

# How Did The Titanic Sink?

Reading Comprehension

DIFFICULTY : MEDIUM

Many people are unaware of the true events which led to the sinking of the Titanic over 100 years ago. At 11:40pm on Sunday 14th April 1912, the fateful ship is just four days in to its maiden voyage when it fatally strikes an iceberg. What led to these tragic events and how did the ocean liner end up at the bottom of the Atlantic?

The RMS Titanic, which is the largest passenger liner in service of the time, departs Southampton, England on April 10, 1912 travelling to New York City, across the Atlantic Ocean. When it sets sail, it has an estimated 2,224 people on board – a mixture of rich and poor seeking new life in America. Until the evening of the 14th April, the journey was going to plan, picking up new passengers at various stops and the excitement and anticipation building on board. At approximately 11:40pm Frederick Fleet, who is the lookout, sees the iceberg in the distance of the ice-laden waters in the remote Atlantic Ocean and rings the bridge to alert them of the impending problem. During this time, the ship's signals are sent out repeatedly to neighbouring vessels to attempt communication but they are not heard. Although the crew on-board are alert to the potential threat in the vicinity, the speed was not reduced as this reflects standard maritime practice. Shockingly there is only 30 seconds before the ship collides with the iceberg at a speed of around 22.5 knots, tearing a hole (with an estimate of 230 feet in length) in the starboard (right-hand) side.

Within minutes of hitting the iceberg, the boat begins to take on thousands of tonnes of sea water through holes in its hull. The man who designed the ship – Thomas Andrews – is on board and goes to examine the damage. He tells the captain that the ship is going to sink as the first five compartments, which are the only measure to stop sudden flooding, are already filled before the captain knows anything. The crew begin to co-ordinate their plan of action to stop the passengers from panicking.



Within the hour, at around 12:30am on 15th April, the captain (Edward J Smith) orders the lifeboats to be lowered. Once lowered, in just 10 minutes, passengers begin their escape, with women and children (from first-class only) occupying the first available spaces in the lifeboats; consequently, passengers from the second and third-class areas begin to rebel. Distressingly, the lifeboat system is only designed to ferry passengers to nearby rescue vessels, not to hold everyone on board at the same time; therefore with the water from the lower decks rising rapidly and the chance of help reaching them in time, there is no safe refuge for all passengers and sadly some lifeboats are launched before being at full capacity.

Following that, with the rescue attempts still continuing in earnest, the real implications of the collision begin to show as the ship's lights go out – causing further widespread panic and worry. The vast amount of water mixed with electrics caused this, meaning the ship is now even harder to track down should anyone be able to respond to SOS signals. By 2:10am, the bow (the front of the boat) is now completely underwater causing the back of the boat to lift up and 18 out of the 20 lifeboats have been lowered.

Just 7 short minutes later, the weight of the front proves too much for the rear as it is forced further out of the water. The ship's hull isn't strong enough to withstand this pressure and devastatingly snaps in two. At this moment, those who know they have no chance of gaining a place on board the lifeboats, scramble to the rear of the boat or sadly jump in to the icy waters. They know there is no way to change their fate and even those who were alive to start with die as a result of hypothermia.

Due to sheer weight, the front quickly disappears beneath the surface of the ocean within 2 minutes and the back half follows soon afterwards. This tragedy – which from start to finish took less than 3 hours – is responsible for the deaths of over 1500 people.

By 2.24 am, the remains of the Titanic travel 2.4 miles to reach the bottom of the Atlantic Ocean. The wreck of the ship is still there today.

## Questions

1. To what city was the RMS Titanic sailing?

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2. Complete the table:

Time:	What was happening?
11:40pm	<hr/> <hr/>
12:30am	<hr/> <hr/>
2.24am	<hr/> <hr/>

3. Clarify the meaning of the following words from the text:

various	
collides	
widespread	

4. Tick whether the statement is true or false:

Statement	True	False
The front of the ship sank quickly because it was heavy.		
When the ship sinks, it is still whole.		
The lifeboats were full when they were lowered from the RMS Titanic.		

5. Draw lines to match the part of the ship to its description.

bow

the right-hand side of the ship

starboard

the only measure to stop sudden flooding

first five compartments

the front of the ship

6. How did Thomas Andrews know the ship was going to sink?

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**7. Write one thing that happened to the people who were unable to get into a lifeboat?**

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**8. 'Once lowered, in just 10 minutes, passengers begin their escape, with women and children (from first-class only) occupying the first available spaces in the lifeboats; consequently, passengers from the second and third-class areas begin to rebel.'**

**Explain why the passengers from second and third class areas began to rebel?**

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**9. What happened after lifeboats were being launched that caused people to panic even more than they were already?**

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**10. Name one thing that would have helped the Titanic but sadly went wrong after the ship had hit the iceberg.**

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## Answers

1. To what city was the RMS Titanic sailing?

*New York City*

2. Complete the table:

Time:	What was happening?
11:40pm	<i>Frederick Fleet sees the iceberg in the distance.</i>
12:30am	<i>The captain orders the lifeboats to be lowered.</i>
2.24am	<i>The remains of the Titanic travel 2.4 miles to reach the bottom of the Atlantic Ocean.</i>

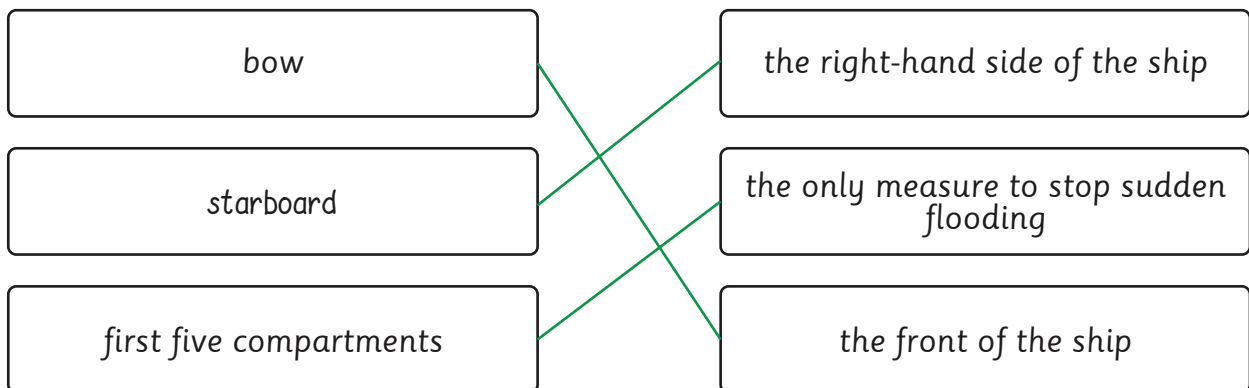
3. Clarify the meaning of the following words from the text:

various	<i>More than one</i>
collides	<i>To hit something when moving.</i>
widespread	<i>Something spreads over a large area or number of people.</i>

## 4. Tick whether the statement is true or false:

Statement	True	False
The front of the ship sank quickly because it was heavy.	✓	
When the ship sinks, it is still whole.		✓
The lifeboats were full when they were lowered from the RMS Titanic.		✓

## 5. Draw lines to match the part of the ship to its description.



## 6. How did Thomas Andrews know the ship was going to sink?

*Because the first five compartments were already full of water.*

## 7. Write one thing that happened to the people who were unable to get into a lifeboat?

*They jumped into the water*

*They died from hypothermia*

*They raced to the back of the ship*



8. 'Once lowered, in just 10 minutes, passengers begin their escape, with women and children (from first-class only) occupying the first available spaces in the lifeboats; consequently, passengers from the second and third-class areas begin to rebel.'

**Explain why the passengers from second and third class areas began to rebel?**

*An answer that discuss the injustice of the first class passenger being allowed to access the lifeboat's before anyone else.*

9. **What happened after lifeboats were being launched that caused people to panic even more than they were already?**

*The lights on ship went out.*

10. **Name one thing that would have helped the Titanic but sadly went wrong after the ship had hit the iceberg.**

*The ship's signals being heard by other vessels or the lifeboats being filled to full capacity.*