

History Detectives



INVESTIGATING THE TITANIC DISASTER

Dear History Detective,

We would like you to find out who was *really* responsible for the Titanic sinking. Why did it happen and how can we stop this from ever happening again?

Your group has been given an envelope containing a number of sources. There are two types of sources:

- **Primary sources** – these are pieces of information from the time, from people who were there. A photograph of the Titanic is a primary source, because it was taken in 1912, by someone who was there.
- **Secondary sources** – these are pieces of information written after the event by people who were not there. A painting of the ship sinking is a secondary source, because nobody on the lifeboats was painting at the time it happened!

We can tell whether sources are primary or secondary by looking at the **provenance** – the bit of writing underneath. This tells us what the source is, when it is from and sometimes who it is by.

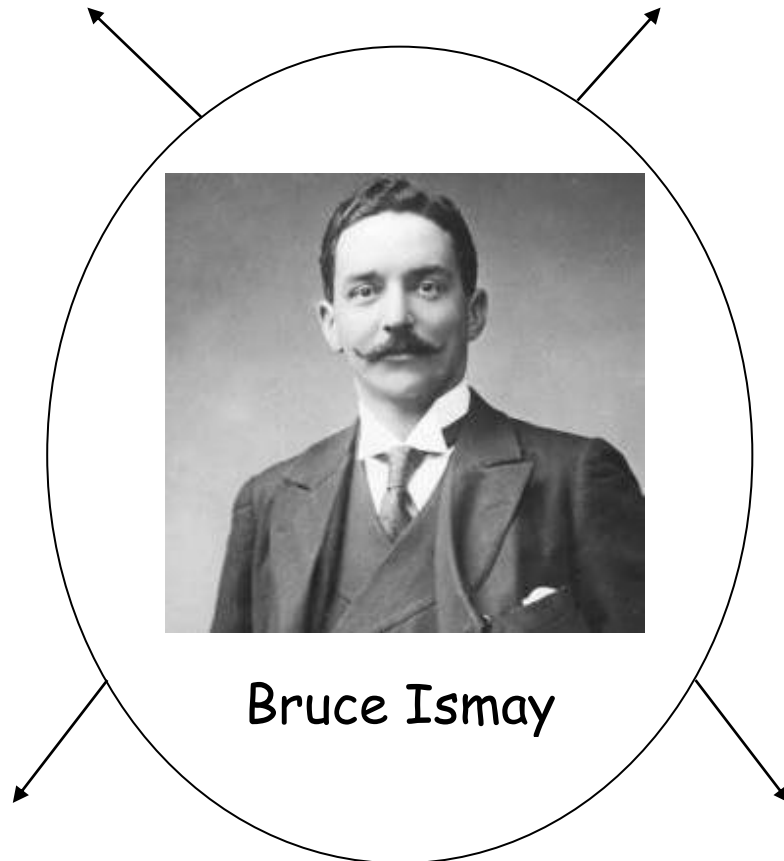
You have a number of challenges to complete.

1. Use the sources to answer the following questions in your booklet.
2. Read the statements to decide who you think was responsible for the sinking.
3. Write an argument, persuading me why your chosen crew member was responsible for the loss of life in the disaster.
4. Imagine that you were on board the Titanic. Write your own diary entries describing the ship hitting the iceberg, the struggle for the lifeboats and finally, the sinking.

Good luck, detectives!

| <i>Question</i> | <i>Answer</i> |
|--|---------------|
| How long and wide was Titanic? | |
| Why was the ship claimed to be 'unsinkable'? | |
| What facilities (things to do) were there for first class passengers on the Titanic? | |
| What might people have had for lunch on Titanic's last day? | |
| How many people were on the Titanic altogether? | |
| Why did the lookout not see the iceberg coming? | |
| How many life boats were there? | |
| What was the name of the ship that rescued passengers in the lifeboats? | |
| How many people were reported to have died the next day by the New York Times? | |
| How many people actually died? | |
| How could the disaster have been avoided? | |

Now study the five statements from crew involved in the disaster. What role did each person play in the sinking?





Captain Smith



Officer Murdoch



Captain Lord



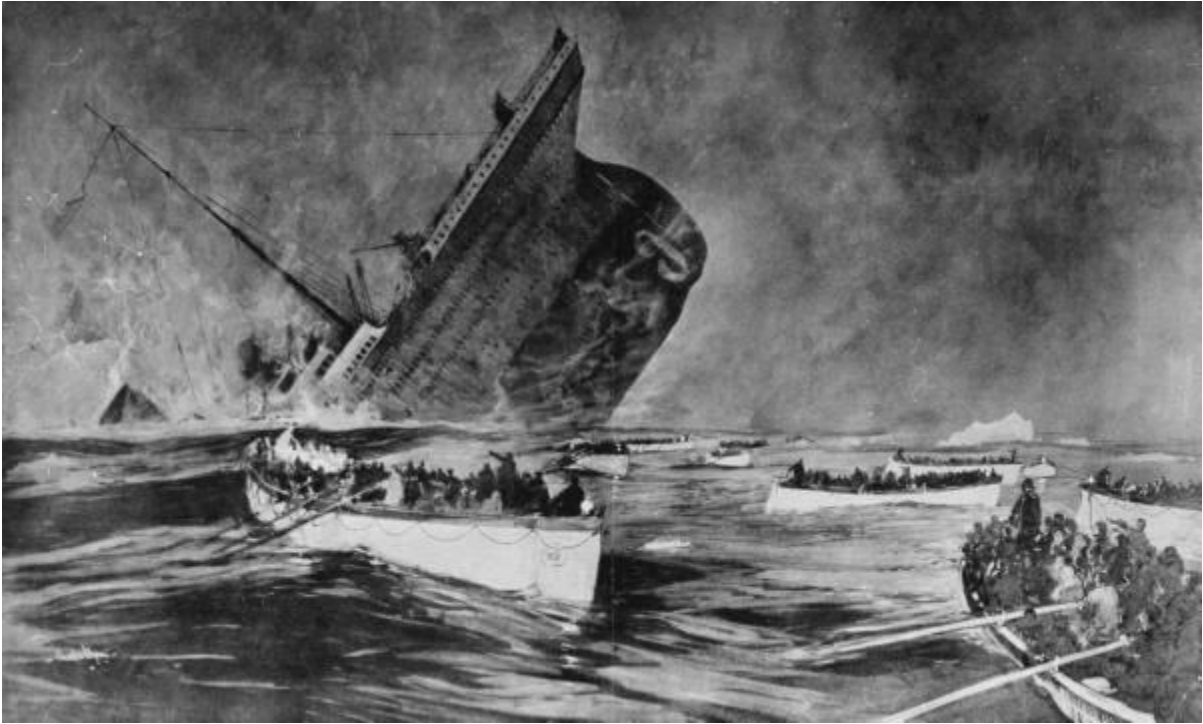
Frederick Fleet



Drawing by Henry Reuterdaahl, based on survivors' stories, 1912



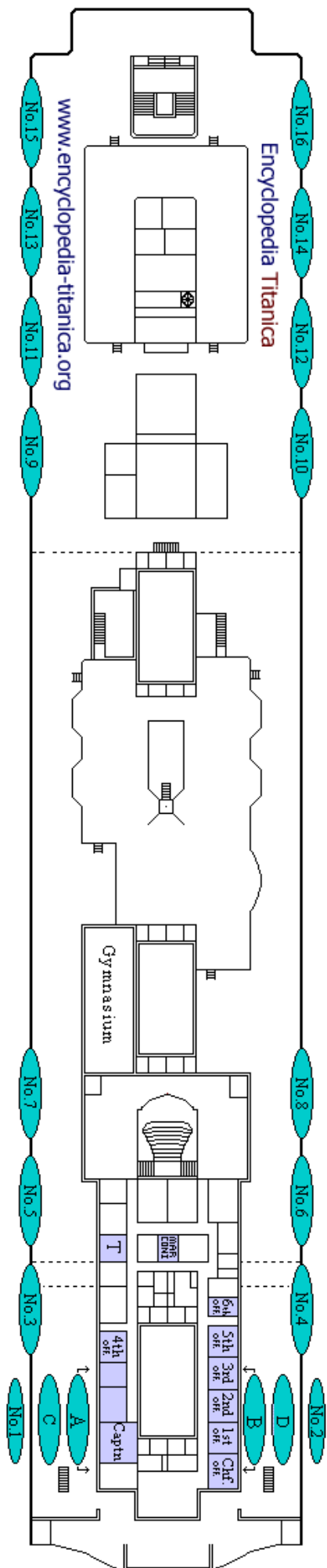
Drawing by Henry Reuterdaahl, based on survivors' stories, 1912



Drawing by Henry Reuter Dahl, based on survivors' stories, 1912



Survivors, photographed from the rescue ship, Carpathia, April 15th 1912



Modern drawing of deck plan showing lifeboats, 2012

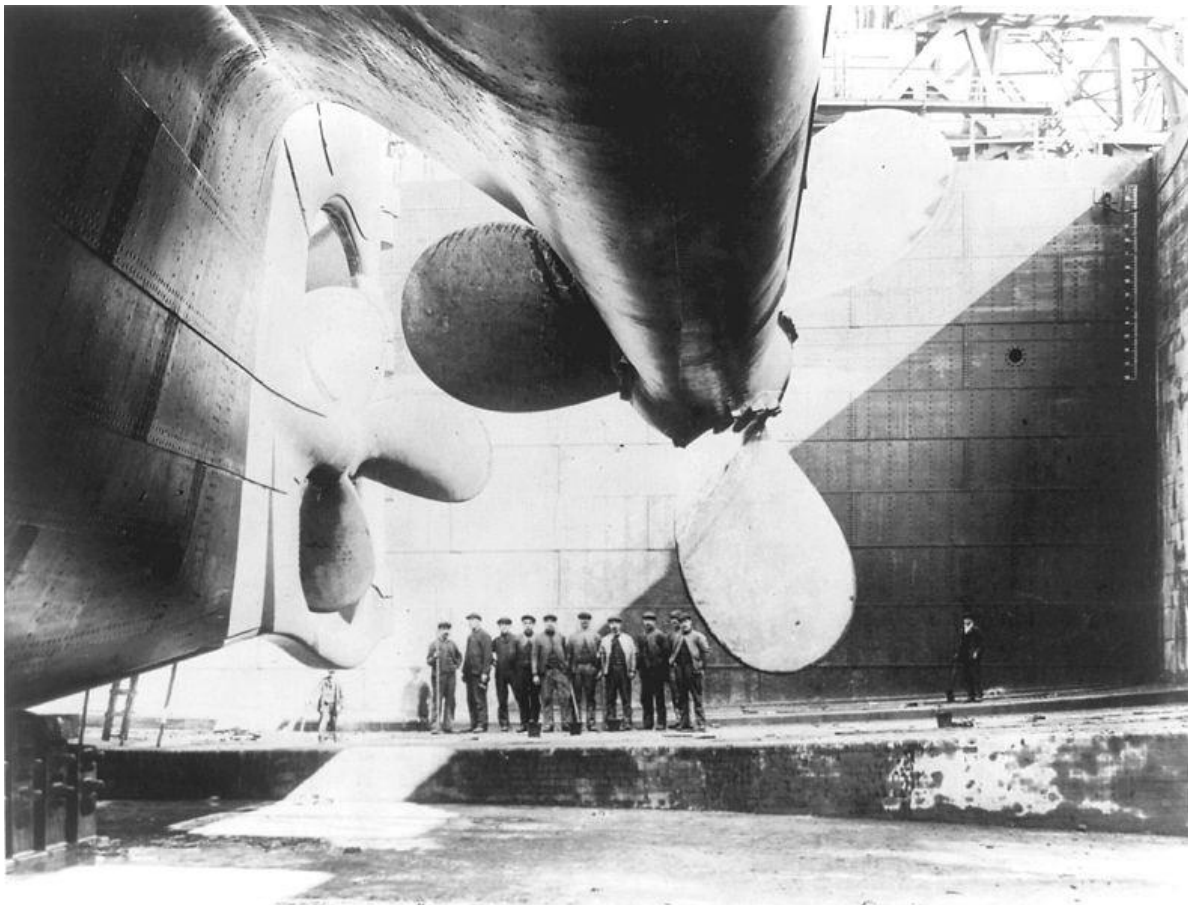
Fact File

- The Titanic was 882 feet, 8 inches long (the length of three football pitches), and 92 feet, 6 inches wide.
- The Titanic's whistles could be heard 100 miles away.
- The Titanic had a heated swimming pool on its decks, the first ever on a boat.
- The R.M.S. in R.M.S. Titanic stands for Royal Mail Steamer. Besides carrying passengers, the Titanic's main purpose was carrying mail between Europe and America.
- It's a tradition to "christen" a ship by breaking a bottle of champagne on its bow, but the Titanic was never christened.
- The Titanic struck the iceberg at 11:40 p.m. on Sunday, April 14, 1912. It sank 2 hours, 40 minutes later at 2:20 a.m. on Monday, April 15.
- The Titanic could carry 3,547 people. It was carrying 2,229 passengers on its first and final trip.
- Women and children were rescued first. At least one man disguised himself as a woman to get onto the lifeboats.
- The ship the Californian was just 6 miles away from the Titanic. Its radio operator went to bed ten minutes before the Titanic sent out distress signals. The Titanic fired distress flares, too, but people on the Californian thought they were just having a party.
- After the Titanic disaster, many changes were made to improve ship safety. All ships must carry enough lifeboats for every passenger on board. Ships' radios are manned 24 hours a day. Regular lifeboat drills are held, and speed is reduced in ice, fog, or any other dangerous weather conditions.

Taken from Titanic Encyclopaedia website, 2012

| <u>Passenger Information</u> | |
|-------------------------------------|-------|
| Passengers on board | 1'316 |
| Crew on board | 913 |
| Total on board | 2'229 |
| Died | 1'516 |
| Suvised | 713 |

Taken from Titanic Encyclopaedia website, 2012



One of Titanic's three colossal propellers, 1911



Titanic's rudder - used to steer the boat. Tiny compared to the rest of the ship! Did this affect the steering? 1911



Frederick Fleet – Look Out (survived)

It was nearly midnight. I was on the night shift in the crow's nest. The sea was as smooth as a pond and the sky brilliant with stars. It was freezing. All I could see was my breath. I didn't have my binoculars because they'd been locked in a cupboard and no-one knew where the keys were.

Suddenly, I spotted the towering grey mountain of ice dead ahead. It came out of nowhere. I would have seen it sooner if I'd had a pair of binoculars!

I rang to the bridge as fast as I could. "Iceberg, right ahead!" I shouted down the telephone. And then I waited. The ice berg was only a mile away. There was nothing I could do now. I braced myself against the mast for the collision.

**Was Frederick Fleet most responsible for the
loss of life on Titanic?**



Bruce Ismay – Manager of White Star Line (survived)

Some people say they heard me persuading Captain Smith to go faster. This is not true. I have always said that it is not the speed of the ship that matters, but how luxurious it is. It was certainly not my fault that the ship was travelling so fast when we hit the iceberg!

Titanic had more lifeboats than it legally required. I was even happy to include four collapsible boats. It still wasn't enough, I accept that, and I'm terribly sorry for those who didn't get to a boat, but the ship sank so quickly, we wouldn't have had time to fit any more people in anyway!

I helped as many people as I could into boats before I got in one myself. There were no more women or children around. I felt that I could be of more help to the survivors than to those still on the ship. From now on, White Star Line will include enough boats for everybody.

**Was Bruce Ismay most responsible for the
loss of life on Titanic?**



Edward Smith – Captain (died)

I was a highly experienced captain. In fact, I even helped to avoid a disaster in Southampton as the Titanic set sail! The size of the ship meant that when it moved forward, it sucked a smaller boat towards it. It was thanks to me that we swerved out of the way in time!

The only reason we were travelling so quickly when we hit the iceberg was because the water was so calm and the sky so clear. My wireless operator did mention that there was ice in the area, but it is usually much smaller than the berg we hit. If I'd have known, I'd have slowed down, of course!

When we sank, I helped as many women and children into boats as I could. The last anyone saw of me was helping a child into a boat, then drifting away into the icy waters...

**Was Captain Smith most responsible for the
loss of life on Titanic?**



William Murdoch – Chief Officer (died)

I was on the bridge when the call came through - "iceberg right ahead!" I immediately ordered the ship to turn starboard (left) in the hope that we would avoid hitting it. I then sent a call through to the engine room, telling them to reverse the engines to slow us down. I closed all of the watertight doors below decks to seal any punctured compartments.

There are some people who think that if we had hit the iceberg straight on, it would only have damaged the front of the ship and we'd stay afloat. But my training has always taught me to try to avoid hitting icebergs.

Maybe if I hadn't reversed the engines, we would have turned quicker, I don't know! But I did everything I could.

**Was Officer Murdoch most responsible for the
loss of life on Titanic?**



Stanley Lord – Captain of S.S. Californian

We had stopped our ship, the S.S. Californian, for the night because the sea was filled with pack ice.

Before we went to bed, our telegraph operator sent a message to a large ship about ten miles away, warning it that there was ice about. It was the Titanic. They told us to stop messaging them, as they had a backlog of messages to send to passengers' relatives in New York.

Later that night, my Second Officer noticed rockets being fired from the Titanic. He tried to signal using a flash light, but got no response. We never thought to switch the radio on. Several more rockets were fired, and the ship did look rather strange. Then, gradually, it seemed to disappear, as though it was sailing away... I decided to try to get in touch with them in the morning.

I didn't know it had sunk, otherwise I would have helped!

**Was Captain Stanley Lord most responsible
for the loss of life on Titanic?**