky
The 1917 Explosion in Halifax Harbor

About the Story
Lexile: 890L
The qualitative complexity factors for this article are high. Details at Scope Online.

Learning Objective:
to analyze how an author brings a story to life

Key Skills:
text structure, mood, supporting details, key ideas and details, close reading, critical thinking, author’s craft

Essential Questions:
• How do we make sense of a tragedy?
• Why should past disasters be remembered?
• How do large-scale disasters alter the regions where they happen?

Standards:
This article and lesson support these Common Core anchor standards:
R.1, R.2, R.3, R.4, R.5, R.6, R.7, W.1, SL.1, L.4, L.5, 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.

Video:
• “Behind the Scenes: The Shattered Sky”

Audio:
• The article read by the author
• Vocabulary

Differentiated article:
• Lower-Lexile version (printable)

Literature Connections: ideas for connecting to curricular texts

Activities to print or project:
• Vocabulary
• Video Discussion Questions
• Close Reading and Critical Thinking
• Author’s Craft
• Core Skills Workout: Central Ideas & Details*, Summarizing*, Text Features
• Quiz*
• Nonfiction Elements*
• Contest Entry Form
*Available on two levels
Step-by-Step Lesson Plan  
Close Reading, Critical Thinking, Skill Building

1 Preparing to Read
   Watch the video.  
   (15 minutes, activity sheet online)
   Project or distribute the Video Discussion Questions. Show our Behind the Scenes video. Then, as a class, answer the first set of discussion questions. (The second set is for after reading.)

   Preview vocabulary.  
   (8 minutes, activity sheet online)
   Project or distribute the Vocabulary Words and Definitions. Review the words as a class. Highlighted words: aptly, hampering, munitions, port, scapegoated, stark, tarnished, vilified

2 Reading and Discussing
   Explore the text features.  
   (5 minutes, activity sheet online)
   As a class, study the photos and the map, which help students understand the complicated events and geography of the story. Have students share what they find interesting or surprising.

   Read and discuss the article.  
   (45 minutes, activity sheet online)
   • Have a volunteer read aloud the As You Read box on page 5. Read the article as a class.
   • Have students work in groups to discuss the following close-reading questions.

   Close-Reading Questions
   Why are the details about World War I in the section “Bad News” important to the story?  
   (text structure) The details about the war are important to the story because they explain that, though Dartmouth and Halifax were far from Europe, there were many soldiers in the area. Halifax had become a major transportation hub for the war effort. This puts the events of the article in historical context.

   In the section “Powerful Explosives,” how does author Kristin Lewis create suspense?  
   (mood) Lewis creates suspense by describing the munitions loaded onto the Mont-Blanc and then stating that the ship was about to crash into another ship. She writes that the Mont-Blanc was carrying nearly 3,000 tons of explosive materials. Then she explains that another ship, the Imo, “steered directly into the path of the Mont-Blanc.”

   In the section “Shock Wave,” which details help you understand how powerful the explosion was?  
   (supporting details) Details include that the ship was ripped into pieces, that the center of the explosion was more than four times hotter than lava, that the shock wave traveled at 5,000 feet per second, and that the explosion created a tsunami.

   Reread the description of Halifax in the introduction. Then reread the description of Halifax after the explosion in the section “Shock Wave.” What do these two descriptions help you understand?  
   (key ideas and details) The two descriptions help you understand how extensive the damage was. In the introduction, Lewis writes that Halifax and Dartmouth “were buzzing with activity.” She describes families getting ready for the day, horse-drawn carriages clattering down the streets, factories churning out goods, and trams rumbling by the water. In the section “Shock Wave,” Lewis explains that the explosion destroyed all of this. She writes that “train cars careened off rails,” “factories collapsed,” and “most of the buildings were gone.”

   • Bring the class back together to respond to the second set of Video Discussion Questions.
   • Break students into three small groups. Assign each group one of the following critical-thinking questions to answer and present to the class.
Differentiate and Customize

For Struggling Readers
In a well-organized paragraph, explain one way the author helps you, the reader, understand what it was like to live through the 1917 Explosion in Halifax Harbor. Use text evidence to support your answer.

For Advanced Readers
In a well-organized essay, explain how the author helps you, the reader, understand what it was like to live through the 1917 Explosion in Halifax Harbor. Use details from the article as well as the video to support your ideas.

For Museum Lovers
Create a museum exhibit for your school about the 1917 Explosion in Halifax Harbor. Your exhibit may include photographs and labels, reproductions of artifacts, and multimedia.

For Historians
Choose another disaster from history. In an essay, compare how people responded to that disaster with how people responded to the 1917 Explosion in Halifax Harbor. (One option is for students to use “Our World Turned to Water” from the October 2017 issue of Scope.)

Critical-Thinking Questions
(5 minutes, activity sheet online)

Resilience is the ability to bounce back—to recover from misfortune. In “The Shattered Sky,” who does Lewis portray as showing resilience? Explain. Lewis portrays the Driscoll family as showing resilience; she explains that after losing one of their children, the destruction of their home, and having to move out of Halifax, the family had another baby and returned home in 1919. Lewis also portrays the general public as showing resilience after World War I when she writes, “. . . the Driscolls, like people all around the world, were ready to rebuild their lives” (10). Lewis portrays Halifax as resilient as well, when she writes that the city is now “thriving” (10).

On page 10, Lewis states that some blamed Mackey and Le Medec for the explosion but that the criminal charges against them “were later dropped.” Why might some people have been quick to blame them for the disaster? As Lewis writes, many people were angry and wanted answers. When something terrible happens, people tend to want someone to blame. Perhaps it’s more comforting to believe that one or two people are responsible for a disaster than to accept that a combination of many small decisions and simple bad luck could lead to something as tragic as the Halifax explosion.

What can be gained by learning about the 1917 Explosion in Halifax Harbor?
Learning about the explosion can remind us how easily accidents can happen—which will drive us to take precautions to prevent tragedies like the Halifax explosion from occurring again. Learning about the explosion can also strengthen our faith in human goodness when we discover the way residents of Halifax, Dartmouth, and nearby communities stepped up to help those affected by the explosion. And finally, learning that Halifax is doing well today can give us hope for the recovery of communities affected by other disasters.

Skill Building
Featured Skill: Author’s Craft
(15 minutes, activity sheet online)
Have students work in groups to complete Author’s Craft: Bringing the Story to Life. This activity will prepare them to respond to the writing prompt on page 10. For alternate culminating tasks, see the box below.