

He nosed around near the bottom of the chimney. Scraps sometimes fell there, dropped during cooking. No such luck today. The fireplace was cold and empty; its owners had disappeared from the house in the middle of the night. In fact, people all along the street had scuttled out of their homes over the last day or so. They had left in a hurry. They could not have taken everything with them, so he would just have to look harder.

He scratched behind his ear. A new smell filtered into his nostrils. Someone else was here. Someone else was sneaking around. Someone else was hungry. He was not going to let them get their teeth into some food before he did!

He followed the scent, out from under the chimney, down along the side wall of the house. He picked his way over splinters and around mucky bits of mud and mortar. His nose led him into a second room, just off the first.

There she was! The someone else he'd smelt across the house! She knew she was caught and rather than scurrying away she turned and looked him dead in the eyes. He began to show his teeth; sharp, dangerous. Hungry.

No more hungry than her though. She too had razor-sharp, jagged teeth and bared them. Neither rival was backing down. He darted forward a pace, to see if it would scare her. She did not flinch. He started forward again, and she raced out towards him. Flashing teeth and scratching claws met. She gouged his side. He bit her neck. He felt her tail thrash against him and another claw scrape his ear.

They separated, both sucking in air in fast, short breaths. Neither of them had won yet. There was more to come.

Why was he so hot? The fight had only taken a few seconds so far. The charred logs in the fireplace had been cold, so where was that heat coming from?

She must have noticed the change in temperature too. He could see her eyes searching around the room and her nose twitching. He smelt the air. Something was changing. Something was seeping in through cracks in the walls and threading its way through gaps in the door.

Smoke.

He flicked his eyes back to her, but she was already off and running. She scrambled up the wall and out through a window. So that was how she got in! He dashed after her, all thoughts of food and fighting forgotten. The bright, terrible, flickering enemy

that all rats learn to fear was coming after him!

She had already reached the ground when he reached the window ledge and looked over. He dug his claws deep into the wall as he climbed down. Not deeply enough. A section of wall gave way underneath him and he tumbled to the ground. The falling clump landed by his head, hardly missing him. There was no time to worry about the fall now. Quick as a flash, he was back on his feet and tearing off into the main street.

What he saw was terrifying.

An orange glow. Tall, licking flames. Great showers of bright golden sparks filling the air. Above it all loomed a monstrous cloud of thick black smoke.

The city was burning.

The ground itself was getting hot. A glowing lump of charcoal bounced a few feet from him. He had to move, but where could he run?

Away from the flames he dashed. Anywhere was better than that street, or so he thought. Each new twist and turn just brought him back to another wall of fire. There were times when he thought he was free, but then the heat would appear again and he would have to run once more, his heart pounding.

The city was a maze. Winding, narrow streets and close wooden houses. It was impossible to see the best way to run without climbing to a roof, but to go so high might leave him trapped.

Other rats flashed past him, alone, in pairs or larger groups. As the city shrank, more and more of his kind were forced together. The fire was like a great hand, scooping them up and about to close around them. Terrified squeals filled his ears as they pushed, bit, scratched and clawed to be the furthest from the fire. He snarled at one rat; clambered over another; pressed another into a wall as he burst past.

Then something changed. There seemed to be something holding the group up. Rats at the back, closest to the fire, screeched in fear. As he squeezed around a corner, he saw what was blocking the path.

The river.

Slow, grey-brown, enormous. A barrier big enough even for a fire.

Some rats were forced into it. Others tried to turn left or right and follow the banks to safety. Still more leapt onto chunks of rubbish and wood. Anywhere was better than trapped between fire and water.

He fought his way through to a floating chunk and jumped on. Others followed, but this was his escape, not theirs. He hissed and bit, snarled and scratched, as the river swirled and pulled his raft out and away from the edge. Away from the burning terror. He could not lose his footing. If the water did not get him, the fire would. So he dug in his claws and clung on. Sparks floated down and hissed as they hit the water. Crashes filled his ears as buildings close to the water fell.

Then he was away.

Carried into the middle of the river, the current carried him downstream. The world in front of him was consumed with fire, but the world he was heading to was untouched.

His belly growled. He would not have to struggle to find food when he reached the other side. Where humans fled to, food could be found. He filled his lungs with the clean air on the river and let it carry him to safety.

Section A

1. How do the rats get out of the house? (C6/2b)

2. Do you like the simile describing the fire as ‘like a great hand’? (R3)

3. Which summary is right? (S2/2c)

- A) This story is about a man who lives in London.
- B) This story is about a dog who plays in a river.
- C) This story is about a rat who runs away from a fire.

Section B

4. Stop reading at the single word sentence 'Hungry'. Do you think 'he' and the 'someone else' will be friends or enemies? Explain your answer. (P2/2e)

5. What are the words 'The bright, terrible, flickering enemy that all rats learn to fear' describing? (C1/2a)

6. Does the rat escape in the end? Give evidence for your answer. (C6/2b)

Section C

7. Stop reading at the single word sentence 'Hungry'. Who or what do you think 'he' is? Why? (P2/2e)

8. What does the word 'gouged' mean? Use a dictionary to find out. (L3)

9. What does the word 'charred' tell you about the logs in the fireplace? (C1/2a)

10. Which two senses is the female character relying on to work out where the heat is coming from? Give evidence from the text to support your answer. (P5/2d)

11. When you read the sentence 'What he saw was terrifying', stop and answer the following question: what do you think he is seeing on the main street? Give a reason for your answer. (P2/2e)

12. What is the effect of describing fire as an 'enemy'? (R3)

13. 'As the city shrank...' What does the author mean when writing that the city is shrinking? (C1/2a)

Section D

14. The author describes the main character's teeth as 'sharp, dangerous. Hungry.' How has the author made the word 'hungry' more impactful than the other two? (C7)

15. The author uses the words 'seeping' and 'threading' to describe the smoke. What do these words tell you about the amount of smoke entering the house at that point in the story? (C1/2a)

16. What is the effect of putting the word 'smoke' by itself as a complete paragraph? (C7)

Fleeing the Fire – Challenge Activity

Section A

These words have been taken from the story. Match each word to the correct meaning.

<u>Word</u>	<u>Meaning</u>
1. filtered	a) having rough or sharp points
2. mortar	b) moving in the direction in which a stream or river flows
3. jagged	c) to be passed through
4. monstrous	d) make an aggressive growl with bared teeth
5. snarled	e) having the ugly or frightening appearance of a monster
6. downstream	f) a mixture used when building, to bond bricks or stones.

Section B

Tick the word closest in meaning.

The word *scuttled* means...

	Tick one
sauntered	<input type="checkbox"/>
dashed	<input type="checkbox"/>
walked	<input type="checkbox"/>

The word *rival* means...

	Tick one
enemy	<input type="checkbox"/>
friend	<input type="checkbox"/>
companion	<input type="checkbox"/>

The word *pounding* means...

	Tick one
painting	<input type="checkbox"/>
hammering	<input type="checkbox"/>
scratching	<input type="checkbox"/>

The word *consumed* means...

	Tick one
thoughtful	<input type="checkbox"/>
changed	<input type="checkbox"/>
devoured	<input type="checkbox"/>

Fleeing the Fire – Challenge Activity

Section C

Fill in the blanks using the word bank below. Then write your own sentence using the left over word.

Fleeing the Fire tells the story of a rat and his journey to safety.

The rat was about where the heat was coming from.

He was that another rat was going to get his food.

The rats were being towards the river.

concerned

terrified

scrambled

confused

forced

Section D

Determine whether each statement is true or false. Correct the false statements in the box below.

	True	False
Scraps sometimes fell from cooking and landed around the chimney.		
Someone else was hungry. He would have to share his food.		
The falling clump landed on his head, cracking his skull with pain.		
The river. A barrier big enough even for a fire.		
The rat would not have to struggle to find food where he was going.		