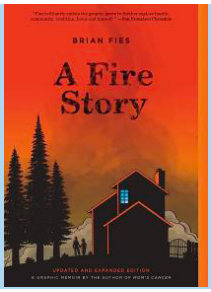
Discussion Guide




*A Fire Story*
Brian Fies

Abrams ComicArts
2019
192 pages
ISBN: 978-1419746826

Disasters and Emergencies

**Summary**

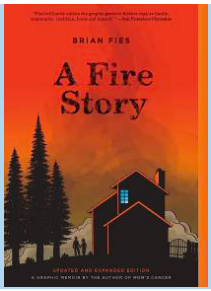
Early on the morning of Monday, October 9, 2017, wildfires burned through Northern California, resulting in 44 fatalities. In addition, 8,900 structures, including 6,200 homes, were destroyed. One of those homes belonged to author and illustrator Brian Fies and his family. In the days that followed, Fies hastily pulled together a firsthand account of his experience in a twenty-page online comic, entitled *A Fire Story*, that went viral. Less than a year after the fire, Brian Fies expanded his webcomic into a full-length graphic novel, including environmental insight and the stories of others affected by the disaster.

**Questions**

1. The first part of the book is an adaptation of Fies's original webcomic (which is reprinted at the end of the book on pages 179–183), "written and drawn in the few days immediately after the fire." How are these pages different from the rest of the book? How does this set the tone in the book? What do these pages reveal about Fies's character and personality?
2. Consider how Fies describes the scene upon discovering that his house and neighborhood have been destroyed. What does his description of the scene tell us about his thought process in the moment? What do you think your reaction might be in this same moment?
3. How does the tone and pace of the narrative change after Fies and his wife arrive at their daughters' home? How does this shift affect the reading experience?
4. In many moments throughout the book, Fies reconciles an inner dispute between what he feels and what he knows to be logical. What are some examples of these moments in the book? Did any of these moments have a particular impact on you? Why or why not?
5. Fies's storytelling oscillates between factual accounts and striking emotional commentary, often quickly and without warning. What does this do for the reader's experience? What does this tell us about Fies?
6. What are your thoughts on the vignettes from the other fire victims? How do they make you feel, and what do they make you consider that is different from the rest of the book? In what ways do they add and/or take away from Fies's story? Why do you think they are included where they are? Why did Fies choose to make them visually different than the rest of the story?
7. Since Fies's experience losing his home to the wildfires, the COVID-19 pandemic has wreaked havoc across the United States and much of the rest of the world. What parallels can you draw between the two experiences? What specific elements from A Fire Story can you relate to having experienced during and after the pandemic?

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8. What is a surprising consequence of the fire that you may not have thought about before reading A Fire Story? What elements of Fies's post-fire experience do you think would be trickiest to navigate? Why?
9. In A Fire Story, Fies includes experiences from many different people. What demographics are missing throughout the book? Why do you think that is?
10. What purpose do the "A Day in the New Life" interludes serve in the larger narrative? How are they different than the rest of the book?
11. In "Mary & Larry's Fire Story," Larry states how after the fire, "Everything was still there. It just changed shape." How does this theme weave itself through the rest of the book?
12. On page 114, Fies states, "I'm self-aware enough to recognize the classic symptoms: sleeplessness, loss of appetite, mental lapses, mood swings. Sadly, understanding trauma doesn't really help relieve it." At what points in the narrative does this idea present itself most prominently? At what points does it present itself more subtly?
13. On page 132, Fies says, "Being part of something so big makes perspective elusive." What do you think he means by this? Where and how does this tension between differing perspectives show up throughout the book?
14. Throughout the book, Fies and his family interact with many volunteers and aid workers. What can we learn from Fies's experience with these people about being compassionate, empathetic, and effective volunteers and aid workers helping those in crisis?
15. Why do you think Fies chooses to jump two years forward at the end of the book?
16. Are there any specific pieces of text or insights from the book that you found poignant or that could help you in your own life? How so?

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