

Questions for Classroom Discussion
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San Francisco Earthquake Documents Questions

Background: The Great San Francisco Earthquake struck at 5:12 AM, April 18, 1906.

Proclamation by E.E. Schmitz, Mayor of San Francisco—April 18, 1906

1. Who has the mayor authorized to maintain order in San Francisco?
2. What do you think “Special Police Officers” were?
3. What has Mayor Schmitz authorized these representatives to do?
4. For what crimes could the ultimate penalty (death) be implemented?
5. What does this first paragraph of the Mayor’s proclamation tell you about the situation in San Francisco later in the day of the earthquake?
6. What has the mayor ordered the gas and electric companies to do (or not to do)?
7. Why do you suppose he issued such an order?
8. In the third paragraph, what does Mayor Schmitz request all citizens do?
9. Why might he have issued this order?
10. What warning does the mayor give the citizens in the final paragraph?

Letter from Silas W. Mack to Clara W. Mack, April 20, 1906

Background: Monterey California is about 85 miles south of San Francisco.

1. To whom is Silas Mack writing and what other attempt to contact this person has he already tried?
2. How does Silas Mack describe April 18, 1906?
3. How much damage did Mack say happened to the homes of Pacific Grove and Monterey?
4. Why, on the other hand, did the Hotel Del Monte experience such damage from the quake?
5. What happened at the hotel that took the life of a young married couple?
6. At first, what did the citizens of Monterey and Pacific Grove think about the extent of the earthquake?
7. What did they learn as the day progressed?
8. In San Francisco, what destroyed the greatest number of buildings?
9. What desperate attempt did the city officials take to try to stop the fire from spreading?
10. How many fires “broke out at once” and what was their cause?
11. Silas Clark writes to his mother “San Francisco is under martial law.” Based upon what he describes in the rest of the paragraph, what do you think *martial law* is?
12. What did the captain of the US Navy ship Paul Jones say he saw as he and his crew passed through the Golden Gate?
13. What had Congress done so far? What was Clark’s opinion of that action?
14. What happened at Stanford University?
15. What geologic feature allowed Monterey and Pacific Grove to ride through the earthquake with so little damage as opposed to San Francisco?
16. What does Clark predict will happen in San Francisco?
17. What was the rumor about the city of Santa Rosa (about 50 miles north of San Francisco)? FYI: The rumor proved to be incorrect.
18. Despite his grief and horror, what joke does he make in the next to last paragraph?