Lesson 3:Who was most to blame for the sinking of the Titanic?

Recall Quiz

1. What was one design flaw for the Titanic that contributed to it being such a tragedy?
2. Which company owned the Titanic?
3. What was J Bruce Ismay alleged to have ordered the captain to do?
4. Why didn’t the California (a nearby ship) help?
5. How much would a first class ticket have been in modern money?

Lesson 3:Who was most to blame for the sinking of the Titanic?

Recall Quiz

1. What was one design flaw for the Titanic that contributed to it being such a tragedy? Watertight Bulkheads
2. Which company owned the Titanic? White Star Line
3. What was J Bruce Ismay alleged to have ordered the captain to do? Increase ship's speed
4. Why didn’t the Californian (a nearby ship) help? The distress signal was never received as Californian turned their radio off
5. How much would a first class ticket have been in modern money? £850 in 1912 equating to £105,000 in today's money

Lesson 3:Who was most to blame for the disaster of the Titanic?

Objectives:

To construct an interpretation as to who was most to blame for the Titanic disaster

To compare and critically analyse British and American enquiries

CORE VOCAB		
Culpable	When someone is to blame for something	
Interpretation	The different viewpoints people have of an event	

Who was to blame for it being such a major **disaster?**

Captain Smith
The Ship's Captain

Thomas Andrews
The Ship's designer

William Murdoch
First Officer

J Bruce Ismay
Chairman of White Star Line

Frederick Fleet
The Lookout

Stanley Lord
Captain of the Californian

Captain:
Innocent folk, held in our
care, living their lives,
dreaming their dreams.
Dreaming... their dreams....

Problem	Who was to blame? Why?	What could have been done differently?
Many lifeboats were being launched with very small numbers of people being on them. If they had been filled up, many more lives could have been saved. Only 50 members of the crew had been trained to man the lifeboats and there had been no drill		
The ship only had 20 lifeboats, which was only enough for about half of the passengers. There should have been more, but they were removed to make more space for first class passengers		
Bruce Ismay was overheard suggesting to Captain Smith that he should sail the ship at full speed so as they could reach New York sooner than expected. This meant that the ship did not have enough time to steer clear of the iceberg.		
The lookouts were not provided with binoculars as these had been locked away. The ship was also not fitted with a search light, making it impossible to see the iceberg.		
The nearest ship, the California, sent out an ice berg warning. However, they then turned their radios off, meaning the Titanic could not contact them. When they saw the flares, they assumed they were fireworks and ignored them. If they had noticed the distress signals, there would have been enough time to save everyone on board		
First Officer William Murdock had been left in charge of the ship. When he was notified of the ice berg straight ahead, he steered to try and avoid it, meaning the ice berg hit the side of the ship, smashing it open. Some experts believe if they had hit it head on, they would have broken through it and caused no damage to the ship.		
There were some major errors with the design and build of the ship. One of these is that poor quality rivets were used to connect the panels, which broke easily. Secondly, the water tight compartments were smaller than they should have been to make more room for first class passengers.		
Although Smith was an experienced Captain, he had never sailed a ship as large as the Titanic. He nearly collided with another ship in the first few days, and had previously had this same problem when captaining the Olympic. He also ignored 7 iceberg warnings and was actually asleep when it hit the iceberg.		

1. Who do you think was to blame?

2. Why?

American Inquiry

The report's key findings were:
•A lack of emergency preparations had left *Titanic*'s passengers and crew in "a state of absolute unpreparedness", and the evacuation had been chaotic: "No general alarm was given, no ship's officers formally assembled, no orderly routine was attempted or organized system of safety begun."
•The ship's safety and life-saving equipment had not been properly tested.
•*Titanic*'s Captain Edward Smith had shown an "indifference to danger [that] was one of the direct and contributing causes of this unnecessary tragedy."
•The lack of lifeboats was the fault of the British Board of Trade, "to whose laxity of regulation and hasty inspection the world is largely indebted for this awful tragedy."
•The SS *Californian* had been "much nearer [to *Titanic*] than the captain is willing to admit" and the British Government should take "drastic action" against him for his actions.
•J. Bruce Ismay had not ordered Captain Smith to put on extra speed, but Ismay's presence on board may have contributed to the captain's decision to do so.

The report was strongly critical of established seafaring practices and the roles that *Titanic*'s builders, owners, officers and crew had played in contributing to the disaster. It highlighted the arrogance and complacency that had been prevalent aboard the ship and more generally in the shipping industry and the British Board of Trade. However, it did not find White Star Line negligent under existing maritime laws, as they had merely followed standard practice, and the disaster could thus only be categorised as an "act of God"

British Inquiry

The report found that *Titanic*'s sinking was solely the result of colliding with the iceberg, not due to any inherent flaws with the ship, and that the collision had been brought about by a dangerously fast speed in icy waters:
The Court, having carefully inquired into the circumstances of the above mentioned shipping casualty, finds, for the reasons appearing in the annex hereto, that the loss of the said ship was due to collision with an iceberg, brought about by the excessive speed at which the ship was being navigated."

It also found that the lookout being kept was inadequate given the navigational hazards *Titanic* faced, and that the ship's officers had been complacent. There were too few lifeboats available and they had not been properly filled or manned with trained seamen, though they had been lowered correctly. The inquiry concluded that *Californian* "could have pushed through the ice to the open water without any serious risk and so have come to the assistance of the *Titanic*. Had she done so she might have saved many if not all of the lives that were lost

The Mersey report did not condemn the failures of the Board of Trade, the White Star Line or *Titanic*'s captain, Edward Smith. The report found that although Smith was at fault for not changing course or slowing down, he had not been negligent because he had followed long-standing practice which had not previously been shown to be unsafe. It concluded that Smith had merely done *"only that which other skilled men would have done in the same position".*

1. Who does the American Inquiry blame for the Titanic disaster? Why?

2. Who does the British Inquiry blame for the Titanic disaster? Why?

3. Why do you think these might have different interpretations about who was to blame?

Remembering Titanic

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