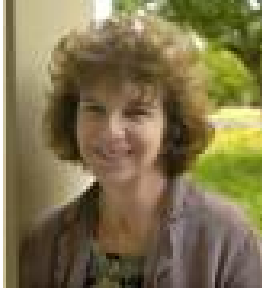


# ***Into the Firestorm***

By Deborah Hopkinson

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## **About the Author:**



Deborah Hopkinson has written many award-winning books since her first in 1994. She first emerged as an award-winning author with her picture book *Sweet Clara and the Freedom Quilt*. Most of her books are either historical fiction or revolve around a non-fictional topic. She thinks that putting that kind of information into a story is a great way for kids to have fun learning about something. Her books have won several awards including *Publishers Weekly* Best Book of 2001, Golden Kite Honor Award, Great Lakes Book Award, and the Jane Addams Children's Book Award to name a few. *Into the Firestorm* is on the Oregon Battle of the Books for 2008-09. Hopkinson lives in Oregon where she not only writes but works full time as the Director of Foundation Relations at Oregon State University Foundation. She has four pets, one of which is a big golden dog, just as the dog in this book. Her website includes background information about many of the topics she writes about as well as some links to other informative sites concerning those topics. That information can be found at [www.deborahhopkinson.com](http://www.deborahhopkinson.com). She can also be contacted either by phone or e-mail at (509) 301-1826 or [deborahhopkinson@yahoo.com](mailto:deborahhopkinson@yahoo.com).

## **Annotation:**

San Francisco's great earthquake and fire of 1906 was a devastating disaster that killed thousands and left the city in shambles. Deborah Hopkinson uses that tragedy as the topic for her book *Into the Firestorm*. In this novel, a young boy named Nick escapes the orphanage he's been staying at and travels to San Francisco, which he sees as the "Paris of the Pacific". When he arrives he finds that maybe all he really can do is pick cotton and is overwhelmed by the enormity of the city. He tries looking for a job and finally Mr. Pat Patterson, who owns a fine writing supplies shop, decides to give him a trial run. Mr. Patterson initially is very reluctant to hire Nick, but he is in need of someone to watch his dog, Shake, while he goes on a business trip. While Nick is watching over Shake is when the disaster occurs. The story follows Nick's heroic efforts to help a little girl and her mom to safety while still looking after the dog. He does not want to let anyone down, as many people have let him down in the past. Nick risks his life returning to an area of the city that is close to the fire to retrieve Shake. While he's there he finds Mr. Patterson and helps him and some other men to save the street they live on. After the fire is out Nick realizes that he has found a home and made some friendships along the way.

This seems to be a very accurate account of the events that took place in 1906. As a reader, you are genuinely concerned for each of the characters as the story unfolds. This would be an attention-getting novel to use to introduce some of the history of this disaster in San Francisco. Boys and girls alike will enjoy reading *Into the Firestorm* since Hopkinson has included so much action and adventure yet kept to a story that touches the heart.

**Genre:** Historical Fiction

**Point of View:** Third Person

**Theme:** Determination, Friendship, Keeping One's Word

**Conflict:** There is an external conflict between Nick and San Francisco since Nick is seen as a thief at the beginning of the story and is being chased by the police. Also there is an internal conflict within Nick as to what he should do during the aftermath of the earthquake. He struggles at times deciding if he should look out for his best interest or keep his promise to little Annie and her mother.

**Conflict Resolution:** Nick ends up being a hero in San Francisco. It takes him a long time to find his place, but once he does he feels at peace with the city. Nick resolves his internal conflict by remembering how he felt when people broke their promise to him and left him. He decides to put Annie and her mother first and then pursue his own needs.

**Characters:**

Nicholas (Nick) Drake: 11 years old, tall, skinny, disheveled looking, determined, loyal, persistent, helpful

Annie Sheridan: 8 years old, different colored eyes, long braided hair, talkative, friendly, impressionable

Mrs. Sheridan: Annie's mother, pregnant, scared, trusting, grateful

Mr. Pat Patterson: Nick's new employer, business-like, well-spoken, kind-hearted

Shakespeare (Shake): a dog, loyal companion

Tommy Liang: teenager, friend Nick makes who lives in Chinatown, unhappy, lonely

Bushy Brows: police officer

Mr. Lind: manager of a whiskey warehouse across from Mr. Patterson's shop, smart, strategic thinker

**Setting:** San Francisco, California, 1906

**Reading Level:** 4.2

**Interest Level:** Grades 4-7

**Booktalk:** What would you do if the city you lived in was engulfed in flames? Would you help your neighbors who you barely know, or would you ensure your own safety and try to get out of the city like everyone else? Nick Drake from *Into the Firestorm* by Deborah Hopkinson was faced with those very decisions. Nick worked on a farm picking cotton until his grandmother died and he was sent to an orphanage in Texas. He had bigger dreams, so he ran away to the city of San Francisco, California. He ran into barriers blocking his dreams constantly until finally a store owner, Pat Patterson, gave him a chance. Pat leaves for a business trip and puts Nick in charge of keeping an eye on his dog, Shake. Early in the first morning there is a large earthquake, which causes a fire to break out and rapidly spread. All of this story is based around an actual event that happened in 1906 in San Francisco when the city was almost lost to flames. Nick doesn't know what to do! He sees a little girl who asks him for help. Her mother is stuck in their apartment. He knows he should try to find Shake, but he also feels that he may be this little girl's only hope. This is just the beginning of a two day long battle to get to safety and still keep to his word that Shake would be safe. Follow Nick as he turns from city thief to city hero!

**Discussion Questions:**

Pre-Reading:

- What do you know about San Francisco?
- Do you know anything about the huge fire that happened there in 1906?
- What do you think this book is going to be about?
- Describe life in the early 1900's.

During Reading:

Road Kid

- Why do you think the Police Officer was after Nick? Pg. 3
- What made Nick easy to spot and remember? Pg. 5
- How would you have felt if you were Nick and were told "Once a picker always a picker?" Pg. 7

### Cotton Picker

- What was Nick's incentive to try to pick as much cotton as he could? Pg. 9
- Why did Nick give some of his cotton to Rebecca? Pg. 12

### Tommy

- Why do you think the boy in the store assumed Nick had stolen something? Pg. 17
- Why did Tommy have a change of heart and give Nick some food? Pg. 20

### A Bowl of Rice

- Why did Nick make a promise to himself that he wouldn't ever walk away from something like his father did? Pg. 23
- What kind of bond did Tommy and Nick have? Pg. 22

### Annie of the North Star

- Since Nick was so hungry, why didn't he use the money he had to buy food? Pg. 28
- Why did the stationary store impress Nick so much? Pg. 30
- Describe Annie Sheridan. Pg. 34

### Paris of the Pacific

- How was Nick trying to convince Mr. Patterson to give him a job? Pg. 41
- What was Mr. Patterson's reaction to Nick? Pg. 45

### A Hundred Pounds

- Why was there a man waiting on Nick when he returned from cotton picking? Pg. 49
- Why and from whom did Nick get his money? How much did he get? Pg. 50

### One Chance

- What made Mr. Patterson decide to give Nick a job? Pg. 58
- What were Nick's responsibilities going to be? Pg. 61

## Something Unexpected and Unseen

- What did Mr. Patterson buy for Nick? Why was Nick so happy? Pg. 65
- What was the one item Nick wished he could have gotten from he and his grandmother's house? Pg. 68
- What do you think woke Nick up? Pg. 72
- Why did Shakespeare run away? Pg. 75

## Aftershocks

- What did the police officer recommend that Nick do? Pg. 80
- What did Nick hideaway from the store? Why? Pg. 82
- Why didn't Nick catch the ferry when it was there? Pg. 88

## Forgotten

- Why was Annie frightened and yelling for Nick? Pg. 93
- Why do you think Nick risked going back into Annie's apartment to retrieve the picture for her? Pg. 98
- Where did Nick find Shake? Pg. 99

## The Last Wagon

- What did Nick have to find for Annie, Mrs. Sheridan and himself? Where did he go to look? Pg. 104
- Why didn't Nick go with Tommy? Pg. 110
- Why did Nick give Tommy one of his coins? Pg. 111

## Everyone Out

- Why does Mr. Lind try to convince the police chief to not use dynamite on their block? Pg. 115
- What game did Annie and Nick begin playing? Why did they stop? Pg. 123

## Union Square

- Who did Nick see in the crowd at Union Square? What did Annie do to get the answers Nick wanted from him? Pg. 134
- Why is Nick so discouraged about the information Bushy Brows gives him? Pg. 136

## March of the Flames

- Where did Nick, Annie, and Mrs. Sheridan stop for the night? Pg. 138
- Why did Nick feel so guilty about falling asleep? 141

## Chased by Fire

- Why was Annie reluctant to leave Nob Hill? Pg. 144
- What made Nick very upset with Annie? Why did she do such a thing? Pg. 147

## Across Van Ness

- Why were Nick, Annie, and Mrs. Sheridan so discouraged when they made it across Van Ness? Pg. 150

## Thursday Night

- Why didn't Annie or Mrs. Sheridan tell the people at the tent that Nick was not really Mrs. Sheridan's son? Pg. 156
- What did Nick do to give Annie a guarantee that he would come back to find them? Pg. 157
- Why was Nick so concerned when he heard footsteps? Pg. 160

## Into the Firestorm

- Why do you think Nick ran from the police officer when he was in front of Mr. Patterson's store? Pg. 163
- Why do you think Nick finally began to cry? Pg. 167

## A Good Dog

- Who do you think is behind the soldier? Pg. 168

- What did Mr. Lind decide to use to help keep the fire away from the warehouse? Pg. 169
- How do you think Nick felt having a reporter write about him? Pg. 172

#### What Matters

- What were the things Mr. Patterson worried about before he was able to return? Pg. 177
- Why can't Nick start writing letters for Mr. Patterson as soon as he asks Nick about it? Pg. 179
- How do you think Nick felt when Mr. Patterson let him take Shake with him? Why was that so important to Nick? Pg. 180

#### Shakespeare's Namesakes

- Why did Mrs. Sheridan name her little boy Will? Pg. 184
- What did Annie take from Mr. Patterson's apartment that Nick did not know about? Why did she do that? Pg. 186
- Why did Mr. Patterson change the name of his shop? Pg. 188

#### **Language:**

Indigents- someone who is really poor and does not have enough money for food, clothing, and Shelter (Pg. 4)

Dewy- covered with a small amount of water (Pg. 11)

Bystanders- people who are watching but not involved in something (Pg. 14)

Asylum- a place to protect someone from danger (Pg. 26)

Inkwell- a small container that holds ink (Pg. 30)

Threadbare- so worn that part of the pieces of fabric are able to be seen (Pg. 32)

Migrant- someone who moves around for work (Pg. 37)

Guffaw- a loud laugh (Pg. 43)

Nourishment- food (Pg. 52)

Chortled- a happy laugh (Pg. 53)

Haunches- the back legs of a four-legged animal, a dog in this story) (Pg. 55)

Flourish- a large movement with the hands (Pg. 68)

Looters-Someone who steals during a time of disaster or confusion (Pg. 80)

Protruded- stuck out (Pg. 90)

Acrid- strong and very bad smelling (Pg. 104)

Nuisance- something that is annoying (Pg. 110)

Trudging- to walk slowly taking difficult steps (Pg. 125)

Tawny- orangey brown in color (Pg. 136)

Disheveled- having messed up hair or clothes (Pg. 142)

Faltered- hesitated, paused (Pg. 156)

Fissures- cracks (Pg. 159)

Unwieldy- not easy to hold (Pg. 166)

Bucket brigade- a line of people that passes buckets of water to put out a fire (Pg. 169)

Smoldering- to burn slowly (Pg. 170)

Motley- a group of people that is very different from one another (Pg. 171)

Voluble- talking a lot and for a long time (Pg. 179)

**Anticipation Statements:**

- An earthquake can cause a fire.
- Young kids can become heroes.
- You should never go into a structurally damaged building.
- If you're given money as a reward for doing something, you should spend it on something you want.
- Using dynamite can stop a fire from continuing to spread.

### **Read-Aloud Passages:**

- Pg. 13-14 /Tommy

This passage has Nick running away from the police. After reading this passage, it makes the reader curious about whether or not Nick will be safe and what he did before this to have to be running in the first place.

- Pg. 142-145/ Chased by Fire

This passage is about the fire spreading to an area that was thought to be safe, at least for the night. It shows the urgency for Nick, Annie, and Mrs. Sheridan to get moving, and moving fast. There are excellent descriptive words that paint such a realistic picture that the reader just wants to get in there and help them run.

### **If you like *Into the Firestorm*, you'll love...**

By Deborah Hopkinson: *Maria's Comet*, *John Adam Speaks for Freedom*, *Sky Boys: How They Built the Empire State Building*, *Shutting Out the Sky: Life in the Tenements of New York, 1880-1924*

Similar Genre: *My Name Is Sally Little Song* by Brenda Woods, *Journey to the Bottomless Pit* by Elizabeth Mitchell, *The Shakespeare Stealer* by Gary Blackwood, *My Brother Sam Is Dead* by James Lincoln Collier

### **Curriculum Connections:**

- Social Studies/Science: Use the internet to research natural disasters and what kind of effect they have had in the history of other cities.

Supplies Needed: Computers with internet access

Resources:

<http://www.brainpop.com/science/earthsystem/naturaldisasters/>

<http://mnw.eas.slu.edu/hazards.html>

<http://www.socyberty.com/History/Americas-10-Worst-Natural-Disasters.94978>

- Language Arts: Research Shakespeare to find out about his life and read some of what he wrote.

Supplies Needed: Computers with internet access

Resources:

<http://www.shakespeare4kids.com/>  
<http://shakespeare.palomar.edu/>  
<http://www.kidskonnnect.com/content/view/148/27/>

### **Resources:**

- The following website is suggested on Deborah Hopkinson's web page, and it is a wonderful resource to use to learn more about the happenings of the earthquake and fire that occurred in San Francisco. There are pictures from after the disaster as well as eye-witness accounts. This would be a great way to perk student interest.

"The Virtual Museum of the City of San Francisco." San Francisco Museum Web Site. 29 June 2008 <<http://www.sfmuseum.org/1906/06.html>>

- Since the dog in this story is named Shakespeare, and Mr. Patterson speaks of him in the novel, it would be a great time to introduce William Shakespeare to students. The following book provides information about him in a fun way and includes activities related to his life, as well as four of his plays. It also includes activities to connect to other content areas.

Nelson, Pauline, and Todd Daubert. Starting with Shakespeare: Successfully Introducing Shakespeare to Children. New Hampshire: Teacher Idea's Press, 2000.

### **Activities:**

- Individual  
Each student needs to write at least 4 journal entries from Nick's point of view. At least one needs to be from before the fire, at least two during the fire, and at least one from after the fire was out. Include how he was feeling and what was happening around him. Be sure to use complete sentences and include details from the story. The form of writing is up to you, the writer.
- Class  
As a class create a newspaper from the day after the fires. Create a few headlines together and then break the class into small groups. Assign each group of students sections of the paper, including writing stories for the headlines. Include activities that will be happening that day and the next, stories about what people did during the fire, how the fire started and spread, what was tried to prevent the fire from spreading, what

damage was done to buildings in the city, etc. If students have other ideas for stories that may have appeared that day, they need to have them approved by the teacher.

**Bibliography:**

<http://www.perma-bound.com/>

[www.deborahhopkinson.com](http://www.deborahhopkinson.com)

The Virtual Museum of the City of San Francisco

*Starting with Shakespeare: Successfully Introducing Shakespeare to Children*