Name _____

The Great Molasses Flood

January 15, 1919, was a normal morning in Boston. Children walked to school. Workers rushed to their jobs. Shoppers shopped in stores. But that was all before the Great Molasses Flood.

At 12:41 that afternoon, there was a loud BANG! A huge steel tank containing over two million gallons of molasses exploded in the north of the city. This was a big problem. Molasses is dark, thick, oozy syrup. People use molasses in many different recipes, but it's probably best known as an ingredient in gingerbread cookies.

molasses

How could a huge tank of molasses explode? Well, molasses doesn't always just sit still. It can go through a chemical reaction. And on that unusually warm January day, the molasses in the container went through a chemical reaction that formed lots of bubbles of gas. More and more bubbles formed, filling the container with more and more gas. The gas made the pressure inside of the container go higher and higher, until: BOOM!

The huge steel tank of molasses cracked open, and a wave of molasses swept through the streets. People fled in every direction. A little boy named Antonio, who was walking home from school, cried out in terror. He ran as fast as he could. But he was swept up in the flood along with carts, horses, trash cans, people, dogs, and more.

As the sun went down, the molasses cooled down. And when molasses cools, it gets thicker and stickier. What had been a terrifying wave of fast-moving syrup just hours ago became a different kind of problem—a layer of sugary, sticky muck. Rescuers saved as many people as they could. But after four days and four nights, they finally stopped searching for survivors. In the end, 21 people died in the flood.

But little Antonio was one of the lucky ones. A firefighter saw the struggling boy in the molasses, dove in, and yanked him out. Antonio woke up in a hospital, sticky and sugary-smelling…but very much alive.

It took a long time to clean up. The city's harbor stayed brown until summer! But for the people who lived to tell the tale of the Great Molasses Flood, the air in Boston never smelled so sweet.