



HURRICANE KATRINA: I WAS THERE

On August 29, 2005, Hurricane Katrina made landfall near New Orleans, Louisiana as a Category 4 hurricane. Few could have imagined how damaging the hurricane would be and how many lives it would change forever. In the days after the hurricane made landfall, there were record storm surges all along the Mississippi Gulf Coast. The surges overwhelmed the levees that protected New Orleans. Soon, 80 percent of the city was flooded up to the rooftops of many homes and small buildings.

HURRICANE KATRINA OPENED UP A DEBATE



In this original series, *Hurricane Katrina: I Was There*, produced by A+E Digital Studios, viewers learn about the experiences of several individuals who survived Hurricane Katrina.

A debate about the state of racial equality and the role of government in protecting its citizens. Frustration had mounted as it took up to two days for a full-scale relief effort to begin. Stranded residents in the Superdome and in locations throughout the city suffered from heat, hunger, and a lack of medical care. As news networks broadcast scenes from the devastated city to the world, it became obvious that a vast majority of the victims were African-American and poor.

In all, it is believed that the hurricane caused more than 1,300 deaths and up to \$150 billion in damages to both private property and public infrastructure. One million people were displaced, a phenomenon unseen in the United States since the Great Depression, and 400,000 people lost their jobs as a result of the disaster. Yet Hurricane Katrina also opened up a national debate about equality, and prompted a rebuilding effort that brought people together across many divides.

CURRICULUM LINKS

Hurricane Katrina: I Was There would be useful for History, Journalism, Current Events, Social Studies, and Film and Media Courses and for community and after-school programs. These first-person testimonies offer powerful perspectives on Hurricane Katrina and the rebuilding effort that followed.

PRE-VIEWING ACTIVITY

Students can read this short article on History.com to review the events of Hurricane Katrina and can discuss the basic events of the storm and its aftermath:

www.History.com/this-day-in-history/hurricane-katrina-slams-into-gulf-coast

TERMS TO DEFINE

It would be helpful for students and viewers to be familiar with these terms before watching these videos:

bayou
breach

levee
civic

disruption
preservation





VIDEO

HURRICANE KATRINA: I WAS THERE: 10 YEARS LATER

In this video, survivors talk about the impact of Hurricane Katrina, 10 years after the historic storm devastated the Gulf Coast. View this video for an overview of the *I Was There* series and to see a sampling of first-person perspectives on Hurricane Katrina:

www.history.com/topics/hurricane-katrina/videos/hurricane-katrina-10-years-later

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is a "disruption?" In what ways was Hurricane Katrina a "disruption"?
2. Why do you think first-person perspectives are an important way to remember events like Hurricane Katrina?

ACTIVITY

In this video, Dr. deBoisblanc says, "I think the real story of Hurricane Katrina was not the images you saw on television. The real legacy is how this hurricane just peeled away all of that that isolates us from each other and allowed for these human-to-human connections that are so unusual in contemporary society. And that was everywhere."

ASK STUDENTS to keep this statement in mind while watching the videos in this series. After watching, students can write an essay, letter, or journal entry responding to this statement with particular reference to Hurricane Katrina.



VIDEO

I WAS THERE: DEFENDER OF THE AMERICAN CAN

Five days after Hurricane Katrina trapped nearly 300 residents in their apartment building, known as the American Can, former recon Marine John Keller fought off looters, swam through floodwaters, and hot-wired boats to help guide them to safety.

ASK STUDENTS to view this view to learn about John Keller's courageous effort to transport people to safety after Hurricane Katrina:

www.History.com/topics/hurricane-katrina/videos/i-was-there-hurricane-katrina-defender-of-the-american-can

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What kinds of previous training helped John Keller assist people during Hurricane Katrina?
2. How would you describe Keller's actions at the American Can building?
3. Why do you think it took so long for people to be rescued from the American Can building?
4. In the interview Keller says "I needed Katrina." What do you think he means by this?





VIDEO

I WAS THERE: ROOFTOP RIDER

Robert Green lost his mother and granddaughter when his Ninth Ward home was lifted off its foundation and floated down the street in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. After rebuilding several years later, Green has made it his life's mission to bring the Ninth Ward residents back and rebuild their historic community.

View this video to learn Green's experiences:

www.History.com/topics/hurricane-katrina/videos/i-was-there-hurricane-katrina-rooftop-rider

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why do you think Robert Green and his family were unable to evacuate New Orleans before the hurricane?
2. After the hurricane, Green became an "ambassador" for his neighborhood. What does this mean?
3. What were some of the positive changes that resulted from Katrina in the Ninth Ward?
4. What does the term "reducing the carbon footprint mean"?



VIDEO

I WAS THERE: RESCUE SWIMMER

When Hurricane Katrina hit the Gulf Coast, U.S. Coast Guard rescue swimmer Laurence "Noodles" Nettles' training was put to the test as he and fellow Guard members were forced to adapt their ocean rescue tactics to save thousands of stranded victims from rooftops and rising floodwaters.

Watch this video to learn about Nettle's rescue efforts as part of the U.S. Coast Guard:

www.History.com/topics/hurricane-katrina/videos/i-was-there-hurricane-katrina-rescue-swimmer

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How would you describe the role of Nettles and the Coast Guard after Hurricane Katrina?
2. What are some of the ways Hurricane Katrina changed Nettles? How did he cope after his experiences with the rescue effort?
3. Nettles calls the Coast Guard a "silver lining" in the wake of the storm. What does this term mean? What is another example of a "silver lining"?



VIDEO

I WAS THERE: HEROES OF CHARITY

Charity Hospital was one of the last hospitals to be evacuated after Hurricane Katrina hit. Trapped inside its walls were patients in critical condition and the doctors and nurses who were struggling to keep them alive. After five days without power and medical assistance, the staff of Charity took matters into their own hands – including orchestrating a risky roof evacuation – to care for their patients.

Ask students to watch the video about Charity Hospital here:

www.history.com/topics/hurricane-katrina/videos/i-was-there-hurricane-katrina-heroes-of-charity-hospital

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why were the doctors and nurses from Charity Hospital so essential in the days after Hurricane Katrina?
2. What does it mean to be "your brother's keeper"?



VIDEO

I WAS THERE: SUPERDOME SURVIVOR

When Hurricane Katrina forced Shelton Alexander, a New Orleans poet, to evacuate his home, he took his truck and video camera to the Superdome. He escaped the chaotic shelter a few days later with a truckload of people and video documentation of history.

Ask students to watch Shelton's story here:

www.history.com/topics/hurricane-katrina/videos/i-was-there-hurricane-katrina-superdome-survivor

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How would you describe conditions at the Superdome in the days after Hurricane Katrina? Why do you think the people there were left without assistance?
2. How does Shelton Alexander use music and rhyme to describe his experiences during the storm?
3. Alexander says, "You can rebuild the home, but you also have to rebuild the mind, the spirit, the soul." Discuss this quote and what it means. Students can also write a short essay or journal entry about this quote and what it means to them.



VIDEO

I WAS THERE: DIVINE INTERVENTION

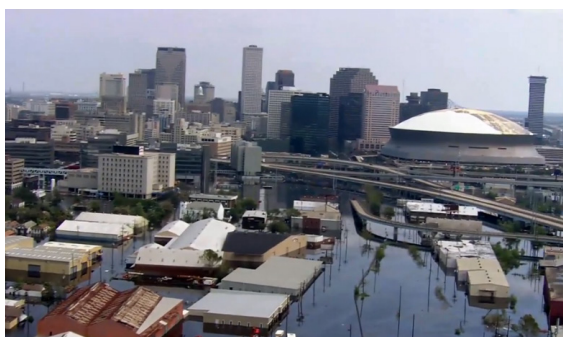
Angela Trahan and Brother Ronald Hingle were part of the same school community for years before Hurricane Katrina brought their lives together in an instant. Angie was trapped in a flooding kitchen with refrigerators blocking the doors to her and her family's escape when Brother Ronald braved the winds and rising waters to bring them to safety.

Ask students to watch the video about the experiences of Katrina survivors at one school here:

www.history.com/topics/hurricane-katrina/videos/i-was-there-hurricane-katrina-divine-intervention

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. In this video, we learn about the role of Katrina outside of the New Orleans area. How did it affect the people at St. Stanislaus School?
2. How did people at the school band together to help one another during the storm?
3. What role do you think memory plays in the history of Hurricane Katrina? Why are memories like Angela's important?



ACTIVITIES

1. First-Person Testimony: Reflections. Ask students to write a short essay about Hurricane Katrina and its importance in U.S. history. Students can use one or more of the videos in the series to inform their essays.

2. Katrina: Lessons from the Storm. As these videos show, Hurricane Katrina became a huge learning experience for many people. Students can research the rebuilding efforts that have taken place during the 10 years since the storm. Students can choose one “silver lining” or improvement made since Katrina and write a short essay or create a visual presentation depicting a lesson learned.

3. Survival Skills. Based on what you know about Katrina, what are some of the ways people can prepare for natural disasters? Make a list of things you can do to prepare for natural disaster. Visit www.ready.gov/severe-weather for ideas and “Build a Kit” online to spark ideas about severe weather preparedness.

4. Weather History. Throughout U.S. history many severe weather events have shaped communities. Do some research about these weather events online at History.com or other sources and write a short paper or create a presentation about one of these events and its outcomes. (Examples: The Johnstown Flood, the San Francisco Earthquake of 1906, The Dust Bowl, etc.) The goal of this activity is to learn more about how natural disasters shape history and how people respond to these unexpected events.

LEARN MORE ABOUT HURRICANE KATRINA

Background and additional videos from History.com:
www.History.com/Katrina

Resources from the New York Times:
www.nytimes.com/interactive/2015/08/26/us/ten-years-after-katrina.html?_r=0

The Make it Right Foundation:
makeitright.org

Hurricane Katrina Digital Memory Bank:
hurricanearchive.org

BOOKS

Antoine, Rebeca (editor). *Voices Rising: Stories from the Katrina Narrative Project*. (University of New Orleans Press, 2009).

Brinkley, Douglas. *The Great Deluge: Hurricane Katrina, New Orleans, and the Mississippi Gulf Coast*. (Harper Perennial, 2007).