

Lesson Plan: A Place Where Hurricanes Happen (or tornadoes, or earthquakes): Disaster Preparedness Lessons from Hurricane Katrina

- Overview

When we hear about natural disasters on the news, often in far off places, it is easy to forget that these events are happening to real people. This elementary school lesson uses *A Place Where Hurricanes Happen* by Renee Watson, illustrated by Shadra Strickland, to get students thinking critically about how such events impact real lives. In the book, a group of children from New Orleans have their lives turned upside down when their city is struck by a devastating hurricane. Through art and journaling, students will analyze what Hurricane Katrina may have felt like to those affected by it and will create disaster preparedness plans of their own.

- Resources & Preparation

- Materials and Technology

- The book, *A Place Where Hurricanes Happen*
- Nonfiction books about natural disasters, such as *DK Eyewitness Hurricane & Tornado* by Jack Challoner or *Tornadoes and Hurricanes* by Time For Kids
- Kid-friendly websites about hurricanes and other extreme weather such as <http://www.weatherwizkids.com/weather-hurricane.htm>, <https://www.natgeokids.com/au/discover/geography/physical-geography/hurricanes/>, <https://www.ready.gov/kids/know-the-facts/hurricanes>, and <https://www.ready.gov/kids/know-the-facts/tornado>.
- Specific information about emergency preparedness kits, <https://www.ready.gov/build-a-kit>
- (Optional) Hurricane Katrina timeline from PBS.org: <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/storm/etc/cron.html>
- Paper and writing utensils for journaling

- Instructional Plan

- Student Objectives:

- Explain the similarities/differences between hurricanes and tornadoes and the conditions in which such storms form
- Summarize the events around Hurricane Katrina and analyze the impact such an event would have in student's own life
- Create a disaster preparedness plan

1. Spend some time as a class discussing the science of extreme weather such as hurricanes and tornadoes. In their journals, have students list the similarities and differences between the two.
2. Before sharing the book *A Place Where Hurricanes Happen*, ask students what they know about Hurricane Katrina. As this event took place before today's elementary students were born, don't be surprised if they do not know many details. Summarize the events for them. Older elementary students may find the Hurricane Katrina timeline from PBS.org helpful.

3. Read *A Place Where Hurricanes Happen* together as a class. After reading, have students choose 2-3 of the following journal prompts to complete.
 - a. Do you have neighbors or parts of your town/neighborhood you would miss if you moved away? Describe your house. Do you share a room with brothers or sisters?
 - b. Of the four children in the story, which one is most like you? Do you have a collection like Keesha? Do you draw like Michael?
 - c. When Tommy's father tells him "some got it worse," what does he mean?
 - d. After the storm, Michael says, "Things aren't what they used to be." Describe a time in your life where you felt the same way.
 - e. Before they leave New Orleans, Tommy's mother tells him he can pack two of his favorite things. If you could only pack two things, what would they be and why?
 - f. Michael's and Keesha's families chose to stay when the storm came instead of leaving New Orleans. People didn't know how bad Katrina would be. If you heard that a storm like Katrina may or may not hit your home, what would you do? Leave or stay?
4. As a class, review the information from ready.gov about what to do during any natural disasters that are common in your area. Discuss the instructions for building an emergency preparedness kit. On a new journal page, have students create their own list of what they would want in their kits.
- Additional Resources
 - For a more in-depth unit, consider reading *Zane and the Hurricane: A Story of Katrina* by Rodman Philbrick together as a class. This 2017 Children's Sequoyah Nominee is appropriate for grades 3-5.