

Calamities

POISON ON THE DRUGSTORE SHELF



On a morning in early October 1982, Adam Janus, age 27, woke up with a pain in his chest. The pain wasn't too severe, but it bothered him. He went out to a local store and bought a bottle of Extra-Strength Tylenol capsules. He returned to his house in Arlington Heights, Illinois, where he took at least one capsule. An hour later he collapsed. His family rushed him to the hospital, watching in horror as doctors struggled to revive him. But their efforts made no difference. Adam's heart and lungs had stopped working. Dr. Thomas Kim, one of the doctors who had tried to save Adam, was shocked at the young man's death. "He suffered sudden death without warning," said Dr. Kim. "It was most unusual."

² Adam's family was overwhelmed by his unexpected death. That evening they sat together at the Janus home. No one was feeling very well, and someone offered to buy a bottle of aspirin. But Stanley Janus, Adam's younger brother,

Four years after the original Tylenol poisonings, tragedy struck again. Here, a manager at a Walgreen's drugstore in Chicago removes packages of Tylenol from the shelves. A New York woman died of cyanide poisoning after taking the pain reliever.

pointed out the bottle of Tylenol in the kitchen. He and his wife Theresa each took at least one capsule. Five hours after his older brother's death, Stanley Janus was pronounced dead. Theresa died two days later.

3 In nearby Elk Grove Village, 12-year-old Mary Kellerman was suffering from a cold. She took a Tylenol and died. Mary Reiner of Winfield had recently returned from the hospital with her new baby. She also took a Tylenol and died. Paula Prince, a flight attendant, was found dead in her apartment in Chicago. In the bathroom was an open bottle of Tylenol.

4 By the end of the week, seven people in the Chicago area had died after taking Tylenol. Each person had swallowed a capsule loaded with cyanide (SYE-uh-nide), an extremely dangerous poison.

5 Apparently, the killer had taken apart a number of Tylenol capsules. Then he or she had inserted huge quantities of cyanide into the red half of the capsules before putting them back together again.

After adding the poison, the killer had returned the contaminated bottles of medicine to store shelves. As Winfield's police chief said, "Apparently a very sophisticated and very malicious person is at large who had to spend a lot of time and effort on this terrible plan."

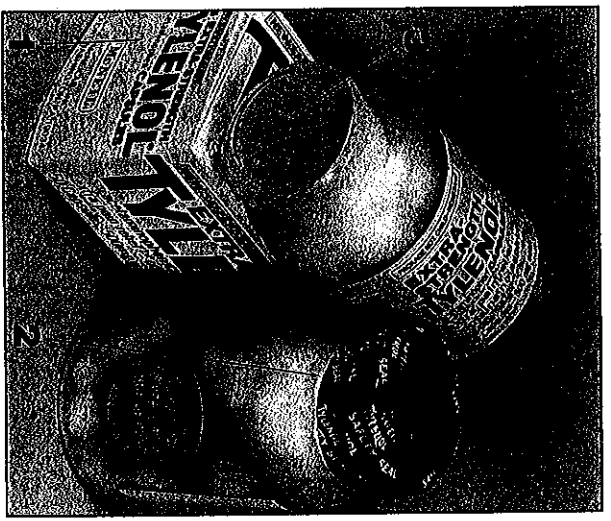
6 Even though the seven victims were all from the Chicago area, people around the country panicked. Cyanide in drugstore medicine! Who would die next? Johnson & Johnson, the company that makes Tylenol, stopped all production and asked store owners to remove the capsules from their shelves. Police stations and hospitals were filled with people convinced they had been poisoned. A Chicago hospital received 700 calls in one day. But Dr. William Robertson, director of the Poison Control Center in Seattle, had some advice for callers. He said, "If it was going to be a lethal dose, you wouldn't have time to call."

7 Illinois's attorney general began a nationwide search for the killer. Police all over the country looked into old and new cases, hoping to find a promising lead. In California, Pennsylvania, and Wyoming, they found similar poisoning cases. But some were clearly unrelated, and others were "copycat" cases set up by people interested in attention.

8 Still, the copycat killers were dangerous in their own right. As Halloween approached, some cities and towns banned trick-or-treating. Citizens were afraid that children would be hurt. And in fact, three children in Chicago got sick after eating chocolate bars. People

were afraid to buy anything from the store. Food and drug manufacturers began to realize that they had to make safer packages in order to stay in business.

9 In mid-October a letter showed up at the office of McNeil Consumer Products. McNeil is a branch of Johnson & Johnson—the branch that manufactures Tylenol. The letter demanded one million dollars, payable to a mailbox at a Chicago bank. The letter threatened more



Tamper resistant packaging was developed as a result of the Tylenol poisonings.

poisonings if the company refused to send the money.

¹⁰ The extortion letter was eventually linked to James and LeAnn Lewis—also known as Robert and Nancy Richardson. FBI agents soon learned about James Lewis's frightening past. Kansas City police recognized him as a tax accountant who was once charged in the killing of an elderly man. He was also accused of attacking his mother with an ax, and he had been hospitalized twice for mental health problems. In 1974 his five-year-old daughter had died after heart surgery, and a police officer who knew Lewis claimed he had always blamed Johnson & Johnson for the girl's death.

¹¹ But when the FBI entered the Lewises' apartment in Chicago, they found no trace of the couple. They tracked the pair to New York City, where more than 100 FBI agents searched for them.

¹² In November the *Chicago Tribune* received a letter signed by Robert Richardson—an alias often used by James Lewis. The letter said, "My wife and I have not committed the Chicago-area Tylenol murders." And records showed that the Lewises had been in New York when the tainted Tylenol first appeared on shelves in Chicago.

¹³ James Lewis was finally arrested in December when a librarian at a branch of the New York Public Library recognized his face. He went to trial, accused of trying to extort money from Johnson & Johnson. Lewis was convicted of that charge and sent to prison. But he was

never charged with the Tylenol murders. And most FBI officials think he probably did not commit them.

¹⁴ Although the Tylenol killer was never found, the tragedy did change the ways in which food and medicine are packaged. Bottles and boxes now have special safety seals. Pills are often enclosed in individual plastic packs.

¹⁵ Still, better packaging does not guarantee safety. In 1986 Diane Elstroth bought a bottle of Tylenol. Minutes later she was dead, killed by cyanide that had been inserted into the capsules. The box was brand-new. The package had three separate safety seals. But the killer had somehow managed to get past those seals to add poison to the capsules.

¹⁶ In the end, there is nothing anyone can do to make packages completely safe. But food and drug companies are doing their best to make sure that their products are as tamperproof as possible.

If you have completed while readings this article, take your reading time below. Then turn to the Words per Minute Table on page 133 and look up your reading speed (words per minute). Enter your reading speed on the graph on page 134.

Reading Time: Lesson 9

Minutes Seconds

A Finding the Main Idea

One statement below expresses the main idea of the article. One statement is too general, or too broad. The other statement explains only part of the article; it is too narrow. Label the statements using the following key:

M—Main Idea B—Too Broad N—Too Narrow

- _____ 1. Adam Janus bought contaminated Tylenol at a local store.
- _____ 2. Several people died after a killer put cyanide into Tylenol capsules.
- _____ 3. Contaminated food and drugs caused a nationwide panic.

_____ Score 15 points for a correct M answer.

_____ Score 5 points for each correct B or N answer.

_____ **Total Score: Finding the Main Idea**

B Recalling Facts

How well do you remember the facts in the article? Put an X in the box next to the answer that correctly completes each statement about the article.

- 1. The first Tylenol deaths took place in
 - a. 1986.
 - b. 1982.
 - c. 1963.
- 2. The seven people who died all lived in
 - a. Seattle suburbs.
 - b. California, Pennsylvania, or Wyoming.
 - c. the Chicago area.
- 3. James Lewis was convicted of
 - a. trying to extort money from Johnson & Johnson.
 - b. murdering at least seven people.
 - c. stealing manufacturing secrets from Johnson & Johnson.
- 4. Lewis also used the alias
 - a. Robert Richardson.
 - b. Richard Smith.
 - c. Ralph Robertson.
- 5. Because of the Tylenol scare, food and drug companies
 - a. stopped making painkillers.
 - b. made packaging safer.
 - c. boycotted Johnson & Johnson products.

Score 5 points for each correct answer.

_____ **Total Score: Recalling Facts**

C Making Inferences

When you combine your own experience and information from a text to draw a conclusion that is not directly stated in that text, you are making an inference. Below are five statements that may or may not be inferences based on information in the article. Label the statements using the following key:

C—Correct Inference F—Faulty Inference

- _____ 1. The Janus family suffered a terrible tragedy.
- _____ 2. The Tylenol killer was a careful, intelligent person.
- _____ 3. The copycat cases did not worry the police.
- _____ 4. The FBI had no trouble tracking down the Lewises.
- _____ 5. The Tylenol case influenced the ways in which companies now package their products.

Score 5 points for each correct answer.

_____ Total Score: Making Inferences

D Using Words Precisely

Each numbered sentence below contains an underlined word or phrase from the article. Following the sentence are three definitions. One definition is closest to the meaning of the underlined word. One definition is opposite or nearly opposite. Label those two definitions using the following key. Do not label the remaining definition.

C—Closest O—Opposite or Nearly Opposite

- 1. After adding the poison, the killer had returned the contaminated bottles of medicine to store shelves.
 - _____ a. poisoned
 - _____ b. purified
 - _____ c. opened
- 2. As Winfield's police chief said, "Apparently a...very malicious person is at large who had to spend a lot of time and effort on this terrible plan."
 - _____ a. kindly
 - _____ b. courageous
 - _____ c. spiteful
- 3. In November the *Chicago Tribune* received a letter signed by Robert Richardson—an alias often used by James Lewis.
 - _____ a. a real name
 - _____ b. a fake name
 - _____ c. a last name

4. He went to trial, accused of trying to extort money from Johnson & Johnson.

- _____ a. blackmail
 _____ b. counterfeit
 _____ c. earn legally

5. Lewis was convicted of that charge and sent to prison.

- _____ a. declared innocent
 _____ b. questioned about
 _____ c. found guilty

_____ Score 3 points for each correct C answer.

_____ Score 2 points for each correct O answer.

_____ **Total Score: Using Words Precisely**

Enter the four total scores in the spaces below, and add them together to find your Reading Comprehension Score. Then record your score on the graph on page 135.

Score	Question Type	Lesson 9
_____	Finding the Main Idea	
_____	Recalling Facts	
_____	Making Inferences	
_____	Using Words Precisely	
_____	Reading Comprehension Score	

Author's Approach

Put an X in the box next to the correct answer.

1. What is the author's purpose in writing "Poison on the Drugstore Shelf"?

- a. To encourage the reader not to use any medicine
 b. To inform the reader about the tainted Tylenol scare in the 1980s
 c. To convey a mood of fear

2. Choose the statement below that is the weakest argument for charging James Lewis and his wife with the Tylenol murders.

- a. They sent a letter to Johnson & Johnson threatening more poisonings if the company wouldn't pay them one million dollars.
 b. Lewis blamed Johnson & Johnson for his five-year-old daughter's death.
 c. Lewis and his wife had been in New York when the poisoned Tylenol appeared on drugstore shelves in Chicago.

3. How is the author's purpose for writing the article expressed in paragraph 15?

- a. The author inspires fear of all drugstore medicine.
 b. The author says that current ways of packaging medicine are not good enough.
 c. The author tells the reader about another case of Tylenol poisoning.

_____ Number of correct answers

Record your personal assessment of your work on the Critical Thinking Chart on page 136.