Following the Flood

How location and sources help explain the Johnstown Flood

7.C.1.1 "Describe the role of geographic factors on events, explaining the importance of a spatial perspective and the integration of specific geographic information supported by analysis of primary and secondary sources."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline three details about where floodwater moved or collected, circle what the photograph shows, and write 1 beside the primary source and 2 beside the secondary source. Use your marks to trace how location and evidence help explain the flood.

Why Johnstown Flooded

1. On May 31, 1889, heavy rain raised the water behind the South Fork Dam in Pennsylvania. The dam held back Lake Conemaugh, about 14 miles upstream from Johnstown. Water flowed over the dam, and it failed. The released water raced down the narrow valley of the Little Conemaugh River. Hills on both sides left the flood little room to spread out before it reached towns below. To understand why the disaster struck Johnstown so hard, you need to look at where the dam, river, valley, and town stood in relation to one another.

2. Johnstown sat where the Little Conemaugh River met Stonycreek River. As floodwater reached this low-lying meeting place, it spread through streets and carried away buildings. Downstream, debris jammed against a stone railroad bridge, blocking the river's path and causing water to back up. A photograph taken after the flood shows wreckage piled at the bridge. That photograph is a primary source: it records what was visible at one place after the flood. It cannot show exactly how the dam failed or when water reached each street.

3. A later historian can compare photographs, survivor accounts, and records about the dam to explain the event. Such a study is a secondary source because it analyzes evidence from the time. A survivor might report the moment water entered a home, but that person could not watch every part of the valley at once. The historian can connect observations from different locations with the shape of the land. Together, these sources help explain why the flood followed a particular route and why some places faced greater danger than others.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did the dam's location and the shape of the valley affect the flood's path toward Johnstown?

2. Why did water back up near the stone railroad bridge?

3. What does the photograph help establish about the bridge, and what can it not tell us about the flood?

4. How could a historian use accounts from different places to explain why some locations faced more danger than others?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

A made-up town has homes on a low east riverbank, a school on high ground west of the river, and one bridge north of both. In four or five sentences, explain how a flood could affect travel to school using these locations, and describe how a resident's eyewitness account and a later flood-risk report could help you check your explanation.

ANSWER KEY

Following the Flood

GRADE 7 · 7.C.1.1

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline three details about where floodwater moved or collected, circle what the photograph shows, and write 1 beside the primary source and 2 beside the secondary source. Use your marks to trace how location and evidence help explain the flood. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did the dam's location and the shape of the valley affect the flood's path toward Johnstown?	**The dam was upstream from Johnstown, so released water flowed toward town. The narrow valley gave the water little room to spread out.**
2	Why did water back up near the stone railroad bridge?	**Debris jammed against the bridge and blocked the river's path.**
3	What does the photograph help establish about the bridge, and what can it not tell us about the flood?	**It shows wreckage piled at the bridge after the flood. It cannot show exactly how the dam failed or when water reached each street.**
4	How could a historian use accounts from different places to explain why some locations faced more danger than others?	**The historian could compare what survivors saw at different locations, then connect those observations to the valley's shape and the flood's route.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

A flood could reach the low homes while the school on high ground stays dry. Students would still need to travel north to the only bridge before crossing west, and flooding near the bridge could block their route. A resident's eyewitness account could tell us whether the bridge was passable on one day, but that person might not know what happened along every road. A later flood-risk report could show which low areas tend to flood, though it might not describe the conditions on that particular day.

Accept answers that connect specific locations to the movement or effects of floodwater. For the open task, look for a plausible route explanation and distinct uses for the eyewitness account and later report.