

Drowned City: Hurricane Katrina and New Orleans

Written and illustrated by Don Brown

Grade Levels: 6+

Lexile: GN920L

Synopsis: More than 80 per cent of New Orleans, Louisiana is under water in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. City residents are stranded and the power is out. Damage is widespread... and help is nowhere near. This intense documentary-style graphic novel uses large panels and dramatic images (including dead bodies) to show how the disaster progressed through the city. Sober text provides chilling facts on the scale of the damage. In short quotes, survivors describe fleeing the rising water, searching for missing loved ones, and the struggle to find supplies and shelter, giving the book a shocking immediacy. The author reports the response of local and federal officials and agencies without offering opinions, leaving it to the reader to draw their own conclusions from the facts presented. A clear-eyed retelling of this 2005 tragedy, packed with topics for discussion, ideal for readers too young to remember the catastrophe.

Author Website: <http://www.booksbybrown.com/>

Author talk on teachingbooks.net:

http://www.teachingbooks.net/book_reading.cgi?id=11938&a=1

Curricular Connections:

- Social studies: Government/Social welfare
- Geography: Natural disasters
- History: Compare Hurricane Katrina to the 1900 Galveston hurricane
- Science: Civil engineering
- Science: How wetlands affect a storm's impact
- Language Arts: Literature/point of view

Lesson Ideas:

- **SOCIAL STUDIES: Government/social welfare**

Discussion questions:

What happened to cause so much destruction?

What systems were in place to prevent:

flooding

stranded people

looting

food and water shortages

Did these systems work or did they fail? Why?

Who is responsible for protecting U.S. citizens from natural disasters?

Do you think the demographic makeup of New Orleans - largely African-American, poor - had any impact on the scope of the tragedy?

- **GEOGRAPHY: Natural disasters**

Activity:

Is your community prepared for a natural disaster?

Resource: <https://www.ready.gov/kids>

- **HISTORY: Hurricane Katrina vs. the 1900 Galveston hurricane**

Activity:

Using the online resources collected by the Maryland State Archives, compare these natural disasters, from initial detection through lasting effects.

<http://teaching.msa.maryland.gov/000001/000000/000153/html/t153.html>

See also the New York Times Learning Network resource “Blowing Through History,” <http://learning.blogs.nytimes.com/2004/08/17/blowing-through-history/>

Local connection: Find and discuss articles about Hurricane Agnes, which hit Maryland in 1972 (since downgraded to Tropical Storm status - archival resources will refer to “hurricane,” however).

- **SCIENCE: Civil engineering**

Activity:

Floodplain modeling. How can human-made structures limit flooding?

Teacher resource:

https://www.teachengineering.org/view_lesson.php?url=collection/cub_/lessons/cub_natdis/cub_natdis_lesson07.xml

Additional resource: Read “Drowning New Orleans” which appeared in Scientific American in 2001 and which predicted how the city’s aging flood defenses might fail in the event of a major event.

<http://www.scientificamerican.com/article/drowning-new-orleans-hurricane-prediction/>

- **SCIENCE: How wetlands affect a storm’s impact**

Demonstration: How a steam plume reacts to different materials.

http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/education/activities/3218_orleans.html

- **LANGUAGE ARTS: Point of view**

Select a character (named or unnamed) in *Drowned City* and imagine their story.

Suggested Companion Titles:

A detailed bibliography is included in the back matter of this book. More general context information can be found in these resources:

FEMA’s Be a Hero! Youth Emergency Preparedness Curriculum Grades 6-8. Includes games, a graphic novel, disaster fact sheets, and information for parents.

<http://www.fema.gov/media-library/assets/documents/34411>

PBS Frontline, "The Storm," originally aired in late 2005. This hour-long documentary focuses on government response. PBS warns of "graphic imagery and language."

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

Larsen, Erik. *Isaac's Storm*. The 1900 Galveston hurricane. Written for adult readers, the tension and incredible events of this book will motivate interested students to tackle the relatively high reading level (Lexile 1020).

Professional Reviews:

- *Booklist* starred, 8/1/2015
- *Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books* starred 10/1/2015
- *Horn Book Guide* starred, 4/1/2016
- *Horn Book Magazine* starred, 9/1/2015
- *Kirkus Reviews* starred, 5/1/2015
- *Library Media Connection*, 9/1/2015
- *Publishers Weekly* starred, 5/25/2015
- *School Library Journal* starred, 8/1/2015

Award:

- Robert F. Sibert Informational Book Honor, 2016