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Paris fire kills 17 immigrants

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27 August, 2005

THE ARTICLE

Paris fire kills 17 immigrants

BNE: Seventeen people died in a fire which gutted a dilapidated apartment building in Paris on Friday. Fourteen children and three adults fell victim to the inferno that has shocked and angered the local community. The building housed West African immigrants, who are generally poor and are crammed into sub-standard accommodation. The blaze is the second this year in Paris to have such a high death toll. President Jacques Chirac was quick to express his sympathy with the families, saying: "This ghastly catastrophe has sent all of France into mourning." Interior minister Nicolas Sarkozy visited the scene and got a hostile reception from distraught residents, who blamed him for the decrepit state of the building.

Authorities have promised an inquiry into the fire and have ordered a review of low-cost housing in Paris to prevent further tragedies. Safety checks are to be carried out in other overcrowded and run-down buildings. The Federation of African Workers claimed the building was unfit for human habitation but typical of the type of conditions in which many immigrants are forced to live. Residents say it was a health hazard, it was swarming with rats and the walls were full of cracks. A firefighter told reporters the fire swept through the building after starting in a wooden stairwell. He said flames and smoke engulfed the apartments, leaving the sleeping families on the upper floors with no way of escaping.

WARM-UPS

1. HOUSING: In pairs / groups, talk about all of the places in which you have lived. Which was the worst place? Have you lived in a dilapidated building or stayed in a dangerous hotel? Is there any unsafe housing in your town?

2. IMMIGRANTS: In pairs / groups, talk about the problems, worries and dangers that poor immigrants face when moving to a new country. What responsibilities do governments have to reduce these problems?

- Housing
- Jobs
- Health
- Food
- Racism
- Repatriation
- Crime
- Other

3. CHAT: In pairs / groups, decide which of these topics or words are most interesting and which are most boring.

Fire / local communities / West Africa / immigrants / poor accommodation / high death tolls / catastrophes / health hazards / rats / walls full of cracks / fire escapes

Have a chat about the topics you liked. For more conversation, change topics and partners frequently.

4. CATASTROPHE: Spend one minute writing down all of the different words you associate with the word "catastrophe". Share your words with your partner(s) and talk about them. Together, put the words into different categories.

5. OPINIONS: How far do you agree with the following opinions on the Paris fire?

- a. The Parisian authorities cannot prevent fires in every apartment building.
- b. There should be a legal limit to how many people can live in one apartment.
- c. There should be external fire escapes on all buildings higher than two floors.
- d. The victims' families should sue the Paris government.
- e. The building owners should go to prison for negligence.
- f. Paris should provide better accommodation for immigrants.
- g. The building owners should be prosecuted for allowing people to live among rats.
- h. Nothing will change in Paris and there'll be another tragic fire.

6. QUICK DEBATE: Students A think governments should do much more to ensure the safety of immigrants. Students B think governments are already doing enough to help immigrants. Change partners often.

BEFORE READING / LISTENING

1. TRUE / FALSE: Look at the article's headline and guess whether these sentences are true (T) or false (F):

- | | |
|---|-------|
| a. Many children died in an inferno in a Parisian apartment building. | T / F |
| b. The building was full of luxury apartments. | T / F |
| c. The fire is the first for decades in Paris that has been so tragic. | T / F |
| d. Survivors were comforted by the visit of the French Interior Minister. | T / F |
| e. Authorities have ordered the demolition of similar low-cost housing. | T / F |
| f. The building was unfit for human habitation. | T / F |
| g. The building was a health hazard and was infested with rats. | T / F |
| h. Fire escapes on the upper floors saved many lives. | T / F |

2. SYNONYM MATCH: Match the following synonyms from the article:

- | | |
|----------------|----------------|
| a. dilapidated | horrendous |
| b. inferno | inappropriate |
| c. crammed | infested |
| d. ghastly | packed |
| e. distraught | decaying |
| f. carried out | danger |
| g. unfit | conducted |
| h. hazard | swallowed up |
| i. swarming | blaze |
| j. engulfed | grief-stricken |

3. PHRASE MATCH: Match the following phrases from the article (sometimes more than one combination is possible):

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| a. a fire which gutted | state of the building |
| b. 14 children and three adults fell | for human habitation |
| c. crammed into sub- | victim to the inferno |
| d. This ghastly catastrophe has sent | through the building |
| e. blamed him for the decrepit | standard accommodation |
| f. ...and have ordered a review | engulfed the apartments |
| g. the building was unfit | a dilapidated apartment building |
| h. it was swarming | of low-cost housing in Paris |
| i. fire swept | all of France into mourning |
| j. flames and smoke | with rats |

WHILE READING / LISTENING

GAP FILL: Put the words in the column on the right into the gaps in the text.

Paris fire kills 17 immigrants

BNE: Seventeen people died in a fire which _____ a dilapidated apartment building in Paris on Friday. Fourteen children and three adults fell _____ to the inferno that has shocked and angered the local community. The building _____ West African immigrants, who are generally poor and are crammed into sub-standard accommodation. The blaze is the second this year in Paris to have such a high death _____. President Jacques Chirac was quick to express his _____ with the families, saying: "This ghastly catastrophe has sent all of France into _____." Interior minister Nicolas Sarkozy visited the scene and got a _____ reception from distraught residents, who blamed him for the _____ state of the building.

Authorities have _____ an inquiry into the fire and have ordered a review of low-cost housing in Paris to prevent further _____. Safety checks are to be carried out in other overcrowded and _____ buildings. The Federation of African Workers claimed the building was unfit for human _____ but typical of the type of conditions in which many immigrants are _____ to live. Residents say it was a health _____, it was swarming with rats and the walls were full of cracks. A firefighter told reporters the fire _____ through the building after starting in a wooden stairwell. He said flames and smoke _____ the apartments, leaving the sleeping families on the upper floors with no way of escaping.

mourning

gutted

sympathy

toll

decrepit

victim

hostile

housed

forced

run-down

swept

habitation

promised

engulfed

hazard

tragedies

AFTER READING / LISTENING

1. WORD SEARCH: Look in your dictionaries / computer to find collocates, other meanings, information, synonyms ... for the words 'upper' and 'floor'.

- Share your findings with your partners.
- Make questions using the words you found.
- Ask your partner / group your questions.

2. ARTICLE QUESTIONS: Look back at the article and write down some questions you would like to ask the class about the text.

- Share your questions with other classmates / groups.
- Ask your partner / group your questions.

3. GAP FILL: In pairs / groups, compare your answers to this exercise. Check your answers. Talk about the words from the gap fill. Were they new, interesting, worth learning...?

4. VOCABULARY: Circle any words you do not understand. In groups, pool unknown words and use dictionaries to find their meanings.

5. STUDENT "IMMIGRANT HOUSING" SURVEY: In pairs / groups, write down questions about immigrants and their living conditions.

- Ask other classmates your questions and note down their answers.
- Go back to your original partner / group and compare your findings.
- Make mini-presentations to other groups on your findings.

6. TEST EACH OTHER: Look at the words below. With your partner, try to recall exactly how these were used in the text:

- gutted
- victim
- crammed
- toll
- ghastly
- decrepit
- inquiry
- run-down
- unfit
- hazard
- swept
- upper

DISCUSSION

STUDENT A's QUESTIONS (Do not show these to student B)

- a. What were your initial thoughts on this headline?
- b. Did the headline make you want to read the article?
- c. Who do you think should bear responsibility for the deaths?
- d. What punishment should be given to anyone found responsible?
- e. Are there any dilapidated buildings in your town?
- f. What is the answer to overcrowding?
- g. Do you think the Paris authorities can prevent similar tragedies?
- h. Have such ghastly tragedies happened in your town?
- i. Do you think city governments do enough to help immigrants and keep them safe?

STUDENT B's QUESTIONS (Do not show these to student A)

- a. Did you like reading this article?
- b. What do you think about what you read?
- c. Describe the worst building you have ever lived or stayed in.
- d. Why do you think a modern city like Paris allows people to live in rat-infested buildings?
- e. What should France's Interior Minister do about sub-standard accommodation in Paris?
- f. What would you do if there were swarms of rats in your neighborhood?
- g. What do you think of the fact that these tragedies always happen to poorer people?
- h. If you were to emigrate, where would you like to go?
- i. Did you like this discussion?

AFTER DISCUSSION: Join another partner / group and tell them what you talked about.

- a. What question would you like to ask about this topic?
- b. What was the most interesting thing you heard?
- c. Was there a question you didn't like?
- d. Was there something you totally disagreed with?
- e. What did you like talking about?
- f. Do you want to know how anyone else answered the questions?
- g. Which was the most difficult question?

SPEAKING

ROLE PLAY: This role play is to discuss how to make living conditions safer in Paris. Team up with classmates who have been assigned the same role as you. Develop your roles and discuss ideas and “strategies” before the role play begins.

Introduce yourself to the other role players.

Role A – Immigrant leader

You think the city must build new houses for immigrant families. Paris forces immigrants to live in the dirtiest and most dangerous accommodation. You believe Paris does not care about immigrants. It spent millions of dollars on an Olympic bid but cannot buy fire escapes.

THINK OF WHAT MORE PARIS SHOULD DO TO HELP IMMIGRANTS.

Role B – City leader

You have ordered an inquiry into low-cost housing. Your government already spends a lot of money on helping immigrants. You think the biggest problem is overcrowding. You believe people should stop living together in such large numbers. You have no budget for fire safety.

THINK OF ALL OF THE THINGS THE CITY DOES TO HELP IMMIGRANTS.

Role C – Fire safety officer

You are shocked at the condition of many of the city’s buildings. Many are wooden and have no fire escapes or fire extinguishers. You think the building owners are responsible for fire safety in their buildings. You believe property owners should be prosecuted if there are lethal fires.

THINK OF MORE FIRE PRECAUTIONS THE CITY NEEDS TO TAKE.

Role D – Property owner

You rent an old and decrepit apartment block to immigrant families. You are worried about the risks of fire. You want the city to pay for fire escapes. You also want authorities to regulate the number of people living in one apartment.

THINK OF MORE WAYS THE CITY CAN HELP PROTECT IMMIGRANTS.

Change roles and repeat the role play. Comment in groups about the differences between the two role plays.

In pairs / groups, discuss whether you really believe in what you said while you were in your roles.

LISTENING

Listen and fill in the spaces.

Paris fire kills 17 immigrants

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Authorities have promised an _____ into the fire and have ordered a review of low-cost housing in Paris to prevent further _____. Safety checks are to be carried out in other overcrowded and _____ buildings. The Federation of African Workers claimed the building was _____ for human habitation but typical of the type of conditions in which many immigrants are forced to live. Residents say it was a health _____, it was swarming with rats and the walls were full of cracks. A firefighter told reporters the fire _____ through the building after starting in a wooden stairwell. He said flames and smoke _____ the apartments, leaving the sleeping families on the upper floors with no way of _____.

HOMEWORK

1. VOCABULARY EXTENSION: Choose several of the words from the text. Use a dictionary or Google's search field (or another search engine) to build up more associations / collocations of each word.

2. INTERNET: Search the Internet and find more information on the tragic Paris fire and the inquiry. Share your findings with your class in the next lesson.

3. LETTER: Write a letter to France's Interior Minister Nicolas Sarkozy. Tell him what he should do to prevent further tragedies. Read your letters to your classmates in your next lesson. Did you all write about similar things?

4. IMMIGRANTS: Write a report for your city government recommending what it should do to help poor immigrants. Tell your classmates the main points of your report in your next lesson. Did you all have similar ideas?

ANSWERS

TRUE / FALSE:

- a. T b. F c. F d. F e. F f. T g. T h. F

SYNONYM MATCH:

- | | |
|----------------|----------------|
| a. dilapidated | decaying |
| b. inferno | blaze |
| c. crammed | packed |
| d. ghastly | horrendous |
| e. distraught | grief-stricken |
| f. carried out | conducted |
| g. unfit | inappropriate |
| h. hazard | danger |
| i. swarming | infested |
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PHRASE MATCH:

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| a. a fire which gutted | a dilapidated apartment building |
| b. 14 children and three adults fell | victim to the inferno |
| c. crammed into sub- | standard accommodation |
| d. This ghastly catastrophe has sent | all of France into mourning |
| e. blamed him for the decrepit | state of the building |
| f. ...and have ordered a review | of low-cost housing in Paris |
| g. the building was unfit | for human habitation |
| h. it was swarming | with rats |
| i. fire swept | through the building |
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GAP FILL:

Paris fire kills 17 immigrants

BNE: Seventeen people died in a fire which **gutted** a dilapidated apartment building in Paris on Friday. Fourteen children and three adults fell **victim** to the inferno that has shocked and angered the local community. The building **housed** West African immigrants, who are generally poor and are crammed into sub-standard accommodation. The blaze is the second this year in Paris to have such a high death **toll**. President Jacques Chirac was quick to express his **sympathy** with the families, saying: "This ghastly catastrophe has sent all of France into **mourning**." Interior minister Nicolas Sarkozy visited the scene and got a **hostile** reception from distraught residents, who blamed him for the **decrepit** state of the building.

Authorities have **promised** an inquiry into the fire and have ordered a review of low-cost housing in Paris to prevent further **tragedies**. Safety checks are to be carried out in other overcrowded and **run-down** buildings. The Federation of African Workers claimed the building was unfit for human **habitation** but typical of the type of conditions in which many immigrants are **forced** to live. Residents say it was a health **hazard**, it was swarming with rats and the walls were full of cracks. A firefighter told reporters the fire **swept** through the building after starting in a wooden stairwell. He said flames and smoke **engulfed** the apartments, leaving the sleeping families on the upper floors with no way of escaping.