

Lost in Death Valley

A story of disaster and survival in the hottest place on Earth

About the Story

Lexile® Measure 840L

For qualitative complexity factors, go to Scope Online.

Learning Objective: to identify key ideas and details in a narrative nonfiction article

Featured Skill: key ideas and details

Additional skills covered in this lesson plan: author's craft, text structure, inference

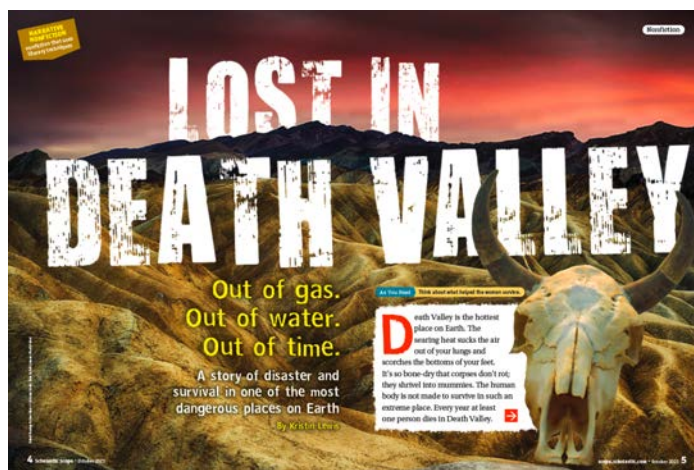
Essential Questions:

- How can we make good decisions in challenging situations?
- What does it take to survive?
- Who's in charge: humans or nature?

Standards:

The article and its suite of support materials support these Common Core Anchor Standards: R.1, R.2, R.3, R.4, R.5, W.2, SL.1, SL.2, L.4, L.5, L.6

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



Your Teaching Package

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

Audio:

- Author read-aloud
- Text-to-speech
- Vocabulary

Video:

- Behind the Scenes

Differentiated Articles:

- Lower-Lexile version
- Spanish language version

Connected readings

from the Scope archives:

- "Disaster in Space"
- "Stranded at Sea"
- "Trapped in a Cave"
- "Disaster on the Ice"

Activities to print, project, or share digitally:

- Vocabulary: Definitions and Practice
- Video Discussion Questions
- Close Reading and Critical Thinking Questions
- Featured Skill: Key Ideas and Details
- Choice Board
- **Core Skills Workout:** Summarizing*, Text Features, Text Structure*, Nonfiction Elements
- Writing Spotlight: Descriptive Writing
- Lesson Plan Slide Deck
- Quiz*

*Available on two levels

Step-by-Step Lesson Plan

1. Prepare to Read (20 minutes)

Watch the Video (10 minutes)

- Watch the **Behind the Scenes** video, which will introduce students to Death Valley and offer insights into the writing process. Have students respond to the **Video Discussion Questions** (available in your Resources tab) in small groups or pairs.

Preview Vocabulary (10 minutes)

- Project the Google Slides version of **Vocabulary Definitions and Practice** on your whiteboard. Review the definitions and complete the activity as a class. Highlighted words: *addled, crude, geological, inferno, notorious, oppressive, perils, reclassified*. Audio pronunciations of the words and a read-aloud of the definitions are embedded on the slides. Optionally, print the PDF version or share the slideshow link directly to your LMS and have students preview the words and complete the activity independently before class.

2. Read and Discuss (45 minutes)

- Invite a volunteer to read the As You Read box on page 5 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 and Critical-Thinking** questions, also located in the Resources tab.

Close-Reading Questions

(25 minutes)

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

- 1. What is the mood of the first paragraph? How does author Kristin Lewis create this mood?** (author's craft) *The first paragraph has a dire mood—that is, a mood of desperate urgency. Lewis vividly describes Death Valley as a place of danger. The phrases “hottest place on Earth,” “sucks the air out of your lungs,” and “scorches the bottoms of your feet” show the intensity of the environment. By stating that at least one person dies in Death Valley each year, Lewis emphasizes the danger of the place.*
- 2. The author calls Death Valley a place of “devastating extremes.” Which details support this description?** (key ideas and details) *Death Valley has extreme land features and temperatures. Lewis writes, “Rocky snowcapped mountains jut thousands of feet into the sky, while vast salt flats and sand dunes sizzle in the sun on the valley floor below.” In fact, the lowest point in North America is located in Death Valley’s Badwater Basin at 282 feet below sea level. The temperature can rise to more than 120 degrees in the summertime, with a record of 134. And the desert is drier than dry; Lewis writes, “It’s so bone-dry that corpses don’t rot; they shrivel into mummies.”*
- 3. What factors contributed to the women getting lost?** (key ideas and details) *The women took a wrong turn, likely at Teakettle Junction; small roads, which you can infer they were on, were not on their map; their GPS was ineffective because Death Valley is so remote; everything looked the same, so they couldn’t find their way back.*
- 4. The section “Terribly Wrong” includes little description of the women’s feelings, yet their emotions are easy to detect. How does Lewis achieve this?** (author's craft) *By describing the situation the women were in, the author makes it possible for the reader to infer their feelings. For example, she writes, “They drove. And drove. And drove,” on separate lines to evoke the frustrating and scary feeling of becoming lost. Lewis also describes the GPS giving the women what turn out to be incorrect instructions “with cool certainty.” You can infer how frustrated and alarmed the women must have felt to realize they could not trust the calm voice of their GPS. Lewis also provides details that make it easy for the reader to imagine being in the women’s position as their car “sputtered to a stop” under a dark sky full of stars—the reader can infer how isolated and frightened the women must have felt.*
- 5. In the section “One in a Million,” why does the author include the paragraph that starts “The human body is not made to withstand . . .”?** (text structure) *This paragraph provides information about the effects of heat on the body. This helps readers understand what Donna, Gina, and Jenny were going through physically and just how much danger they were in.*

6. **What can you infer about how the three women helped one another survive?** (inference)
You can infer that the women helped one another survive by working as a team and by offering one another encouragement. Gina went to look for signs of life while Donna and Jenny gathered pine needles and cacti. Gina convinced her mother to try starting the car again. Donna cared for Gina when she got sick with dehydration and exhaustion. None of them gave up.
- As a class, discuss the following questions.

Critical-Thinking Questions

(10 minutes)

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

1. **What role did luck play in the women's survival? What choices did they make that also helped them survive?** *The women were lucky that their car started again the morning after it had stopped, and that they found a campsite, which provided enough food, water, and shelter to keep them alive. They were lucky that Tyler Johns and Scott Steele decided to make one more pass in their helicopter before giving up. The women also took numerous steps that helped them survive. Donna had stocked the car with supplies, showing that she knew to plan for the unexpected. They gathered nutrient-rich pine needles. They also left their car in the road so it could be seen, which helped Johns and Steele find them.*
2. **What crucial role did other people play in helping the women to survive?** *The women would not have survived if not for the intervention of people outside Death Valley. Donna's daughter Sky suspected something was wrong and managed to figure out that her mother had been at Scotty's Castle, Death Valley. Sky contacted the California Highway Patrol, which ultimately found and saved the women.*

3. Write About It: Key Ideas and Details (45 minutes)

- Have students complete the **Featured Skill Activity: Key Ideas and Details**. This activity prepares them to respond to the writing prompt on page 10 in the printed magazine and at the bottom of the digital story page:

Survival stories often demonstrate the power of resilience and problem-solving. How did these traits help the women survive in Death Valley? Answer in a well-organized essay. Use text evidence.

- Alternatively, have students choose a task from the **Choice Board**, a menu of culminating tasks. (Our Choice Board options include the writing prompt from the magazine,

differentiated versions of the writing prompt, and additional creative ways for students to demonstrate their understanding of a story or article.)

4. Writing Spotlight: Descriptive Writing

(15 minutes)

- Project the **Writing Spotlight: Descriptive Writing** activity, available in the Resources Tab, on your whiteboard for a mini-lesson on descriptive writing, using mentor sentences from the article. Read and discuss Slides 1-4 as a class. Answers should be similar to:
 - *Slide 2: hot and dry; “hottest place on Earth,” “searing heat,” “sucks the air,” “scorches,” “bone-dry,” “shrivel into mummies,” “extreme,” and “inferno”*
 - *Slide 3: Details about Death Valley’s effects on the human body are missing from Ed’s version. Lewis likely started her article the way she did to impress upon readers just how dangerous of a situation the three women were in. Plus, Lewis’s description evokes an emotional reaction that Ed’s version does not.*
 - *Slide 4: The passage on the left contains greater detail and more evocative writing. Lewis uses verbs and details to bring the scene she is describing to life in a way the passage on the right does not. For example, the passage on the left says “Rocky snowcapped mountains jut thousands of feet into the air,” while the passage on the right says “It has mountains.”*
- Have students complete the You Try It on Slide 5 on their own. Then ask volunteers to share their sentences.
 - *Answers will vary. Possible answer: “And then they saw it—a splash of glorious green in a sea of desolate brown. It was a stand of trees off in the distance. In fact, they’d glimpsed the same trees the previous day, after they’d lost their way.”*

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. Is Death Valley a hot place? *Yes, it is.*
2. Is Death Valley National Park a popular place to visit? *Yes, it is.*
3. Did Gina, Donna, and Jenny reach the Racetrack? *No, they didn’t.*
4. Did the women’s GPS help them find their way out of the park? *No, it didn’t.*
5. Did the women survive? *Yes, they did.*

Either/Or Questions

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

1. Is it better to visit Death Valley in the summer months or the winter months? *It is better to visit Death Valley in the winter months.*
2. Is Death Valley a dry place or a rainy place? *Death Valley is a very dry place.*
3. Who alerted CHP about the missing women, Sky or Lizard Lee? *Sky alerted CHP about the missing women.*
4. Did CHP search for the women using a helicopter or a car? *CHP searched for the women using a helicopter.*
5. Did the women spend three hours in the wilderness or three nights in the wilderness? *The women spent three nights in the wilderness.*

Short-Answer Questions

Challenge students to produce simple answers on their own.

1. Why is it important to bring a paper map on any wilderness adventure? *Devices that have GPS, like our phones and the women's vehicle in the story, don't always work in remote places or places with a lot of trees and mountains.*
2. What is one thing that helped the women survive? *The women found a campsite that provided food, water, and shelter.*

Language-Acquisition Springboard: Learn words related to hot temperatures.

Review and discuss words related to hot temperatures used in the article. These words are often used when talking about cooking or fire:

- sear ("searing heat")
- scorch ("scorches the bottoms of your feet")
- sizzle ("sand dunes sizzle")
- burn ("the ground burned their feet")
- blaze ("a blaze of stars lit up the night sky")

Additional words not in the article:

- boil
- bake
- blister
- steam
- scald

Other survival stories from the Scope archives:

- Narrative Nonfiction: ["Disaster in Space"](#)
- Narrative Nonfiction: ["Stranded at Sea"](#)
- Narrative Nonfiction: ["Trapped in a Cave"](#)
- Drama: [Disaster on the Ice](#)