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Routing Slip: (please circulate)
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The federal government has a payroll problem. Over the past two years, it has overpaid, underpaid, or failed to pay over half of the federal workforce of about 260,000. The trouble stems from Phoenix, a payroll management system launched in February 2016.

**The Root of the Problem**

Ten years ago, the federal Conservative government decided to centralize and upgrade the government payroll system. Rather than have 1200 staff working in 101 departments across the country calculate wages and issue paycheques for the Public Service, the government wanted to consolidate payroll staff in one location and have a computer program do more of the work. These changes, the Conservatives said, would save the government $78 million a year.

The government awarded the contract to replace its 40-year-old payroll management system to International Business Machines Canada (IBM). The new system needed to be able to handle a $17-billion payroll and process 8.9 million transactions a year, taking into account 80 collective agreements and 80,000 rules. It would be implemented by 500 new staff working in Miramichi, New Brunswick.

**Phoenix Flops**

The new payroll centre processed its first payments on February 24, 2016. From the start, the technology didn’t work as expected. Many workers were paid the wrong amount, and attempts to fix the problems only seemed to make matters worse. Six months after Phoenix was introduced, about 80,000 public servants had been affected. They weren’t receiving parental leave, long-term disability, and severance pay. Hundreds of people had received no pay at all.

Many of the errors were triggered by a change of position, status, or salary. They occurred when staff were hired or fired, retired or resigned, when they left or returned from long-term disability or parental leave, or when they were transferred or promoted.

**Canada’s Public Service**

Federal public servants are the non-political staff of the government. They make up the Public Service of Canada which runs the government’s day-to-day business and carries out government policy and rules.

Public servants work at approximately 1600 locations across Canada. However, most – about 42 percent – are located in Ottawa.

About 200 government departments (such as Health Canada), agencies (such as Parks Canada), commissions (such as the Canadian Grain Commission), boards (such as the Veterans Review and Appeal Board), councils (such as the Canadian Judicial Council), and Crown corporations (such as the Royal Canadian Mint) are all staffed by public servants, making the Public Service the country’s largest employer.

**Definitions**

**Centralize**: to give control of a country, organization, or industry to one central group of people

**Consolidate**: to combine several small things, especially companies or organizations, into one large unit

**Payroll**: the department that determines the amount of wages or salary due to each employee; the total amount of money paid by a company to the people it employs
They were also sparked by a salary increase, new union agreement, or overtime pay.

Workers were shocked and understandably upset. Long-term widespread payroll problems are unheard of in Canada. How could a large, stable employer like the federal government produce so many errors, with no ability to correct them?

Dealing with the Debacle

The Liberal government, which came to power in October 2015, took over responsibility for Phoenix a few months before the system went live. Once reports of problems began emerging, the Liberals could have slowed down the implementation of the system while the issues were addressed. Instead, the new government gave public servants repeated assurances that the problems and the system that created them would soon be fixed.

However, they soon found out that was easier said than done. Corrections were complex. The errors didn’t just affect the amount of salary. They also affected payroll deductions for income tax, employment insurance, Canada Pension Plan (CPP), union dues, and employee benefits.

Errors that weren’t resolved in the same calendar year became even harder to fix because they impacted income tax payments. Overpayments and lump sum repayments artificially inflated employees’ taxable income, for example, bumping their income into brackets taxed at a higher rate. The system also generated incorrect T4 slips for some public servants.

In an attempt to clear up these problems, the government increased staff in Miramichi, opened payroll centres in other locations, and brought in more payroll officers. These efforts, however, weren’t successful. By December 2017, the number of unresolved claims had reached 551,000, affecting about 156,000 government workers. By March 2018, there was still a backlog of some 384,000 cases.

Staff Short-Changed

The failure is causing tremendous hardship for public servants like Tammy Kuempel of Winnipeg.

“Everyone talks about how much the Phoenix system is costing, but there’s a human cost,” she said. When her mother passed away, she had no funds to pay for the funeral. “All I received for one paycheque was $78. Cheques were bouncing, my mortgage bounced.”

Salma Tmoulik worries that she won’t receive maternity leave payments when she has her second child this spring. The government still owes her $12,000 from her 2016 maternity leave.

“We should be enjoying our kids, not stressing about this,” said the Ottawa woman.

Kirby Dawson of Halifax said, “I’ve had every possible error you can think of. I’ve had overpayments, I’ve had underpayments, and I even went three consecutive months without a paycheque whatsoever. Trying to budget for me over the last two years has been unbelievable.”

Compensation, Please

In February, unions representing Canada’s public servants sent a letter to the government, asking it to compensate its members for the financial hardship, lost time, and stress caused by Phoenix’s failure.

The NDP backed the unions’ request. The party introduced a motion in the House of Commons on February 27 requesting compensation for affected workers, and an official apology.

“Phoenix has been a complete debacle,” said NDP finance critic Peter Julian. “There’s an expectation when you do a good-day’s work that you’ll be paid at the end of the day, and you’ll be able to put food on the table,. That hasn’t happened in this case at all.”

Moving On

In response, Public Services and Procurement Canada Minister Carla Qualtrough said, “All I can do again is apologize that we’ve put people in this situation.”

Then, in March, the Liberal government announced that it had given up on fixing Phoenix. It will spend the next two to three years – and $16 million – looking at options to replace the problem-plagued system. At the same time, it will continue with efforts to stabilize the situation.

“We didn’t create this mess,” said Prime Minister Justin Trudeau. “But we are going to fix it.”

Definitions

Debacle: something that fails completely in an embarrassing way

T4 Slip: a form provided by an employer that shows what an employee was paid during the tax year, as well as CPP, QPP, and EI contributions and any other amounts deducted
ON THE LINES

Answer the following in complete sentences:

1. Explain who public servants are and what they do.

2. How many federal public servants are there in Canada?

3. What is the Phoenix payroll system and what was it designed to do?

4. Who decided to replace the dated federal payroll system and why? What were the promised benefits of this change?

5. Which company received the contract to replace the 40-year-old federal payroll system?

6. What would the new payroll system be required to do? Who would run the new system?

7. When did the new system take effect and when did the payroll problems begin?

8. What did the new Liberal government promise to do when problems with Phoenix first emerged?

9. Describe the scope of the payroll problem created by Phoenix. How big is the current backlog?

10. How much has the Phoenix payroll system cost Canadian taxpayers so far?

11. How does the federal government plan to move forward on this issue?
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 price tag for Phoenix has ballooned from $307 million to almost $1 billion?

JUST TALK ABOUT IT

1. What is your understanding of the federal government’s payroll problem? Explain.

2. Imagine that someone in your family is one of the public service employees affected by the Phoenix payroll debacle, and that he or she hasn’t been paid in months. How would this situation affect your family? How would it affect you? Explain.

3. What solutions to the federal government’s payroll problem can you suggest? Be specific.

ONLINE

Note: The links below are listed at [www.lesplan.com/en/links](http://www.lesplan.com/en/links) for easy access.

1. Find out more about the Phoenix payroll problems by watching [https://youtu.be/gFSXQAmztDQ](https://youtu.be/gFSXQAmztDQ)

2. Watch a Rick Mercer ‘Heritage Minute’ about the Phoenix payroll system at [https://youtu.be/NqQpxQcb-6Y](https://youtu.be/NqQpxQcb-6Y)

3. Watch Rick Mercer rant about the Phoenix payroll system at [https://youtu.be/q_W5iaMBUPE](https://youtu.be/q_W5iaMBUPE)

4. Check out these infographics on the Phoenix payroll system:
   - Phoenix by the numbers [https://infogram.com/timeline-dark-1hke6ovow3j325r](https://infogram.com/timeline-dark-1hke6ovow3j325r)
   - Phoenix stories from across Canada
   - Overpayment of federal public servants
WHAT ARE EDITORIAL CARTOONS?

Editorial cartoons are found in the editorial – or opinion – section of a newspaper. They are created by cartoonists as a way of visually commenting on and often criticizing the world around them – with humour. Editorial cartoonists express their ideas and opinions about issues (for example, what to do about Canada’s economy), events (such as the Olympic Games) or public figures (like the Prime Minister).

Because cartoons are drawn from the viewpoint of the cartoonist they do not tell the whole story about the event, issue or individual, but they reveal important messages. Their purpose is to grab people’s attention and cause them to re-examine their views on a subject. Editorial cartoons typically send a particular kind of message. The message is conveyed through images and wordplay. Their tone is generally ironic (portraying events in ways that are unexpected or contrary to how they seem), satiric (ridiculing the event, individual or issue), or humorous (inviting readers to laugh at themselves or at others).

In order to interpret the message of an editorial cartoon it is helpful to understand the context – the time, place and situation. It is also useful to understand some of the common art techniques used by cartoonists to emphasize their points. Considering these things will help you better decode and appreciate the message behind the cartoon.

WHAT COMMON ART TECHNIQUES ARE USED BY EDITORIAL CARTOONISTS?

Caption (a sentence or phrase that is the title or explanation of the cartoon);

Labels (words or numbers in the drawing to identify people, objects or dates);

Relative size (some images are drawn much larger or much smaller than others);

Light and dark (use of dark shading and white space to create an effect);

Composition (the arrangement or location of figures or objects in the centre or background);

Symbols (a sign or image to represent something else);

Caricature (a distorted, simplified or exaggerated representation of a figure).

(To learn more about interpreting political cartoons, read the Toolkit: Decoding Political Cartoons by Charles Hou on the Library and Archives Canada’s web site at http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/education/008-3050-e.html)
YOUR TASK:

Examine the editorial cartoon. Then, use the questions below to help you decode the cartoon’s message. Be specific and include as many details as possible in your answers.

INITIAL READING: What can an initial look reveal?

1. Glance quickly at the cartoon. What is your first impression – your “gut response”?
2. Consider your background knowledge. What do you already know about the context of the cartoon – the time, place or situation? (List key facts.)

CLOSER LOOK: What’s happening in the cartoon?

3. Describe what you see in the cartoon. What do you notice about the buildings? What do they represent?

DRAW CONCLUSIONS: What overall impression can you draw?

4. Identify possible biases. Whose perspective or point of view is expressed in the cartoon?
5. Explain the overall message of the cartoon in a paragraph. (Remember, a good interpretation is specific and detailed.) ★
In Churchill, Manitoba, a jug of milk costs more than $12. A head of lettuce costs $7. Compare that with prices in Toronto, where the same amount of milk is about $4.60 and a head of lettuce is around $2.12.

**A BROKEN LINK**

Why the huge difference? The main reason is that Churchill, a town of about 900 people, is located some 1000 kilometres north of Winnipeg on the west shore of Hudson Bay. Known as the polar bear capital of the world, this remote town attracts tourists – but it’s too cold to farm there or keep livestock. That means basic goods must be brought in from far away.

As a result, Churchill residents have always faced high living costs. Recent events, however, have caused prices to soar even higher. In the winter and spring of 2017, two major blizzards and a flood destroyed parts of the Hudson Bay Railway line that served Churchill. Track washed out in 24 locations, and five bridges were affected.

The consequences were serious. The region’s only train – the one that regularly brought food and other goods to the community, and allowed people to come and go – stopped running.

**SORRY, BUT...**

Churchill residents expected that the tracks would be repaired quickly, and that the train service would resume. Prices would return to normal, and residents who needed to visit a larger centre for medical care or other reasons could just hop on the train. However, that’s not what happened.

Omnitrax is an American company based in Denver, Colorado, that owns the railway. Last May it announced the line from The Pas to Churchill would be shut down instead of fixed. Omintrax claimed the cost to repair the tracks could be as much as $60 million and it couldn’t afford the expense.

**WHAT?!**

Residents of the small town were upset. Without the train, the only way to get supplies to the town – or for people to travel to or from other places in Canada – is by plane or by boat. Both are far more expensive than rail. They’re also dependent on fair weather conditions.

Locals disputed Omintrax’s repair estimate, too. They said it was wildly inflated, and pointed to quotes by others to support their claim.

One qualified company hired by local First Nations leaders to assess track damage said it could get the train running again for only $2 million. Another firm said that the track could have been fixed for under $10 million if Omintrax had undertaken the work before the frigid Arctic weather hit in late 2017, covering the line in deep layers of snow and ice.
Why is Omnitrax Stalling?

So if cost wasn’t behind Omnitrax’s refusal to repair the rail line, what was? Critics say the company wants to abandon its holdings in Churchill.

The firm bought the Hudson Bay Railway from the then-Liberal federal government for $11 million in 1997. Ottawa sold the railway because it was very expensive to run. In fact, subsidizing the train to ensure people could get goods cost the government $130 million in the 10-year period before the sale.

When it bought the railroad, Omnitrax also bought the Port of Churchill, another liability to the federal government, for $10 million.

The Wheat Board Factor

Despite the federal government’s struggles running the Hudson Bay Railway and the Port of Churchill, Omnitrax had hoped to make money by using the infrastructure to transport and ship grain. At first, the company succeeded – barely. But in 2012, the federal Conservative government dissolved the Wheat Board, and Omnitrax’s Churchill investments started to struggle.

The Wheat Board, which was established in 1935, had ensured that Canadian farmers had equal shipping access to markets in Canada, the United States, and overseas. Using the Churchill railway and port were key to accomplishing this goal. After the Wheat Board disbanded, however, there was less reason for private companies to use the remote port for shipping the grain, so fewer did.

Omnitrax tried to sell the railroad and port in 2015, but couldn’t find a buyer. So after the port saw a 34 percent drop in grain shipments, in 2016 Omnitrax simply shut it down.

Who is Responsible?
The federal government says that under an agreement it signed with the company in 2008, Ottawa and the Manitoba government each pledged to give Omnitrax $20 million to help with the cost of upgrading the railway. For its part, Omnitrax promised to complete the upgrades by October 2018 – a date that was later extended to October 2019. Omnitrax also had to maintain and operate the rail line for ten years after repairs were completed – until 2029. Omnitrax, the government says, is not living up to its obligations.

Did You Know?

Churchill was Canada’s only Arctic deep-sea port. Some analysts believe that the closure poses a national security threat. Why? It’s harder for Canada to claim ownership of the region without a northern port.

Meanwhile, in November 2017, a Toronto-based investment company announced that it would partner with two Manitoba groups in an effort to buy Omnitrax’s assets. Omnitrax, however, says it won’t give up ownership unless it receives fair compensation. It expects “a reasonable arrangement to repair and transfer the Port of Churchill” and the rail line; if it doesn’t, it will seek $150 million in damages from Ottawa.

“We’ve said right from the get-go that our company won’t repair the railroad. We’ve been that way from Day 1. It will get repaired as part of a deal,” said Merv Tweed, president of Omnitrax’s Canadian operations.

In response, the federal government filed its own multi-million-dollar lawsuit to force Omnitrax into making the necessary repairs.

“Omnitrax has legal obligations to clean up and repair the tracks,” Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said. “This is a responsibility that is squarely on the shoulders of Omnitrax.”

Caught in the Middle

By mid-April, an agreement still hadn’t been reached. In the meantime, the people of Churchill are caught in the middle – and losing hope.

“There’s more people leaving the community, the classrooms have smaller class sizes... people are moving elsewhere or moving back home,” said Dorota Walkoski, a Churchill resident. “It’s tough to see friends leaving.”

“There is nowhere else like here, but it's getting harder and harder for regular people,” said Steve Palmer, another resident. “We’re at our wit’s end. It’s very hard. There's not enough money.”

“You don't make enough money, costs are going up too quick,” agreed his wife, Dawne Palmer. ★
ON THE LINES

Answer the following in complete sentences:

1. List four important facts about Churchill, Manitoba.

2. Describe the cost of living in this isolated community.

3. Why was the Hudson Bay Railway sold in 1997? What was the sale price?

4. Who purchased the railway?

5. What was this company’s plan when it bought the railway?

6. What changed in 2012? What happened to the port?

7. Describe what happened to the railway last winter?

8. What impact did this damage have on Churchill?

9. What did the railway company announce in May 2017? Why did it refuse to fix the damage?

10. Describe the latest developments in this ongoing dispute.
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 by mid-April, an agreement to repair the rail line to Churchill still hadn’t been reached?

JUST TALK ABOUT IT

1. a) What is your understanding of the reasons why Churchill does not currently have train service? Explain.
   b) If you were Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, how would you handle the issue of the broken rail line to Churchill? Give reasons to support your response.

2. a) What are some challenges that people living in isolated northern communities face?
   b) What reasons can you suggest to explain why people choose to live in communities like Churchill despite the challenges?
   c) Would you like to live in Churchill, or a similar northern community? Why or why not?

ONLINE

Note: The links below are listed at www.lesplan.com/en/links for easy access.

3. Discover some of the history of “Prince of Wales Fort in Churchill – Manitoba, Canada,” at https://youtu.be/g_nSf42BwSY [2:05]
4. Learn more about Churchill at http://everythingchurchill.com/
5. Read about Churchill’s rich history at https://www.churchillscience.ca/about/history-of-churchill.cfm
ACROSS

3. Omnitrax estimated track repairs could cost $60 _____

4. party in power in Ottawa in 2012

6. Conservatives dissolved this agency (2)

9. a severe snowstorm

11. president of Omnitrax Canada’s operations

13. far away from other people

14. Churchill residents have always faced high living _____

15. party in power in Ottawa in 1997

DOWN

1. Omnitrax based in this state

2. _____ of Churchill was closed

5. to pay money to keep prices low

6. Churchill is located 1000 km north of this city

7. fixed price estimate to do work

8. an overflow of water onto land

10. Churchill was northern Canada’s only _____ port (2)

12. Churchill bears
MAP ASSIGNMENT

Complete this map assignment to better understand the article *Churchill – A Northern Town Without A Train.*

**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 in CAPITAL letters and shade each as indicated:
- Saskatchewan (green)
- Manitoba (orange)

**Part B** Locate and label the capital city of each province above and **underline** each city name.

**Part C** Locate and label the following province, territories and U.S. states in CAPITAL letters and shade each as indicated:
- Ontario (red)
- Northwest Territories (pink)
- Nunavut (yellow)
- Montana (red)
- North Dakota (brown)
- Minnesota (purple)

**Part D** Locate and label the following Manitoba cities and towns:
- Brandon
- Steinbach
- Thompson
- Portage la Prairie
- Winkler
- The Pas
- Churchill

**Part E** Draw and label the following and shade each river light blue:
- Churchill River
- Nelson River
- Saskatchewan River
- Assiniboine River
- Red River

**Part F** Locate and label the following and shade all fresh water light blue:
- Reindeer Lake
- Cedar Lake
- Lake Winnipegosis
- Lake Manitoba
- Lake Winnipeg
- Lake of the Woods

**Part G** Locate and label Hudson Bay and shade all ocean water dark blue.

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

**Part I** Draw and label the railway line between The Pas and Churchill.

**Part J** Complete your map with a frame, title and compass. ★
Who poisoned the Skripals?

Recent events in Salisbury, England had all the hallmarks of a spy thriller. For the double agent at the center of the story, however, the consequences were all too real – and the incident has plunged relations between Russia and the West to their lowest point in decades.

**Unusual situation**
The drama began on March 4 at about 4 p.m., when a man and a woman were found in deep distress on a park bench in the southwest British town. A doctor who stumbled upon the pair said the woman was “slumped in her seat, completely unconscious.”

Emergency workers were called to the scene. Nick Bailey, a police officer who tried to help the two victims, soon fell ill himself. After various treatments administered by hospital staff failed to revive the victims, health workers realized they were dealing with an unusual situation.

**Poisoned!**
Three days later, police concluded that the trio had been exposed to a highly lethal nerve agent. This, they said, was a case of attempted murder.

The two intended targets were Sergei Skripal and his 33-year-old daughter, Yulia. Detectives believe the Russian nationals first came into contact with the nerve agent at the front door of Mr. Skripal’s home. They also found traces of the substance at a pub and a restaurant where the Skripals had spent the afternoon, prior to falling ill.

As a precaution, 48 people who may have been exposed to the poison were assessed in hospital. Some 500 others who visited the establishments on March 4 and 5 where the Skripals had dined were told to wash their clothes and possessions. No one else fell ill, however.

As for the three who were poisoned? On March 22, Detective Sergeant Bailey was discharged from hospital. By early April, Sergei and Yulia Skripal had regained consciousness and were improving every day.

**The prime suspect? Russia**
British Prime Minister Theresa May said there was no doubt who was behind the attack: Russia. Investigators, she explained, had determined that the poison belonged to a group of nerve agents, known as Novichok, that Russia (then known as the Soviet Union) developed in the 1970s and 1980s. This was the first known use of a chemical weapon in Europe since World War II, and Russian involvement was “the only plausible explanation.”

Meanwhile, British Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson pointed his finger squarely at Russian President Vladimir Putin. Mr. Johnson said Mr. Putin was “overwhelmingly likely” to have ordered the attack.

**Who is Sergei Skripal?**
Why might Russia have targeted Mr. Skripal and his daughter?

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**Definitions**

- **Double agent**: an agent who pretends to act as a spy for one country while in fact acting on behalf of an enemy
- **Hallmark**: a distinguishing characteristic, trait, or feature
- **Lethal**: deadly
- **Nerve agent**: a toxic, usually odorless, compound that is used as a chemical weapon to disrupt the transmission of nerve impulses. It may cause breathing difficulties, coughing, vomiting, muscle weakness or paralysis, convulsions, coma, and death.
- **Plausible**: appearing worthy of belief
Mr. Skripal was a Russian diplomat during the 1980s and 1990s. But he was also a spy for Russia’s military espionage organization, the GRU. His role was to gather intelligence on European countries, then pass the information on to Russia. In 1995, however, British intelligence officials convinced him to work for them, instead. As a double agent, Mr. Skripal traded the names of Russian spies to the UK for money.

In 2004, Russian officials arrested Mr. Skripal and sent him to a labour camp. He remained there until 2010, when he was released in a spy swap. He was flown to the UK, and settled in Salisbury with his family, where he endured tragedy after tragedy. First, his wife died of cancer in 2012. Then, his brother died in 2016, and his son in 2017. Some believe the latter two deaths are suspicious.

**A FAMILIAR PATTERN**

This isn’t the first time that Russia has been accused of poisoning a Russian national in Great Britain. In 2006, former spy Alexander (Sasha) Litvinenko died after being exposed to a radioactive substance.

Eventually, an official British government inquiry concluded that the Russians were behind this attack. Other reports suggest that at least 14 other recent deaths in the United Kingdom involving Russian nationals may have Russian connections.

“When it happened to us 11 years ago, we [needed] to prove it,” Mr. Litvinenko’s widow said after news broke of the Skripal’s poisoning. “Nobody could believe that [the] Russian state was behind all this crime.”

**‘GET OUT!’**

On March 14, in response to the Salisbury poisoning, Prime Minister May announced a series of sanctions against Russia. The UK would expel 23 Russian diplomats, and said it might freeze some Russian assets.

As well, all high-level contact between officials of the two countries was suspended. An invitation to visit Britain issued to Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov was withdrawn, and no government ministers or members of the Royal Family would attend the FIFA World Cup of Soccer hosted by Russia in June.

**INTERNATIONAL RESPONSE**

Then, on March 26, the United States, Canada, and most member states of the European Union and NATO – more than 25 countries in all – expelled over 100 diplomats. The U.S. also closed the Russian consulate in Seattle.

“Together we have sent a message that we will not tolerate Russia’s continued attempts to flout international law and undermine our values,” Ms. May said.

**RUSSIA’S ANGRY COMEBACK**

For its part, Russia angrily denied it was involved in the attack and demanded that the UK provide proof.

“There are other explanations besides those put forward by our Western colleagues who declare that it can only be the Russians who are responsible,” said Mr. Lavrov. He suggested that the UK might have poisoned the Skripals to distract from the Brexit controversy.

The Russian Embassy in Britain said that the expulsions of its diplomats were “unacceptable, unjustified, and short-sighted,” and the Russian government retaliated by expelling 23 British diplomats, 60 U.S. diplomats, and several more from other countries. It also closed the British and U.S. consulates in St. Petersburg, and threatened to expel diplomats from other countries supporting Great Britain.

“We have told our British colleagues that ‘you’re playing with fire and you’ll be sorry,’” said Vassily Nebenzia, Russia’s ambassador to the United Nations.

**MORE TO COME**

The Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons was called in to investigate the poisoning. Russia said it will accept the OPCW’s findings, but only if its work is fully transparent.

Meanwhile, Mr. Johnson has stuck by Britain’s allegations, saying the Russians are trying to “obscure the truth and confuse the public.”

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**DEFINITIONS**

**Asset**: money or property; things that people own

**Brexit**: the prospective withdrawal of Britain from the European Union

**Consulate**: the building where foreign government officials, called consuls, work

**Diplomat**: a person who represents his or her country’s government in a foreign country

**Espionage**: the systematic use of spies to get military or political secrets

**Intelligence**: information collected about the secret plans and activities of a foreign government, enemy, etc.

**Labour Camp**: a place where prisoners are kept and forced to do hard physical labour

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WHO POISONED THE SKRIPALS?

ON THE LINES

Answer the following in complete sentences:

1. Explain what a double agent is.

2. Describe Sergei Skripal’s two responsibilities before he became a double agent.

3. Which country paid him to reveal secret information? How long did he act in this dual role?

4. How did he end up in Britain? Explain.

5. What happened to Sergei Skripal and his daughter on March 4th?

6. Who else was affected by the poison that nearly killed the Skripals?

7. What nerve agent do British authorities believe was used in the attack?

8. Describe how the British government reacted to this incident.

9. How did other countries respond to this incident?

10. How did Russia respond to the accusation?
**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 attack on the Skripals was the first known use of a chemical weapon in Europe since World War II?

**JUST TALK ABOUT IT**

1. a) What evidence is there that Russia might be responsible for poisoning the Skripals? What evidence is there that another country might be responsible the poisonings?
   
b) Who do you suppose might have poisoned the Skripals? Support your response with evidence from the article.

2. What if the West had chosen not to hold Russia responsible for the poisoning? Explain.

3. As you see it, what is likely to happen next in this standoff between Russian and the West? Give reasons to support your response.

**ONLINE**

Note: The links below are listed at [www.lesplan.com/us/links](http://www.lesplan.com/us/links) for easy access.


3. Learn more about the poison, Novichok agent, which was used to poison the Skripals, at [https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/neuroscience/novichok-agent](https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/neuroscience/novichok-agent)

4. Visit the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons website to learn more about chemical weapons: [https://www.opcw.org/about-chemical-weapons/what-is-a-chemical-weapon/](https://www.opcw.org/about-chemical-weapons/what-is-a-chemical-weapon/)

5. Find out more about spies at:
   - [https://youtu.be/OmFJ-R8Xq4E](https://youtu.be/OmFJ-R8Xq4E) [2:54] - What is life like for the real ‘James Bond’? BBC News (about MI6)
   - [https://youtu.be/Nbn_zs8wO8c](https://youtu.be/Nbn_zs8wO8c) [2:59] What you need to know about the three main arms of Russia’s intelligence apparatus, including the GRU ★
MAP ASSIGNMENT

Complete this map assignment to better understand the article *Who Poisoned The Skripals?*

**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 in CAPITAL letters and shade each as indicated:
- Scotland (orange)
- England (red)
- Wales (pink)
- Northern Ireland (yellow)
- Ireland (green)
- France (brown)

**Part B** Locate and label the capital cities of the United Kingdom and Ireland and *underline* each city name.

**Part C** Locate and label the following cities in England:
- Birmingham
- Leeds
- Sheffield
- Bradford
- Liverpool
- Manchester
- Salisbury

**Part D** Locate and label the following cities in Scotland:
- Glasgow
- Edinburgh

**Part E** Locate and label the following islands:
- Isle of Man
- Outer Hebrides Islands
- Inner Hebrides Islands
- Orkney Islands

**Part F** Locate and label the following and shade all salt water dark blue:
- Atlantic Ocean
- North Sea
- Moray Firth
- Firth of Forth
- North Channel
- Irish Sea
- St. George’s Channel
- Celtic Sea
- Bristol Channel
- English Channel
- Strait of Dover

**Part G** Draw and label the following rivers and shade them light blue:
- Thames River
- Shannon River

**Part H** Draw and label the Prime Meridian.

**Part I** Complete your map with a frame, title and compass. ★
Complete this map assignment to better understand the article *Who Poisoned The Skripals?*

**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 countries in CAPITAL letters and shade each as indicated:

- Sweden (yellow)
- Russia (red)
- Japan (yellow)
- China (green)
- Mongolia (orange)
- Kazakhstan (pink)

**Part B** Locate and label the capital cities of these countries and *underline* each city name.

**Part C** Locate and label the following countries in CAPITAL letters and shade each as indicated:

- Norway (orange)
- Finland (green)
- Belarus (purple)
- Ukraine (yellow)
- Georgia (purple)
- Azerbaijan (green)
- Iran (orange)
- Turkmenistan (purple)
- Uzbekistan (yellow)
- Tajikistan (orange)
- Kyrgyzstan (brown)
- North Korea (pink)
- South Korea (purple)

**Part D** Locate and label the following Russian cities.

- St. Petersburg
- Novosibirsk
- Yekaterinburg
- Nizhny Novgorod
- Samara

**Part E** Locate and label the following and shade all ocean water dark blue:

- Arctic Ocean
- Barents Sea
- Laptev Sea
- Bering Sea
- Sea of Okhotsk
- Black Sea

**Part G** Locate and label the following and shade all fresh water light blue:

- Caspian Sea
- Aral Sea

**Part H** Draw and label the following rivers and shade them light blue:

- Volga River
- Ural River
- Ob River
- Lena River

**Part I** Shade all remaining territory grey.

**Part J** Complete your map with a frame, title and compass. ★
The world’s best-known scientist died on March 14th.

Stephen Hawking was a brilliant theoretical physicist and cosmologist – someone who delves into the origin and evolution of the universe. His research probed the mysteries of black holes, the Big Bang, gravity, and quantum physics. He wrote multiple books, including the bestseller *A Brief History of Time*, to introduce these mind-bending ideas to the general public.

**MUCH CELEBRATED**

Just how significant were Stephen Hawking’s achievements? Well, he is frequently compared to the greatest scientists ever, like Charles Darwin (the Theory of Evolution), Isaac Newton (Laws of Gravity and Motion), and Albert Einstein (Theory of General Relativity and existence of black holes).

During his lifetime, Dr. Hawking was awarded 13 honorary degrees plus numerous awards, medals, and prizes. He held prestigious academic posts such as the Lucasian Professor of Mathematics at the University of Cambridge, England (the same position held by Sir Isaac Newton in 1669.)

**GRIT, DRIVE, AND STUBBORNNESS**

As a young boy, Stephen Hawking was inquisitive. His classmates nicknamed him ‘Einstein.’ He was also a lazy and mediocre student.

“When I was 12, one of my friends bet a bag of sweets that I would never amount to anything,” the scientist once said.

Ignoring that prediction, he went on to study at Cambridge University. Then, in 1963, at the age of 21, he received a devastating medical diagnosis. He had a fatal disease – ALS (Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis). Over a short period of time, he could expect to lose control over his muscles (including, eventually, his breathing). Doctors gave him two years to live.

The prospect of an early death drove Mr. Hawking to make use of the time he had left. While his frail body atrophied in a wheelchair, his mind atrophied: became weaker or smaller

**CANADIAN CONNECTION**

Stephen Hawking had an important connection with Canada – especially to the Waterloo, Ontario region. Dr. Hawking was a distinguished visiting research chair at the Perimeter Institute for Theoretical Physics and the Institute for Quantum Computing in Waterloo. He used his significant star power to raise the international profile of these Canadian research centres.

“The institute’s twin focus on quantum theory and gravity is very close to my heart and central to explaining the origin of the universe,” he said.
Science, Technology, and the Environment
ONE LESS STAR IN THE UNIVERSE
— STEPHEN HAWKING, 1942 - 2018

explored the furthest reaches of the universe, providing profound insights into gravity, space, and time.

As his condition worsened, Professor Hawking became unable to write equations or turn pages of a book without help. His speech became hard to decipher. Then, a tracheotomy left him unable to speak at all, so he learned to use machines to talk. He would select words and sentences displayed on a screen just by twitching his cheek. These words were fed into a speech synthesizer.

An unlikely celebrity
Stephen Hawking did not fit the stereotype of a physics or mathematics nerd. He loved the limelight. He had a great sense of humour and a zest for adventure.

One example? On his 60th birthday, he went for his first hot-air balloon ride. Then he crashed his electric-powered wheelchair while speeding around a corner, breaking his leg. Another time, he got to experience weightlessness while flying over the Atlantic Ocean in a Boeing 727 jet that was performing parabolic arcs.

“The zero-g part was wonderful,” he said. “I could have gone on and on. Space, here I come.”

Stephen Hawking also appeared on television shows such as Star Trek, The Big Bang Theory, and The Simpsons. (“Your theory of a doughnut-shaped universe is interesting, Homer. I may need to steal it.”)

He met with U.S. presidents and popes. He gave lectures and a TED talk. His life story was turned into an award-winning movie, The Theory of Everything. Its star, Eddie Redmayne, won an Oscar award for portraying Mr. Hawking.

No rush
The professor, the longest known survivor of ALS, lived to age 76. He became an inspiration to disabled people, and was invited to be part of the opening ceremonies for the 2012 Paralympic Games in London.

“A beautiful mind
Many people have heard of Stephen Hawking. Far fewer understand his contributions to science.

Early in his career, he wowed his peers with his work on black holes, along with new arguments that our universe has expanded from a Big Bang. Dr. Hawking and a colleague showed that if there was a Big Bang, it must have started from an infinitely small point – in physicist speak, a ‘singularity.’ In the trillionth of a second after the Big Bang, the universe expanded to astounding proportions.

Scientists generally accepted that black holes were collapsed stars whose gravitational pull was so strong that nothing, not even light, could escape. Dr. Hawking later shocked his peers by suggesting that black holes were not so black after all. They created and radiated particles known as ‘Hawking’ radiation. That caused them to lose energy and hence lose mass. Eventually the black holes disappeared – in an explosion of energy equivalent to a million megaton hydrogen bombs.

Dr. Hawking later theorized that black holes could even leak matter.

“So if you feel you are in a black hole, don’t give up. There’s a way out,” he joked.

The matter that escaped from the black hole would not resemble what went in. The atoms would be scrambled. So, for example, if a car were sucked into a black hole, what came out would be unrecognizable.

Much of his work was related to finding the elusive Grand Unified Theory, or “Theory of Everything” that would bring all of the major physics theories together.

Two weeks before he died, the cosmologist finished laying the groundwork for what would be his last scientific paper. It would prove the existence of other universes outside of our own. Such parallel universes are called the ‘multiverse.’

“Stephen always had interesting new ideas,” said his colleague Thomas Hertog, who co-wrote the paper with Dr. Hawking. “Science was an adventure for him, and you were never sure where it would take him.”

“”I’m not afraid of death, but I’m in no hurry to die,” he once said. “I have so much I want to do first.”

Stephen Hawking’s remains will be buried in London’s historic Westminster Abbey near those of Isaac Newton (1727) and Charles Darwin (1882). ★

Definitions
Parabolic arc: a curve that is similar in shape to the rising and falling path of an object that is thrown into the air

Tracheotomy: a medical operation in which a hole is cut in someone’s trachea to let air into their lungs
Answer the following in complete sentences:

1. Describe Stephen Hawking when he was a young boy.

2. What diagnosis did he receive when he was 21 years old?

3. How did this news affect Mr. Hawking?

4. What happened to his body as his condition worsened? Explain how he continued to communicate.

5. Explain why his life was remarkable from a medical point of view.

6. List at least three areas of research that Stephen Hawking investigated.

7. List at least three of Stephen Hawking’s most significant achievements.

8. Briefly describe his research regarding the Big Bang.

9. Briefly describe his research regarding black holes.
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 Stephen Hawking’s remains will be buried in London’s historic Westminster Abbey, near those of Isaac Newton and Charles Darwin?

JUST TALK ABOUT IT

1. As you see it, what is the significance of Stephen Hawking’s life? Of his death? Explain.

2. Consider the following quotes by Stephen Hawking:

- I have noticed even people who claim everything is predestined, and that we can do nothing to change it, look before they cross the road.

- However difficult life may seem, there is always something you can do and succeed at.

- Intelligence is the ability to adapt to change.

- Work gives you meaning and purpose and without it life is empty.

- Look up at the stars and not down at your feet. Try to make sense of what you see, and wonder about what makes the universe exist. Be curious.

Choose one of the quotes, and respond to it. What is your understanding of this quote? Do agree or disagree with the speaker? What does this quote tell you about Stephen Hawking? Explain.

ONLINE

Note: The links below are listed at www.lesplan.com/en/links for easy access.


2. Watch “This is Stephen Hawking’s Last Inspiring Message to Humanity,” at https://youtu.be/VYxjumUbjjo [3:05]

3. Hear what journalist and author Lucy Hawking has to say about growing up with Stephen Hawking as a father by watching “My Father, Stephen Hawking,” at https://youtu.be/RVVR4QyiQMc [5:41]

4. Learn facts about Stephen Hawking’s personal and family life and his contributions to pop culture and science by watching “Physicist Stephen Hawking has died” at https://youtu.be/uA8GdGjJqz_s [2:46]

5. Find out more about the disease that affected Stephen Hawking at https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/164342.php

Imagine that you are an investigative reporter interviewing the person in this scene. Generate two powerful questions to ask in your interview. (A powerful question is not easy to answer, is specific to the situation, is open-ended and requires further research.) Then, record plausible answers – those that are most likely to be given, believable, and supported by evidence in the image.

QUizzes

PHOENIX FAILS TO PAY OFF

Write the letter that corresponds to the best answer on the line beside each question:

_____ 1. How many public service employees work for the federal government?
   a) 75,000
   b) 180,000
   c) 260,000
   d) 400,000
   e) 720,000

_____ 2. Where do most of these public servants work?
   a) Miramichi
   b) Ottawa
   c) Toronto
   d) Vancouver
   e) Winnipeg

_____ 3. Which company was awarded the contract to create a new federal payroll system?
   a) IBM
   b) Microsoft
   c) KPMG
   d) Ernst and Young
   e) Amazon

_____ 4. True or False? The NDP government has promised to fix the Phoenix payroll problem.

_____ 5. True or False? The new Phoenix payroll problem worked well for the first few months.

6. What advice would you give the Public Services and Procurement Minister Carla Qualtrough regarding the Phoenix pay system? Give reasons to support your response.

CHURCHILL – A NORTHERN TOWN WITHOUT A TRAIN

Write the letter that corresponds to the best answer on the line beside each question:

_____ 1. How many people live in Churchill, Manitoba?
   a) 450
   b) 600
   c) 900
   d) 3,200
   e) 10,000

_____ 2. Who owned the Hudson Bay Railway before 1997?
   a) the federal government
   b) VIA Rail
   c) the Wheat Board
   d) the Manitoba government
   e) Canadian National Railway

_____ 3. Why did Omnitrax close the Port of Churchill?
   a) storms and a flood destroyed rail access to Churchill
   b) the Wheat Board ordered it shut down
   c) it was too expensive to maintain and refurbish
   d) cargo ships could only arrive during the summer months
   e) few companies were using it to ship grain

_____ 4. True or False? The population of Churchill is going up.

_____ 5. True or False? Ottawa and Omnitrax are close to an agreement to re-open the Hudson Bay Railway.

6. What advice would you give to the federal and the Manitoba governments regarding the Hudson Bay Railway? Give reasons to support your response.
WHO POISONED THE SKRIPALS?

Write the letter that corresponds to the best answer on the line beside each question:

_____ 1. Who convinced Sergei Skripal to become a double agent?
   a) the GRU   b) Boris Johnson
   c) British intelligence   d) the CIA
   e) Theresa May

_____ 2. Which nerve agent do British authorities believe was used to poison the Skripals?
   a) Polonium   b) Mercury
   c) Cyanide   d) Novichok
   e) Arsenic

_____ 3. Who was the least seriously injured in the poison attack in Salisbury?
   a) Detective Sergeant Nick Bailey   b) Yulia Skripal
   c) Sergei Lavrov   d) Vladimir Putin
   e) Sergei Skripal

_____ 4. True or False? Russia has never been suspected in the deaths of other Russian nationals in the UK.

_____ 5. True or False? Only the UK expelled Russian diplomats because of the poison attack in Salisbury.

6. Theresa May was right to expel Russian diplomats from the UK. Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Give reasons to support your response.

STEPHEN HAWKING - ONE LESS STAR IN THE UNIVERSE

Write the letter that corresponds to the best answer on the line beside each question:

_____ 1. Which serious disease was Stephen Hawking diagnosed with?
   a) Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis   b) Down syndrome
   c) Leukemia   d) Alzheimer’s disease
   e) Epilepsy

_____ 2. Which British university did Stephen Hawking work at?
   a) Harvard University   b) London School of Economics and Political Science
   c) University of Oxford   d) University of Cambridge
   e) Massachusetts Institute of Technology

_____ 3. Much of Professor Hawking’s research was focussed finding the elusive:
   a) Theory of Evolution   b) Laws of Gravity and Motion
   c) Theory of General Relativity   d) Quantum Theory
   e) Grand Unified Theory

_____ 4. True or False? Professor Hawking was able to speak after his tracheotomy.

_____ 5. True or False? Professor Hawking was the longest known survivor of ALS.

6. As you see it, what is Stephen Hawking’s legacy? Give reasons to explain your answer.
PHOENIX FAILS TO PAY OUT

1. Explain who public servants are and what they do.
   Public servants are the non-political staff of the government. Federal public servants make up the Public Service of Canada (PSAC) which runs the government’s day-to-day business and carries out government policy and rules. (Public servants work at some 1600 locations across Canada, but most work in Ottawa. The federal government is Canada’s largest employer.)

2. How many federal public servants are there in Canada?
   about 260,000

3. What is the Phoenix payroll system and what was it designed to do? It is a payroll management system designed to process payroll for federal public servants. (A payroll department determines and distributes wages or salary due to an employee.)

4. Who decided to replace the dated federal payroll system and why? What were the promised benefits of this change? Ten years ago, the federal Conservatives decided to centralize and upgrade the government payroll system. Ottawa wanted to consolidate 1200 payroll staff in one location and rely more on computers. The Conservatives said these changes would save taxpayers $78 million a year.

5. Which company received the contract to replace the 40-year-old federal payroll system?
   International Business Machines Canada (IBM Canada)

6. What would the new payroll system be required to do? Who would run the new system?
   The new system needed to handle a $17-billion payroll and process 8.9 million transactions a year, taking into account 80 collective agreements and 80,000 rules. It would be run by 500 employees working in Miramichi, New Brunswick.

7. When did the new system take effect and when did the payroll problems begin? Phoenix launched in February 2016. From the start the technology didn’t work as expected. Many workers were paid wrong amounts, and attempted fixes made matters worse. Six months later, about 80,000 public servants had been affected. (Many didn’t receive parental leave, long-term disability, and severance pay. Hundreds of PSAC members were not paid at all.)

8. What did the new Liberal government promise to do when problems with Phoenix first emerged?
   The new government gave repeated assurances that the problems and the system would be fixed soon.

9. Describe the scope of the payroll problem created by Phoenix. How big is the current backlog?
   Over the past two years, Phoenix has overpaid, underpaid, or failed to pay 180,000 public servants. By December 2017, there were 551,000 unresolved claims affecting some 156,000 employees. By March 2018, the backlog had dropped to 384,000.

10. How much has the Phoenix payroll system cost Canadian taxpayers so far? The cost for Phoenix has climbed from $307 million to almost $1 billion.

11. How does the federal government plan to move forward on this issue? In March, Ottawa announced it had given up on fixing Phoenix. Ottawa will spend $16 million over the next few years to look at options to replace the problem-plagued payroll system. At the same time, it will continue with efforts to stabilize the current system.

EDITORIAL CARTOON

1. Answers will vary.

2. The Phoenix payroll management system was launched in February 2016 to replace the federal government’s 40-year-old payroll system. It was meant to save the government $78 million a year; instead, its cost has ballooned from $307 million to almost $1 billion. The system has not worked as expected. Tens of thousands of public service workers have been paid the wrong amount, or not been paid at all, and attempts to fix the system only seem to have made the situation worse.

3. The cartoon shows two office buildings, side by side. The building on the left, labelled “Phoenix Payroll System Data Processing,” is very short compared to the building on the right, labelled “Phoenix Payroll System Complaints Processing.”

4. The perspective is that of the cartoonist.

5. The cartoonist may be suggesting that the resources needed to deal with complaints about the Phoenix payroll system are far greater than the resources required to actually process the public service payroll – because the Phoenix system isn’t working as intended.
What in the world? • Level 2

2017/2018: Issue 7

CHURCHILL – A TOWN WITHOUT A TRAIN

1. List four important facts about Churchill, Manitoba.
   1) The population is about 900 people (and falling). 2) It is located 1000 kilometres north of Winnipeg on the west shore of Hudson Bay. 3) It is known as the polar bear capital of the world. 4) The climate is too cold to farm or keep livestock. 5) It was Canada’s only Arctic deep-sea port when it was operating.

2. Describe the cost of living in this isolated community.
   Residents have always faced high living costs (due to Churchill’s isolated location.)

3. Why was the Hudson Bay Railway sold in 1997?
   What was the sale price? The then-Liberal federal government sold the railway for $11 million because it was so expensive to run. Ottawa had subsidized the line to the tune of $130 million in the previous ten years.

4. Who purchased the railway? Omnitrax, an American company based in Denver, Colorado. (Omnitrax also bought the Port of Churchill for $10 million.)

5. What was this company’s plan when it bought the railway? Despite Ottawa’s struggles to run the railway and the Port of Churchill, Omnitrax had hoped to make money by transporting and shipping grain.

6. What changed in 2012? What happened to the port?
   The then-Conservative government dissolved the Wheat Board and Omnitrax’s Churchill operations began to struggle. (The Wheat Board’s policy had been to use the Port of Churchill.) Fewer companies now used Churchill to export grain. Omnitrax tried to sell the railroad and port in 2015, but failed. After the port saw a 34 percent drop in grain shipments, it was shut down in 2016 - but the railway continued to operate.

7. Describe what happened to the railway last winter?
   Last winter and spring two major blizzards and a flood destroyed parts of the railway line that served Churchill. Track washed out in 24 locations, and five bridges were affected. (Churchill residents expected that the tracks would be repaired quickly, and that the train would resume.)

8. What impact did this damage have on Churchill?
   Residents were upset after steep prices soared even higher. With no train, the only way to receive supplies – or for people to travel – is by plane or by boat. Both are far more expensive than rail and they depend on good weather.

9. What did the railway company announce in May 2017?
   Why did it refuse to fix the damage? Omnitrax announced it would close the line. It claimed the repairs might cost as much as $60 million and it couldn’t afford the expense. (Omnitrax’s repair estimates were disputed and controversial.)

10. Describe the latest developments in this ongoing dispute. Last November a three-group consortium offered to buy Omnitrax’s assets but the U.S. company said it wanted ‘fair’ compensation. Omnitrax threatened to sue Ottawa for $150 million. In response, the federal government filed its own multi-million-dollar lawsuit to force Omnitrax to make the repairs as per an agreement that was signed in 2008 whereby Ottawa and the Manitoba government each pledged to give Omnitrax $20 million to help with the cost of upgrading the railway.

PUZZLE

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WHO POISONED THE SKRIPALS?

1. Explain what a double agent is. A spy or government agent who pretends to work for one country or organization while in fact acting on behalf of an enemy.

2. Describe Sergei Skripal’s two responsibilities before he became a double agent. Mr. Skripal was a Russian diplomat during the 1980s and 1990s and he also worked as a spy for Russian military intelligence – the GRU (the GRU is Russia’s largest foreign intelligence agency). His role was to gather information on European countries.

3. Which country paid him to reveal secret information? How long did he act in this dual role? In 1995 British intelligence convinced him to work as a double agent. He sold the names of Russian spies for money. In 2004 he was arrested by Russia and sent to a labour camp.

4. How did he end up in Britain? Explain. In 2010 he was released in a spy swap. He settled in Salisbury, England with his family. (His wife died of cancer in 2012, his brother died in 2016, and his son in 2017. Some believe the latter two deaths are suspicious.)

5. What happened to Sergei Skripal and his daughter on March 4th? They were exposed to a lethal nerve agent. They were found “in deep distress” in a local park and taken to hospital. Initial attempts to revived them failed. Authorities think that Mr. Skripal and his 33-year-old daughter, Yulia, were first exposed at their front door. (Police believe the intent was to kill them.)

6. Who else was affected by the poison that nearly killed the Skripals? Detective Sergeant Nick Bailey, who tried to help the Skripals, also fell ill.

7. What nerve agent do British authorities believe was used in the attack? Novichok - a poison that belongs to a group of nerve agents developed by Russia (Soviet Union) in the 1970s and 1980s. (This was the first known use of a chemical weapon in Europe since World War II. Detective Sergeant Bailey was discharged on March 22, and by early April, the Skripals had regained consciousness and were improving.)

8. Describe how the British government reacted to this incident. British Prime Minister Theresa May said there was no doubt Russia was behind the attack and that Russian involvement was “the only plausible explanation.” Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson said Russia’s President Vladimir Putin was “overwhelmingly likely” to have ordered the attack. Britain expelled 23 Russian diplomats, and threatened to freeze Russian assets. All high-level contacts between the two countries were also suspended. An invitation to visit Britain issued to Russia’s Foreign Minister was withdrawn, and no government ministers or members of the Royal Family will attend the FIFA World Cup of Soccer in Russia in June.

9. How did other countries respond to this incident? More than 25 countries, including Canada and the U.S., as well as most member states of the European Union and NATO, expelled over 100 Russian diplomats. The U.S. also closed the Russian consulate in Seattle.

10. How did Russia respond to the accusation? Russia angrily denied it was involved and demanded that the UK provide proof. The Russian government retaliated by expelling 23 British diplomats, 60 U.S. diplomats, and several more from other countries (including four from Canada). It also closed the British and U.S. consulates in St. Petersburg, and threatened to expel diplomats from countries supporting Great Britain. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov stated that “There are other explanations beside those put forward by our Western colleagues. . .” He suggested that Britain may have poisoned the Skripals to distract from the Brexit controversy.
1. Describe Stephen Hawking when he was a young boy.
He was inquisitive but he was also a lazy and mediocre student. (His classmates nicknamed him ‘Einstein.’)

2. What diagnosis did he receive when he was 21 years old?
While at Cambridge University he was diagnosed with ALS (Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis - a.k.a. Lou Gehrig’s disease or motor neuron disease). Over a short period of time, he could expect to lose control over his muscles (including, eventually, his breathing). Doctors gave him two years to live. (ALS gradually paralyzes people because the brain cannot communicate with the body’s muscles. Over time, the muscles break down, and an ALS patient will lose the ability to walk, talk, eat, swallow, and eventually breathe.)

3. How did this news affect Mr. Hawking? The prospect of an early death drove Mr. Hawking to make use of the time he had left. While his frail body atrophied in a wheelchair, his mind explored the furthest reaches of the universe, providing profound insights into gravity, space, and time.

4. What happened to his body as his condition worsened? Explain how he continued to communicate.
Professor Hawking became unable to write equations or turn book pages without help. His speech became hard to decipher. He lost his voice after a tracheotomy, so he used machines to talk. He would select words and sentences from a screen by twitching his cheek. These ‘words’ were then fed into a speech synthesizer.

5. Explain why his life was remarkable from a medical point of view. Professor Hawking, who lived to age 76, became the longest known ALS survivor. (He inspired disabled people, and was invited to be part of the opening ceremonies for the 2012 London Paralympic Games.

6. List at least three areas of research that Stephen Hawking investigated. Dr. Hawking was a brilliant theoretical physicist and cosmologist – someone who delves into the origin and evolution of the universe. His research probed the mysteries of black holes, the Big Bang, gravity, and quantum physics.

7. List at least three of Stephen Hawking’s most significant achievements. 1) He was awarded 13 honorary degrees plus numerous awards, medals, and prizes. 2) He held prestigious academic posts such as the Lucasian Professor of Mathematics at Cambridge University (the same position held by Sir Isaac Newton in 1669.) 3) He wrote multiple books, including A Brief History of Time, to introduce his ideas to the public. (He is frequently compared to the greatest scientists ever, like Charles Darwin [the theory of evolution], Isaac Newton [laws of gravity and motion], and Albert Einstein [theory of general relativity and existence of black holes].

8. Briefly describe his research regarding the Big Bang.
Early in his career, he wowed his peers with new arguments that the universe has expanded from a Big Bang. Dr. Hawking and a colleague showed that if there was a Big Bang, it must have started from an infinitely small point – a ‘singularity.’ In the trillionth of a second after the Big Bang, the universe expanded to astounding proportions.

9. Briefly describe his research regarding black holes.
Scientists thought black holes were collapsed stars whose gravity was so strong that nothing, not even light, could escape. Dr. Hawking suggested that black holes created and radiated particles known as ‘Hawking’ radiation. That caused them to lose energy and hence lose mass. Eventually the black holes disappeared – in an explosion of energy equivalent to a million megaton hydrogen bombs. Dr. Hawking also theorized that black holes could even leak matter.

QUizzes
Phoenix Fails to Pay Out
1. c 2. b 3. a 4. False 5. False

Churchill – A Northern Town Without A Train
1. c 2. a 3. e 4. False 5. False

Who Poisoned the Skripals?
1. c 2. d 3. a 4. False 5. False

Stephen Hawking
1. a 2. d 3. e 4. False 5. True
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### Publications

- **English Publications**
  - The Canadian Reader (Grades 3 and up)
  - What in the World? Level 1 (Grades 5 and up)
  - What in the World? Level 2 (Grades 8 and up)

- **Publications en français**
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