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TORONTO, FRIDAY

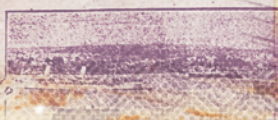
PRICE TWO CENTS

HALIFAX DEAD

HALIFAX, N.S., Dec. 6—Chief of Police Hanrahan to-
night and subsequent fire, destroying a large section of the
city says over two thousand. Twenty-five teams loaded

Y SHAT RED
Y EXPLOSION

After 100 in Ruins as
Building Shook



Dear Uncle Murray,

Little I thought when I wrote
a couple of weeks ago, that I'd
be writing now under such
altered circumstances. I know
you are all very anxious to get
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to let you know just all about
the things that have happened
since I last wrote to you.

ETHEL BOND WORKSHEETS



ETHEL BOND

Biography



Ethel Bond was born in Halifax in 1888. Her parents were Alexander (1858–1917) and Margaret (née Kellough) Bond (1858–1903). After graduating with a BA from New Brunswick's Mount Allison University in 1911, Ethel moved back to Halifax. She was a practising Methodist and lived adjacent to the Kaye Street Methodist Church, which she regularly attended. Here she presumably met Frederick Hockin, the son of a former minister. Although they were engaged to be married, Hockin was killed in July 1917 while fighting in the First World War. Disaster struck again in December 1917, when the Halifax Explosion destroyed her house (and much of her neighbourhood) and killed her father. After the Explosion, Ethel moved to Winnipeg, where she became involved in social welfare, and studied the subject at the University of Manitoba. At the same time, she became close with Frederick's younger brother, Harold. The two married in 1919 and had a son, Alan. She died in 1958.



Above: Ethel Bond (young adult), c. 1911
(private collection of Koralee King).



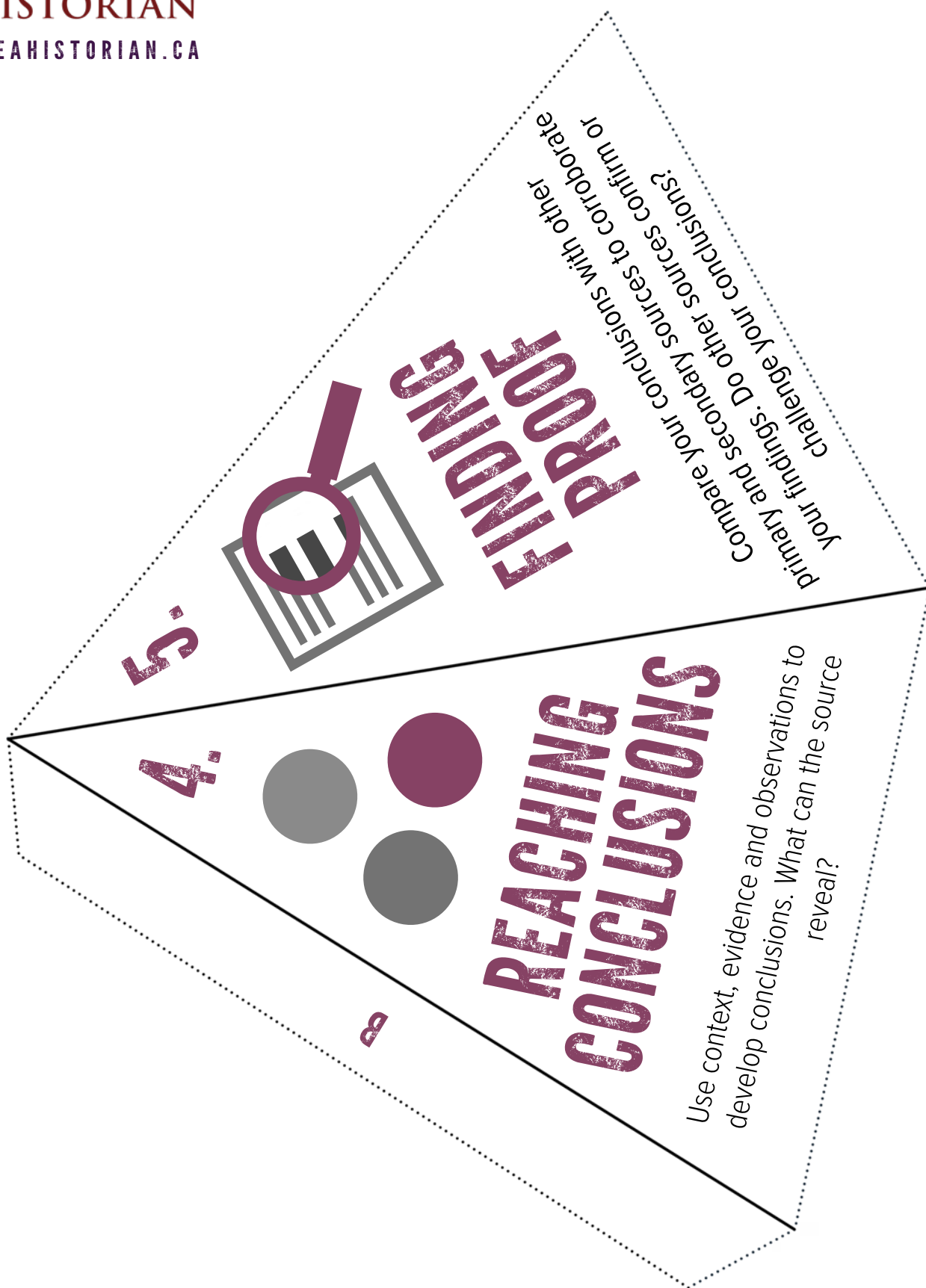
Above: Bond Family, c. 1900 (private collection of Koralee King).

3D PYRAMID: 5 STEPS TO ANALYZE PRIMARY SOURCES

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Cut along dotted line
2. Fold along solid line
3. Connect tab A to Section 5
4. Connect tab B to section 3







Use this worksheet to support the 'Exploring' exercise in Activity 4 of *Think Like a Historian: The Halifax Explosion Education Guide*.

298 South Street
Halifax, N.S.
Dec. 16th 1917

Dear Uncle Murray,

Little I thought when I wrote a couple of weeks ago, that I'd be writing now under such altered circumstances. I know you are all very anxious to get some first hand, definite news from us and I'm going to try to let you know just all about things. It is very hard to write about it all and yet the later one leaves writing the harder it is to get at it.

You have bye [sic] this time got the wire Jean sent and also her letter so you know that the worst has happened to us. But really Uncle Murray when we see the suffering and agony of people and how one person after another has been cut up beyond recognition, lived awhile and then died, why we have a very great deal to be thankful for. Daddy, while he was killed and we simply do not know where to turn, is free from all this pain and suffering and he never knew what happened to him.

The morning of the disaster Bid [nickname for sister Bertha] was late getting up and Daddy and I had had our breakfast and family prayer. Miss Newcombe was coming to sew and I was in a hustle, so when we came out into the kitchen Daddy picked up our sugar tin from the pantry floor and went to the mill to fill it. I went to the front door to get the morning paper and had merely reached the door when I was knocked down, stunned. Things kept coming on me and I got a bang in my chin and I really thought that it was all up with me. Everywhere it was pitch black and coming as it did out of a clear beautiful morning, I immediately thought the magazine in Wellington had blown up. The first thing I remember is scrambling up out from under things and climbing up the remains of the stairway to Bertha. She was standing in the upper hall just by the sky-light, dark closet door and blood seemed dripping from everywhere. She had been in the bathroom and was blown from the toilet clean out into the hall and I think her cuts were from the glass on that big picture hanging there. Her left leg up above the knee was cut in a number of places. Her face seemed all cut and she had two teeth knocked off. You see she only had her underclothes on so she was pretty well exposed.

A heavy blue bathrobe was blown completely off and she didn't see it after. She says she saw the church collapse before she herself was knocked out but I have no recollection of anything beyond the one big crash. When we got some clothes for Bid and I saw she was alive, I went as fast as I could to Daddy. You see I knew where he went and I crawled over things and got to the ruins. The barn was flat. The mill was in the same state. I don't know where things were but everything had collapsed. I couldn't hear a sound and called frantically but go[t] no answer. I thought that he might be stunned and pinned down so he couldn't move so I began to move boxes and things and when I looked down his body was right at my feet and everything was quiet. Oh, I can't tell you how I felt. It was all so dreadful and the moans and crys [sic] that rent the air will ring in my ears for ages. Something, we don't know just what, struck Daddy on the head, making a very deep cut and causing instant death. His head was bleeding terribly and we could do nothing. The heart action was completely stopped and his head from the concussion and loss of blood was even then cold. Bid came and we lifted a couple of things off but the crys [sic] of the living who needed help were so insistent that we simply had to leave and help them. Fires started as soon as the explosion came and we were forced to act quickly. Our house did not

catch immediately. Killams were calling. Mr. K. was in bed – diphtheria – and the kiddies were out here at Seymour St with Theakstons. Mrs Killam was in the cellar at the time and thought she had done something amiss with the furnace and it had blown up.

She had a very hard job getting out and strained herself badly. Mr K. was blown out of bed and could not do much to help himself. The whole back of their house was slid around and the upper floor was blown down on a slant so Bid and I guided him as he slid down in his night clothes. We got him on to a mattress Mrs K threw down and covered him with blankets while Mrs K got some clothes for him: We left them and went over the field to the parsonage, not expecting to see one of them alive. Mr Swetnam was out and trying to get little Dorothy out. Mrs Swetnam and Carmen both were killed. Little Dorothy was unhurt but she was in a little hole where it seemed impossible to get her out. Her father got down [in the] cellar and got an old saw and tried to saw through the big sill but he would saw a bit and then thrown [sic] down the saw in despair. She was sort of in a triangle made by the east wall falling up the hill and was so pinned in her head could not get out through the whole [sic]. The poor child had whooping cough too and had a spell while in her prison. He would not let us try up the wall for fear something would fall and crush Dorothy and when I told her she'd have to push her head through, some how that it was a matter of life or death, he told me not to tell her any such thing. The back of the house was on fire by then and we got desperate so Bid put all her weight on a piece of wood sticking out and between the three of us we pulled the child out. Nothing could be done for those in the ruins as the fire drove everyone away.

One poor woman in the old Gibson house was alive, pinned under the stove, upstairs. The house was burning and another woman was in our field like a maniac. We could do nothing for the woman in the house only pray that unconsciousness would come to her before the fire reached her. It was heart rending and we could do positively nothing to help her. We took the Swetnams back to our ruins and got them some clothes and tried to gather something together. If the fire had not come we could have saved a great deal. Young St was all ablaze and the houses opposite us on Kaye St were in the same condition. We grabed [sic] coats mostly as they were the only things in sight. Upstairs, we could get into the bathroom, Bertha's front room and the upper hall. All the other rooms were all demolished. I went to my room but all I could reach was my old fur lined coat packed in its box with moth stuff. All my clothes and everything on my dressing table, in fact nothing presented itself to me. Everything was a confused mass of stuff and was piled so against the door that I couldn't get in. The whole back of the house was blown off and broken water pipes covered me with dirty water and stuff. Downstairs the parlour were [sic] in the same state. Really we could find nothing and we were ordered away or we'd be so hemmed in by fire we'd not get away alive. Bid opened the safe and took out everything. She tore open some two sofa pillows and emptied everything into these for bags. We each had new plush coats (mine not paid for) and they were both in the spare room closet—burned. Uncle Murray I can't tell you how we got away but we joined the crowds of people, cut and bleeding terribly and as we went we put our coats on those who needed clothing. The sights I saw were terrible. Really Daddy was far better off than so many. He was ready to die. His faith in God was always an example to us and when we know he went to Heaven without feeling pain or knowing the agonies that some people have known we feel comforted. Had I been killed when I was knocked down I'd never have suffered, any at all. The suffering came when I came back to consciousness and realized everything. It was so hard to leave Daddy's body and yet we could not do anything else. We got up to the top of the hill in the open. Bertha left in an auto with Mr Killam for the Theakstons. Then came frantic crys [sic] and warnings to run west to the woods as fast as we could as the magazine in the Barracks would blow up in any minute. Imagine the feelings of those lying on doors for stretchers and some just lying on the ground. But I'm not going to harrow up your feelings any more. Mrs K, Evelyn, (Rev.) Mr and Mrs Laird (Mrs K's sister and husband from P.E.I) walked as far west as we could then turned south and made for Seymour St. Soldiers stopped us everywhere and ordered us to stop and get in the open. In time we got here and finally landed in Rod McDonald's field up back of the Golf Links next to Marlboro Woods. One thing after another happened and finally we with Billy Page a lad from near Brandon who is on the Niobe landed at Mr John Sutherlands here at 298 South St. You remember Barnstead and Sutherlands? Jim Rhind is Mrs S's brother. Here we are and nothing will induce us to go to Aunt Libbie's or Fred Walkers. Fred was very anxious and indeed we drove up there last Sunday but the association of things there was too much for us and we had to come back before we'd been there three hours. He lives in a new flat on Hunter St. It is a new street pauallel [sic] with Robie running from Willow to Cunard up next to Windsor St. We had been there only two Sundays before with Daddy and had gone over the whole place and had seen all

their wedding presents. It was more than Bid could stand so we came away. It is terrible in town. No glass anywhere. All the shop windows are boarded up and we get the feeling that the buildings will fall on us.

I can't begin to tell you the full extent of the ruined district as I don't really know. George Bowen[s] case is terrible. He had two children killed, Clara about thirteen and little Alfred the dearest little pet about five. Mrs Bowen was very badly hurt and suffered intensely. She had one leg amputated and they were so sure she'd live. After a few days of terrible agony (or so we heard) she died and George and Jamie are broken hearted. They are leaving here tomorrow morning for Winnipeg so you'll probably see him.

Allisons are all alive. We saw Mr Allison and Lizzie this afternoon. Mr was O.K. Lizzie had her foot hurt and it was her first time out doors [sic]. She walked very lame and could only wear a big overshoe. Han was cut about the chest and face. She had to have several stitches. Mrs Allison had a big cut in her neck. Jean was the worst of that family and is still in hospital. Her arms are bandaged from wrists to shoulder blades and one leg was cut so badly it was feared it would have to come off. Lizzie told us tonight it was a great deal better. They have tubes in it draining it and now feel sure they'll save it. Her face too is badly cut. She was standing in front of a window and got it in bad shape. We haven't seen any Phillip's yet. They are all alive. I really can't tell you any details. Annie was 'phoning us and she has written you so you probably know now. Mrs Phillips has a very bad eye and I think it had to be removed.

The loss of sight has been terrible. Between 200 & 250 totally blind. An equal number have lost one eye. Mr Rod McDonald has lost one eye.

Albert and Uncle Andrew have been in. Glass was broken and a flower stand blown over at Uncle A's. Grandmother doesn't remember from one day to another what has happened. If we can and weather permits we may go up for Xmas but it depends on the lawyers and whether they need our signatures.

The McDonalds are all well and no injuries. The Birnstones are all alive. Old Mr Dibbon is alive but Winnie and the children are gone. Winnie's husband was in Dartmouth at the time. Flossie (Mosher) Townsend was killed. Grace Giffin escaped. She was blown through the roof and somehow landed alive and found Flossies [sic] baby. Stanley was out of time and Frank Townsend is wounded badly but will live. Emma (Knight) Howley her husband and little girl, and Minnie Knight all killed. Young John Hills, (Jessie will remember the cute little Ruth Hills and Margaret Hills.) he, his wife and three children all killed. Poor Arthur Hawkins was in Orrs (next to Mumfords store) and they can get no trace of him. Mr & Mrs Isaac Creighton, Belle Tummonds who married Camin Creighton and Gertie Tummonds, all have been killed. Dearie me, I could go on and on but I must not. Miss England is fine. We saw her this afternoon at Morton's. She is writing or has written to Alberta.

You might tell Mamie, Alberta, Harold or anyone who asks after us. We are well now and won't have a scar. Bid may have a pick on her nose.

We all are still dazed over it all and can talk of nothing else. You may see us when we get things settled for we can never stay in Halifax. We have no plans as yet.

Ethel.



Use this worksheet to support the '5Ws' exercise in Activity 4 of *Think Like a Historian: The Halifax Explosion Education Guide*.

WHO?	Who wrote the letter? To whom was it written?	
WHEN? AND WHERE?	When and where was the letter written?	
WHAT?	What is the letter about?	
WHY?	Why was the letter written?	

What further questions do you have?

ETHEL BOND

Annotated Letter

Use this worksheet to support Activity 4 of *Think Like a Historian: The Halifax Explosion Education Guide*.

298 South Street¹

Halifax, N.S.

Dec. 16th 1917²

Dear Uncle Murray,³

Little I thought when I wrote a couple of weeks ago, that I'd be writing now under such altered circumstances. I know you are all very anxious to get some first hand, definite news⁴ from us and I'm going to try to let you know just all about things. It is very hard to write about it all⁵ and yet the later one leaves writing the harder it is to get at it.

You have by[sic] this time got the wire⁶ Jean sent and also her letter so you know that the worst has happened to us. But really Uncle Murray when we see the suffering and agony of people and how one person after another has been cut up beyond recognition, lived awhile and then died, why we have a very great deal to be thankful for.⁷ Daddy, while he was killed and we simply do not know where to turn, is free from all this pain and suffering and he never knew what happened to him.⁸

The morning of the disaster Bid [nickname for sister Bertha]⁹ was late getting up and Daddy and I had had our breakfast and family prayer.¹⁰ Miss Newcombe was coming to sew and I was in a hustle, so when we came out into the kitchen Daddy picked up our sugar tin from the pantry floor and went to the mill to fill it. I went to the front door to get the morning paper and had merely reached the door when I was knocked down, stunned. Things kept coming on me and I got a bang in my chin and I really thought that it was all up with me. Everywhere it was pitch black and coming as it did out of a clear beautiful morning.¹² I immediately thought the magazine in Wellington¹³ had blown up. The first thing I remember is scrambling up out from under things and climbing up the remains of the stairway to Bertha. She was standing in the upper hall just by the sky-light, dark closet door and blood seemed dripping from everywhere. She had been in the bathroom and was blown from the toilet clean out into the hall and I think her cuts were from the glass on that big picture hanging there. Her left leg up above the knee was cut in a number of places. Her face seemed all cut and she had two teeth knocked off. You see she only had her underclothes on so she was pretty well exposed.

Bold passages indicate annotations for **context**.

Underlined passages indicate annotations for **inference**.

1. The South Street address served as Ethel's temporary home after the explosion, as she notes later in the letter.
2. Ethel Bond is writing 10 days after the Explosion.
3. Ethel is writing to her uncle, Murray Kellough (1874–1965), who grew up near Halifax but was living in Winnipeg in 1917. Murray was 14 years older than Ethel.
4. Letters were an important means of conveying immediate, first-hand experience in the wake of the disaster. The wording implies that Ethel expected Uncle Murray to have heard general news of the Explosion through the press or from others. Ten days after the Explosion, news had travelled across Canada.
5. This suggests Ethel's emotions were making it a struggle to recall the traumatic event and think through the events in detail.
6. We can infer that a telegram was sent to alert distant family and friends of who had survived and who had died in the Explosion.
7. We can infer that Ethel believed that she and her sister were lucky to walk away relatively unscathed, compared with the thousands who lost their lives or were seriously wounded.
8. We can infer from this that Ethel is reassuring herself and her uncle that her father died instantly, and that he is free from the suffering they are now going through.
9. Family members used nicknames for one another as a short-form and a term of endearment.
10. The morning of 6 December began as any other, with breakfast and family prayer.
11. A phrase used at the time to describe thinking that you were about to die. When Ethel was initially knocked down, she thought she was going to die.
12. Ethel draws a visual contrast between light and dark.
13. The magazine was a military arsenal for weapons and explosives at the Wellington Barracks, only two blocks from Kaye Street, where the Bonds lived.

A heavy blue bathrobe was blown completely off and she didn't see it after. She says she saw the church collapse before she herself was knocked out but I have no recollection of anything beyond the one big crash. When we got some clothes for Bid and I saw she was alive, **I went as fast as I could to Daddy. You see I knew where he went and I crawled over things and got to the ruins. The barn was flat. The mill was in the same state.**¹⁴ I don't know where things were but everything had collapsed. I couldn't hear a sound and called frantically but go[t] no answer. I thought that he might be stunned and pinned down so he couldn't move so I began to move boxes and things and when I looked down his body was right at my feet and everything was quiet. Oh, I can't tell you how I felt. It was all so dreadful and **the moans and cries [sic] that rent the air will ring in my ears for ages.**¹⁵ Something, we don't know just what, struck Daddy on the head, making a very deep cut and causing instant death. His head was bleeding terribly and we could do nothing. The heart action was completely stopped and his head from the concussion and loss of blood was even then cold. Bid came and we lifted a couple of things off but the cries of the **living**¹⁶ who needed help were so insistent that we simply had to leave and help them. **Fires started as soon as the explosion came**¹⁷ and we were forced to act quickly. Our house did not catch immediately. Killams were calling. Mr. K. was in bed – diphtheria – and the Kiddies were out here at Seymour St with Theakstons. Mrs Killam was in the cellar at the time and **thought she had done something amiss with the furnace and it had blown up**¹⁸ She had a very hard job getting out and strained herself badly. Mr K. was blown out of bed and could not do much to help himself. The whole back of their house was slid around and the upper floor was blown down on a slant so **Bid and I guided him**¹⁹ as he slid down in his night clothes. We got him on to a mattress Mrs K threw down and covered him with blankets while Mrs K got some clothes for him: We left them and went over the field to the parsonage²⁰ not expecting to see one of them alive. Mr Swetnam was out and trying to get little Dorothy out. Mrs Swetnam and Carmen both were killed. Little Dorothy was unhurt but she was in a little hole where it seemed impossible to get her out. Her father got down [in the] cellar and got an old saw and tried to saw through the big sill but he would saw a bit and then thrown down the saw in despair. She was sort of in a triangle made by the east wall falling up the hill and was so pinned in her head could not get out through the whole[sic]. The poor child had **whooping cough**²¹ too and had a spell while in **her prison.**²²

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14. After the Explosion, Ethel and Bertha ran straight to the mill to check on their father.

15. Ethel relays the auditory memories of the aftermath –not hearing anything at first, but then the air filling with moaning and crying.

16. Ethel and Bid prioritized those crying out for help over those who had already died.

17. Wood- and coal-fired ovens in houses were knocked over by the blast, spreading fires in many wood-frame homes in Halifax.

18. People couldn't make sense of the blast and what could have caused it.

19. Ethel describes a common experience after the explosion: helping friends and neighbours, and being helped by them.

20. The parsonage at the Kaye Street Methodist Church was just behind Ethel Bond's house. We can infer from her description of the property that the Bonds' neighbourhood was more suburban.

21. Whooping cough – a bacterial respiratory infection also known as pertussis – was common in the early 20th century. Before vaccinations were introduced in the 1930s, whooping cough posed a serious health risk and claimed the lives of many children.

22. Note the metaphor Ethel uses to describe the space where the child was trapped – a prison. Ethel also refers to the coughing fit, or spell, that the child had whilst trapped.

He would not let us try up the wall for fear something would fall and crush Dorothy and when I told her she'd have to push her head through, some how that it was a matter of life or death, he told me not to tell her any such thing.²³ The back of the house was on fire by then and we got desperate so Bid put all her weight on a piece of wood sticking out and between the three of us we pulled the child out. **Nothing could be done for those in the ruins as the fire drove everyone away.**²⁴

One poor woman in the old Gibson house was alive, pinned under the stove, upstairs. The house was burning and another woman was in our field like a maniac. We could do nothing for the woman in the house only pray that unconsciousness would come to her before the fire reached her. It was heart rending²⁵ and we could do positively nothing to help her.²⁶ We took the Swetnams back to our ruins²⁷ and got them some clothes and tried to gather something together. **If the fire had not come we could have saved a great deal.**²⁸ Young St was all ablaze and the houses opposite us on Kaye St were in the same condition. We grabbed[sic] coats mostly as they were the only things in sight. Upstairs, we could get into the bathroom, Bertha's front room and the upper hall. All the other rooms were all demolished. I went to my room but all I could reach was my old fur lined coat packed in its box with moth stuff. All my clothes and everything on my dressing table, in fact nothing presented itself to me. Everything was a confused mass of stuff and was piled so against the door that I couldn't get in. The whole back of the house was blown off and broken **water pipes covered me with dirty water and stuff.**²⁹ Downstairs the parlour were[sic] in the same state. Really we could find nothing and we were ordered away or we'd be so hemmed in by fire we'd not get away alive.³⁰ Bid opened the safe and took out everything. She tore open two sofa pillows and emptied everything into these for bags.³¹ We each had new plush coats (mine not paid for)³² and they were both in the spare room closet—burned. Uncle Murray I can't tell you how we got away but we joined the crowds of people, cut and bleeding terribly and as we went we put our coats on those who needed clothing.³³ The sights I saw were terrible. Really Daddy was far better off than so many. He was ready to die. His faith in God was always an example to us and when we know he went to Heaven without feeling pain or knowing the agonies that some people have known we feel comforted. Had I been killed when I was knocked down I'd never have suffered, any at all. The suffering came when I came back to consciousness and realized everything.³⁴

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23. As Ethel tried to convey the seriousness of the situation to young Dorothy, Mr. Swetnam tried to protect his youngest child from the severity of the situation. We can infer that this was to prevent Dorothy from panicking.

24. Ethel and the others were forced to leave behind many of the wounded as the houses burned. This hints at the large numbers who died as a result of, and in the aftermath of, the Explosion.

25. Ethel was aware that some neighbours would burn alive in their homes, and there was nothing she could do but "pray that unconsciousness would come" first. From this, we might also infer the importance of Ethel's religious faith.

26. Ethel may have been trying to alleviate feelings of guilt from not being able to help everyone.

27. Ethel begins describing her family's home as "our ruins," suggesting that, while their house didn't catch fire immediately, it was uninhabitable. Such language also reflects her emotional state and the degree of loss and grief experienced following the Explosion. Ethel was one of more than 6,000 people made homeless by the property damage caused by the Explosion.

28. This alludes to the fact that the fires came not long after the blast. As a result of the fires, the Bonds and many others lost the majority of their belongings. Relief stations set up around the city distributed food and clothing to those in need. Friends and families provided shelter to those who lost their homes, and community shelters were established in churches and theatres to house many others without shelter.

29. From this we learn that Ethel's house had modern amenities such as running water.

30. We can infer that soldiers, firefighters and others in Halifax feared the fire would spread to the Wellington Barracks magazine and cause a second Explosion. As a result, they ordered people away from their homes (west and south).

31. Having a safe in a residential home was not typical for this time. Owning a safe is a signal of the Bond's higher class position, compared with most of their neighbours. Ethel and Bertha emptied their safe of valuables, using the pillow covers from their sofa to transport everything. This reveals a survival nature in response to the crisis – ripping apart furniture to take what was needed.

32. The large snowstorm and winter weather that followed the Explosion meant that people needed to recover warm items of clothing. It was typical of the time for items to be put on lay-away or a payment plan. We may infer that Ethel felt a duty to repay the store for the coats, despite being destroyed, as she deemed it significant enough to mention.

33. Ethel and Bertha gathered the coats they could from their house, and shared them with those in need. This demonstrates their charity and willingness to help others.

34. Ethel writes of her father's faith in God, and her own belief in Heaven. She suggests that the reality of the aftermath of the Explosion is more painful than dying would have been.

It was so hard to leave Daddy's body and yet we could not do anything else. We got up to the top of the hill in the open. Bertha left in an auto with Mr Killam for the Theakstons.

Then came frantic cries and warnings to run west to the woods as fast as we could as the magazine in the Barracks would blow up in any minute. Imagine the feelings of those lying on doors for stretchers and some just lying on the ground. But I'm not going to harrow up your feelings any more.³⁵ Mrs K, Evelyn, (Rev.) Mr and Mrs Laird (Mrs K's sister and husband from P.E.I.) walked as far west as we could then turned south and made for Seymour St. Soldiers stopped us everywhere and ordered us to stop and get in the open. In time we got here and finally landed in Rod McDonald's field up back of the Golf Links next to Marlboro Woods. One thing after another happened and finally we with Billy Page a lad from near Brandon who is on the **Niobe**³⁶ landed, at **Mr John Sutherlands here at 29B South St.**³⁷ You remember Barnstead and Sutherlands? Jim Rhind is Mrs S's brother. Here we are and nothing will induce us to go to Aunt Libbie's or Fred Walkers. Fred was very anxious and indeed we drove up there last Sunday but the association of things there was too much for us and we had to come back before we'd been there three hours. He lives in a new flat on Hunter St. It is a new street parallel[sic] with Robie running from Willow to Cunard up next to Windsor St. We had been there only two Sundays before with Daddy and had gone over the whole place and had seen all their wedding presents. It was more than Bid could stand so we came away. It is terrible in town. **No glass anywhere.**³⁸ All the shop windows are boarded up and we get the feeling that the buildings will fall on us.

I can't begin to tell you the full extent of the ruined district as I don't really know. George Bowen['s] case is terrible. He had two children killed, Clara about thirteen and little Alfred the dearest little pet about five. Mrs Bowen was very badly hurt and suffered intensely. She had one leg amputated and they were so sure she'd live. After a few days of terrible agony (or so we heard) she died and **George and Jamie are broken hearted.**³⁹ **They are leaving here tomorrow morning for Winnipeg so you'll probably see him.**⁴⁰

Allisons are all alive. We saw Mr Allison and Lizzie this afternoon. Mr was O.K. Lizzie had her foot hurt and it was her first time out doors [sic]. She walked very lame and could only wear a big overshoe. Han was cut about the chest and face. She had to have several stitches. Mrs Allison had a big cut in her neck. Jean was the worst of that family

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35. Soldiers called for people to run from the devastated area to escape a second Explosion, which never came. By forcing people away from their homes, the soldiers inadvertently prevented them from treating and caring for the wounded who were unable to move. Ethel's use of the word "harrow" – which means to cause further distress – reveals that she does not want to explain further how horrible this was for fear of upsetting her uncle.

36. The HMCS Niobe was a Canadian Navy depot ship that spent most of the war in Halifax Harbour.

37. Immediately after the Explosion, people in relatively undamaged houses, especially in the more affluent South End of Halifax, offered to take in newly homeless strangers. Very few accepted the offer; as with Ethel and Bertha (Bid) Bond, who stayed in the South End with friends, most homeless Haligonians preferred to stay with people they knew.

38. The pressure from the blast of the Explosion shattered windows across the city.

39. This highlights the tragedy that people experienced, and emphasizes the scale of the damage and destruction caused by the Explosion.

40. Nova Scotians had long been leaving home to pursue opportunities in New England and Central and Western Canada. After the Explosion, Haligonians relied on their connections in other parts of Canada and North America, and many followed their friends and relatives out of the region.

and is still in hospital. Her arms are bandaged from wrists to shoulder blades and one leg was cut so badly it was feared it would have to come off. Lizzie told us tonight it was a great deal better. They have tubes in it draining it and now feel sure they'll save it. Her face too is badly cut. She was standing in front of a window and got it in bad shape. We haven't seen any Phillip's yet. They are all alive. I really can't tell you any details. Annie was 'phoning us and she has written you so you probably know now. Mrs Phillips has a very bad eye and I think it had to be removed. **The loss of sight has been terrible. Between 200 & 250 totally blind. An equal number have lost one eye.**⁴¹ Mr Rod McDonald has lost one eye.

Albert and Uncle Andrew have been in. Glass was broken and a flower stand blown over at Uncle A's. Grandmother doesn't remember from one day to another what has happened.⁴²

If we can and weather permits we may go up for Xmas but it depends on the lawyers and whether they need our signatures.⁴³

The McDonalds are all well and no injuries. The Birnstones are all alive. Old Mr Dibbon is alive but Winnie and the children are gone. Winnie's husband was in Dartmouth at the time.

Flossie (Moshier) Townsend was killed.⁴⁴ Grace Giffin escaped.

She was blown through the roof and somehow landed alive and found Flossie's baby. Stanley was out of time and Frank Townsend is wounded badly but will live. Emma (Knight) Howley her husband and little girl, and Minnie Knight all killed. Young John Hills, (Jessie will remember the cute little Ruth Hills and Margaret Hills.) he, his wife and three children all killed. Poor Arthur Hawkins was in Orrs (next to Mumfords store) and they can get no trace of him. Mr & Mrs Isaac Creighton, Belle Tummonds who married Camin Creighton and Gertie Tummonds, all have been killed. Dearie me, I could go on and on but I must not. Miss England is fine. We saw her this afternoon at Morton's. She is writing or has written to Alberta.

You might tell Mamie, Alberta, Harold⁴⁵ or anyone who asks after us. We are well now and won't have a scar. Bid may have a pick on her nose.⁴⁶

We all are still dazed over it all and can talk of nothing else. You may see us when we get things settled for we can never stay in Halifax. We have no plans as yet.⁴⁷

Bold passages indicate annotations for **context**.

Underlined passages indicate annotations for inference.

41. The blast shattered windows across the city. The broken glass that flew through the air blinded or partially blinded hundreds of people, and killed many others. In the aftermath of the Explosion, the Canadian National Institute for the Blind was established.

42. We may infer from this that Ethel's grandmother was suffering from dementia. Some of the extended family were living outside of Halifax, but still nearby.

43. The family may have had legal business to take care of, potentially settling family business or signing death certificates.

44. We can infer that Uncle Murray was originally from Halifax, as Ethel provides a list of people that he would have known.

45. This may refer to Harold Hockin, Ethel's future husband.

46. A "pick on her nose" may refer to a small nick in the skin, or the need for Bid to have a splint in her nose after hitting her face on the ground in the blast.

47. Ethel hints that she and Bertha might move to Manitoba, where they have family; remaining in Halifax would be too painful.

Ethel.

Source:

<https://novascotia.ca/archives/explosion/narratives.asp?ID=14>

Transcribed from original English by Historica Canada.



Use this worksheet to support the 'Reaching Conclusions' exercise in Activity 4 of *Think Like a Historian: The Halifax Explosion Education Guide*.

As you study the details of the letter, develop conclusions based on what you observe and what you can infer. What can we learn about Ethel Bond's experiences during the Halifax Explosion from her letter?

Record your observations, hypotheses, and conclusions in the chart below.

Observations	Hypotheses	Conclusions
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		



Use this worksheet to support the 'Finding Proof' exercise in Activity 4 of *Think Like a Historian: The Halifax Explosion Education Guide*.

Letter from Bertha Bond (Ethel Bond's sister) to Alexander (Sandy) Wournell, 10 December 1917.

Did you receive my cable? __

298 South Street

Halifax, N.S.

Sandy my dear,

10th Dec '17

It may be beyond my power of thought to collect enough to put on paper but I want you to see my hand-writing first because that may convince you that I am all right. Both Ethel + I had a most miraculous escape and for that we are so thankful, but Sandy when we got out of the house and found our dear dad, it made us – well, I can't describe the sensation I had. He had just gone into the mill to get some sugar which was in a [bbl?] inside the door and there we found his body. Our greatest comfort is that his death was instant and that he was ready to go. You know, Sandy that neither Ethel nor I are of a collapsing nature so as hard as it was we had to cover the body and leave it. I wasn't half dressed. We had been up late the night before so that morning Ethel said for me to take another nap and she would get the breakfast so I did and didn't wake til about nine o'clock. Then I hurried into my under clothes + corsets, stockings, + an old pair of boots which I didn't button. Then I put on a heavy bath-robe + went into the bath room and I was there when the explosion occurred [sic]. The first shock didn't stun me but the church fell + I saw it go. Maybe a shell struck it or maybe it was simply the concussion then in another instant I was knocked into the hall, face down and walls + I don't know what all began to tumble in + as I felt the stuff piling up on my back I was sure that was the end of me and all I was thinking was of you. I remember saying or rather thinking, your name over + over but when I hit the floor first and for a few seconds I was stunned + if I had never lived I'd never have known what happened [to] me or felt any pain but as it was I began to move + wiggle out from under the stuff. My face and head was bleeding considerably – I could tell by the look of the floor + also by the way the blood was dripping off my chin but for all that my knees didn't shake a particle. I called Ethel + at the same time she called me + she came scrabbling up what was left of the stairs + met me at the top. She says she never expected to see my face whole again by the look of it then and I felt sure too that it would have to be patched up but I might as well tell you now that I don't expect to have a scar – only two new upper front teeth to replace the ones that were broken off.

The robe I had on went I don't know where – I didn't see it so I picked up a flannel dress + put it over my head as I followed Ethel to go outside. The whole place was like a black fog gradually lifting and the screams of the children + women + those crying for help was simply terrifying. I jumped out the side of the house and I've already told you what we did then. Killam's house was all to pieces and Mr. K. blown out of his bed. When he saw me he begged me to come put something around him. I went but couldn't get to him anyway. At last I heard Mrs. K. She had just crawled out of the cel[lar] so she said "I'm all right Bertha, and I'll get Fred down" so then I found some more that needed looking after + finally landed at the parsonage. I didn't expect to find a soul there but I did. Little Dorothy was unhurt but so completely pressed in that her father was doing his best to saw her out. The other two where [sic] gone. I left him + looked up some other people you don't know + then got back to Killams in time to help him get a bed for Mr. K in our field. By now the fires were blazing in pretty good shape + one glance at the parsonage showed that urgent help was needed there. So I said Ethel we've got to go there quick. I'll never forget Mr. Swetnam's look when he spoke and if we hadn't gone hid [sic] never in this world have been saved.

Then it was time to run so we ran to our place and grabbed what clothes we could. We got upstairs and I thought of my ring. It had been in my jewel box on the bureau. I found it among the plast[er] but the tray had gone. In a minute I located it but no ring. I just [knew] I had to get it I did + also my watch which was in the mess. We had no time to hunt for anything more or any way of gathering or carrying it so as we went we picked up a few clothes. I picked up enough odd pieces to finish dressing later – all the old coats in the coat room we took. We rigged out the two Swetnams + were ready to leave when I dropped my load + went to see if the safe was anywhere. It flashed into my mind that if it had been a shell from sea another might come so I opened it up first try – ripped open a couple of little cushions + crumpled everything in the safe into these rude bags – shut the door and when we got out Ethel didn't know what I had done. It was a dreadful hustle. At the top of the hill we sat our bundles down and gave away all our coats but our fur-lined ones which we had on. Someone gave me a bandage to tie up my head and just then a Red Cross man came along and he took me in hand and sat me down to be quiet. Of course I looked a great deal worse than I was + nobody knew me. Then I was put in an auto and taken to Theakstons [sic] on Seymour St. Just as we left everybody was ordered West or South as there was danger of the Wellington magazine but we are thankful to say that danger was checked in time. Down at Seymour St. I wouldn't go in the house but got in the middle of the St. and sat down + buttoned up my boots. It seemed a terribly long time before the rest came down then we moved along to a big field beyond South St. There we found Mrs. Clarke + Hilda from Russel St. and had any amount of looking after by the people around here. About one o'clock word came that we could go into the houses so we went to Mrs. Frank Hillis's which was right there on Waterloo St. There was one stove that could stand a fire so she made us a cup of tea + after the rest of us dressed ourselves right + tied up our cuts. After lunch who should come along looking for us but little Billy Page with his left arm and his head ____ [not legible] up and then we went to the V.G. Hospital and got some proper looking after. On our way up South St. we saw Mr. + Mrs. Sutherland out putting up double windows to keep out the wind. We told them who we were and they insisted on us coming back to stay with them + while we were at the hospital we decided that that was what we'd do not only because we'd rather be there but because the Hillis's had such a crowd. Mrs. S. you know is Jim Ryan's sister and she is just like a mother to us and it is lovely being here with her. She wants us to stay with her until we know what we are going to do. I don't know yet what's ahead of us but we are not worrying. It's not [sic] use. Jim R. came down Sat. and he did more for us than I can tell you just now. Isn't it strange, Sandy, how we happened to move here? Archie found us and I was awfully glad to see him. He was in the Carleton House at the time and when he got to our place we had gone but Alice Grant told him Ethel + I were on the hill. When he got there the order had come to clear out so it was awhile before he located us. He had been to Dartmouth and found your brother's folks before he came here + it was a good job because J.R. couldn't get across at all but he could tell Renie what we knew.

We can hardly realize yet what it means to us and that so many of our friends are all gone + that all our side of Hfx [sic] is gone + burnt to the level but we are looking at our trouble as best we can with never a waver because there are so many worse off than we are. I want you more than anything else in the world to feel right close but, Sandy, I'm keeping up ____

- Your ____ little ____ (Bertha)



Use this worksheet to support the 'Finding Proof' exercise in Activity 4 of *Think Like a Historian: The Halifax Explosion Education Guide*.

In pairs, compare Ethel Bond's letter to Bertha Bond's letter. Compare your findings in the chart and fill in the blank spaces with other points of comparison you can make from the letter.

Point of comparison	Source 1: Ethel Bond Letter	Source 2: Bertha Bond Letter
1. Physical description of Explosion		
2. Emotional description of Explosion		
3.		
4.		
5.		

Consider the following questions as you review your findings:

- How is Ethel's perspective on the Halifax Explosion different from her sister's?
- How is it the same?
- Are the accounts more similar or different?
- What are the most important similarities or differences? Are there inconsistencies?
- What does this tell you about the reliability of individual sources?
- What does comparing perspectives reveal to you about the Halifax Explosion?
- Are there still any gaps in your understanding of the experience of different people living and working in Halifax at the time?
- What accounts or whose voice are you still seeking?