

Blizzard Of Glass

A TEACHER'S GUIDE FOR

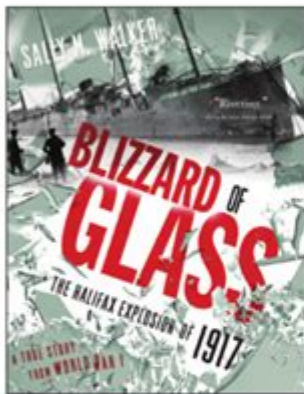
BLIZZARD OF

GLASS

THE HALIFAX EXPLOSION OF 1917

BY SALLY M. WALKER

FOR
USE WITH
COMMON CORE
STATE
STANDARDS



Grades 5 to 9; Ages 10 to 14
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ABOUT THE BOOK

December 6, 1917, started like any other day in Halifax. Women made breakfast, men went to work, children got ready for school. But everything stopped when two ships collided in Halifax Harbour. One of the ships was loaded with munitions for the troops fighting in Europe; the other was preparing to collect medical supplies for the war's victims. The resulting disaster was the largest man-made explosion until the detonation of the atomic bomb in 1945. The blast flattened most of Halifax and the town across the harbor, Dartmouth. It killed nearly two thousand people. As if that wasn't devastating enough, a blizzard hit the next day, dumping more than a foot of snow on the area and slowing much-needed relief efforts. This harrowing story of tragedy and recovery reveals the extraordinary strength and determination of a community in one of its darkest hours.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sally M. Walker is the author of *Written in Bone: Buried Lives of Jamestown and Colonial Maryland*, *Fossil Fish Found Alive*, and *Secrets of a Civil War Submarine*, which was awarded a Sibert Medal. She first learned about the Halifax Harbour explosion while she and her family were living in Nova Scotia.

Although she now lives in Illinois, the many stories she heard then have remained strong in her memory. When she isn't writing, Ms. Walker presents book-talk sessions at library and reading conferences and for a local bookstore. Visit her online at www.sallymwalker.com.



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Blizzard of Glass refers to the devastating event that occurred during the winter of 1888, when an unexpected storm swept through the northeastern United States, particularly affecting New York City. This blizzard, known for its ferocity and the sheer volume of snow and wind it produced, is often remembered not only for the physical impact it had but also for the tragic loss of life and the chaos it brought to a rapidly industrializing society. The term "blizzard of glass" evokes imagery of sharp, glistening ice particles that filled the air and transformed the landscape into a treacherous environment. This article delves into the historical context, the events of the blizzard, its aftermath, and its legacy in American meteorological history.

Historical Context

The Blizzard of Glass occurred during a period of significant transformation in the United States. The country was experiencing rapid industrial growth, and cities were expanding at an unprecedented rate. This era, often referred to as the Gilded Age, was characterized by:

- Urbanization: A massive shift of populations from rural areas to cities in search of jobs and better living conditions.
- Technological Advancements: Innovations in transportation, communication, and industry, which were reshaping everyday life.
- Social Changes: The emergence of new social classes, including a burgeoning middle class, and the challenges that came with urban life, such as poverty and overcrowding.

Despite these advancements, the infrastructure and emergency preparedness for extreme weather events were not adequately developed, setting the stage for the chaos that would ensue during the blizzard.

The Blizzard Event

Timeline of the Blizzard

The Blizzard of Glass struck on March 11, 1888, and lasted for approximately two days. The storm developed rapidly, catching many people off guard. Here is a brief timeline of the key events:

1. March 11, 1888: The storm began in the early morning hours, with light snowfall and unseasonably warm temperatures.
2. Midday: The situation escalated quickly, as winds picked up and temperatures dropped sharply, turning the light snow into a blinding blizzard.
3. March 12: The storm reached its peak intensity, with winds exceeding 45 miles per hour and snowfall accumulating at rates of up to four inches per hour.
4. March 13: The storm finally began to dissipate, leaving behind a staggering amount of snow and chaos in its wake.

Impact and Damage

The blizzard had a profound impact on the northeastern United States, particularly in cities like New York City, Boston, and Hartford. The effects can be summarized as follows:

- Snow Accumulation: In some areas, snow drifts reached heights of over 50 inches, effectively paralyzing transportation and communication.
- Transportation Disruptions: Railroads were severely affected, with many trains stuck in snowdrifts and unable to reach their destinations. Consequently, thousands of passengers were stranded.
- Loss of Life: It is estimated that over 400 people lost their lives during the storm, many of whom were caught outside or unable to reach safety in time.

- **Economic Impact:** Businesses were forced to close, and the economy suffered due to the disruptions in trade and transportation.

Survival Stories

Amidst the chaos and destruction, numerous stories of survival and heroism emerged during the Blizzard of Glass. These narratives highlight the resilience of individuals and communities in the face of adversity:

1. **Stranded Travelers:** Many individuals found themselves stranded in train stations, where they huddled together for warmth. Some were fortunate enough to be rescued by local residents who braved the storm to provide shelter.
2. **Courageous Rescuers:** Local authorities and volunteers took it upon themselves to rescue those trapped in their homes or stranded in the streets. Their bravery and selflessness saved countless lives.
3. **Community Solidarity:** Communities came together to provide food, shelter, and care for those affected by the storm. Neighbors checked on each other, demonstrating the importance of social bonds during crises.

Aftermath and Recovery

The aftermath of the Blizzard of Glass left a lasting impact on the affected regions. The recovery process was slow and fraught with challenges:

Immediate Recovery Efforts

- **Clearing the Streets:** City officials initiated efforts to clear the streets of snow, employing horse-drawn plows and volunteers to assist in the monumental task.
- **Emergency Services:** Hospitals and emergency services were overwhelmed with patients suffering from frostbite, pneumonia, and other storm-related ailments.
- **Aid and Assistance:** Charitable organizations stepped in to provide food and shelter for those who had lost their homes or livelihoods.

Long-term Changes

In the years following the blizzard, several changes were implemented to improve response to similar events:

- **Meteorological Advancements:** The blizzard highlighted the need for better weather forecasting and communication. The U.S. Weather Bureau (now the National Weather Service) began investing in technologies and methods to predict storms more accurately.
- **Infrastructure Improvements:** Cities recognized the necessity of improving infrastructure to cope with severe weather. Investments were made in snow removal equipment and emergency response

systems.

- Public Awareness: The blizzard served as a wake-up call for the public, educating citizens about the importance of preparedness for extreme weather events.

Legacy of the Blizzard of Glass

The Blizzard of Glass remains a significant event in American history, not only for its immediate impact but also for the lessons it imparted:

- Cultural Memory: The storm has been immortalized in literature and local folklore, serving as a reminder of nature's power and unpredictability.
- Meteorological Studies: The event spurred further research into meteorology and the science of weather prediction, leading to advancements that have improved public safety over the years.
- Preparedness: The blizzard underscored the importance of being prepared for extreme weather, influencing how communities approach disaster response to this day.

Conclusion

The Blizzard of Glass stands as a testament to the unpredictable forces of nature and the resilience of the human spirit. Its legacy continues to shape meteorological practices, urban planning, and community preparedness. As society progresses and faces new challenges, the lessons learned from this historic blizzard remain relevant, reminding us to respect the power of nature and to be prepared for the unexpected. The stories of survival, heroism, and community solidarity during this tumultuous time resonate through history, ensuring that the Blizzard of Glass will never be forgotten.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is 'Blizzard of Glass' and what does it refer to?

'Blizzard of Glass' refers to a significant weather event characterized by heavy snowfall and high winds that can create dangerous conditions, particularly during winter storms. The term is often used to describe the visual and physical impact of the storm, where the snow resembles a blizzard of glass shards.

How does 'Blizzard of Glass' impact local communities?

'Blizzard of Glass' can severely disrupt local communities by causing transportation delays, power outages, and hazardous walking conditions. Emergency services may be strained, and community events may be canceled due to unsafe weather.

What are the safety precautions to take during a 'Blizzard of Glass'?

Safety precautions during a 'Blizzard of Glass' include staying indoors, avoiding travel unless

absolutely necessary, keeping emergency supplies on hand, and ensuring that heating systems are functional to prevent hypothermia.

How does climate change influence the frequency of 'Blizzard of Glass' events?

Climate change can influence the frequency and intensity of 'Blizzard of Glass' events by altering weather patterns, leading to more extreme winter storms. Warmer air can hold more moisture, potentially resulting in heavier snowfall during winter storms.

What historical events are associated with 'Blizzard of Glass'?

One historical event associated with the term 'Blizzard of Glass' is the severe winter storm that occurred in the early 20th century, which produced blinding snow and high winds, resulting in significant property damage and loss of life.

How can technology help in predicting 'Blizzard of Glass' conditions?

Technology plays a crucial role in predicting 'Blizzard of Glass' conditions through advanced meteorological models, satellite imagery, and real-time weather data analysis, which help meteorologists forecast storms more accurately and provide timely warnings to the public.

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