The Dirty History of Soap
The surprising story of how keeping clean has changed over the years

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

Learning Objectives:
Students will synthesize information from two articles about how humans have washed themselves over time and why their understanding of cleanliness has changed.

Content-Area Connections:
Social studies: social history
Science: health

Key Skills: Synthesizing, vocabulary, author’s craft, text evidence, cause and effect, drawing conclusions, problem and solution, compare and contrast, applying ideas, explanatory writing

Standards Correlations
The article and lesson support these Common Core anchor standards: R.1, R.2, R.3, R.4, R.7, R.9, W.2, SL.1, L.6

For more standards information—including TEKS—go to Storyworks Digital.

Your Teaching Resources
Use these powerful teaching tools for in-class or remote instruction. Find them in this story’s Resources tab.

New! Learning Journey Slideshow! This ready-made slide deck combines the article, video, and interactive questions. Share it with students as is or customize it to your liking.

Audio
- Author Read-Aloud: Allison reads her articles!
- Text to speech

Slideshows
- Text Features Slideshow
- Vocabulary Slideshow

Differentiation
- Lower-Lexile Articles
- Lower-Lexile Read-Aloud
- Lower-level Activities and Quiz

Skill-Building Activities share digitally, print, or project
- Vocabulary
- Close-Reading and Critical-Thinking Questions*
- Core Skills Workout: Analyzing Two Texts: Synthesizing
- Comprehension Quiz*
- Questions for English Language Learners

*Available on two levels
Step-by-Step Lesson
Close Reading, Critical Thinking, Skill Building

1. Preparing to Read

Preview Text Features and Vocabulary

- Whether students are viewing the print article or the digital version at storyworks.scholastic.com, ask them to read the headlines and subheads of each article and look at the pictures, captions, and section headers. Ask: What do you think each article is about? What do they have in common? Prompt students to read the Up Close box on page 16.
- Show or assign the text features slideshow. (optional)
- Show or assign the vocabulary slideshow to preview challenging words in the article. Reinforce learning by assigning the Vocabulary Skill Builder. Highlighted words: ingredients, ancient, cleansers, luxury, harsh, regularly, donated, disinfect

2. Reading and Discussing

- Read the articles as a class or have students read them independently. Then ask small groups to discuss or write their answers to the close-reading and critical-thinking questions.
  Tip: If you’re teaching remotely, you can have each group respond in a shared Google Doc or discuss the questions in their own chat room.

Close-Reading Questions
The following questions can be shared in printable or interactive form from the Resources tab.

1. Read the first section of “The Dirty History of Soap.” What is Abigail Foote mixing together? Why? Why do you think the author starts with this description? (author’s craft) Abigail Foote is mixing meat fat and ashes to make soap. The author probably starts with this description to surprise readers by showing that long ago making soap was a dirty, messy job involving unexpected ingredients.
2. Based on the section “Greasy, Itchy, and Stinky,” why didn’t people use soap on their bodies in ancient times? What were other ways people kept clean? (text evidence)

People didn’t wash with soap because it was smelly and made skin itchy. Japanese people cleaned themselves with rice water, Native Americans used crushed-up plants, and ancient Greeks and Romans covered themselves with oil and sand and then scraped off the mixture.

3. Reread “Smelly = Safe.” In Abigail Foote’s time, why did many people avoid bathing? (cause and effect)

They believed bathing was unhealthy. They thought dirt on the skin blocked diseases from getting into the body.

4. Reread “Invisible Enemies.” How did the Civil War help change the way people think about keeping clean? What did scientists discover that added to this thinking? (cause and effect)

During the Civil War, more soldiers died of diseases than died in battle. The soldiers realized that washing themselves could help them stay healthy; they brought this idea home with them. Around the same time, scientists discovered that tiny, invisible germs cause illness but washing can get rid of germs and keep people healthy.

5. How has what we’ve learned about soap and handwashing affected our lives today? (drawing conclusions)

Today we know that washing our hands with soap is an important step in protecting ourselves from getting sick. Specifically, we know that washing our hands is a key to staying safe from Covid-19.

6. In “Lending a Clean Hand,” Jayden Perez realized that many of his classmates and others in his community had a problem. What was it? How did he help solve it? (problem and solution)

Jayden realized that many people couldn’t find hand sanitizer to protect themselves from Covid-19. He managed to get 1,500 spray bottles of it and donated them to kids, emergency workers, neighbors, and other community members.

7. What is the difference between hand sanitizer and soap? What is useful about each product? (compare and contrast)

Both products break up germs so they can’t make you sick, but soap also removes them from your hands when you rinse them. Soap is more effective, but hand sanitizer is useful when you’re not able to get to a sink to wash with soap and water.

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**Critical-Thinking Questions**

8. Since soap was first invented about 5,000 years ago, how has the way people keep clean changed? Use information from both articles in your answer. (synthesizing)

Even though soap was invented about 5,000 years ago, people didn’t often use it on their bodies because it was harsh and smelly. Instead, they cleaned themselves with products like rice water, crushed-up plants, or oil and sand. But many didn’t wash at all because they believed it was unhealthy. By the 1860s, people realized that washing with soap and water...
could help keep them healthy. Today, we wash with soap and water to stay clean and healthy or use hand sanitizer when soap and water aren’t available.

9. How did Jayden Perez’s donation of hand sanitizer support people in his community, aside from helping them keep clean? What can we learn from his actions? (applying ideas) Jayden showed people in his community that he cared about them and that they weren’t facing a big problem alone. We can learn that by being thoughtful and generous, like Jayden, one person can help those around them. Also, he set an example of pulling together with his community to make them feel better in a crisis.

3. Skill Building and Writing

Featured Skill: Synthesizing

- Distribute the Synthesizing Skill Builder. After students complete it, have them respond to the writing prompt on page 19.

Great Idea for Remote Learning

- Hold a whole-class or small-group discussion of the close-reading and critical-thinking questions. As in your physical classroom, establish rules for discussion and appropriate ways to respond to one another. You might have students use a “raise hand” emoji in your virtual classroom or ask students to respond to questions in the chat feature.

Differentiate and Customize

For Struggling Readers
Assign students the lower-Lexile version of this feature. They can listen to the author read-aloud as they follow along in the text. Then ask them to find five sentences in the articles that describe how people have felt over time about using soap or keeping clean.

For Advanced Readers
Have students read the sidebar “Clean Time Machine” or view the text features slideshow. Then invite them to do research to write two more blurbs that could be added to the sidebar. They can draw a picture to go with the blurb or find an image online.

For ELL Students
To help improve fluency, invite students to choose a favorite section of the article and listen to it several times with our author read-aloud. Students may then try reading the section aloud with a partner or with a family member at home.
Can’t Miss Teaching Extras

Watch a Video [This video](#) from SciShow Kids explains the science behind how soap works to wash away dirt, oil, and germs.

Meet Jayden Perez Your students can watch as Jayden Perez explains his generous project of donating hand sanitizer and the many other ways Jayden enjoys helping other people, in [this video](#).