

The Day the Earth Split Apart

The terrifying true story of some of the worst earthquakes in American history

About the Story

Lexile: 890L

For qualitative complexity factors, go to the Story tab.

Learning Objective: to explore key ideas and details in a work of narrative nonfiction

Key Skills: mood, key ideas and details, cause and effect

Essential Questions:

- How do the processes that shape the earth shape our lives?
- Why are wars fought?
- What is the value of studying the past?

Standards:

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

- Behind the Scenes

Audio:

- Article read-aloud
- Text-to-speech
- Vocabulary

Differentiated Articles:

- Lower-Lexile version
- Spanish language version

Connected readings from the Scope archives:

- "Is This Mountain Cursed?"
- "Mountain of Doom"
- "Beauty and Disaster"
- "Did the World's Tallest Mountain Shrink?"

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

- Writing Planner: The New Madrid Earthquakes
- Close Reading and Critical Thinking
- Video Discussion Questions
- Choice Board
- Vocabulary: Definitions and Practice
- Core Skills Workout: Summarizing*, Text Structure*, Text Features, Text Evidence*, Nonfiction Elements
- Quiz*
- Contest Entry Form

*Available on two levels

Step-by-Step Lesson

1. Preparing to Read

25 minutes

Do-Now: Solve a Riddle (5 minutes)

- Project the following riddle on your whiteboard:

We occur around the globe every day.

We can cause landslides, tsunamis, avalanches, and flooding. We can even change the length of a day.

Scientists can't predict us, though animals have been observed behaving differently just before we strike.

In 2014, one of us caused Mount Everest to shrink an inch and the city of Kathmandu, in Nepal, to rise 3 feet.

The majority of us occur in the Pacific Ocean, in a region known as "The Ring of Fire."

What are we?

- Share the answer with students: earthquakes. Tell students that today they will read stories of people who lived through some of the worst earthquakes in American history.

Watch a Video (10 minutes)

- Watch the **Behind the Scenes video**, in which author Kristin Lewis talks about her research and writing process. Have students respond to the **Video Discussion Questions** (available in your Resources tab) in small groups or as a class.

Preview Vocabulary (10 minutes)

- Project the **Vocabulary: Definitions and Practice**. Review the definitions as a class. Highlighted words: *alliance, disquiet, geologists, magnitude, omen, orator*. Optionally, print or share the interactive link directly to your LMS and have students preview the words and complete the activity before class. Audio pronunciations of the words and a read-aloud are embedded in the interactive slides.

2. Reading and Discussing

45 minutes

- Invite a volunteer to read the **As You Read** box on page 4 of the magazine or at the top of the digital story page.

- Read the article once as a class. (*Differentiation: Share the **lower-Lexile version** or the **Spanish version** of the article.*) Optionally, have students listen to author Kristin Lewis read her article aloud 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 article again and respond to the following close-reading questions.

Close-Reading Questions

(20 minutes)

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

- 1. What is the mood of the article's opening? How does the author create it?** (mood) *Students will likely say that the mood is chaotic, terrifying, and suspenseful. One way the author creates the mood is through sensory details that help readers feel, hear, and see the chaos of the earthquake in their minds. For example, she writes that "violent shaking jolted them awake" and "trees were crashing down." The author also uses figurative language to create vivid and terrifying sensory details, such as "the earth was rolling toward them—like towering waves in the ocean" and "the shaking earth tossed them about like rag dolls." The title and illustration also add to the mood, as the letters of the title and every element of the scene depicted on the water are in a state of mayhem. Lastly, the author creates the mood by beginning and ending with two dark questions: "Was the world ending?" and "Were they the only ones left alive?"*
- 2. What "extraordinary events," as the author refers to them, were unfolding at the time of the earthquakes?** (key ideas and details) *Just before the earthquakes, a giant comet had been visible for months and a dramatic solar eclipse occurred. In addition, the young United States had recently doubled in size through the Louisiana Purchase.*
- 3. What was the impact of the Louisiana Purchase?** (cause and effect) *The Louisiana Purchase contributed to the conflict between Native nations and the United States. The purchase doubled the size of the country, which lured White settlers westward to claim land long inhabited by Native nations. This caused much anger—especially after the United States government repeatedly broke its promises to Native nations regarding land use—and contributed to the outbreak of war.*
- 4. Why did Tecumseh want to create an alliance of Native nations? How did he foster support for such an alliance?** (key ideas and details) *Tecumseh wanted to unite Native nations against the expansion of the United States into Native lands. To convince nations to join, he mentioned Great Britain's support of his cause. He also spoke of the force of the Great Spirit in his destiny: His name meant "Shooting Star," and the recent comet, he said, had been sent by the Great Spirit as a sign that he, Tecumseh, was to unite the nations. Tecumseh cited his brother's prediction of the recent eclipse as further evidence of the Great Spirit's forces at work. Tecumseh's*

warning in the village of Tuckhabatchee was later seen as a prophecy and convinced many peoples to join the alliance.

5. **How does the author characterize Tecumseh?** (key ideas and details) *The author characterizes Tecumseh as a powerful leader, a brave and brilliant warrior, and a gifted speaker.*
6. **Why was the Mississippi River important in the early 1800s? How did the quakes affect the river?** (cause and effect) *The Mississippi River was a vital transportation route that was used to carry goods, people, food, and supplies in a time before cars, railroads, and planes. The quakes caused the Mississippi to flow backward briefly. Its waters churned and roared, capsizing boats. Islands in the river were submerged, disappearing forever, and new islands appeared.*

Critical-Thinking Questions

(5 minutes)

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

1. **Back in 1811, people didn't have the same tools and scientific understanding of earthquakes that we have today. What do you think it was like to live through a big quake?** *Answers will vary.*
2. **Analyze the final line of the article. What do you think the author means? How does the author utilize voices from the past in her article?** *When the author writes that voices are "calling to us from the past," she means that we can understand past events by reading or listening to the words of people who lived through those events. She seems to be suggesting as well that people of the past would want us to listen to their stories and understand their perspectives. In the article, the author utilizes the voices of Walker and Tecumseh, who offer us different perspectives on not only the New Madrid Earthquakes but also on the United States itself. The author includes primary source material—quotes from Tecumseh, Godfrey LeSieur, Eliza Bryan, a reporter from the Martinsburgh Gazette, and reverend John Carrigan. These voices from the past help us imagine what being there during the earthquakes might have been like.*

3. Skill Building and Writing

30 minutes

- Have students complete the **Writing Planner: The New Madrid Earthquakes**. This activity will help them organize their ideas in preparation for the activity on page 9 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.

Articles from Scope archives related to Earth processes:

- Paired Texts: [“Is This Mountain Cursed?”](#) (October 2022)
- Paired Texts: [“Mountain of Doom”](#) (March 2020)
- Paired Texts: [“Beauty and Disaster”](#) (December 2018/January 2019)
- Short Read: [“Did the World’s Tallest Mountain Shrink?”](#) (April 2018)

Support for Multilingual Learners

These questions are designed to help students respond to the text at a level that’s right for them.

Yes/No Questions

Ask students to demonstrate comprehension with a very simple answer.

1. Can earthquakes strike in the middle of the United States? *Yes, they can.*
2. Do most earthquakes in the New Madrid seismic zone cause damage? *No, they don’t.*
3. Did the New Madrid Earthquakes cause flooding? *Yes, they did.*
4. Were many people in the U.S. moving west in the early 19th century? *Yes, they were.*
5. Is Tecumseh remembered as a hero? *Yes, he is.*

Either/Or Questions

Encourage students to use language from the question in their answer.

1. In 1811, were there 17 states or 50 states? *There were 17 states.*
2. Did the Mississippi River connect people from north to south or from east to west in America? *The Mississippi River connected people from north to south in America.*
3. Did White settlers moving west affect Native nations positively or negatively? *White settlers moving west affected Native nations negatively.*
4. Did the New Madrid Earthquakes last for weeks or for months? *The New Madrid Earthquakes lasted for months.*
5. In the War of 1812, did Great Britain fight with the U.S. or with Tecumseh’s alliance of Native nations? *Great Britain fought with Tecumseh’s alliance of Native nations in the War of 1812.*

Short-Answer Questions

Challenge students to produce simple answers on their own .

1. Why do earthquakes happen? *Pieces of the Earth’s crust called tectonic plates slide past one another and collide. Earthquakes happen as a result of the movements of these plates.*
2. What detail about the earthquakes of 1811 to 1812 stood out to you? Why? *Answers will vary.*

Language-Acquisition Springboard: Practice Reading ou Words

Before reading the article, preview words in the article that have the vowel combination *ou*, noting the different ways this vowel combination can be pronounced.

- Say *soup* aloud. Then give examples of other words in which *ou* is pronounced the same way it is in *soup*. (*Louisiana, through, groups, you*)
- Say *mouth* aloud. Then give examples of words in which *ou* is pronounced the same way it is in *mouth*. (*soundly, ground, around, hours, outside, southeastern, house, sounding, thousands, out*)
- Say *cousin* aloud. Then give examples of other words in which *ou* is pronounced the same way it is in *cousin*. (*southern, country, tough, young, courageous*)
- Say *book* aloud. Then give examples of words in which *ou* is pronounced like the *oo* in *book*. (*could, would, Missouri*)