Out of the Burning Darkness

At a time when kids labored in coal mines, a tragedy changed the nation.
itself? Why do you think she includes them? (author’s craft) Lewis includes details about how deep the miners traveled into the mine. For example, she writes that there is a “30-second drop into pitch blackness” and that they are “317 feet below the surface.” Lewis describes the mine as a “maze” that extends “for miles.” She includes these details to help readers imagine how big the mine was and how deep miners had to go. The details also show how lonely and dangerous it was to work in a mine, and how difficult it would have been to save miners in need of rescue.

• How do the picture and caption at the top of page 7 add to your understanding of the article? (text features) They provide information about the job of the trapper. This helps you understand and visualize what Albert was doing when the fire broke out, and why he was able to escape.

• According to the section “Difficult and Dangerous,” what laws existed about children working? Why would parents let their kids work in dangerous mines? (supporting details) There were laws that required children to be at least 12 to work in a mine; however, people often did not obey them. Many families were so poor that if they did not send their children to work, the children would starve.

• According to “Scorching Heat,” what caused the fire to break out in Cherry Mine? Why was this fire particularly difficult to put out? (cause and effect) The fire was caused by oil from a lamp, which had dripped onto a hay car, setting the hay on fire. This fire was challenging to put out because the hay car was stuck under the air shaft, and the fresh air was making the flames spread.

• Why did the mine company leaders decide to seal off the air shaft? Why did many people believe that this was a cruel act? (supporting details) The mine company leaders hoped that sealing
the air shaft would stop the fire, as fires need oxygen to keep burning. Many believed that this was cruel because without fresh air entering the mine, anyone still alive would quickly die.

• What is the main idea of “New Laws”? (main idea) The main idea is that the Cherry Mine disaster inspired people to make important changes in the workplace. People were angry about what had happened to the miners, and because of this, they created new safety rules. Additionally, the disaster helped fuel a movement that ended child labor in the United States.

Critical-Thinking Questions
• The Cherry Mine disaster was a terrible tragedy. Did anything good come from it? Explain. (analyzing) Students will likely say yes. The Cherry Mine disaster helped lead to new safety rules. The disaster also helped the movement to end child labor in America.

• How does this story show an example of humans being greedy? How does it show humans being generous and brave? (analyzing) The mine company’s decision to seal off the air shaft of the mine shows greed. Company officials hoped to save their coal, which was valuable to them, but at the cost of human lives. People generously donated and came to Cherry to try to help the miners. The brave group of miners who operated the cage in the air shaft sacrificed their lives rescuing dozens of other miners from the fire.

3. Skill Building
Featured Skill: Main Idea
• Distribute the main idea and supporting details Skill Builder and have students complete it in groups. Then ask them to respond to the writing prompt at the bottom of page 9.

Differentiate and Customize

For Struggling Readers
Listen to the lower-Lexile audio version of the article together. Afterward, work together to make a timetable of what happened at different points in Albert’s day: 6:30 a.m., 11:30 a.m., after lunch, around 4:00 p.m., and at sunset.

For ELL Students
The story includes a number of domain-specific words related to coal mining (fossil fuel, dynamite, deposits) that may be difficult for ELLs. Before reading the article, go through these words together using our vocabulary slideshow to help.

For Advanced Readers
Ask students to go to storyworks.scholastic.com to read our February 2019 nonfiction article “Out of the Flames,” about how teenager Katie Weiner escaped the Triangle factory fire. Then have them write an essay comparing Katie’s experience of a factory fire with Albert’s experience of a mine fire.

For Guided Reading
Read this article with your guided-reading groups, focusing on identifying the main idea and supporting details in each section. As you work with each group, other students can focus on the main idea Skill Builder, or another Skill Builder, in small groups or independently.