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Saving Culture from Disaster



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Protecting the Past

The past is all around us. It can be found in art and in buildings. It can even be found in street signs and in personal items. History is everywhere you look. But what happens when there is a disaster, such as a flood or an earthquake? History can be lost. It can be washed away. That is why it is key to protect the past during times of **crisis**.

People called **conservators** (kuhn-SUHR-vuh-tuhrz) visit places hit by disasters. They look for items that represent the local **culture**. The items might be pieces of art. Or they might be parts of buildings or items from a destroyed museum.

Conservators know the importance of the past. They know that the past tells us where we have been.

The past reminds us of our progress. It tells us how our culture has grown and changed.



A conservator carries art pulled from rubble.

A conservator looks at an iron sculpture under a microscope.



Conservators work to save art after an earthquake.

Haiti Earthquake

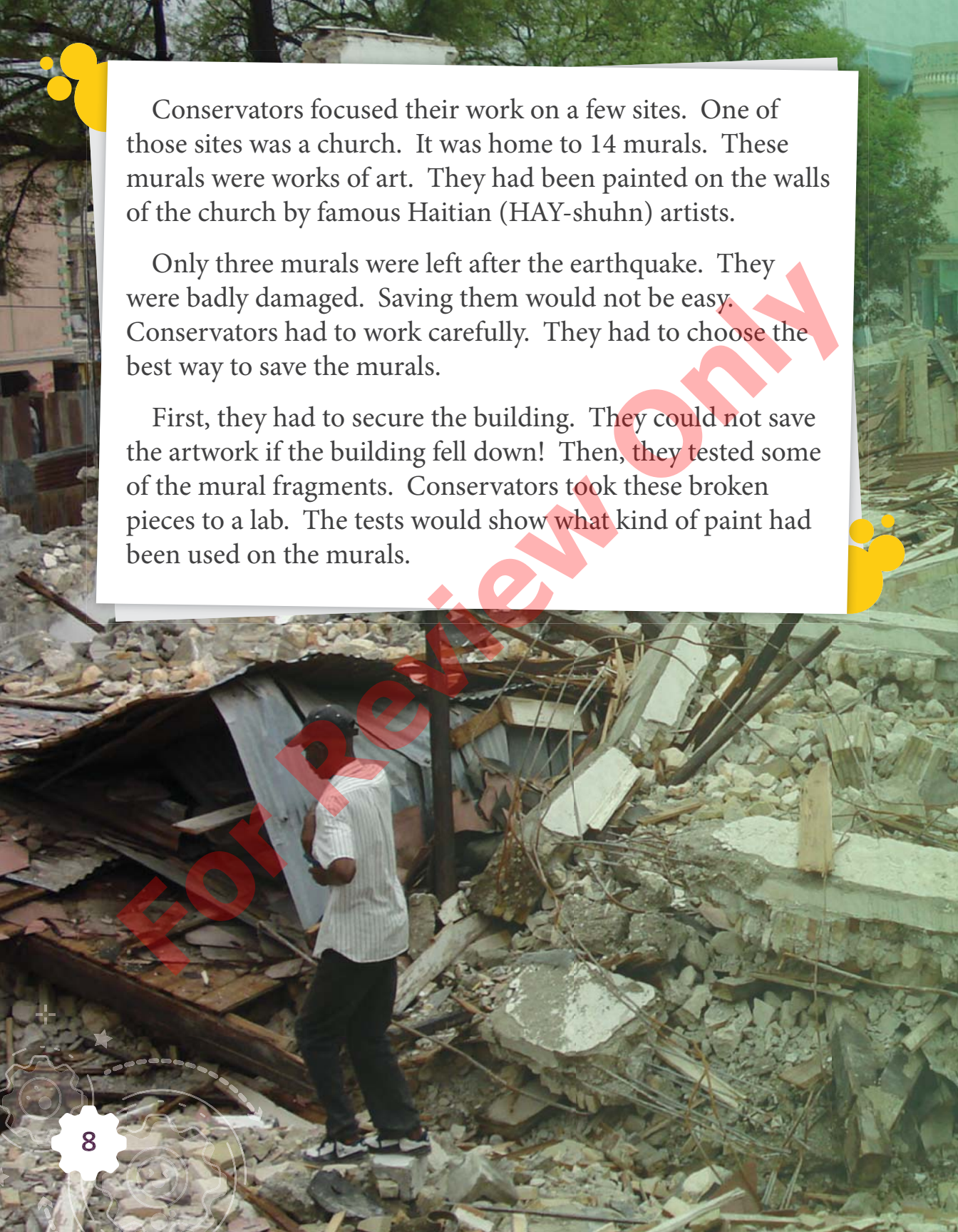
Conservators work in tough places. They work in places that have had major disasters. In 2010, Haiti (HAY-tee) faced great loss. A strong earthquake shook the ground. It knocked down many buildings.

Haiti has a big **population**. Most of the people who live there are poor. Many of them do not have jobs. They were not prepared to deal with a disaster.

Over 200,000 people died in the quake. Many were left homeless. But it was not just lives and homes that were lost. Culture was also lost. Museums were destroyed. Libraries and churches were ruined. Each of these places was home to books and artwork. Much of the country's culture was lost. But some things were saved. Conservators worked hard to find and save key pieces of culture.



Almost one-third of the people in Haiti were affected by the earthquake.



Conservators focused their work on a few sites. One of those sites was a church. It was home to 14 murals. These murals were works of art. They had been painted on the walls of the church by famous Haitian (HAY-shuhn) artists.

Only three murals were left after the earthquake. They were badly damaged. Saving them would not be easy. Conservators had to work carefully. They had to choose the best way to save the murals.

First, they had to secure the building. They could not save the artwork if the building fell down! Then, they tested some of the mural fragments. Conservators took these broken pieces to a lab. The tests would show what kind of paint had been used on the murals.



TECHNOLOGY

Building Support

Structural engineers came to the church before any work was done. Their job was to make sure the building was safe. They saw a few problems. There were long cracks in the church walls. The cement that held the walls in place was also crumbling. They decided that scaffolding needed to be built. Scaffolding is made of wooden planks and metal poles. It provides support to buildings so workers can do their jobs without the walls falling down.

STEAM CHALLENGE

Define the Problem

A major storm is headed your way. Flooding is expected. The director of an art museum asks you to protect an old photograph. Your task is to design a way to protect a small photograph from the damage a flood might cause.



Constraints: You may use four different materials to build something that will protect your photograph.



Criteria: Your device will keep the photo dry for 30 seconds when put underwater.





Research and Brainstorm

How might a flood damage a photograph? What are some ways that conservators have saved items from water damage? What types of materials do they use?



Design and Build

Sketch your design. What purpose will each part serve? What materials will work best? Build the model. Put a photo in your model to test it out. If you don't have a photo, use a drawing on a piece of paper.



Test and Improve

Place your protected photo into an empty container. Fill the container with water. Once it is full, leave the photo for 30 seconds. Remove and observe the photo. Did it work? How can you improve it? Modify your design, and try again.



Reflect and Share

Could you protect the photo with fewer materials? What materials might work better? How would you change your plan if it was a larger piece of artwork?

