

The Tornado That Changed America

The story of the Tri-State Tornado of 1925

About the Story

Lexile: 850L

For qualitative complexity factors, go to Scope Online.

Learning Objective: to analyze author's craft in a work of narrative nonfiction

Key Skills: text structure, compare and contrast, figurative language, author's craft

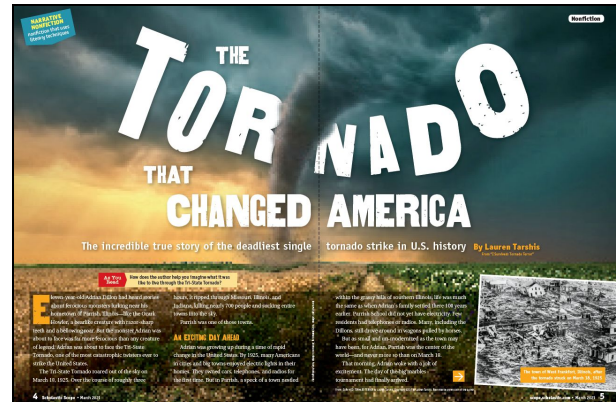
Essential Questions:

- What role does weather play in our lives?
- Why should past disasters be remembered?
- Why is it important to study weather and climate?

Standards:

The article and lesson support these Common Core anchor standards: R.1, R.2, R.3, R.4, R.5, R.7, W.2, SL.1, L.4, L.5, L.6

For more standards information—including TEKS—go to Scope Online.



Your Teaching Support Package

Find your full suite of support materials at scope.scholastic.com.

Video:

- Author Chat

Audio:

- Read-aloud
- Text-to-speech
- Vocabulary

Slideshow:

- Background Builder

Differentiated Articles:

- Lower-Lexile version
- Spanish language version

Skill Building Activities to print, project, or share digitally:

- Close Reading and Critical Thinking
- Preparing to Write: Analyzing Author's Craft
- Video Discussion Questions
- Nonfiction Elements*
- **Core Skills Workout:** Summarizing*, Text Features, Text Structure, Text Evidence*, Mood
- Vocabulary: Definitions and Practice
- Choice Board
- Quiz*
- Contest Entry Form

*Available on two levels

Step-by-Step Lesson

Close Reading, Critical Thinking, Skill Building

1. Preparing to Read

8 minutes

Preview Vocabulary (8 minutes)

- Project the **Vocabulary: Definitions and Practice** on your whiteboard, or if you're remote, share it on your screen. Review the definitions as a class. (Optionally, have students complete the practice activity for homework.) Highlighted words: *depot, dissipate, doted, infancy, obliterated, reverie, roiling*

2. Reading and Discussing

45 minutes

- Have a volunteer read the As You Read box on page 4 of the magazine or at the top of the digital story page.
- Read the story once through as a class, as well as the Background Builder slideshow at Scope Online. (*Differentiation: Share the **lower-Lexile version** of the article with students who may need it.*) Optionally, have students listen to the read-aloud of the story while they follow along. The **audio read-aloud** is located in the Resources tab in Teacher View and at the top of the story page in Student View.
- Divide students into groups to read the story again and respond to the following close-reading questions. *Tip: If you're remote, you can have each group respond in a shared doc or discuss the questions in their own chat room; you can also use the questions as an asynchronous assignment.*

Close-Reading Questions

(10 minutes)

The following questions can be shared in printable or interactive form.

- How does the section "An Exciting Day Ahead" contribute to the article?** (text structure)
The section "An Exciting Day Ahead" helps readers better understand the time and place in which the Tri-State Tornado occurred, and it introduces the people who will be affected by the tornado

later in the article. Author Lauren Tarshis gives readers a glimpse into what life would have been like for small-town farm families and school-aged children during that time by providing details about current technologies, popular games, and typical chores and responsibilities for kids like Adrian, who is the central figure in the article.

2. **According to the article, how has our understanding of weather and weather reporting changed since Adrian's time?** (compare and contrast) *In Adrian's time, weather forecasts were mere guesses and were usually wrong because the satellites, radars, sophisticated computers, and other high-tech storm-tracking tools we have today didn't yet exist. Plus, Tarshis explains, in the late 1800s, the word tornado had been banned from government weather reports and meteorologists' forecasts—because it was thought that the word might cause people to panic about a tornado that was in fact unlikely to occur. No doubt studying the weather was considerably more dangerous back then as well. As pictured in the text feature "Adventures in Weather Science," weather scientists in Adrian's time used hot-air balloons and kites to collect data—far riskier tools than the armored, bulletproof vehicles used to collect weather data today.*

3. **Tarshis writes, "Parrish School did not yet have electricity. Few residents had telephones or radios. Many, including the Dillons, still drove around in wagons pulled by horses." Why are these details important to the story?** (text structure) *These details are important because they help readers understand how Parrish was different from most cities and big towns in a rapidly changing America. More important, they help readers understand that there was simply no way for the people of Parrish to receive warnings or alerts about the deadly storm that was headed their way or to get to a safer place or receive emergency assistance as quickly as we can today.*

4. **How does Tarshis use figurative language to portray the tornado?** (figurative language) *Tarshis uses figurative language to portray the tornado as violent and predatory, a living being with an appetite for destruction. In the introduction she uses a metaphor to compare the tornado to a mythic beast, writing: "Eleven-year-old Adrian Dillon had heard stories about ferocious monsters lurking near his hometown of Parrish, Illinois—like the Ozark Howler, a bearlike creature with razor-sharp teeth and a bellowing roar. But the monster Adrian was about to face was far more ferocious than any creature of legend" (4). Tarshis continues to portray the tornado as a monster throughout the story. For example, she writes "... at about 4:30 p.m., the monster faded to a ghostly swirl. It took its last breaths over a field in southern Indiana before disappearing at last" (9). Tarshis also uses vivid and violent verbs throughout the article, such as growled, roared, sucking, punched, feasting, and chew. Other figurative language she uses to portray the storm as violent and deadly includes onomatopoeia such as "Whoosh!" and "Crash!" and the simile "the skies had turned purplish black, like a gigantic bruise."*

Critical-Thinking Questions

(5 minutes)

The following questions can be shared in printable or interactive form.

1. **Why should we remember disasters from the past like the Tri-State Tornado?** *Students may say that stories like Adrian's remind us what is most important in life, help us make sense of tragedy and become more resilient, remind us how powerful nature is, and underscore how important scientific ventures are.*
2. **What does the genre of narrative nonfiction offer readers that expository nonfiction does not? Do you prefer one genre over the other?** *Students may say that narrative nonfiction pieces like "The Tornado That Changed America" allow readers to learn about a factual event through the eyes of a person who lived through it, making reading more interesting, relatable, meaningful, and in this case, gripping. Some may say narrative nonfiction makes it easier to understand a sequence of events or new factual information.*

3. Watch and Discuss the Video

20 minutes

- Watch the **Author Chat** video, in which author Lauren Tarshis talks about her writing and research process. Then have students respond to the **Video Discussion Questions** in small groups or independently.

4. Skill Building and Writing

20 minutes

- Have students complete **Preparing to Write: Analyzing Author's Craft**. This activity will help them organize their ideas in preparation for the writing prompt on page 10 in the printed magazine and at the bottom of the digital story page.
- Alternatively, have students choose a culminating task from the **Choice Board**, a menu of differentiated activities.