Articles and Questions

Each **free article** of ***What in the World?*** includes:   
  
1) a PDF file

*and*

2) a Word file

These files contain **only** the article and questions. They do **not** contain Answer Keys.

This **Word** file allows students to complete assignments using a computer either at school or at home. Teachers can assign all or parts of the file by email attachment or a school website. The **Word** file also allows teachers to:

• easily modify and format content including changing *fonts* and text sizes

• create a PDF document and use Adobe Reader's 'Read Out Loud Mode'

• save paper and copying costs and help protect the environment

• promote and encourage students’ computer skills

What Else Can You Do With The Word File?

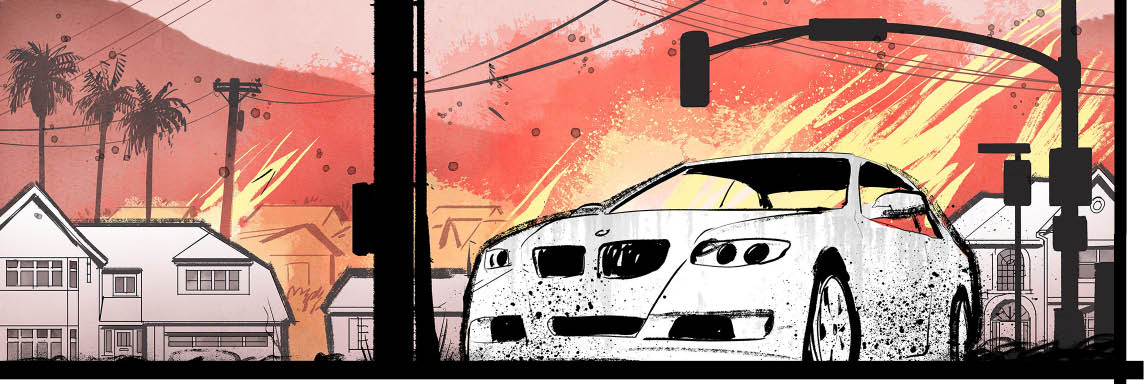
#1) You can easily upload the file to Google Docs and share it with students or other teachers. **See how here:**

<https://support.google.com/drive/answer/2424368?hl=en>

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<https://support.google.com/docs/answer/187189?hl=en&co=GENIE.Platform=Desktop>

**Fighting An Inferno In California**



Large areas of southern California were consumed by devastating wildfires that began in early January and continued during the following weeks. Relentless flames, fueled by powerful Santa Ana Winds, high temperatures, and dry vegetation, have consumed lives, homes, and businesses. Officials are still investigating how the fires started.

**A wall of orange terror**

Conditions were dry and dangerous because expected winter rains did not arrive, and much of southern California had experienced drought-like conditions. In late January, nine large wildfires were reported across the region. At least 28 people had died as a result of the red-hot infernos sweeping across the region. Over 16,000 structures had been reduced to ash. Some 200,000 residents had evacuated, and many thousands more waited nervously on evacuation alert.

The largest and most destructive blaze, the Palisades Fire in the Santa Monica Mountains, destroyed over 9000 hectares. That’s bigger than 23,000 football fields.

The Eaton Fire in the San Gabriel Mountains north of Los Angeles caused nearly as much damage, scorching over 5600 hectares and levelling city block after city block.

In late January, after a week of relative calm, which allowed firefighters to slow the wildfires and build containment lines, new blazes were reported. Authorities issued **red-flag** **warnings** for most of Los Angeles and Ventura **Counties** as bone-dry vegetation and expected strong winds increased the likelihood of more widespread destruction.

**Battling the blazes**

Los Angeles was at war—and emergency services were stretched thin. Thousands of exhausted first responders and volunteers worked tirelessly to protect lives and property. At the local level, those on the front lines struggled to contain the blazes, often battling extreme conditions in rugged terrain. Fierce winds sent hot embers flying long distances that ignited new blazes faster than the brave men and women could respond.

Aerial tankers dispersed hundreds of thousands of litres of fire retardant to slow advancing fires. Other fixed-wing aircraft and helicopters also dropped huge amounts of water on hot spots.

At the state level, California provided personnel, equipment, and funding. Federally, the U.S. Forest Service contributed firefighting teams, financial aid, and other support.

**Help from afar**

The world is helping as well. Specialists from Australia and Mexico brought their wildfire management skills to help tackle the infernos. Assistance even came from as far away as Israel, Ukraine, and Japan. Canadian firefighters and water bomber crews, who are experienced working in challenging conditions and understand fire suppression strategies, have pitched in, too.

**A terrible toll**

Compounding the tragedy is the environmental damage. The fires have caused widespread destruction of ecosystems, habitats, and wildlife, searing forests and brushlands, displacing animals, and disrupting their natural habitats. Vast amounts of carbon dioxide were also released, further contributing to global warming.

The blazes have also filled the air with hazardous levels of fine **particulate** matter, creating a choking haze over the region. The poor air quality posed a significant health risk for vulnerable residents such as children, the elderly, and those with existing health issues.

The economic toll was huge. While the insurance cost of the devastation was estimated to be about $30 billion, other estimates put the total damage at over $250 billion, making this one of the costliest natural disasters in American history.

**A challenging recovery**

Immediate efforts focused on providing housing for those displaced, offering financial assistance to rebuild, and addressing health needs for those affected. Shelters were set up, and some companies donated thousands of free hotel nights as well.

Going forward, however, restoring communities after the fires won’t be easy. California already faces a housing shortage—and building new homes takes time. Residents must also deal with toxic ash runoff and mudslides, which are likely to worsen when predicted rains arrive.

Infrastructure improvements will be key to a successful rebuild. Investments in fire-resistant housing, improved water storage systems, and modernized emergency response capabilities could help LA better weather future disasters.

Long-term recovery will depend on addressing climate change, one of the root causes of disasters like these. Public awareness campaigns are needed to help foster a culture of preparedness, encouraging residents to take proactive steps to protect their homes and communities.

California Governor Gavin Newsom was focussed on the present and the future. "We have got to be thinking three weeks, three months, three years ahead; at the same time, we're focusing on the immediacy, which is life, safety, and property," he stated.

Ultimately, the resilience of Angelinos will play a crucial role in the city’s recovery. By coming together to support each other, rebuilding lost neighbourhoods, and advocating for meaningful change, they can ensure that LA emerges better prepared for future challenges. The wildfires may have left a scar, but they also offer an opportunity to rethink and rebuild.

**California, A Golden State With Issues**

With 39 million residents, California is the most populous U.S. state. Nearly four million people live in Los Angeles alone, making it the second-largest municipality in America after New York City. Known for its TV and Hollywood film industries, LA is where dreams of stardom are made—and often shattered.

California’s economy, featuring entertainment, technology, farming, and tourism, is the largest in the U.S. and the fifth-largest in the world. In 2023, its$4-trillion **GDP** was 1.7times higher than Canada’s**.** Silicon Valley, in the northern part of the state near San Francisco, is a global centre for high tech and innovation. It is the birthplace of many tech giants, including Apple, Google, and Facebook.

The state’s natural beauty features huge, awe-inspiring redwood trees and sparkling beaches. California is known world-wide for its surfing culture. The climate is varied. Along the coast, warm, mild weather prevails. Inland, deserts and mountains experience more extreme conditions. The state is also a leading producer of milk, dairy products, cattle, almonds, grapes, and many other crops.

**How The Santa Ana Winds Fuel Fires**

The Santa Ana Winds (also known as Devil Winds) are strong, dry winds that can generate temperatures as high as 32 degrees Celsius. They occur in southern California, usually between October and March, and originate over the Great Basin, a desert region located mostly in Nevada and Utah. As air flows westward from this area, it descends into mountain passes and canyons, gaining speed and losing moisture through compression—a process called adiabatic heating.

Wind speeds during Santa Ana events can exceed 100 kilometres per hour in narrow passes and exposed areas. That makes these airstreams one of the most powerful natural forces in the region. Temperatures often rise by several degrees, and humidity levels can drop below 10 percent, creating extremely dry conditions.

The high-speed winds, combined with low humidity and dry fuel, have hampered firefighting efforts. The winds have intensified the existing blazes, driven destruction across vast areas, and increased risks for residents and emergency responders.

**county:** an area of a state or country that is larger than a city and has its own government to deal with local matters

**GDP - Gross Domestic Product:** the total value of all goods and services produced in a country or region in a set time period

**particulates:** very small particles of a substance, especially those that are produced when fuel is burned.

**red flag warning:** warning issued when warm temperatures, very low humidity, and strong winds are expected to combine to produce a high risk of fire danger.

**Comprehension Questions**

1. Describe California's economy.

2. List at least five other important facts about California.

3. What happened in southern California in early January? Why was the situation so dangerous?

4. How many large fires were burning in late January? Which two were the most destructive?

5. Describe the efforts to fight and contain these fires.

6. What are the **Santa Ana Winds**? Where and when do they form?

7. Explain how these winds affect California.

8. How do these winds fuel wildfires?

**Questions For Further Thought**

1. Consider this quote from the article: ***"Long-term recovery will depend on addressing climate change, one of the root causes of disasters like these.”***

What is your understanding of this passage? Do you agree or disagree with this passage? Give reasons to support your response.

2. Humanitarian organizations such as the Red Cross provide relief for victims of disasters like the California wildfires. What types of support do you suppose victims might need during and after such a major disaster? Explain.

3. Before these devastating wildfires, a number of home insurance companies cancelled policies in high-risk disaster areas like California. Some of these homeowners, about 1 in 7, chose to get insurance through a government-sponsored plan, but many chose not to get insurance at all.

Financial analysts are predicting that there will be an enormous increase to property insurance in California given the estimated $250 billion it will take to rebuild after these devastating wildfires.

As you see it, will these wildfires affect where people choose to live in California? Give reasons to support your response.

**Questions For Online Exploration**

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

1. Learn more about the southern California wildfires and the destruction they’ve left behind:  
**https://www.cbc.ca/news/world/la-county-wildfires-week-outlook-1.7429649**

What questions do you have?

2. Check out this timeline of the Eaton and Palisades wildfires in early January:  
**https://www.nbclosangeles.com/news/california-wildfires/timeline-eaton-palisades-fires-la-county/3614940/**

What similarities and differences between these two wildfires did you notice?

3. Explore these maps and charts that document the impact of the California wildfires:   
**https://www.cnn.com/2025/01/08/us/maps-visuals-los-angeles-wildfires-dg/index.html**

What did you learn?

4. Watch this interview with Gavin Newsom, governor of California, as he describes these wildfires, the efforts to contain them, and the long road ahead:  
**https://www.yout-ube.com/watch?v=ekEMq5dVZb0** [18:19]

What do you believe will be the biggest challenge for Governor Newsom?

5. Learn how the Santa Ana Winds contributed to these wildfires:  
**https://www.cbc.ca/news/science/winds-la-fires-1.7426103** [0:41] [3:38]  
**https://www.cbc.ca/player/play/video/9.6611202** [2:11]

What did you learn?

6. Hear from residents who have been affected by these wildfires:  
**https://www.cbc.ca/news/entertainment/hollywood-wildfire-los-angeles-1.7425919** [0:14] [1:47] [6:23]  
**https://www.cbc.ca/player/play/video/9.6607988** [0:52]

7. Learn how foreign countries are providing assistance to California:  
**https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/quebec-british-columbia-wildfires-los-angeles-1.7426060**[**https://www.factcheck.org/2025/01/canada-and-mexico-are-helping-to-fight-california-fires-contrary-to-meme/**](https://www.factcheck.org/2025/01/canada-and-mexico-are-helping-to-fight-california-fires-contrary-to-meme/)

8. Meet an LA couple who built a fire-resistant home that withstood these fires:  
**https://moneywise.com/news/top-stories/los-angeles-wildfires-pacific-palisades-fire-resistant-home**

What did you learn?

**Putting It All Together**

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

\_\_\_\_\_\_ 2. **California's economy is ranked as the \_\_\_\_\_ largest in the world.** a) second b) fourth  
 c) fifth d) ninth  
 e) fourteenth

\_\_\_\_\_\_ 2. **Which California wildfire caused the most destruction?** a) the Hollywood Fire b) the Palisades Fire  
 c) the Eaton Fire d) the Ventura Fire  
 e) the Hughes Fire

\_\_\_\_\_\_ 3. **In which two states do the Santa Ana winds form?** a) Arizona and Colorado b) Oregon and Idaho  
 c) Nevada and Utah d) Wyoming and Montana  
 e) New Mexico and Texas

**B.** Mark the statements **T** (**True**) or **F** (**False**). If a statement is **True**, write one important fact to support it on the line below. If a statement is **False**, write the words that make it true on the line below.

\_\_\_\_\_\_ 4. **True** or **False?** The population of California is 50 million.

\_\_\_\_\_\_ 5. **True** or **False?** California's GDP is less than Canada's total GDP.

\_\_\_\_\_\_ 6. **True** or **False?** Gavin Newsom is the governor of California.

**C. Fill in the blanks to complete each sentence.**

7. Southern California has experienced very unusual \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_-like conditions that dried out vegetation.

8. A \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ warning is issued when extreme weather conditions create a high fire danger risk. (2)

9. Hazardous levels of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ released into the air pose a health risk to some residents.

**D. Respond to the following question in paragraph form. *(Use a separate sheet of paper if necessary.)***

10. As you see it, what is the significance of this story? Give reasons to support your response.

This rubric may be helpful in providing students with formative, strength-based feedback and/or assessing students’ responses holistically. This easy-to-modify activity is included in the doc file which you can download from:   
**www.lesplan.com/subscribers**

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Emerging** | **Developing** | **Proficient** | **Extending** |
| **Supports thinking** | Answers or reflections are brief and include obvious facts/details/ evidence. | Answers or reflections are general and supported with some relevant facts/details/evidence. | Answers or reflections are clearly supported with specific, relevant facts/details/evidence. | Answers or reflections are insightful and supported with specific, relevant facts/details/evidence. |
| **Shows understanding** | Responses show a basic understanding of the text, topic, issue or message. | Responses are thoughtful and show a general understanding of the text, topic, issue or message. | Responses are thoughtful and show a complete understanding of the text, topic, issue or message. | Responses are insightful and show a deep understanding the text, topic, issue or message. May synthesize ideas or explain the ‘so what’. |
| **Thinks  critically** | Makes straightforward connections or inferences. Focuses on retelling. | Makes logical connections to self (T:S) and/or background knowledge (T:S). Inferences are logical | Makes meaningful connections to self. Considers ideas between texts (T:T).  Inferences are plausible. | Makes powerful connections that go between texts and/or beyond the text (T:W).  Inferences are plausible and insightful. |

