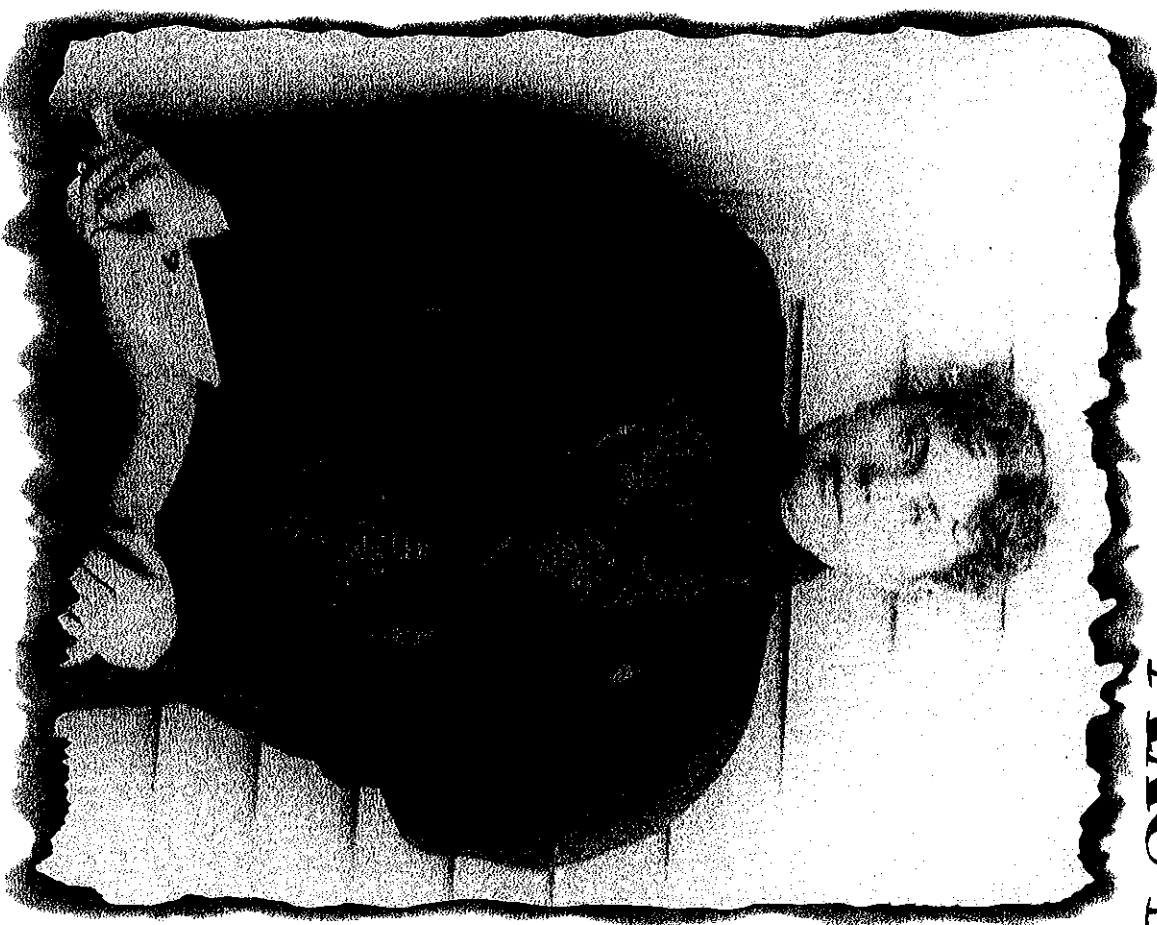


Was Lizzie Borden an Axe Murderer?



Lizzie Borden took
an axe

And gave her mother
forty whacks.

When she saw what she
had done,

She gave her father
forty-one.

This rhyme has been around for more
than a hundred years. It describes

Lizzie Borden as a cold-blooded killer.
But is the rhyme accurate? Did Lizzie
butcher her parents one hot August

*Neighbors said that Lizzie Borden was kind
and gentle. Yet when her father and
stepmother were found murdered in their
home, suspicion focused on Lizzie. She was
the only one home at the time. Didn't she
hear or see anything?*

morning in 1892? Or did someone else commit the brutal murders?

² The crimes took place in Fall River, Massachusetts. That's where thirty-two-year-old Lizzie Borden lived with her father, stepmother, and older sister, Emma. The morning of August 4, 1892, began quietly enough in the Borden house. Mr. Borden left for work around 9 A.M. Mrs. Borden started to do her housework. The maid, Bridget Sullivan, went outside to wash windows. Emma was away. She was visiting friends in a nearby town. And Lizzie? Well, Lizzie said she spent much of the morning out in the barn. She was getting things ready for a fishing trip she planned to take. The rest of the time, she said, she was in her room, lying down.

³ Sometime between 9 and 9:30 A.M., Mrs. Borden was making a bed in a second-floor bedroom. Someone crept into the room behind her. Without warning, the killer brought an axe down on Mrs. Borden's head. Nineteen times she was struck with the axe. Blood splattered all over the walls. By the time the killer was finished, Mrs. Borden lay dead. Her

body was not found right away, however. When Mr. Borden came home around 10:30 A.M., he had no idea that anything was wrong.

⁴ Mr. Borden headed straight for the couch in the sitting room. He had not been feeling well, and the sweltering heat of the morning had drained his energy. He wanted to rest awhile. The maid was also feeling sick that day. A nap sounded like a good idea to her, too. Accordingly, Bridget Sullivan went up to her attic room and quickly fell asleep.

⁵ Once again the killer sprang into action. Before Mr. Borden knew what was happening, an axe struck him in the face. The killer delivered ten blows, leaving Mr. Borden—like his wife—dead in the house.

⁶ At 11:15 A.M. Lizzie Borden screamed to Bridget Sullivan. "Come down quick! Someone's killed Father!" With those words, Lizzie announced the horrible news. Soon neighbors, police officers, and reporters were swarming around the Borden home. One of the neighbors discovered Mrs. Borden's body in the upstairs bedroom. By evening, Lizzie's sister

Emma had heard the news. She hurried home to be with Lizzie.

⁷ Meanwhile, questions swirled through the community. Who could have done such terrible deeds? And why? Suspicion centered on Lizzie. Her story didn't make sense. She said she had been out in the barn, but there were no footprints on the dusty barn floor. It looked to police as though no one had set foot in there for days or even weeks. In addition, the maid reported an interesting detail. When Mr. Borden came home that morning, Lizzie had stood at the top of the stairs, laughing in an odd way. And several hours after the murders, Lizzie was seen burning a piece of wood that looked like an axe handle.

⁸ Besides, many people whispered, no one else could have done it. The doors to the house were locked, so no intruder could have gotten in. Everyone knew that Lizzie hated her stepmother. And with Mr. and Mrs. Borden both dead, Lizzie and her sister would inherit half a million dollars.

⁹ Yet some questions could not be answered. There was blood all over the crime scenes. So how could it be that

no blood was found on Lizzie or her clothing? If Lizzie were the killer, where had she hidden the murder weapon? And how could she have stayed so calm during the hour between the two killings?

¹⁰ Some people decided that Lizzie's sister, Emma, was the murderer. She, too, hated her stepmother. In fact, Emma hated Mrs. Borden even more than Lizzie did. Lizzie was just a baby when her real mother died. But Emma was eleven years old. She was old enough to remember her mother—and to hate the woman who tried to replace her. Like Lizzie, Emma knew she would get a lot of money when her parents died. And although Emma had been staying with friends on the day of the murders, she could easily have sneaked back into town. She had a key to the house. She would have had no trouble unlocking the door.

¹¹ Other people believed both sisters were innocent. After all, neither one had ever been violent before. They had always been kind and gentle. The Borden house had been broken into

a few months earlier. Perhaps the thief had returned, this time with murder in mind. Or what about the enemies Mr. Borden had made in his business dealings? The killer could have been someone seeking revenge. A stranger could have slipped into the house while Lizzie was in the barn. During that time, the door was unlocked.

¹² The police were in a difficult spot. The entire nation was watching the events in Fall River. Most police officers believed Lizzie was the killer. But they had no witness, no murder weapon, and no real evidence. It would be hard to make a case. Still, there was tremendous pressure on them to make an arrest. One week after the killings, they did. They arrested Lizzie Borden and charged her with two counts of murder.

¹³ The trial took place in June of 1893. It lasted thirteen days. Both sides did their best. But in the end, the jury simply could not believe that the calm, quiet Lizzie Borden had committed such awful acts. They spent one hour

discussing the case. Then they found Lizzie not guilty.

¹⁴ In many ways, though, the jury's verdict did not matter. Lizzie's life was changed forever. Most people believed she was guilty. To this day, Lizzie Borden is not remembered for her love of animals. She is not remembered for the money she gave to the poor. She is remembered only as the woman who gave her mother "forty whacks" and then went on to give her father "forty-one."



If you have been timed while reading this article, enter your reading time below. Then turn to the Words per Minute Table on page 147 and look up your reading speed (words per minute). Enter your reading speed on the graph on page 148.

Reading Time: Lesson 13

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. One of the most famous unsolved mysteries in Massachusetts is the murder of Lizzie Borden's parents in 1892.
- _____ 2. To many people, Lizzie Borden seemed guilty of murdering her parents because her story about where she was when the crimes occurred didn't make sense.
- _____ 3. Although Lizzie Borden was tried for the 1892 murder of her parents, there was never any solid evidence that she was guilty.

_____	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 murders at the Borden home occurred
 - a. on a hot August morning.
 - b. during a hot August night.
 - c. shortly after Mr. Borden remarried.
- 2. The murderer killed Mr. Borden
 - a. when he discovered Mrs. Borden's body.
 - b. during an argument.
 - c. as he slept on the couch.
- 3. The maid reported that Lizzie had
 - a. laughed strangely that morning.
 - b. been out in the barn.
 - c. lost her keys to the house.
- 4. People who blamed the Borden sisters for their parents' murders did not give this as a reason:
 - a. A desire to inherit Mr. Borden's wealth.
 - b. Revenge for driving away their boyfriends.
 - c. Hatred for their stepmother.
- 5. At Lizzie's trial, the verdict was
 - a. not guilty.
 - b. not guilty, on grounds of insanity.
 - c. thrown out because of prejudice on the part of the jury.

_____	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. Whoever killed Mr. and Mrs. Borden had to be strong and able to move quietly.
- _____ 2. For a long time before the murders, there had been great unhappiness in the Borden household.
- _____ 3. The members of the jury at Lizzie's trial were divided by the evidence and had to discuss several issues in depth before they came to an agreement.
- _____ 4. An innocent person accused of a famous crime can be confident that once a jury finds him or her not guilty, the public will accept that verdict.
- _____ 5. The public's desire to learn every detail of a well-known crime is nothing new.

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. It describes Lizzie Borden as a cold-blooded killer.
 - _____ a. habitually late
 - _____ b. extremely tenderhearted and emotional
 - _____ c. without normal human feelings of pity and kindness
- 2. Or did someone else commit the brutal murders?
 - _____ a. extremely cruel
 - _____ b. local
 - _____ c. kind
- 3. Meanwhile, questions swirled through the community.
 - _____ a. moved in a straight line
 - _____ b. waited
 - _____ c. whirled
- 4. Suspicion centered on Lizzie.
 - _____ a. distrust
 - _____ b. faith
 - _____ c. excitement

5. The doors to the house were locked, so no intruder could have gotten in.

- _____ a. one who belongs
- _____ b. unwanted outsider
- _____ c. instructor

_____ 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 149.

Score	Question Type	Lesson 13
_____	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. Judging by statements from the article, you can conclude that the authors want the reader to think that
 - a. Lizzie Borden killed her mother and her father.
 - b. Lizzie Borden did not kill her mother and her father.
 - c. we will never know for sure whether Lizzie Borden killed her mother and her father.
2. Choose the statement below that is the weakest argument for believing that Lizzie Borden was innocent of the crime.
 - a. Lizzie looked too calm and quiet to commit murder.
 - b. Lizzie was the only one at home at the time, besides the maid, and the doors were locked.
 - c. There were no footprints on the dusty barn floor.
3. What do the authors imply by saying "Lizzie was just a baby when her real mother died"?
 - a. Lizzie didn't remember her mother and probably didn't hate her stepmother for replacing her mother.
 - b. Lizzie had never known a mother's love, and her lack of affection while growing up made her cold and heartless.
 - c. Perhaps Lizzie's birth had something to do with her mother's death at such an early age.
4. The authors probably wrote this article to
 - a. persuade readers that Lizzie Borden was innocent.
 - b. inform readers about a fascinating mystery.
 - c. show how easy it is to fool a jury if you act gentle.

_____ Number of correct answers
Record your personal assessment of your work on the Critical Thinking Chart on page 150.