

Primary Source Reading 10-2 ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Opening Day at Coney Island

About the Selection

The *New York Times* ran a front-page review of the opening of the new and improved Coney Island amusement park in 1904. By 1900 Coney Island was already popular as an escape from city pressures—500,000 people visited Coney Island on a typical summer weekend. The improved Coney Island in 1904 seemed more designed as an escape from reality and a place where

Reader's Dictionary



pugilistic: having to do with boxing

the world's exotic flavors were available to anyone who paid the price of admission.

GUIDED READING

As you read, note what made Coney Island attractive to so many people. Then answer the questions that follow.

CHAPTER 10

They took the lid off Coney Island last night, and a quarter of a million men and women got a glimpse of a swaying, rocking, glittering magic city by the sea. It was Coney Island's opening day, but Coney Island never before experienced such a bewildering opening . . . there were more dazzling, wriggling, spectacular amusements offered than had ever before been collected together at any one place at any time.

Picturesque Luna Park, with its added acres of new attractions, and the much-talked-about Dreamland presented a bewildering mixture of men, animals, and things that words can barely describe. They had been gathered from every corner of the globe. . . .

With the new order of things came herds of elephants, genuine Nautch girls, Indian rajahs, snake charmers, Eskimos, Indians, Japs, Russians, Chinamen, acrobats, jugglers, performing camels, pugilistic horses, and bears that could ride a horse. . . .

Sixteen of the newly acquired acres of land in Luna Park were set aside for the reproduction of the glittering Durbar of Delhi. . . . The magnificence of the scene was such as to make those who witnessed it imagine they were in a genuine Oriental city. In fact, there was a charm about the streets of Delhi that kept the people spellbound until the exhibition ended. Five thousand people at a time saw this remarkable show, and then went back to see it a second time.

The Trip to the Moon, Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea, the chutes, the scenic railway, and the other features of Luna Park were all patronized. A new feature, known as the whirl-the-whirl, proved to be a money coiner. In that boats are arranged to sail through the air in circular fashion at a height of almost a hundred feet. . . .

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Primary Source Reading **10-2** (continued) ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

... Police Commissioner McAdoo ... [said] that the new Coney Island was clean, moral, and magnificent.

Probably one of the most interesting features is the Dwarf city, with its thousand tiny inhabitants. Storekeepers, policemen, firemen, musicians, wagon drivers, and others who live there are all dwarfs. ...

The Incubator Building in Dreamland ... has a gable with a large stork overlooking a nest of cherubs. It is a scientific demonstration of how the lives of babies can be saved. It cost \$36,000, and the building is full of babies.

Source: *New York Times*, May 15, 1904.

READER RESPONSE

Directions: Answer the following questions on the lines below.

1. What effect did the Durbar of Delhi have on visitors to the park?

2. What was the purpose of the Incubator Building?

3. **Critical Thinking** What words used to characterize groups of people would the *New York Times* not use today?

4. **Critical Thinking** What do you think the Police Commissioner meant when he stated that Coney Island was moral?
