

"The Storm" Teacher's Guide

ABOUT THE FILM:

Hurricane Katrina and the disastrous flooding of New Orleans and the Gulf Coast have left many wondering what went wrong. Some claim there was insufficient planning and others say that there was no clear line of authority between the levels of government, thus paralyzing the decision-making process. On Sept. 7, 2005, a bipartisan joint committee was established to review the response of state, local and national governments to Hurricane Katrina. Their report to Congress is to be given no later than Feb. 15, 2005. Media coverage of the investigation reveals a political struggle for Post-Katrina leverage by playing a "blame game." FRONTLINE's documentary "The Storm" investigates why decades of hurricanes and disaster planning still left New Orleans so unprepared for Hurricane Katrina. Veteran producers Marcela Gaviria and Martin Smith journey from New Orleans to Washington and across the stricken Gulf Coast region, examining the impact of communications systems' failures on hurricane victims.

WATCHING THE FILM:

Teachers can either assign the film for viewing as homework or show the film in class. Suggested discussion questions are provided. The featured lesson and activities in this guide can be used regardless of whether or not the film is viewed.

A NOTE TO TEACHERS:

For classes in Social Studies, Language Arts, Current Events, and History; Grade level 9th-12th

"The Storm" chronicles over 40 years of federal responses to Gulf Coast hurricanes and their effectiveness. The teaching activities are designed to help students evaluate how government helps citizens in times of crisis and examine how prepared students and their communities are for future natural disasters. Although the program and featured lesson plan focuses on the impact of Katrina on New Orleans, it is important to remind students that many communities on the Gulf Coast were devastated.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

A list of questions for students to discuss after viewing "The Storm".

FEATURED LESSON PLAN:

"Playing the Blame Game"

Lesson Objectives:

Students will become familiar with:

- The response of federal, state and local officials to the flooding of New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina
- The preparations that were made in advance of the storm
- Hurricane Katrina's impact on the nation

ADDITIONAL LESSON IDEAS:

How a Major Hurricane Impacts a City

Students will compare the Galveston Hurricane of 1900 to Hurricane Katrina.

Is Your Community Prepared for a Natural Disaster?

Students will become familiar with different types of natural disasters, how to prepare for them and where these disasters are most likely to occur.

In the First Person

Students will write a story describing the effects of Hurricane Katrina from the perspective of someone directly affected by the hurricane.

Literature Connection: *Their Eyes Were Watching God*

Students will read about the impact of a flood and hurricane on the main character in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, by Zora Neale Hurston.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

An annotated list of relevant Web sites.

Purchasing the Film

"The Storm" be purchased from Shop PBS for Teachers

[<http://teacher.shop.pbs.org/home/index.jsp>]

Also, teachers and students can watch the film streamed in its entirety on FRONTLINE's Web site [<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/storm/>]

Credits

This teacher's guide was developed by Simone Bloom Nathan of Media Education Consultants. It was written by Patricia Grimmer, Carbondale High School, Carbondale, Illinois. Advisers were Ellen Greenblatt of University High School, San Francisco and Greg Timmons, curriculum writer/educational consultant.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why did the communication system break down hours after Hurricane Katrina?
2. What was the purpose of the Hurricane Pam exercise? Why was it unsuccessful?
3. Why did many people remain in New Orleans after there was an evacuation order?
4. What problems existed for the people that were trapped in the city?
5. Why has there been criticism of President George W. Bush's initial response to Hurricane Katrina?
6. What hazards were posed by the floodwaters?
7. What were the criticisms of FEMA?
8. What lessons do you think were learned as a result of Hurricane Katrina?

LESSON PLAN

"Playing the Blame Game"

Lesson Objectives:

Students will become familiar with:

- The response of federal, state and local officials to the flooding of New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina
- The preparations that were made in advance of the storm
- Hurricane Katrina's impact on the nation

Materials Needed:

Internet access

Student Worksheets

Time Needed:

5 minutes for large group discussion

10-15 minutes for research "Katrina: What Happened When"

15 minutes for groups to answer the discussion questions

20 minutes for group presentations

Procedure:

Step 1:

- Write on the board or overhead "What do we know about Hurricane Katrina?"
- Ask the students to write down five things that they know about Hurricane Katrina and the flooding of New Orleans and the Gulf Coast.
- Ask students to share one or two answers and conduct a large group discussion focusing on the problems that Hurricane Katrina caused.
- Explain that many local, state and federal office holders have been criticized for their failure to help hurricane victims and this criticism is being called a "blame game."

Step 2:

- Divide the class into four groups and distribute copies of the four worksheets "Hurricane Katrina and the Blame Game."
- Assign each group a section of "Katrina: What Happened When."
- Students will evaluate the impact that people and agencies had on New Orleans.
- Students will report their findings to the class.

Step 3:

For homework, ask the students to write a two or three paragraph letter to the editor, for their school or local newspaper, that gives their opinion of "What Went Wrong?"

Alternatively, students can draw an editorial cartoon that answers the question "What went wrong?"

Method of Assessment:

- Completion of note-taking assignments
- Participation in group presentation
- Completion of homework

STUDENT TIMELINE WORKSHEET: GROUP ONE

"Hurricane Katrina and the Blame Game"

Directions:

Your group will be covering a portion of the timeline "Katrina: What Happened When" and answering questions based on the reading. Your job is to analyze how events or individuals might have been responsible for the poor response to Hurricane Katrina. You will be reporting your findings to the class.

Group One (July 23, 2005 - Aug. 28, 2005):

1. Read the summaries of the articles that cover your time period at:
<http://www.factcheck.org/article348.html>. As a group, decide what criticism might be made of the actions of the following people:
 - New Orleans Mayor Ray Nagin

 - President George W. Bush

2. Read the article found at:
<http://www.ohsep.louisiana.gov/newsrelated/incaseofemrgencyexercise.htm>. As a group, answer the following questions:
 - Who participated in Hurricane Pam?

 - What was the purpose of this exercise?

 - What major issues or problems were identified?

 - What impact did officials think this hurricane would have on New Orleans?

 - What was done with the information that was learned from Hurricane Pam?

3. Using information from your reading, take a stand on whom you would blame for the poor response to Hurricane Katrina. Explain your answer and provide supporting information.

4. Using supporting information, organize a short presentation that covers your group's findings on who is to blame for the devastation. Include a recommendation on how this problem could be avoided in the future. Summarize what you will be presenting here.

STUDENT TIMELINE WORKSHEET: GROUP TWO
"Hurricane Katrina and the Blame Game"

Directions:

Your group will be covering a portion of the timeline "Katrina: What Happened When" and answering questions based on the reading. Your job is to analyze how events or individuals might have been responsible for the poor response to Hurricane Katrina. You will be reporting your findings to the class.

Group Two (Aug. 29, 2005 Aug. 31, 2005):

1. Read the summaries of the articles that cover your time period at: <http://www.factcheck.org/article348.html>. As a group, decide what criticism might be made of the actions of the following people:
 - President George W. Bush
 - Secretary of Homeland Security Michael Chertoff
 - United States Senator David Vitter
 - Louisiana Governor Kathleen Blanco
2. Read the article found at: http://www.nola.com/newslogs/breakingtp/index.ssf?/mtlogs/nola_Times-Picayune/archives/2005_09_07.htm. As a group, answer the following questions:
 - What was FEMA's response to the breach of the 17th Street Canal?
 - What reaction did Greg Stone and Ivor Van Heerden have to FEMA's response?
 - Why did the flooding continue after Hurricane Katrina left the city?
 - What evidence is there that communications broke down between various levels of government and agencies during the flooding?
3. Using information from your reading, take a stand on whom you would blame for the poor response to Hurricane Katrina. Explain your answer and provide supporting information.
4. Using supporting information, organize a short presentation that covers your group's findings on who is to blame for the devastation. Include a recommendation on how this problem could be avoided in the future. Summarize what you will be presenting here.

STUDENT TIMELINE WORKSHEET: GROUP THREE
"Hurricane Katrina and the Blame Game"

Directions:

Your group will be covering a portion of the timeline "Katrina: What Happened When" and answering questions based on the reading. Your job is to analyze how events or individuals might have been responsible for the poor response to Hurricane Katrina. You will be reporting your findings to the class.

Group Three (Sept. 1, 2005 -Sept. 2, 2005):

1. Read the summaries of the articles that cover your time period at: <http://www.factcheck.org/article348.html>. As a group, decide what criticism might be made of the actions of the following people:
 - President George W. Bush
 - FEMA director Michael Brown
 - New Orleans Mayor Ray Nagin
2. What problems did the following people report:
 - CNN Correspondent Adaora Udoji
 - Dr. Sanjay Gupta
 - CNN Correspondent Paula Zahn
 - New Orleans Mayor Ray Nagin
 - Red Cross Officials
3. Read the transcript found at: <http://www.cnn.com/2005/US/09/02/nagin.transcript/>. As a group, answer the following questions:
 - What were Mayor Ray Nagin's criticisms of President George W. Bush?
 - Why does Mayor Ray Nagin blame the governor, FEMA and Homeland Security for the 17th Street Canal breach?
4. Using information from your reading, take a stand on whom you would blame for the poor response to Hurricane Katrina. Explain your answer and provide supporting information.
5. Using supporting information, organize a short presentation that covers your group's findings on who is to blame for the devastation. Include a recommendation on how this problem could be avoided in the future. Summarize what you will be presenting here.

STUDENT TIMELINE WORKSHEET: GROUP FOUR

"Hurricane Katrina and the Blame Game"

Directions:

Your group will be covering a portion of the timeline "Katrina: What Happened When" and answering questions based on the reading. Your job is to analyze how events or individuals might have been responsible for the poor response to Hurricane Katrina. You will be reporting your findings to the class.

Group Four (Sept. 3, 2005 – Sept. 15, 2005):

1. Read the summaries of the articles that cover your time period at: <http://www.factcheck.org/article348.html>. As a group, answer the following questions:
 - What issues came up as the dead were removed from the streets of New Orleans?
 - What responsibility does the federal government have for the failures in New Orleans according to President George W. Bush?
 - What does FEMA director Michael Brown say about the actions of the Louisiana Governor Kathleen Blanco?
2. Read the transcript found at: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2005/09/20050915-8.html>. As a group, answer the following questions:
 - What responsibility does President Bush say local communities must assume for future planning?
 - What promises does President Bush make to minorities and lower-income citizens?
 - Why does President Bush say he is taking responsibility for the breakdown in the government response to Hurricane Katrina?
3. Using information from your reading, take a stand on whom you would blame for the poor response to Hurricane Katrina. Explain your answer and provide supporting information.
4. Using supporting information, organize a short presentation that covers your group's findings on who is to blame for the devastation. Include a recommendation on how this problem could be avoided in the future. Summarize what you will be presenting here.

ADDITIONAL LESSON IDEAS

How a Major Hurricane Impacts a City

Students will compare the Galveston Hurricane of 1900 to Hurricane Katrina. Using the following Web sites, students can learn about the impact of the Galveston Hurricane on that city, and compare it to what the long-term impact of Hurricane Katrina might be in New Orleans.

<http://www.pbs.org/newshour/extra/teachers/lessonplans/socialstudies/katrina.html>

<http://www.pbs.org/newshour/local/gulfcoast/background/galveston.html>

<http://www.1900storm.com/>

Is Your Community Prepared for a Natural Disaster?

Students will become familiar with different types of natural disasters, how to prepare for them, and where these disasters are most likely to occur.

http://www.fema.gov/areyouready/natural_hazards.shtm

In the First Person

Students will choose a person -- real or imagined -- who was affected by Hurricane Katrina. They will write a one- to three-page story describing the effects of Hurricane Katrina from that person's perspective. Alternately, students could present this information in a poem, monologue, dialogue or rap.

Literature Connection: *Their Eyes Were Watching God*

Students can explore the impact of a flood and hurricane on the main character in Zora Neale Hurston's book *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. The following Web site has additional teaching ideas using the book.

<http://www.sdcoe.k12.ca.us/score/eyes/eyetg.htm>

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

A Note about Internet Resources

Students need to be aware that Web sites sometimes present only one view of an issue. Encourage them to think about Web sites as they are reading. Guiding questions as they review Web sites are: What did you learn from this site? What didn't you learn from this site? Who sponsors this site? What bias might the sponsor have? How current is the site?

WEB SITES

FRONTLINE "The Storm"

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/storm/>

The companion Web site to the FRONTLINE documentary provides extended interviews with direct participants in the story, analysis of significant issues, frequently asked questions, readings and links.

Tracking Hurricanes -- Hurricane Facts, Figures and Trivia

<http://www.pbs.org/newshour/science/hurricane/facts.html>

This site from the PBS Online NewsHour contains tables and comparisons of hurricanes from 1900 to 2000. Students can learn more about the history of hurricanes in this country, and which were the most deadly and damaging.

The Online NewsHour: Rebuilding the Gulf Coast: Case Study, Galveston, Texas

<http://www.pbs.org/newshour/local/gulfcoast/background/galveston.html>

This PBS Online NewsHour site has created a program, "Case Study: Galveston, Texas" which looks at how a major hurricane changed the direction of this city.

NewsHour Extra Lesson Plan: The Gulf Coast Region

<http://www.pbs.org/newshour/extra/teachers/lessonplans/socialstudies/katrina.html>

This PBS Online News Hour site includes a comprehensive lesson focusing on the geography of New Orleans and the effects of Hurricane Katrina.

FEMA: Are You Ready? An In-depth Guide to Citizen Preparedness

<http://www.fema.gov/areyouready/>

The Federal Emergency Management Agency's site has information that is especially appropriate for middle school classes. Students will become familiar with how to prepare for different types of natural disasters and where these disasters are most likely to occur.

The 1900 Storm: Galveston, Texas

<http://www.1900storm.com/>

The Galveston County Daily News created this home page, which has many personal accounts, pictures, video clips and moving stories with which students could identify.

"Katrina: What Happened When"

<http://www.factcheck.org/article348.html>

Factcheck.org is a nonpartisan, nonprofit project of the Annenberg Public Policy Center at the University of Pennsylvania. This special report provides a timeline of the events before and after Hurricane Katrina. All of the stories are summarized and there are links to many articles.