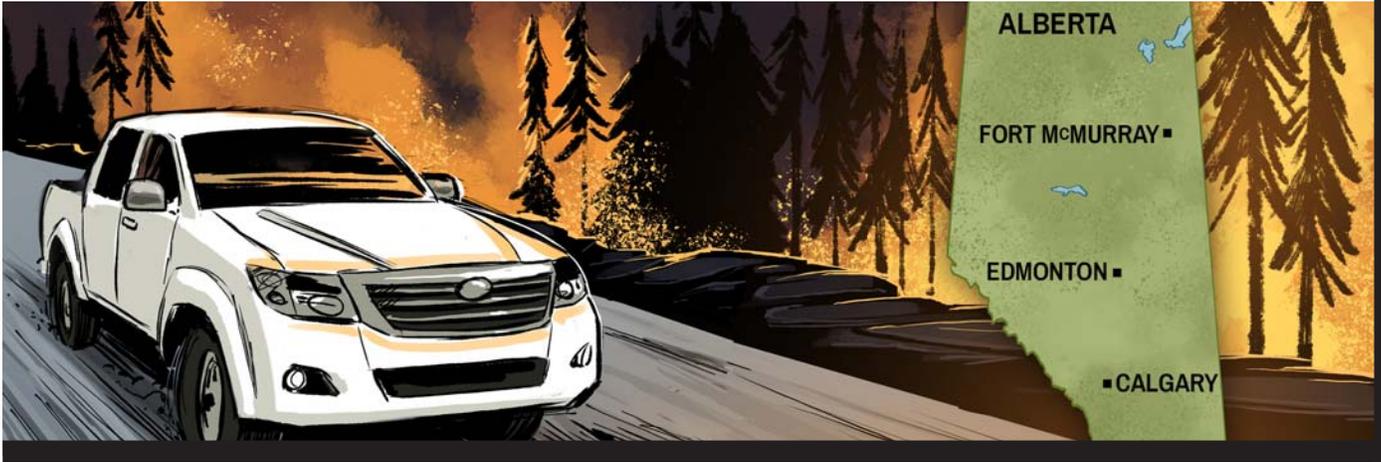




NATIONAL

# WILDFIRE DEVASTATES FORT McMURRAY

– ‘THE BEAST’ RAMPAGES THROUGH A CANADIAN COMMUNITY



‘The Beast.’ That’s what media reports were calling a ferocious wildfire that began tearing through the Northern Alberta community of Fort McMurray in the first week of May.

The nickname was well earned. The fire raged through several neighborhoods, leaving terrible devastation in its wake. Officials ordered the entire town **evacuated** on May 3. Nearly 90,000 residents, including nine newborns, had to leave.

## NO TIME TO SPARE!

Many fled with just seconds to spare. One man, Szymon Bicz, was at work listening to his radio when he heard that the flames were moving at breakneck speed. He raced back home, gathered some clothing and his passport and jumped in his car. He said the experience was terrifying.

“Thick black smoke was closing in and surrounded the car,” he

reported. “People were driving up on paths and grass just to get out of there.”

Video of the evacuation showed vehicles maneuvering through a blizzard of sparks. Flames licked the sky. Trees lining the route were quickly reduced to cinders.

Hundreds of trucks, cars, motorcycles and mobile homes were forced to pull over. Engines were sputtering because of the smoke. Some people were running out of gas. Many were in shock, crying.

## TRAPPED BY A MONSTER

To the south, the communities of Gregoire Lake Estates, the Fort McMurray First Nation, and Anzac were the first to open their doors to 8000 distressed Fort McMurray residents.

The fire was **relentless**, however. It rapidly moved in that

direction – and those places had to be evacuated, too.

“It’s following us. It’s definitely a monster,” one woman said.

Officials soon had to close Highway 63 – the only southern route out of Fort McMurray. Those still in the city had to flee in the opposite direction.

On May 5, about 25,000 evacuees headed north to take refuge in oil sands camps. Some became stranded after several roads in that area, too, were closed. About 12,000 people had to be air lifted out.

When Highway 63 reopened the next day, another 7000 people drove south to one of the many temporary shelters set up in Edmonton and elsewhere.

Remarkably, no one died in the fire. However, a car crash during the evacuation process took the

## DEFINITIONS

**EVACUATE:** to remove to remove people from danger

**RELENTLESS:** continuing in a severe or extreme way



NATIONAL

# WILDFIRE DEVASTATES FORT MCMURRAY

– ‘THE BEAST’ RAMPAGES THROUGH A CANADIAN COMMUNITY

lives of 15-year-old Emily Ryan and a relative, Aaron Hodgson.

## SPARK TO INFERNO

The wildfire was first spotted on May 1, just south of Fort McMurray. At the time, satellite images could barely pick it up. Overnight, however, the inferno doubled in size from 1200 hectares to over 2600. The blaze then seemed to take on a life of its own. It easily jumped the nearby Athabasca and Hangingstone rivers and spread northward into the city.

## FUELING THE FIRE

Did human carelessness start the blaze? No one could say for certain. Whatever caused it, however, circumstances helped it intensify.

As the fire escalated during the first few days, the temperature was over 30 degrees Celsius. Worse, conditions were extremely dry after a winter with little snowfall. What’s more, 70-kilometre-an-hour winds had whipped up.

All these factors contributed to the wildfire’s incredibly rapid growth.

By May 8, 500 firefighters were battling the blaze, along with 26 helicopters, 14 air tankers and 88 other pieces of equipment.

Yet it was still out of control. Firefighters feared The Beast would double in size again and spread to neighbouring Saskatchewan.

## HELPING HANDS

Canadians went all out to show their support for Fort McMurray victims. By May 6, the Red Cross had collected close to \$30 million in private donations to help those who had lost so much. The Canadian and Alberta governments promised to match every dollar the organization gets from private sources.

## HELP FROM THE SKY

Finally, on May 8, The Beast began to **falter**. A few drops of rain began falling, signifying a big dip in temperature.

Alberta fire official Chad Morrison said firefighters were working on putting out hot spots. He was very happy with the progress they were making.

“It definitely is a positive point for us,” said Mr. Morrison. “This is great firefighting weather. We can really get a death grip on it.”

## THE LONG ROAD BACK

Conditions improved enough for Alberta Premier Rachel Notley to visit the community on May 9. She found cause for

hope. True, 2400 buildings had been destroyed and the fire had consumed nearly 230,000 hectares. That’s about three times the size of Edmonton. But surprisingly, 85 percent of the town was still standing.

## DID YOU KNOW?

Analysts say that the Fort McMurray wildfire caused up to \$9 billion in damage, making it the most expensive natural disaster ever in Canada.

Still, the fire remained out of control and the city may not be **habitable** for a long time, the premier warned. There’s no gas or power and the water is undrinkable. Hazardous material is scattered everywhere.

Albertans also worry that The Beast will take its toll on the **economy**. Alberta is already in a downturn because the price of oil – a major source of its income – has dropped dramatically in recent months.

Yet many people remained optimistic.

“Home is still here,” said Fort McMurray Fire Chief Darby Allen. “We’re here. We’re ready for the future. When we get you back, we can build a future together.” ★

## DEFINITIONS

**ECONOMY:** the wealth and resources of a country or region  
**FALTER:** start to lose strength or momentum

**HABITABLE:** suitable to live in



NATIONAL

# WILDFIRE DEVASTATES FORT MCMURRAY

– ‘THE BEAST’ RAMPAGES THROUGH A CANADIAN COMMUNITY

## ON THE LINES

1. Explain where and when ‘The Beast’ started.

---

---

---

2. Identify the conditions that allowed this fire to grow in the first few days.

---

---

3. What happened on May 3 in Fort McMurray? What did the residents do and where did they go?

---

---

4. Where did many people go after Highway 63 was reopened?

---

---

5. Describe the efforts that were made to control the fire.

---

---

6. Describe the damage that this fire caused to Fort McMurray and the surrounding area.

---

---

---

7. What did the Red Cross and the Alberta and federal governments do to help the evacuees?

---

---

8. What is the total estimated cost of the damage caused by the fire?

---



NATIONAL

# WILDFIRE DEVASTATES FORT MCMURRAY

– ‘THE BEAST’ RAMPAGES THROUGH A CANADIAN COMMUNITY

## BETWEEN THE LINES

An *inference* is a conclusion drawn from evidence. A *plausible inference* is supported by evidence in the article and is consistent with known facts outside of the article.

What inference(s) can you draw from the fact that the Fort McMurray fire caused up to \$9 billion in damage?

---

---

---

---

---

## JUST TALK ABOUT IT

1. In many cases, people in Fort McMurray had minutes to organize themselves before fleeing. Many were forced to make difficult decisions about what to bring, and what to leave behind. If you were in this situation, what three portable items would you take? Give reasons for your choices.
2. The Fort McMurray wildfire has severely disrupted the lives of thousands of people. It’s a challenging, heartbreaking time for many. As you see it, what lessons can be learned, or what hope can be found, despite all the devastation? Explain.

## ONLINE

Visit our student website at [www.news4youth.com](http://www.news4youth.com) and click on the *What in the World?* tab to:

1. Watch [security cam footage](http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/edmonton/fort-mcmurray-man-watches-his-home-burn-on-security-cam-1.3570690) of a Fort McMurray home burning (or visit <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/edmonton/fort-mcmurray-man-watches-his-home-burn-on-security-cam-1.3570690>).
2. View a [dashcam video](http://www.edmontonsun.com/2016/05/05/dash-cam-video-shows-terrifying-drive-for-evacuees-out-of-fiery-fort-mcmurray) of a driver fleeing the Fort McMurray fire (or visit <http://www.edmontonsun.com/2016/05/05/dash-cam-video-shows-terrifying-drive-for-evacuees-out-of-fiery-fort-mcmurray>).
2. See [photos](http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/photos/wildfire-forces-evacuation-of-fort-mcmurray-1.3562195) of the Fort McMurray wildfire (or visit <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/photos/wildfire-forces-evacuation-of-fort-mcmurray-1.3562195>).
3. See [photos](http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/edmonton/jaw-dropping-images-of-fort-mcmurray-before-and-after-the-fire-1.3575947) of Fort McMurray before and after the wildfire (or visit <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/edmonton/jaw-dropping-images-of-fort-mcmurray-before-and-after-the-fire-1.3575947>).
4. [Compare the size](http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/how-does-the-fort-mcmurray-wildfire-s-area-compare-across-canada-1.3575733) of the Fort McMurray wildfire to other areas in Canada (or visit <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/how-does-the-fort-mcmurray-wildfire-s-area-compare-across-canada-1.3575733>).
5. View an infographic showing [how the Fort McMurray wildfire grew](http://www.cbc.ca/news/multimedia/fort-mcmurray-wildfire-how-it-grew-day-by-day-1.3570720) (or visit <http://www.cbc.ca/news/multimedia/fort-mcmurray-wildfire-how-it-grew-day-by-day-1.3570720>).
6. Find out [how to fight a wildfire](http://www.cbc.ca/news/multimedia/infographic-how-to-fight-a-wildfire-1.3570756) (or visit <http://www.cbc.ca/news/multimedia/infographic-how-to-fight-a-wildfire-1.3570756>). ★



IMAGES IN THE NEWS

# WILDFIRE DEVASTATES FORT MCMURRAY

– ‘THE BEAST’ RAMPAGES THROUGH A CANADIAN COMMUNITY

## Directions:

1. Study the photograph below.
2. Then, complete each quadrant on the **Getting Inside the Picture** chart. Use as many details as you can.
3. Now, select one of your powerful words. Use this as a springboard for a 5-minute **Quick Write**. Let your pen flow. *A good descriptive paragraph has vivid details and helps the reader “get inside the picture” (experience the event as if he/she were right there).*
4. Generate three possible titles for this picture. Then select the one that best captures the essence of the image. Explain why this is the most suitable title.



A giant fireball is seen as a wildfire rips through the forest 16 kilometres south of Fort McMurray, Alberta on Highway 63 on May 7, 2016. (THE CANADIAN PRESS/Jonathan Hayward)

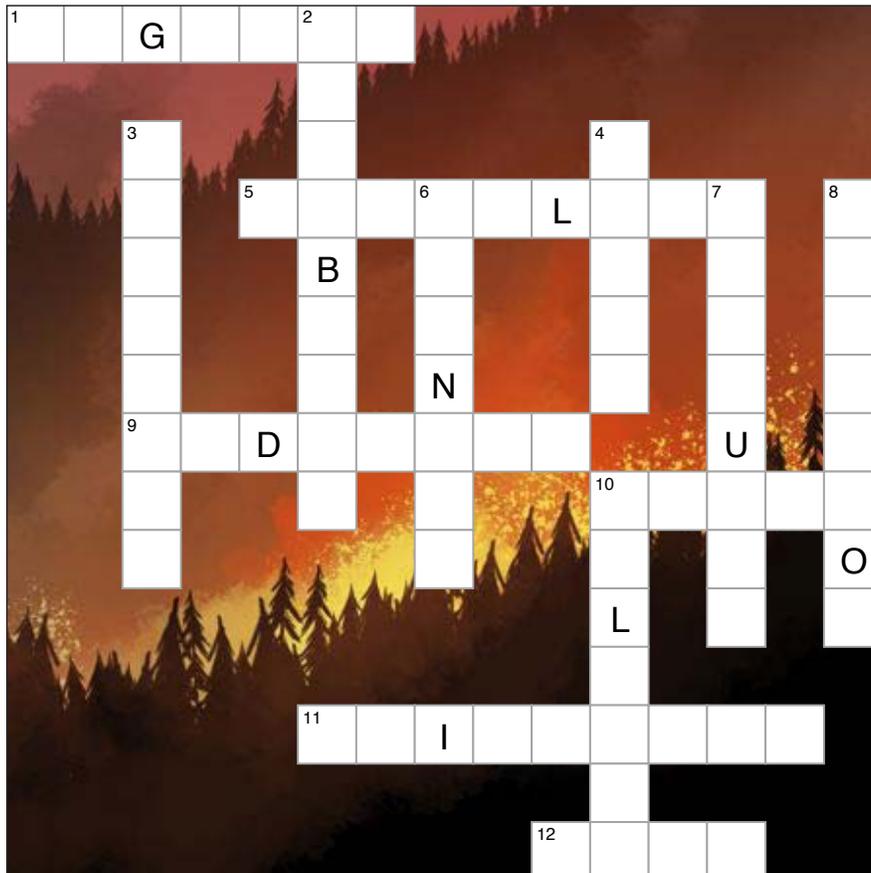


# WILDFIRE DEVASTATES FORT MCMURRAY

– ‘THE BEAST’ RAMPAGES THROUGH A CANADIAN COMMUNITY

Title: \_\_\_\_\_

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Senses</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">What might you hear, smell, taste or touch? What colours, textures, sounds, movements do you experience?</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Images</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">What details in the photograph create vivid pictures in your mind?</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Words</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">What powerful words describe the scene? What might you think, wonder, say if you were there?</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Feelings</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">What do you feel when you look at this image? What might the people in the photograph be feeling?</p>
<p>Quick write</p>	
<p>Possible titles:</p> <p>1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____</p>	
<p>The best title is # _____ because . . .</p>	



**ACROSS**

1. \_\_\_\_\_ 63 through Fort McMurray was closed
5. wildfire first spotted on \_\_\_\_\_ images
9. humanitarian organization that provides relief to victims of war or natural disaster (2)
10. what media reports called the wildfire
11. some 2400 \_\_\_\_\_ in Fort McMurray were destroyed
12. very little \_\_\_\_\_ fell near Fort McMurray this winter

**DOWN**

2. river near Fort McMurray
3. wildfire burned 230,000 \_\_\_\_\_
4. strong \_\_\_\_\_ helped the wildfire spread
6. the wealth and resources of a country or region
7. to remove people from danger
8. large city south-west of Fort McMurray
10. the wildfire caused an estimated \$9 \_\_\_\_\_ in damage

# MAP MAP ASSIGNMENT

Complete this map assignment to better understand the article *Wildfire Devastates Fort McMurray*.

## INSTRUCTIONS

1. Obtain the required resources and read all the instructions before starting.
2. Colour your map after all labelling is completed.
3. Print in pencil only first, then go over the printing in black ink.
4. Work carefully and neatly.

**Resources Required:** pencil, black pen, pencil crayons, ruler, eraser and an atlas.

**Part A** Locate and label the following provinces, territory and U.S. states in CAPITAL letters and shade each as indicated:

Alberta (yellow)	Saskatchewan (green)
British Columbia (pink)	Northwest Territories (purple)
Washington (orange)	Idaho (red)
Montana (brown)	

**Part B** Locate and label the capital city of Alberta and underline.

**Part C** Locate and label the following cities in Alberta:

Calgary	Red Deer
Lethbridge	Fort McMurray
Medicine Hat	Sherwood Park

**Part D** Locate and label the following cities in B.C. and Saskatchewan:

Kelowna	Kamloops
Dawson Creek	North Battleford

**Part E** Locate and label the following bodies of fresh water and shade them light blue:

Lesser Slave Lake	Lake Athabasca
-------------------	----------------

**Part F** Locate and label the following rivers and shade them light blue:

South Saskatchewan River	North Saskatchewan River
Athabasca River	Peace River
Slave River	Fraser River

**Part G** Locate and label the following lines of latitude:            49° N            60° N

**Part H** Complete your map with a frame, title and compass bearing. ★



Alberta







They go by many names – wildfires, forest fires and bush fires, among others. Whatever they're called, though, these destructive blazes can cause heartbreaking damage to homes, whole communities and the environment.

Wildfires usually start in uninhabited areas like grasslands, scrublands or forests, but they have also consumed houses and farms. They often begin unnoticed, then spread with terrifying speed.

## A DANGEROUS TRIANGLE

Three conditions – a heat source, oxygen, and fuel – need to be present for a wildfire to ignite. Firefighters call this the fire triangle.

A heat source can include lightning, campfires or

cigarettes. Air feeds the fire the oxygen it needs to burn. As for fuel? That's any material that can **combust**, including trees, grasses, brush or structures. The more of this fuel there is, the greater the fire is likely to be.

## DID YOU KNOW?

Many experts speculate that El Niño was a factor in the Fort McMurray fire. This cyclical weather pattern resulted in a dry winter and record high temperatures in May throughout the region.

## IN THE LINE OF FIRE

And where do wildfires happen? Areas usually hit the hardest are moist enough for trees to grow but also have long, hot periods. Those conditions describe much of Canada and the United States.

Many other places around the world are at risk, too, including parts of Australia and South Africa.

## HUMAN CAUSES

Frustratingly, more than four out of every five wildfires are caused by human carelessness or criminal acts. Discarded cigarettes, unattended campfires, downed power lines – even **arson** – have ignited blazes that can last for weeks or even months.

## BATTLING THE BLAZES

Firefighters battle these infernos by trying to destabilize the fire triangle. They do this by dousing water and spraying retardants on the flames. They use planes to dump water and chemicals from the sky. They also remove as much vegetation as they can to try to starve a fire of its fuel.

## DEFINITIONS

**ARSON:** the criminal act of deliberately setting a fire

**COMBUST:** to burn or set on fire



# INFERNO!

– THE ANATOMY OF A WILDFIRE

Sometimes, they even fight fire with fire. In a process called controlled burning, they actually start blazes to remove potential wildfire fuel such as undergrowth, brush, and litter.

## A SCARY EARLY START

Most wildfires occur in the summer and fall. They also happen during **droughts**, when dead branches, foliage and other material dry out and become highly **flammable**.

However, some scientists believe climate change is a factor that explains why wildfire season appears to be starting earlier than ever.

In British Columbia, 78 wildfires burning across the province on May 8 had already consumed 400 square kilometres. Only eight square kilometres had burned by the same period last year.

Throughout Canada by early May, 1156 fires had swallowed 53,053 hectares. Alberta and New Brunswick had the most fires. The number of blazes and the damage they caused are both way above the 10-year average for this time of year.

## HOT TIMES AHEAD?

If that keeps up, we may break records set in 2015.

“We had a very busy fire year [in 2015],” said Jeff Weir, director of fire management for **Parks Canada**. “We had more wildfires than normal and those fires burned larger areas than normal.”

The agency recorded 122 wildfires in 2015 that burned through 4600 square kilometres of parkland. That’s seven times the area of the city of Toronto.

Parks Canada puts aside about \$8 million a year to fight fires. Any money not spent is used in busier seasons. However, firefighting cost \$14 million last summer, so the reserve is pretty much tapped, Mr. Weir said.

Western Canada’s dry 2015 summer also resulted in one of the worst wildfire seasons on record. In Alberta, more than 1800 fires burned almost 500,000 hectares. In Saskatchewan, 13,000 people had to be evacuated due to out-of-control fires in the north. The Canadian military was called in to help firefighters **quell** the inferno.

More than 1.7 million hectares burned.

In B.C., flames claimed some 280,000 hectares. The province had already spent all of its firefighting money – \$290 million – by early summer. That was months before the fire season ended.

## THE CLIMATE CHANGE CONNECTION

Green Party Leader Elizabeth May says we must be cautious before we directly link global warming to the kind of tragedy that struck For McMurray.

“It’s well-known that one of the consequences of climate change will be a greater prevalence of extreme weather events around the planet,” she said.

“However any time we try to make a political argument out of one particular disaster I think there is a bit of a shortcut that can sometimes not have the desired outcome.” ★

## DEFINITIONS

**DROUGHT:** a prolonged period of abnormally low rainfall; a shortage of water resulting from this

**FLAMMABLE:** easily set on fire

**PARKS CANADA:** the Canadian government agency run by the Minister of the Environment that protects and presents Canada’s natural and cultural heritage, including national parks

**QUELL:** to stop or put an end to something



## ON THE LINES

1. During which two seasons do most wildfires occur?

---

2. Describe the type of climate and terrain where most wildfires occur.

---

3. What is the 'fire triangle'? Explain.

---

4. How many wildfires are caused by humans?

---

5. Describe how firefighters fight wildfires.

---

6. Explain what a 'controlled burn' is.

---

7. Describe the wildfire situation across Canada in early May.

---



PUZZLE

# INFERNO!

– THE ANATOMY OF A WILDFIRE



## INSTRUCTIONS:

Locate the following words in the puzzle above.

Briefly explain the importance of each word on a separate sheet of paper.

ARSON

EL NINO

IGNITE

RETARDANT

COMBUST

EVACUATE

LIGHTNING

TRIANGLE

DROUGHT

FUEL

OXYGEN

WILDFIRE

