

# America's Deadliest Disaster

A 14-year-old makes a heroic rescue in the Galveston Hurricane of 1900

## About the Article

### Levels

Lexile Level: **780L**

Guided Reading Level: **T**

DRA Level: **50**

### Learning Objectives

Students will examine how the author uses descriptive details to help readers understand what a terrible disaster was like. They will write their own narratives using descriptive details.

### Content-Area Connections

**Social studies:** history

**Science:** natural disasters

### Key Skills

Descriptive details, vocabulary, key details, inference, main idea and supporting details, cause and effect, text structure, narrative writing

### Standards

#### Correlations

This article and lesson support the following Common Core anchor standards: **R.1, R.3, R.4, R.5, W.3, SL.1, SL.2, L.5, L.6**

Check our website for more standards information.



## Your Teaching Support Package

Here's your full suite of materials, all of which you'll find at [storyworks.scholastic.com](http://storyworks.scholastic.com):

**Video:** "Behind the Scenes: America's Deadliest Disaster"

### Audio:

- On-level version
- Lower-Lexile version

### Differentiated article:

- Lower-Lexile version (printable)

### Activities to print or project:

- Vocabulary
- Video Activity
- Close-Reading and Critical-Thinking Questions\*
- Descriptive Details
- **Core Skills Workout:** Text Features, Summarizing,\* Text Evidence,\* Text Structures
- Research Kit—Great for Project-Based Learning!
- Comprehension Quiz\*
- Questions for English Language Learners

**Vocabulary Slideshow** Great visual support!

\*Available on two levels

# Step-by-Step Lesson Plan

## Close Reading, Critical Thinking, and Skill Building



### 1. Preparing to Read

#### Watch a Video;

#### Preview Text Features and Vocabulary

(40 minutes, activity sheets online)

- Have students open to pages 4-5 and read the headline and subhead. Ask them to describe what they see in the photograph, and invite them to imagine what the area might have looked like before the hurricane. Call on a volunteer to read aloud the Up Close box on page 5.
- Show our **video** “Behind the Scenes: America’s Deadliest Disaster,” in which author Lauren Tarshis discusses her writing process. Have students complete the **video activity**.
- Project the **vocabulary slideshow** to preview challenging words. Follow up with the **vocabulary activity**. Highlighted words: *churning, devouring, transforming, immigrants, prone, surge, predictions, absurd, debris, reclaim*

### 2. Close Reading

#### Read and Unpack the Text

(45 minutes, activity sheet online)

- Read the article as a class. Have students read it a second time in small groups, answering the **close-reading questions**. Regroup to discuss the **critical-thinking questions**.

#### Close-Reading Questions

- In the first section of the article, what details does the author include to help you imagine the sounds Harry Maxson heard on September 8, 1900? (descriptive details) *The author writes “Harry’s ears pounded with the sounds of the screaming wind and of flying bricks and chunks of shattered wood smashing . . .” She imitates this sound with the words Bam! Bam! She includes the woman’s “desperate cry” calling “Help me!”*

- Reread the section “A Changing World.” What was Galveston, Texas, like in 1900? How did its location affect it during storms? (key details) *Galveston was elegant and modern, the “richest and most important” city in Texas. It had electric lights, street cars, and a public library, plus beautiful beaches and fancy mansions. It is located between the Gulf of Mexico and Galveston Bay. With water on two sides, it often flooded during storms.*

- Reread the last two paragraphs of “No Escape.” If the Galveston Hurricane were to happen today, what might be different? Why? (inference) *Today, people would probably know more about the hurricane in advance, like where and when it would likely hit. They would have a better chance of moving out of the hurricane’s path. In 1900, scientists didn’t have the knowledge and tools we now have.*

- Reread “A Raging Sea.” What were the effects of the hurricane? What details does the author include to help you understand what the hurricane was like? (descriptive details) *The hurricane’s winds ripped apart houses and buildings. Then the storm surge flooded the city, washing away many more buildings. The author describes “flying roof tiles and branches” and “a 30-foot-high wall made of broken buildings and furniture and beds and carriages.” She describes the city as “a raging sea, filled with debris” and says “Telephone poles flew like spears.”*

- Based on “A Raging Sea” and “Daring Rescue,” what was Harry’s family like? How would you describe Harry? (main idea and supporting details) *You can tell that Harry’s family was generous and caring. They opened their well-built home to anyone in need, eventually sheltering 140 people. His mother offered fresh biscuits and hot coffee to everyone. Harry was brave and selfless. Even though he could barely swim, he was determined to save*

people stranded in a flooded house. He made two trips through raging waters, helping to rescue 36 people.

- Based on “Lucky to Survive,” how did the hurricane change Galveston? (cause and effect) At first, Galveston was almost completely destroyed, and about 8,000 people were killed. Even though it was rebuilt, it has never again become the important city it once was.

### Critical-Thinking Questions

- Which section of the article does not mention Harry? Why is this section included? (text structure) The section “No Escape” doesn’t mention Harry. The purpose of this section is to provide background information about how powerful and destructive hurricanes are, and why Galveston was caught off guard. The section helps readers understand why the city suffered so badly in the disaster.
- In this article, the author uses three similes—comparisons using *like* or *as*. Find the similes and explain what each one helps you picture. (descriptive details) Similes include



“Outside, the wild, churning ocean was like a furious beast devouring his neighborhood,” (p. 4); “The streets, paved with crushed oyster shells, sparkled like they’d been sprinkled with diamonds,” (p. 6); “Telephone poles flew like spears,” (p. 8). Make sure students accurately interpret what each one means.

### 3. Skill Building

#### Featured Skill: Descriptive Details

- Distribute the **descriptive details** activity and have students complete it in groups. Then invite them to respond to the writing prompt at the bottom of page 9.

#### • Ideas to Engage and Inspire •

- **Create a News Broadcast** Ask students to imagine that TV news shows existed in 1900. Have them work in groups of three to create a segment reporting on the Galveston Hurricane and Harry’s actions. One of the students can act as Harry in an interview. They can record their segments, or act them out for the class.



## Differentiate and Customize

### For Struggling Readers

Go online to find a **lower-Lexile version** of this article, which you can print and distribute to students. Read it together in a small group, or have them listen to the audio of this version while they follow along.

### For ELL Students

Read the lower-Lexile version of the article aloud to students as they follow along. Then pose questions from our **Questions for English Language Learners**. This resource, available online, provides questions for students at different stages of language acquisition.



### For Advanced Readers

Present this essential question to students: What motivates people to perform heroic acts? Put students in small groups to discuss, reflecting on Harry’s actions during the hurricane and other examples they are familiar with. Then come together as a class to share ideas.

### For Guided Reading

Read the article with students in your guided reading groups. Use the close-reading questions—either on-level or lower-level—to deepen students’ understanding of the text. Meanwhile, have the rest of the class complete one of the activities from our **Core Skills Workout**.