Our Beautiful Town Is Gone
Stories of horror, heroism, and hope from a wildfire in Paradise, California

About the Article
Levels
Lexile Range: 800L-900L
Guided Reading Level: S
DRA Level: 40

Learning Objectives
Students will read an article about a devastating wildfire and identify key details that help them understand what people experienced during and after the event.

Content-Area Connections
Science: natural disasters, climate change
Social-Emotional Learning: resilience, social engagement

Key Skills
Key details, vocabulary, text evidence, author’s purpose, cause and effect, compare and contrast, main idea, explanatory writing

Standards Correlations
This article and lesson support the following Common Core anchor standards: R.1, R.2, R.3, R.4, R.6, R.7, W.2, SL.1, SL.2, L.4, L.6
Check our website for more standards information.

Your Teaching Support Package
Here’s your full suite of materials, all of which you’ll find at storyworks.scholastic.com:

Video: “Behind the Scenes: Our Beautiful Town Is Gone”

Audio:
• On-level version  • Lower-Lexile version

Differentiated article:
• Lower-Lexile version (printable)

Skill Builders to print or project:
• Video Discussion Questions
• Vocabulary
• Close-Reading and Critical-Thinking Questions*
• Core Skills Workout: Main Idea and Supporting Details,* Text Features, Summarizing,* Text Structure
• Letter-Writing Template
• Research Kit
• Comprehension Quiz*
• Questions for English Language Learners

Vocabulary Slideshow Great visual support!
*Available on two levels

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Tarshis describes Paradise as a “large and bustling town” where kids liked to hike in the forest, fish in the river, and eat pancakes at a beloved local restaurant. She probably includes these details to help you understand that the town was a beautiful and peaceful place, where ordinary people lived before disaster struck.

Based on “Bigger and Deadlier,” what is climate change? How has it affected wildfires in California? (cause and effect) Climate change refers to Earth’s weather becoming hotter and more unpredictable. Scientists say it has made wildfires in California larger and harder to control.

The November 2018 fire was faster-moving and more dangerous than past wildfires. Strong winds blew burning tree bits across the river, starting dozens of fires. The flames burned up a football field-sized piece of land every second.

People like Eleanor, Lucas, and Kevin faced traffic jams and blocked roads that prevented them from leaving quickly. Kevin drove his school bus past burning houses and trees, worried that he would never see his family again. Eleanor struggled to fit all of her favorite belongings in the car.

According to “Flaming Birds,” how was the November 2018 fire different from other wildfires that had threatened Paradise before? (compare and contrast) The November 2018 fire was faster-moving and more dangerous than past wildfires. Strong winds blew burning tree bits across the river, starting dozens of fires. The flames burned up a football field-sized piece of land every second.

How does author Lauren Tarshis describe Paradise before the fire? Why do you think she includes these details? (author’s purpose) Tarshis describes Paradise as a “large and bustling town” where kids liked to hike in the forest, fish in the river, and eat pancakes at a beloved local restaurant. She probably includes these details to help you understand that the town was a beautiful and peaceful place, where ordinary people lived before disaster struck.
Differentiate and Customize

**For Struggling Readers**
Keeping track of the different individual stories in the article may be challenging for some students. Have them choose one of the people featured (such as Eleanor or Kevin) and make a list of what happened to that person during the fire. They should then exchange lists with another student who listed details about a different person.

**For ELL Students**
Listen to the lower-Lexile audio version of the article with students. As a specific person is mentioned in the article, point out that person in the “Faces of Paradise” sidebar on page 7. Afterward, work with students to orally summarize what happened to each person.

**For Advanced Readers**
Invite students to imagine that they are holding an online fund-raiser to help the people of Paradise rebuild their town. Have them write a one-page post for the fund-raiser webpage, explaining what the town experienced during and after the fire, and telling people why they should help.

**For Small Groups**
Put students into groups of four or five. Ask groups to list details about how each person in the article has moved on since the tragedy. Ask: What conclusions can you draw about their response to the fire? What lessons could you take away from reading about them?

**Critical-Thinking Questions**
- What is the main idea of the section “Life Continues”? (main idea) The main idea is that although the people of Paradise lost their homes and their town, they have continued living their lives and remain hopeful about the future.
- In the last section of the article, Tarshis explains that “the town’s strength didn’t come from the wood and bricks of the houses and buildings” but from the people. What evidence in the article supports this statement? (text evidence) The people of Paradise faced the fire and its effects with courage and determination. For example, Kevin drove through a burning neighborhood to help save 22 kids. Josh protected hundreds of terrified people from the flames. And the people of the town have bravely moved forward with their everyday lives since the fire, even after losing almost everything.
- Look at the “Faces of Paradise” sidebar on page 7. Why do you think Tarshis told the story of the Paradise fire through the eyes of these different people? (author’s purpose) Tarshis probably told the story through the eyes of these people to help readers imagine what it was like to live through the disaster. By featuring different experiences, Tarshis gives a fuller picture of the challenges ordinary people faced and the heroic acts they performed.

3. **Skill Building**
**Featured Skill: Key Details**
 Distribute the key 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. You can distribute our letter-writing template to help them.