

# “This Is the End of the World”

The terrifying true story of the Great Alaska Earthquake

## About the Story

**Lexile® Measure 850L**

For qualitative complexity factors, go to *Scope Online*.

**Learning Objective:** to identify key ideas and details in a narrative nonfiction article

**Featured Skill:** key ideas and details

**Additional skills covered in this lesson plan:** compare and contrast, cause and effect, problem and solution

### Essential Questions:

- How do events that shape Earth also shape our lives?
- What is a community?
- What can be learned from natural disasters?

### Standards:

The article and its suite of support materials support these Common Core Anchor Standards: R.1, R.2, R.3, R.4, R.5, R.7, W.2, SL.1, SL.2

For more standards information—including TEKS—go to *Scope Online*.



## Your Teaching Package

Find your full suite of support materials at [scope.scholastic.com](https://scope.scholastic.com).

### Audio:

- Author read-aloud
- Text-to-speech
- Vocabulary

### Video:

- Behind the Scenes

### Slideshow:

- Background Builder: What to Know About Alaska

### Differentiated Articles:

- Lower-Lexile version
- Spanish language version

### Connected readings from the *Scope* archives:

- “The Day the Earth Split Apart”
- “Aftershocks”
- “Did the World’s Tallest Mountain Shrink?”

### Activities to print, project, or share digitally:

- Video Discussion Questions
- Vocabulary: Definitions and Practice
- Close-Reading and Critical-Thinking Questions
- Featured Skill: Key Ideas and Details
- Choice Board
- **Core Skills Workout:** Summarizing\*, Text Features, Text Structure\*, Nonfiction Elements
- Lesson Plan Slide Deck
- Quiz\*

\*Available on two levels

# Step-by-Step Lesson Plan

## 1. Prepare to Read (20 minutes)

### Watch the Video (10 minutes)

- Watch the **Behind the Scenes** video in which author Lauren Tarshis offers insights into her writing process. Have students respond to the **Video Discussion Questions** (available in your Resources tab) in small groups or pairs.

### View the Slideshow (5 minutes)

- View the **Background Builder** slideshow: “What to Know About Alaska.”

### Preview Vocabulary (10 minutes)

- Project the Google Slides version of **Vocabulary Definitions and Practice** on your whiteboard. Review the definitions and complete the activity as a class. Highlighted words: *bore, etched, fissures, gape, inland, molten, prone*. Audio pronunciations of the words and a read-aloud of the definitions are embedded on the slides. Optionally, print the PDF version or share the slideshow link directly to your LMS and have students preview the words and complete the activity independently before class.

## 2. Read and Discuss (45 minutes)

- Invite a volunteer to read the As You Read box on page 5 or at the top of the digital story page.
- Read the article once as a class. (*Differentiation: Share the lower-Lexile version or the Spanish version of the article.*) Optionally, have students listen to Tarshis read her article aloud while they follow along. The **audio read-aloud** is located in the Resources tab in Teacher View and at the top of the story page in Student View.
- Divide students into groups to read the article again and respond to the following **Close-Reading and Critical-Thinking** questions, also located in the Resources tab.

## Close-Reading Questions

(30 minutes)

The following questions can be shared in printable or interactive form.

- 1. Compare the earthquakes Tom Gilson experienced throughout his childhood with the Great Alaska Earthquake of 1964.** (compare and contrast) *Most of the earthquakes Tom experienced as a child were minor, lasting mere seconds and causing little damage. The ground would shake a little and the dishes in Tom's home would rattle on the shelves. By contrast, the Great Alaska Earthquake of 1964 caused devastation in Valdez and many other parts of Alaska, with effects felt as far away as Japan. The Great Alaska Earthquake lasted a record-breaking four-and-a-half minutes.*
- 2. What was it like to live in Valdez, Alaska, in 1964?** (key ideas and details) *Alaska was (and still is) mainly wilderness, with small towns and villages scattered across the state. Valdez, with a population of 600, was bigger than most of Alaska's towns. It had a school, and kids could play Little League baseball. It was, however, very isolated. As Tarshis notes, it had no bowling alley, dentist's office, or TV service. Tarshis writes, "When Tom walked just a half a mile outside of town, he was more likely to see a bear than another human being." But to the citizens of Valdez, its spectacular natural beauty and wildlife made up for its isolation.*
- 3. What causes an earthquake?** (key ideas and details) *Tarshis explains that earthquakes are caused by movements deep underground in Earth's crust. The crust consists of 15 enormous slabs called tectonic plates, which sit on top of molten rock. They are constantly moving at a very slow pace. Sometimes they push against each other, which causes pressure to build. Over time, the pressure can become so powerful that one plate slips forcefully over, under, or past the other, and this is what causes an earthquake.*
- 4. What were the effects of the Great Alaska Earthquake in Alaska?** (cause and effect) *The earthquake had catastrophic effects across southern Alaska. Roads, bridges, houses, and other buildings were destroyed. The land jutted up in places and collapsed in others. Flooding drowned forests and sent debris across the land. The Valdez waterfront crumbled into the sea. One hundred and fifteen people in Alaska lost their lives.*
- 5. What were the effects of the Great Alaska Earthquake outside of Alaska?** (cause and effect) *The earthquake had far-reaching effects. Tsunamis caused by the earthquake struck the west coast of the U.S., causing deaths in Oregon and California. The gigantic waves even reached Japan—5,000 miles from Alaska.*
- 6. Why was Valdez especially vulnerable to the earthquake? When the people rebuilt the town, what did they do to keep history from repeating itself?** (problem and solution) *Scientists discovered that Valdez was built on bits of rock and sand mixed with water, rather than on hard rock. When the earthquake began, the ground gave way and the waterfront collapsed*

into the sea. The citizens of Valdez rebuilt their town four miles down the coast and further inland, where the ground was more solid, to safeguard against catastrophic damage from a future earthquake.

- As a class, discuss the following questions.

### Critical-Thinking Questions

(5 minutes)

The following questions can be shared in printable or interactive form.

1. **How do you think a person might change after experiencing a natural disaster like the Great Alaska Earthquake of 1964?** *Answers will vary. Students might offer that people may have a deeper sense of gratitude for what they have, including a newfound appreciation for the preciousness of human life. They might also experience a stronger sense of community than they felt before the disaster. It's also possible that people would feel more vulnerable or fearful as the result of experiencing a natural disaster.*
2. **Why should people care about natural disasters, even those that are far away?** *Answers will vary. Students may offer that people should have empathy for others, even if they live in another part of the world. Students may also note that natural disasters can have far-reaching consequences, as was the case with the Great Alaska Earthquake. Plus, whether or not a disaster affects you directly, much can be learned from natural disasters, such as why they occur, how to best respond and rebuild afterward, and how to prepare for future disasters.*

### 3. Write About It: Key Ideas and Details (45 minutes)

- Have students complete the **Featured Skill Activity: Key Ideas and Details**. This activity prepares them to respond to the writing prompt on page 10 in the printed magazine and at the bottom of the digital story page:

***How does author Lauren Tarshis transport readers to March 27, 1964? Answer this question in a short response. Use text evidence.***

- Alternatively, have students choose a task from the **Choice Board**, a menu of culminating tasks. (Our Choice Board options include the writing prompt from the magazine, differentiated versions of the writing prompt, and additional creative ways for students to demonstrate their understanding of a story or article.)

## Support for Multilingual Learners

These questions are designed to help students respond to the text at a level that's right for them.

### Yes/No Questions

Ask students to demonstrate comprehension with a very simple answer.

1. Did Tom Gilson experience earthquakes before the Great Alaska Earthquake of 1964? *Yes, he did.*
2. Did Tom know that a terrible earthquake was coming? *No, he did not.*
3. Are most earthquakes caused by human activity? *No, they are not.*
4. Did the earthquake destroy the town of Valdez? *Yes, it did.*
5. Did Tom's family survive the earthquake? *Yes, they did.*

### Either/Or Questions

Encourage students to use language from the question in their answer.

1. Was Valdez busy and booming or quiet and isolated? *Valdez was quiet and isolated.*
2. Do most earthquakes last seconds or minutes? *Most earthquakes last seconds.*
3. When the earthquake ended, did people immediately realize how much damage it had caused or did they realize it days later? *They realized how much damage the earthquake had caused days later.*
4. Did the earthquake affect only Alaska or did it affect other places too? *The earthquake affected other places too.*
5. Does Tom Gilson still think about the earthquake or does he no longer think of it? *He still thinks about the earthquake.*

### Short-Answer Questions

Challenge students to produce simple answers on their own.

1. What causes an earthquake? *Earthquakes are caused by movements deep underground, within Earth's crust.*
2. Why did the people of Valdez rebuild their town four miles down the coast? *After the earthquake, scientists discovered that most of Valdez had been built on bits of rock and sand mixed with water. When the shaking started, the ground melted away, which is why the waterfront crumbled into the sea. The people of Valdez wanted to rebuild where the ground was more solid.*

### Language-Acquisition Springboard: Boost language and comprehension with literary devices.

After reading the article, tell students that similes are comparisons made using *like* or *as*. For example, "The puppy's eyes shone like stars." This simile helps readers imagine the puppy's sparkling eyes. Explain that author Lauren Tarshis uses several similes to describe the earthquake's damage. Ask students to consider each of the following similes:

**"The *Chena* tossed and turned like a toy in a bathtub."**

Have students draw a picture of the *Chena* in the sea based on this simile. Then ask: Was the sea calm or rough? *The sea was rough.*

**“Railroad tracks twisted like snakes.”**

Have students draw a picture of the railroad tracks based on this simile. Then ask: Were the tracks straight and strong or bent and broken? *The tracks were bent and broken.*

**“Fissures now stretched across the land like evil, jagged-toothed smiles.”**

Have students draw a picture of the land based on this simile. Then ask: What’s one word you would use to describe the land? *Answers might include rough, cracked, or scary.*

**“Like enormous pieces of chocolate floating slowly on a layer of hot gooey caramel, Earth’s plates are always in motion.”**

Have students draw a picture of Earth’s layers based on this simile. Then ask: Which layer of the Earth is like pieces of chocolate? Which layer is like hot gooey caramel? *The Earth’s crust is like pieces of chocolate. The Earth’s mantle is like hot gooey caramel.*

**Connected readings from the Scope archives about the effects of earthquakes:**

- Narrative Nonfiction: [“The Day the Earth Split Apart”](#)
- Fiction: [“Aftershocks”](#)
- Short Read: [“Did the World’s Tallest Mountain Shrink?”](#)