

UNIT 1 Fire

This unit focuses on descriptive accounts. You will practise identifying and using precise and evocative vocabulary and images, and selecting, paraphrasing and sequencing notes for informative purposes. You will also learn more about past participles, connectives, the role of adverbs, and the use of *would* for repeated action in the past.

Activities

- 1 a Tell a partner how you feel about fire, and about incidents you can remember in your life where fire was involved (e.g. when you were kept warm by a fire indoors or outdoors).
- b Contribute to a word cloud to be collected on the board of all the words which relate to the idea of fire, with both positive and negative connotations. Think of all the different kinds of fire there are (e.g. matches, lightning) as well as adjectives used to describe it.
- c Collect a list on the board of stories, novels and films in which fire plays an important role. Discuss the role of fire and what it represents in each case.





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- 2** There are many proverbs which use fire as their image. Work with a partner on the following activities.
- a** Paraphrase these proverbs.
 - i** Out of the frying pan into the fire.
 - ii** There's no smoke without fire.
 - iii** One should fight fire with fire.
 - iv** Fire is a good servant but a bad master.
 - v** Don't start a fire you can't put out.
 - b** Research or remember other proverbs and sayings about fire, and share them with the class. Some may be local to your country.
 - c** Look at the photograph on the previous page of an Amazonian forest fire.
 - i** Write down all the words, phrases and images which come to mind as you look at it.
 - ii** Now asterisk the more interesting and memorable ones, and think of reasons why they are more powerful than the others.
 - iii** Share your asterisked choices with the rest of the class.

Text 1A is Pliny the Younger's description in a letter of the eruption of Mount Vesuvius at Pompeii, western Italy, in AD 79.

Text 1A

On 24th August, in the early afternoon, a cloud appeared over the Bay of Naples. The general appearance of the cloud rising from the mountain can best be expressed as being like an umbrella pine, for it rose to a great height on a kind of trunk and then split off into branches. In places it looked white, elsewhere blotched and dirty, according to the amount of soil and ashes it carried with it.

Later, ashes were falling, hotter and thicker as ships drew near, followed by bits of pumice and blackened stones, **charred** and cracked by the flames; then suddenly the ships were in shallow water, and the shore was blocked by the **debris** from the mountain.





Meanwhile, on Mount Vesuvius, broad sheets of fire and leaping flames blazed at several points, their bright glare **emphasised** by the darkness of the night. The buildings were now shaking with violent shocks, and seemed to be swaying to and fro as if they had been torn from their foundations. Carriages began to run in different directions though the ground was quite level, and would not remain **stationary** even when wedged with stones. We also saw the sea sucked away and apparently forced back by the earthquake: at any rate it **receded** from the shore so that quantities of sea creatures were left stranded on dry sand. On the landward side a fearful black cloud was rent by forked and quivering bursts of flame, and parted to reveal great tongues of fire, like flashes of lightning magnified in size.

Soon afterwards the cloud sank down to earth and covered the sea, spreading over the earth like a flood, as if the universe had been plunged into eternal darkness for evermore.

At last the darkness thinned and dispersed like smoke or cloud; then there was daylight, but yellowish as it is during an eclipse. Everything was changed, buried deep in ashes like snowdrifts.

3 In this activity you will look more closely at the vocabulary in Text 1A.

a Pick out the words and phrases which you think are most strongly descriptive in Text 1A. Explain why you think they are so powerful and memorable.

b Give synonyms for the five words in bold in Text 1A. Are they as effective as the original words, and if not, why?

charred debris emphasised stationary receded

c The five bold words in the passage are difficult to spell. Write them out, along with the other five words below, with their 'hot spots' underlined. Then write them three times each without looking at the word. After that you can check to see if you were right.

appearance apparently quantities creatures tongues



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- 4** a Imagine that you witnessed the scene described in Text 1A. Write notes which record the main features. Use your own words as far as possible and avoid figurative language.
- b Now imagine you are a news reporter for the *Pompeii Times*. Interview your partner about what they witnessed of the eruption, and make notes of what they say as the basis of your report. Include direct speech to use as a quotation from the witness.
- c Write your news report, of about one page, after you have ordered the notes into an appropriate sequence. Use the key point below to help you. Begin your report ‘Yesterday evening . . .’ and remember to include a headline and one subheading in the middle of the report. When you have finished, swap reports with your partner to check for errors, then give it to your teacher.

Key point



News reports

Style:

- The aim of a news report is to be as informative as possible, so names, ages and exact dates and numbers are given, in a condensed way: for example, ‘Neighbour and ex-employee, Imraan Patel, 35, rang the fire brigade.’
- Because of a need to save space, the headline is as short as possible, not only in overall length (usually no more than five words) but also in the length of the individual words (monosyllables where possible, e.g. *bid*, *plan*, *break*).
- Beyond the number ten, numbers are used instead of words in journalistic writing.
- Present rather than past tense verbs are used in headlines and elsewhere to save space and to make the events seem more dramatic.
- Since the aim of news reports is informative, figurative language is not appropriate.
- A subheading, which is a short phrase, sometimes taken from an interview to follow, keeps up the reader’s interest in what is to come.

Structure:

- The structure of a news report is different from that of other kinds of writing because it starts with what happened most recently, usually yesterday.





- In the first couple of paragraphs, it gives the basic information – the who, what, when and where: for example, ‘Late last night there was a serious fire at the SuperComfy furniture warehouse on the outskirts of New Delhi.’
- It goes on to give the background to the news event: for example, ‘Only recently a safety inspection by the regional Fire Department found that the alarm and sprinkler systems were not up to standard.’
- It may then interview a witness or someone affected by the event (e.g. the owner of the warehouse or of a nearby endangered property). Their comments may be included as direct speech to give drama and variety to the report.
- Finally, a news item will say what is currently happening (e.g. that the fire is still smouldering or that firefighters are searching the ashes for clues to the cause of the fire) or give a prediction for the future (e.g. that there will be an inquiry into the incident in two weeks’ time or that the owners have said that the fire was deliberately started by a business rival and that this will be proved). So instead of a chronological structure, a news report goes from recent past → past (or further past) → present → future.
- You may not be able to use all of the available information and may have to select what is most important for the reader to know.

Text 1B

All that is ____ does not glitter,
 Not all those who wander are ____:
 The old that is strong does not wither,
 Deep roots are not ____ by the frost.

From the ____ a fire shall be woken,
 A light from the shadows shall ____:
 Renewed shall be ____ that was broken,
 The ____ again shall be king.

From The Fellowship of the Ring by J.R.R. Tolkien





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- 5** Work on Text 1B in small groups.
- Fill in the missing words on a copy of the poem. To help you, pay attention to the rhyme and metre, and the use of alliteration, assonance and antithesis (contrast).
 - On a copy of the poem put this symbol $\acute{\text{˘}}$ above the syllables which are stressed. Then look at the rhyming words. What can you say about the rhyme scheme and metre of the poem?
 - Paraphrase in your own words the message of the poem.
 - Think of a title for the poem.
 - Write another four-line verse for the poem, in the same form. It must continue the same idea.

Text 1C is an extract from an informative book which describes watching a steam train pass.

Text 1C

Every night, at exactly eight minutes past nine, it roars through the village. I can see it coming several miles away, its powerful headlight fingering rails and telegraph wires with a shimmer of light. Silently and slowly it seems to draw nearer; then suddenly, it is almost above me. A wild roar of steam and driving wheels, the wail of its hoarse whistle at the crossing, and then, looming black against the night sky, it smashes past, and in the swing of drivers and connecting rods I think of a greyhound, or a racehorse thundering the final stretch. High in the cab window, a motionless figure peers ahead into the night; suddenly he is blackly silhouetted by the glare of the opened fire-door, and in the orange light I can see the fireman swing back and forth as he feeds his fire. The light burns against the flying steam





and smoke above; then blackness – and now the white windows of the carriages flicker past, and through the swirl of dust and smoke I watch the two red lights sink down the track.

From America at Work by Joseph Husband

- 6** a Look at the ten underlined figurative verbs in Text 1C. Explain in your notebook what effect each one creates and why it is appropriate.
- b Explain, in detail, how the device of antithesis is being used in this text.
- c Explain, with examples, the effect of the alliteration in the text.
- 7** a On a copy of Text 1C, put brackets () in pencil around the adverbs.
- b Read the key point on the role of adverbs. Then discuss with a partner which adverbs can be removed from Text 1C without loss of meaning. Erase the brackets if you think the adverb is adding something extra to the description.
- c Decide with a partner the places in the passage where adverbs could be inserted to give additional meaning, and what the adverbs would be.

Key point



Role of adverbs

Often adverbs are used in a lazy way, that is to say that they are tacked onto a weak verb and the description is less powerful than if a stronger and more precise verb had been selected, making the adverb unnecessary. Unless the adverb is adding something new to the meaning, they are better not used, especially if they have been used already in the same passage.

In good descriptive writing the effectiveness of the description is due to the choice of interesting and unusual verbs and adjectives, and the images they form. Adverbs are a kind of telling but not showing: for example, 'He threw the ball violently' is weaker than 'He hurled the ball'; 'She left the room quickly' is not as effective as 'She fled the room', which has connotations of terror as well as speed.





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Text 1D is adapted from a *Sunday Times* magazine article about how in ancient times warships were set alight by mirrors.



ARCHIMEDES' SECRET DEATH RAY



For the Romans it looked like their easiest battle. They came to invade Syracuse – and found soldiers with mirrors.

As their boats approached the coast of Sicily the sun came out, a light beam leapt from the shore and their boats burst into flames. They had become victims of the first 'death ray'.

For centuries **archeologists** have argued over descriptions of how Archimedes, antiquity's greatest inventor, used **concentrated** solar energy to destroy the Roman fleet in 212 BC.

Historians have said nobody then knew enough about optics and mirrors. This month, however, a study will show that some ancient **civilisations**, including that of the Ancient Greeks, had such advanced scientific knowledge that they may even have made telescopes – an invention attributed to the 16th-century **astronomer** Galileo – and that 'burning mirrors' would have been within their reach.

Archimedes, a Greek born around 280 BC, was famed for his mathematical skills and his ability to use them for building war machines. These included

catapults that hurled boulders at the enemy, long chutes that could be projected from the city walls for rocks to be rolled down, and cranes with grappling hooks that could lift ships and shake the sailors into the water.

Archimedes is best known for running through Syracuse shouting 'Eureka' after realising, while in the bath, that he could work out the purity of gold by measuring the volume of water it displaced. For his fellow citizens, however, that would have been trivial compared with a death ray for **incinerating** the dreaded Romans.

There were later examples of the use of the death ray, the first being in 6th-century Constantinople; when the Byzantine capital was besieged by enemy ships, dozens of men holding mirrors set fire to them.

Modern scientists have recreated such events under controlled conditions. In 1973 a Greek scientist lined up 60 sailors on a quay with large mirrors, from which they reflected light onto a small boat 50 metres away. The boat was in flames within three minutes.



8 Complete in your notebook these sentences about Text 1D.

- a** Archimedes was
i Roman **ii** Sicilian **iii** Greek.
- b** Archimedes was alive in
i 212 BC **ii** the 16th century **iii** the 6th century.
- c** Archimedes lived in
i Sicily **ii** Italy **iii** Constantinople.
- d** Archimedes was
i an historian **ii** a mathematician **iii** an archeologist.
- e** Archimedes invented
i gold **ii** burning mirrors **iii** warships.

The following activities focus on the vocabulary and grammar of Text 1D.

9 a Write definitions for the words in bold in Text 1D, as they are used in the passage. Then check your definitions in a dictionary.

archeologists concentrated civilisations
 astronomer incinerating

- b** Write your own sentences including each of these words, demonstrating that you understand their meaning.
- c** With a partner, list in three columns all the words you can think of which contain the following letter strings:
- i** *scop* or *optic*, which mean vision
- ii** *ology*, which means study
- iii** *scienc/t*, which means knowledge.

- 10 a** On a copy of Text 1D, underline the uses of the present perfect tense (e.g. 'they have said'). Give the rule for how the tense is formed.
- b** Look at the final paragraph of the passage. Why is the first verb in the present perfect tense when the others are in the past simple? Discuss with a partner the rule for using the present perfect tense. Give two examples of your own of sentences which contain verbs in both the past simple and present perfect.
- c** The second part of the verb in the present perfect tense is called the past participle. Circle five irregular past participles in Text 1D.



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Key point



Past participles

Regular past participles end in *-ed*, e.g. *walked*. However, strong/irregular verbs in English have irregular past participles, just as they also have irregular past simple forms (e.g. *bring* → *brought* → *brought*; *sing* → *sang* → *sung*). Sometimes the form is the same for the past simple and the past participle. These have to be learnt, which is not difficult as they are the most commonly used verbs. Some have optional forms, one older and one more recent (e.g. *burned/burnt*; *leaped/leapt*). They may not be pronounced the way they are spelt (e.g. *read* → *read*).

We use the present perfect for a recent action, or one with no time specified or implied, or one which is not yet completed: for example, 'I have looked for it everywhere but I haven't found it yet.' The time adverbs *yet*, *just* or *since* are often used with the present perfect. The past participle, with *had* instead of *have*, is also used to form the past perfect tense. This tense refers to actions which happened further back in the past than the past simple, or to the order in which events happened in the past: for example, 'I had arrived home before I remembered that I had left my bag at school.'

Text 1E

Greek myth: The Gift of Fire

Prometheus was a Titan, one of the old gods. His father, Iapetus, led a revolt against Zeus, the chief of the new race of gods. Prometheus felt sorry for newly created humans, who had to live on the cold earth, and wanted to give fire to them. Zeus forbade this, and guarded the entrance to Olympus, the mountain home of the gods, so that Prometheus could not steal it. But the goddess Athena told him of a back entrance, so Prometheus was able to steal fire and smuggle it to humans. Zeus was very angry that Prometheus had disobeyed him, so he ordered that Prometheus be chained to a rock. Every day a great eagle would come to Prometheus and eat his liver, leaving only at nightfall, when the liver would begin to grow back once more. At daybreak, the eagle would return to the chained Prometheus and again attack his liver. The daily ritual would be repeated for ever.