

A Sticky, Sweet Disaster

by Margaret Ryan

Some people said they heard a groaning sound as they walked by the tank. One woman said she heard loud knocking. It was as if someone was inside the huge tank trying to escape. Was something illegal going on?

No, there was nothing illegal happening. No one was trapped inside the tank. It was just molasses. Molasses is a thick syrup made from raw sugar. There was more than one million gallons of molasses in the tank!

A factory called the Purity Distilling Company owned the molasses. It was stored in a large tank near the boat docks in Boston, Massachusetts. The tank, 50 feet high, was made of iron plates that were held together with metal bolts called rivets.

At about noon, on Wednesday, January 15, 1919, the pressure inside the tank became too great. So one by one, the rivets popped, and the tank broke apart. Then more than one million gallons of warm molasses poured out. The river of molasses moved with tremendous force.


Waves of molasses rolled through the streets. The waves were 15 to 30 feet high. Nothing in their path could escape. The molasses flood destroyed houses. It caused damage to cars. It ruined a section of train tracks. Sadly, the Great Molasses Flood of 1919 also claimed 21 lives and injured 150 people.

The city of Boston was left with the stickiest mess in history. Plain water wouldn't wash the molasses away. As a result, the city had to use salt water from the harbor. It took six months before all traces of the molasses disappeared. But people said a sweet smell stayed in the air for much longer.

Some say that on a hot summer day in Boston you can still smell sweet molasses in the air!

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Resource Links

 RDI Book 1: p. 349

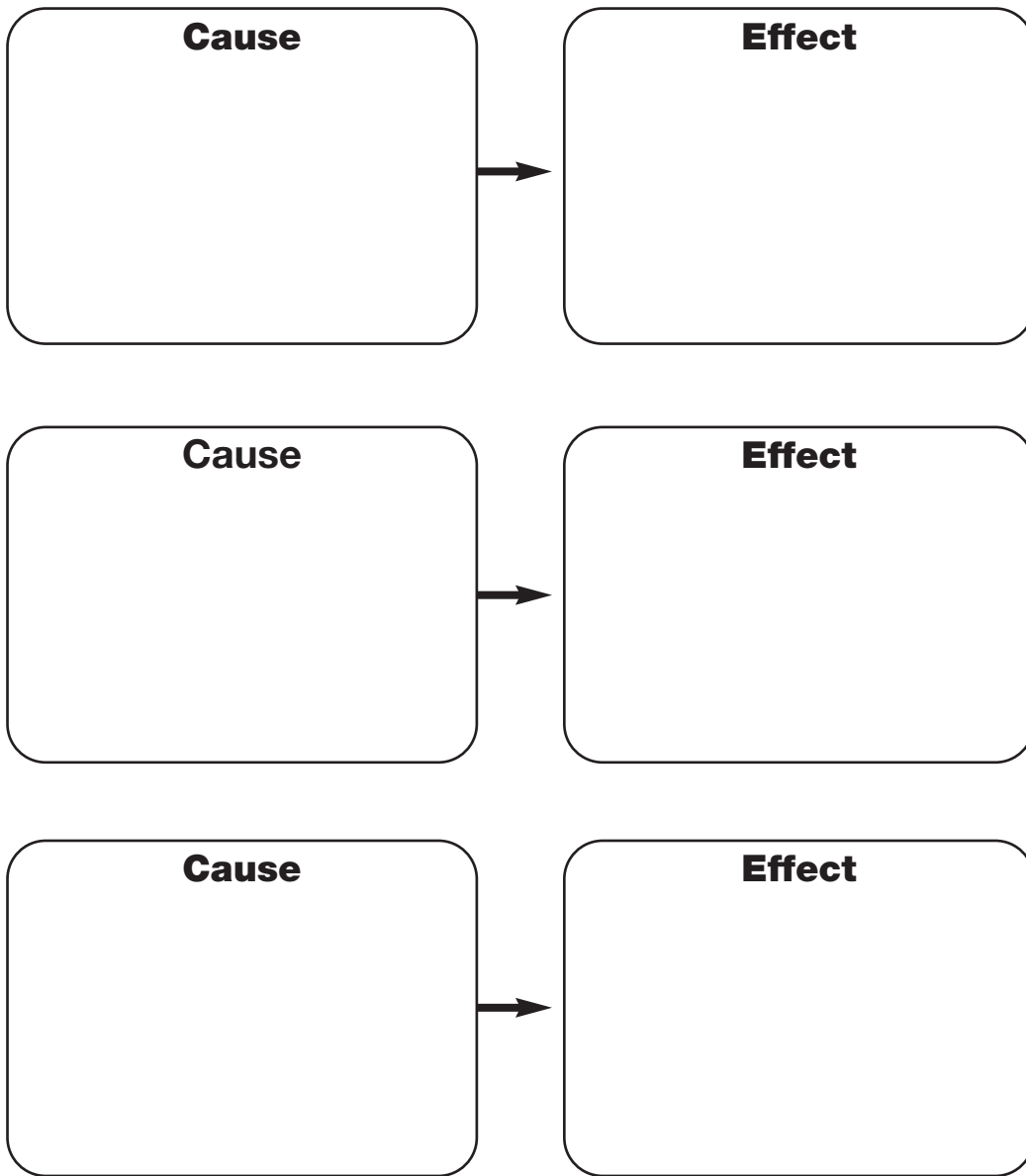
SAM Keyword: Cause

Cause and Effect

A **cause** is the reason something happened. It answers the question: *Why did this happen?* An **effect** is the result. It answers the question: *What happened?* Words such as *because, why, caused, since, and as a result* often signal a cause-and-effect relationship.

Use this chart to identify causes and effects.

Passage: _____



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