

Style, Genre and Disaster: Using Disaster to Teach Writing

Melanie Murray

Introduction

This unit is designed for advanced 11th and/or 12th graders, geared towards fostering skills in the following areas: researching critically and responsibly, summarizing effectively and interpreting truthfully, writing with a strong and relatable voice and studying various genres of writing from fiction to nonfiction, informational to narrative, PSA to memoir, while adopting the point-of-view, context and background of a witness to/survivor of disaster. Students will be required to gain a concrete and factual sense of the concept of “disaster” and to answer questions such as, how do we define disaster? How do we respond to them? (from a family standpoint, community, or larger societal sense) and how do we learn from them/archive them in the collective memory through art, folklore and other creative ways? In a more social sense, students should be demonstrating the ability to “get inside” the mind of another person, to wear their shoes, figuratively speaking, and to view various types of disasters (both natural and man-made) through the eyes of another person (be it fictional or historical). The emphasis on the final writing portion of the unit should be that the student can write through the lens of a witness or a survivor, and “lose themselves” in the experience of others while possibly gaining a new perspective on their own lives and experience.

Rationale

Today’s youth are facing a more turbulent world than any generation before them. With increasing weather-related disasters due to climate change and an insurmountable pollution crisis, integrating the concept and reality of disaster into a lesson is a great opportunity to activate student thinking on the topic. This unit will seek to meet the Common Core standards of 11-12 ELA, but will also strive to inspire awareness, curiosity, empathy, and a broad, global view of society’s relationship with disaster and with each other in times of disaster. I hope to see students asking questions that will open their minds to the experiences of others, and in turn help them reflect on their own experiences in a different way. A practical, logical mindset on disaster is another desired result of this reading and writing unit; for students to show the agency and the ability to seek out answers and solutions instead of being passive, to look beyond themselves and examine their role in growing environmental crises and to take even the smallest action towards responsible citizenship in their daily lives.

Major Objectives

I am writing this unit with my 11th grade CP in mind. My major objective for the unit is independent research. Students have so much more information at their fingertips (literally) than generations before them but they lack both the critical thinking to evaluate

the reliability of sources, and the stamina to conduct research over long periods. They want to Google something and have an instant answer to their question, and they are easily frustrated when that does not happen, lacking the initiative and drive to keep digging. I may also be thinking of my Dual Enrollment seniors, for whom a significant portion of ENG 102 is conducting research and forming an arguable thesis statement based on that research. Furthermore, students need to know how to read, summarize and evaluate research in order to respond to it and form a coherent and arguable thesis statement. I hope that this unit will encourage students to make evidence-based claims and tell me what they know, rather than what they think, or to at least base the latter on the former, and not the other way around. In addition to research standards, students will be reading various types of literature about disasters, examining the way humans respond to disasters socially, culturally, artistically, politically, historically and asking the question: “why is man obsessed with disaster?” The culminating assignment is a final comprehensive writing portfolio that will include: 1-2 exposition of a fictionalized disaster (modeled after a real disaster but given creative license) requiring incorporation of research including statistics, dates, and other data, presented in an objective voice. Should be presented in a narrative voice that emphasizes sequence of events, cause-and-effect relationships, and pertinent vocabulary found via researching the disaster topic. 1-2 page reflection/memoir: students will write about the event/disaster as if they were a survivor/witness/rescuer/first responder/government official: emphasis will be on establishing voice and POV, sensory language, attention to genre, audience, purpose, tone, word choice. 1-2 page “address” (via president, governor, mayor, or some other government official) given to the class in an oral presentation that should follow the tradition of presidential/government addresses and demonstrate a clear purpose and audience. 1-2 page film analysis: students will watch a Hollywood movie about a real/fictional disaster and compare/contrast it with real footage/documentary coverage of a real disaster. Students will evaluate the accuracy and stylistic choices of the film version in a genre study. 1-2 page “How-To-Survive” Guidebook based on research conducted into real-world resources for survival and safety.

I also hope, that in a non-academic sense, this unit will foster some awareness of world events, the ability to view the Internet and the never-ending news cycle as a source of useful information, and not just white noise to ignore. With this unit, I hope students will be able to see patterns over the course of history, to evaluate major changes between world events, and to discern between objective and subjective reporting. A little bit of empathy would be a nice bonus.

Essential Questions

What is man’s relationship with natural disasters? What does it say about man’s relationship with nature? (existentialism). How do humans respond to disaster on a social level? A cultural level? An artistic level? A spiritual/religious level? How can we prepare

for a changing world and the likelihood of more disasters? How have human societies kept records of disasters/preserved them in the public memory over the years/centuries?

Demographics

The majority of my 11th graders are profoundly low-level readers, and a significant portion of them are ELL, so necessary accommodations will be made. The majority of my students are African American, Hispanic and Latino, and the issue of race and adversity in general, should be a hot topic this semester, given recent events like Hurricane Maria and the water crisis in Flint, Michigan. Though I would love to send students freely into the Internet in search of information, I know that modeling will be very important with this lesson. Key requirements in terms of independent research are as follows: Compiling and interpreting statistical data, comprehending and summarizing news coverage of certain events, including detecting bias, reflecting on first-hand accounts and possibly literary writings related to certain events, reading and understanding disaster response protocol from government sources (local, national, international), determining what kind of background information is necessary to fully understand the context of certain events.

I will provide for students a baseline list of disaster events that they may choose from, and hopefully from there they will move forward more independently. For example, a student may know about the sinking of the *Titanic*, but find the attack on the *Lusitania* more interesting, and then take on the necessary tasks of researching that event, which will likely be more complicated since it's related to WWI as opposed to a disaster of human error. They may have knowledge of the water crisis in Flint, Michigan, and perhaps the research will lead them to dig into recent droughts in Africa. They may know about Hiroshima and Nagasaki, but be encouraged to look into other, less-well-known events such as Three-Mile Island or Chernobyl, etc.

Students will be provided with readings at the onset of the unit, but the main objective is for them to conduct their own research, evaluate sources, ask pertinent questions, and then formulate an arguable claim about the relationship between race (or nationality), socioeconomic status, and disaster preparedness and response.

Objectives

In this unit, students will be reading various types of texts (literature, non-fiction, historical fiction, memoir, journalism, essays, poetry, interviews) through a variety of mediums (film, text, art, music) that discuss disasters both conceptually and in a concrete way. Students will be reflecting on the way we (socially, culturally, politically, creatively) respond to disasters, why humans are so fascinated by disaster, the causes and effects of disasters, making predictions regarding future disasters, drawing connections between disasters and their own world. They will be reflecting on the way the media responds to/disseminates information about disaster, the way communities (large and small) respond to disaster, and the way art responds to/handles disaster. Students will also be conducting guided and independent research (individual/partner research) that requires

students to search for and evaluate, summarize and analyze, compare and contrast, annotate and respond as well as mastering citations and MLA format as part of a research objective. They will be compiling data from a variety of sources and interpret and respond to it: charts, statistics, images, etc. In addition to the research element of the objective for this unit, students will also be writing about disasters from a variety of perspectives and in a variety of styles (narrative, informational, persuasive, argumentative).

A few of the reading objectives for this unit include: non-Fiction Texts (includes informational texts, historical non-fiction, speeches, PSAs, memoir, essay) for the purpose of the students demonstrating the following standards: Defining disaster (as opposed to conflict, emergency and apocalypse), understanding causes, processes, effects of disasters and the human element to them in terms of how societies, communities, the media, and various cultures and demographics both prepare for and respond to disaster. Students will also be assessed in their understanding various forms of data, especially visual data such as charts, graphs, surveys, statistics, and demonstrating annotation and analysis, close-reading skills. Since students will be reading both non-fiction and literature, they will be tasked in reading and comprehending Voice and perspective (first-hand accounts, comparing non-fiction with fiction).

In addition to texts and materials pertinent to the topic of disasters itself, students will be assigned to read texts, or portions of texts on writing, devoted not to content of disaster but skill of creative writing, especially the use of descriptive language and sensory detail, sequence of events, tone, mood and audience. Once the topic and essential question (man's relationship to nature/natural disasters) have been established, students will turn from non-fiction to literature (includes fiction, poetry/song lyrics, mythology & folktale) in order to perform the following: Genre study: how does the voice of the narrator change from fiction to nonfiction? What stylistic choices does a fiction writer make that a non-fiction writer can't make? Liberties? Constraints? How does a fiction author create drama? How can that same drama be found in non-fiction? Analyze the stylistic and creative choices of both a fiction, and a non-fiction author and compare how they handle the topic of disaster. Students will also read in order to analyze a Critical Element: Sensory Language: students will read texts chosen for their use of vivid imagery, will demonstrate close-reading skills, analyze word choice, tone, overall effect on the text. All of these fictional texts (see bibliography) have been carefully researched and will serve to both model the writing skills required of the students, as well as to pinpoint certain critical elements that can be found in fiction as well as non-fiction). Students will be required to research these authors and evaluate their background and expertise as well as the accuracy of the fictionalized disaster (where applicable).

In addition to the reading objectives, students will be tasked with performing several different types of writing. These writing objectives cover a wide range of genres, time periods, styles, purposes and authors, and all of which will have been modeled for the students in the reading prior to the writing portion of the unit. Some of these writing objectives include: Art and Disaster (teacher will provide list of topics, but students are free to choose their own): Exposition and Analysis: Choose a piece of fine art (sculpture,

painting, drawing, etc.) that depicts a natural disaster. Students will introduce artist, background, context, cultural relevance, etc. before beginning the description and exposition. The description and exposition will analyze and describe the work including materials, methods, dimensions, and will again require students to use vivid word choice and sensory language, and to be as descriptive as possible. Students will also be required to use art vocabulary and jargon that may be unfamiliar to them. Students will analyze the meaning of the work as it pertains to disaster, formulating a thesis statement that touches upon the larger cultural response to disaster including how a certain society responds to it psychologically, mythologically, culturally, artistically, religiously and spiritually.

Another writing objective will be a film/genre study: Movies and Disaster (teacher will provide list of topics/movies, but students are free to choose their own). Students will summarize and analyze a film that depicts a REAL disaster. They will conduct research on the disaster depicted in the film and analyze the film's accuracy, creative choices, taking into account purpose, background, audience, and other stylistic/logistical details (what was required technologically to portray a tornado in a realistic way? Does the film handle the event respectfully? Is it exploitative? Is it wildly inaccurate? etc.). They will then compare/contrast a Hollywood portrayal of disaster vs. real footage (students will watch documentaries/news footage, exposit that footage and first-hand accounts, analyze the mood and tone of the real footage and then compare it to a fictionalized account)

Teaching Strategies

The unit will start with a brief writing prompt asking the students to define the word "disaster." They will then discuss this definition with each other, and begin conducting independent internet research to find a type of disaster about which they will compile data. This will be in order to show students what disasters look like, how they behave, where they happen and how frequently, who they affect and why, and how likely they are to experience a disaster themselves in their lifetime. The first strategies used by the teacher will be informal assessment, discussion, monitoring and free-writing. Following the introduction to the unit, teacher will move on to modeling Creative Writing: Journal/Diary Entry. Teacher will model with short writing prompts: ("Do Now" on the board: complete the sentence and write on your own: "Our family had no time to pack. All we had time to do was run." Students will practice sequence of events, plot, descriptive language, voice, narrative tone, word choice, etc. They will have a choice about choosing a type of disaster they previously looked into the class before. Students will, through creative writing, examine the point-of-view and voice of a witness/survivor/first responder. Following this, teacher will use real-life accounts and recordings to demonstrate the importance of first-responders and to get students thinking about ALL the people affected by disasters, not just the victims. Teacher model: voices of

rescuers/first responders: Ex: “Put your baby in a shoebox and put it up high:”¹ Teacher will provide real 9-1-1 dispatch recordings, first responder and rescuer testimony, first-hand accounts and students will summarize, analyze, respond with an emphasis on CHARACTER and VOICE in a variety of texts, and how purpose/audience relate to tone and stylistic choices. Teacher will use journalistic texts and establish multiple points of view, perspectives, styles and audiences revolving around the same event. Some of these texts might be things like articles from local newspapers vs. national/international newspapers, as well as essays and articles debating the role of the media as it relates to disaster (see bibliography). Another strategy will be to analyze these various texts for objectivity vs. subjectivity, which students will apply to their own writing at the end of the unit.

Genre study, teacher model: Fiction/Non-Fiction on disasters. Students will be introduced to a variety of texts (see bibliography below) and mediums before being tasked with choosing a genre and voice to commit to for the final writing project. Strategies will include comparing/contrasting the reporting of certain events based on time period (ex: how is Pliny the Younger different from a modern-day reporter witnessing a hurricane? How did cultures view natural disasters in the ancient world and how do we view them now?

Classroom Activities

This lesson plan will ideally last a marking period, with the first half consisting of reading, the second consisting of writing. It is designed for a block setting, in which classes of 90 minutes meet on an alternating basis. There will be infrequent homework, usually consisting of assignments not completed in class, or long-term projects, some involving collaboration.

Lesson 1 (90 minutes)

Do-Now/Warm-Up: Define the word “disaster” in your own words. Provide three examples of disasters. Then google the term “disaster” and write down the definition provided by the World Health Organization ²

Activity 1

(APK/Introduction): Teacher will introduce the World Health Organization Disaster Development Continuum³, presenting it on the board and discussing the social aspects of

¹ Steve Sternberg, “Battle Scarred: The Personal Stories of the Katrina Rescuers.” USNews.com, August 28, 2015. <https://www.usnews.com/news/articles/2015/08/28/battle-scarred-the-personal-stories-of-the-katrina-rescuers>

² Addis Ababa. Disasters & Emergencies Training Package. WHO/EHA Panafrican Emergency Training Center. March, 2002/ accessed August 10, 2018.

disaster. The class will be divided into 4 groups, each assigned to one stage of the cycle. Students in each group will have five minutes to discuss the meaning of their stage and where in the sequence it falls. Class will come back together and discuss as a group what each stage means and in what order these stages proceed. Students will take Cornell notes on the process. They will also create a visual representation of the continuum to keep in their notes.



4

They will then get in partnerships/small groups and research a natural disaster (to be chosen from <https://www.livescience.com/11365-10-worst-natural-disasters.html>) and apply the continuum to that event, using at least 5 different online sources, which they will cite in MLA format. Groups will create a five-slide minimum Google Slide presentation with the following specifications:

1. Title slide: group member's names, central focus on the natural disaster with an image and a clearly readable caption.
2. Introductory slide: 5 Ws: What is the event? When, how and why did it happen? Who was involved/affected? (bullet points)
3. Sequence of events (1-2 slides): students will give a sequential narrative of the event with at least one image on each slide.

³ *Ibid*

⁴ *Ibid*

4. Disaster Development Continuum slide (1-2 slides): focus on the elements of Mitigation, Preparedness, Response and Recovery, at least one image required to accompany text.

Activity 2 (Homework): Students will read the NBC News article “The Science Behind Why We Can’t Look Away From Tragedy”⁵(available on Schoology) and write a 1-page exposition and response.

Lesson 2 (90 Minutes)

Warm-Up: Have you or anyone you know ever experienced a disaster? Use your imagination: what kind of disaster scares you the most? What kind of disaster do you think you’d be able to survive?

Activity 3 (APK): Round table discussion of last night’s homework, informal. Review of Warm-Up

Activity 4: In-class reading and prep for Socratic Seminar (it is assumed in this lesson that students have performed socratic seminars previously, however resources <https://www.facinghistory.org/resource-library/teaching-strategies/socratic-seminar> will be available on Schoology to help students delegate responsibilities and prepare). Students will read independently the article https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/on-innovations/prepare-yourself-natural-disasters-will-only-get-worse/2011/09/14/gIQAvRVPUK_story.html?noredirect=on&utm_term=.b08f223fad3, annotating and compiling cornell notes as they read. The teacher will then select a discussion leader or two, who will begin generating discussion ideas and lead a classwide discussion for 5-10 minutes. Students will independently prepare 5 socratic questions in response to the article. Student will then get in small groups of 3 or 4 and narrow down their questions to 5.

Lesson 3

Do-Now/Warm-Up: What do you think are some good rules for class discussion? How can we maintain productivity and democracy during a Socratic Seminar?

Activity 5: Establishing Rules for the Socratic Seminar (or perhaps reviewing already-decided-upon rules from previous seminars). Students will return to their small groups and discuss appropriate policies for socratic seminars such as: always refer to the text as evidence for ideas, only one person talks at a time, those on the outer circle don’t speak,

⁵ Danielle Page, “The Science Behind Why We Can’t Look Away From Tragedy,” NBCNews.com, September 28, 2017.

they only observe, etc. Small groups will join back up as a class and 5 major non-negotiable rules will be established/reviewed, with the explicit condition that students who violate these rules will not be part of the socratic seminar and will not receive credit for participating.

Activity 6: Socratic Seminar on the Washington Post article “Prepare Yourself, Natural Disasters Will Only Get Worse,” by Erwann Michel-Kerjan ⁶. Students will keep in mind that the purpose of SS’s is not to state one’s opinion but to ask questions and learn through investigation. Students in the outer circle will take notes, students in the inner circle will ask questions, with two selected students as discussion leaders.

Activity 7: Students will access the list of selected novels/books on disasters and choose one from the list. Because the texts vary in length and complexity, some students may be the only ones reading certain titles, while others are sharing the responsibility of reading more broadly among their “book clubs,” which will be established in the following class. Students will, as a class, be made well aware of the final reading deadline in advance, and will have to budget their time and keep up with their reading log accordingly.

Lesson 4

Warm-Up/APK: Provide a brief paragraph about your selected book in which you provide the following:

1. Author’s name and credentials
2. Date and city of publication, name of publisher
3. Brief synopsis (no spoilers)
4. 3-5 sentences remarking on success/critical response of the book

Activity 8: Reading Logs: Students will form book clubs and create a shared Google Sheet in which EACH STUDENT will keep a weekly log of pages read (students will hold their group members accountable for reading, keep each other up to speed if someone is absent or falls behind). Teacher will also have access to these Google Sheets and students will receive a weekly grade for their completion of this assignment. Along with the weekly log will be a Weekly Exposition, and every other week, book clubs will elect a representative to give a “report” of the portion read that week. This report may be analytical as well as evaluative.

Activity 9: WHO’s Disaster Management Continuum: The Stages of Disaster. ⁷ Students will gather in their book clubs and analyze the disaster portrayed in their text in regards to

⁶ Erwann Michel-Kejan, “Prepare Yourself, Natural Disasters Will Only Get Worse,” Washingtonpost.com. Sept. 13, 2011.

⁷ *Ibid*

Mitigation, Preparedness, Response and Recovery. Their analysis must touch upon the following points:

1. Define and describe the population impacted by the disaster
2. Describe the government's role in terms of one of the stages of disaster
3. Evaluate the effectiveness of the community in terms of one of the stages of disaster
4. Make a proposal about how the community/government could do better OR a prediction about what the community/government will do in the case of future events.

Activity 10: What Disaster Looks Like: Students will conduct small-group research and find either real or imagined footage of their disaster (students reading fiction may use movie clips; students reading nonfiction can easily find newsreel footage/interviews, etc.) and individually compose a compare/contrast essay of 1-2 pages that touches upon the following points:

1. What is the point of view of the author/narrator of your text? How does this affect the way you view the disaster? Imagine how it might be described from a different point of view.
2. What is the point of view of the film version? Is it eyewitness? Is it a detached narrator? Is it from an Eye of God point of view? How does this compare to the point of view of your selected text?
3. Which do you prefer? Why?

Lesson 5

Activity 11: Read two articles written by first responders (Hurricane Katrina⁸ and 9/11⁹) and do a quick-write (5 min) in which you compare the following: context, purpose, tone and voice. What similarities do you see between the responders? What differences do you see in terms of how they approach the disaster and their role in it?

*Informal Discussion: Tone and Voice: How do these elements differ between responders and witnesses/survivors? Is there a *responsibility* to be objective when writing something reflective?

⁸ Danielle Page, "The Science Behind Why We Can't Look Away From Tragedy," NBCNews.com, September 28, 2017. <https://www.nbcnews.com/better/health/science-behind-why-we-can-t-look-away-disasters-ncna804966>

⁹ Sandra Diamond Fox, "9/11 First Responder, Survivor, Share Stories of Renewal at New Canaan Event." NewCanaan Dailyvoice.com, Sept. 13, 2016. <http://voicesofseptember11.org/month-in-review/911-first-responder-survivor-share-stories-renewal-new-canaan-event>

Activity 12: Students will watch any 3 post-disaster/crisis speeches (options available on Schoology: Kennedy’s Cuban Missile Crisis Speech, Carter’s “Crisis of Confidence” Speech, Clinton’s Post-Oklahoma City Bombing Speech, W. Bush’s “War on Terror” Speech, Obama’s Newtown speech, and Trump’s comments on Hurricane Maria). Students, as a group, will analyze each speech and provide the following: context for the speech, purpose of speaker, demands of audience, structure and organizational pattern of the speech. They will then compare any TWO out of the THREE and include analytical and evaluative points.

Activity 12: Debate: Students will break into groups based on which speech they preferred the most. Students will then debate the merits/weaknesses of any 2 speeches.

Activity 13: Students will write their own presidential address. It can address either the disaster covered in their selected text, any other recent natural disaster, or a fictional one (students have, in the past, written about the “Unicorn Rainbow Apocalypse” and I accepted their work because it mimicked the tone and structure of a presidential address, so content can be a little out-of-the-box here). Speech should be outlined in the following format before students may begin drafting.

- I. Greeting (My fellow Americans)
- II. _____
Lay out the problem (explain the situation)
- III. Our government is in the process of _____
(what is being done that can comfort/encourage the American people?)
- IV. We must _____ (what must the people do in order to play a role in the developing crisis/disaster?)
- V. Promise/Solution WE WILL _____
(how do presidents end their speeches on a positive note? Why is it so important to maintain a positive tone in such a speech?)
- VI. Conclusion (1-2 encouraging sentences before invariably closing with “God Bless America”).

*May be done for homework/completed during following class if not completed in 90-minute period.

Lesson 6

Activity 14: Peer Review: Students will randomly select partners and switch papers. They will evaluate each other’s work (and their own) looking out for the following requirements:

- I. Structure/organization (does it follow the outline format?)
- II. Content (does it address a disaster/crisis?)

- III. Purpose and Audience (is it clear what the objective of the speaker is? What the needs of the audience are?)
- IV. ASE (is it written in Standard English with no spelling or grammatical errors?)
- V. Conclusion (does it end with a strong, decisive message to the American people?)

Students will then switch papers back and evaluate THEIR OWN work based on their partner's feedback and a second look at the requirements.

Lesson 7

Activity 15: **Culminating Writing Assessment (2-3 class periods)**

Instructions: Students will choose from one of the following options and compose a 3-5 page essay.

Option 1: Write as a survivor. Describe the disaster as if you were experiencing it firsthand. Include the onset of the disaster and its causes, the duration of it including vivid description, and its aftermath. Students will be graded for strong voice, sensory language, and plot structure.

Option 2: Write as a first responder. Adopt the tone and point of view of a paramedic, firefighter, police officer, FEMA representative, or some other kind of official responder. Describe in FIRST PERSON the events in sequential order, using the jargon and tone of a first responder based on our readings.

Option 3: Write as a representative of the government. Adopting the objective, detached tone of FEMA guidelines, for example, write either a pamphlet with useful information for those vulnerable to/currently experiencing disasters, the script for a PSA, or a website devoted to helping civilians either mitigate, prepare, respond, or recover from a disaster. Visual aides are encouraged.

Option 4: Analyze or Evaluate: Reflect on the disaster portrayed in your selected text. Using evidence from official government websites (see above), evaluate the effectiveness of ALL FOUR stages of the Disaster Management Continuum and propose suggestions for improvement.

Students will be graded for Content, Organization/Structure, Format (including citations), SWE and Voice and will be provided with a rubric and feedback at various stages through the duration of the assignment (2-3 class periods in which students will workshop and peer review, brainstorm, outline, draft, revise and edit).

Resources

Teacher Resources

Books

Ababa, Addis. *Disasters & Emergencies Training Package*. WHO/EHA: Panafrican Emergency Training Centre. Updated March, 2002.

This is one example of a government-issued document regarding training, procedures, and other logistical aspects of disasters that students will have to be familiar with in order to complete the writing assignments.

Barry, John. *Rising Tide: The Great Mississippi Flood of 1927 and How it Changed America*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1998.

Great book for demonstrating how response to and memory of disaster changes over time; could make for a great compare/contrast activity as we study how time affects how we look at disaster.

Brooks, Max. *The Zombie Survival Guide: Complete Protection from the Living Dead*. New York: Three Rivers Press, 2003.

Fictional, but written in a tone and voice so as to appear historically accurate; will help students establish a tone of objectivity as well as how to incorporate real-life facts and research into a fictional landscape and narrative.

Brooks, Max. *World War Z: An Oral History of the Zombie War*. New York: Three Rivers Press, 2007.

Same purpose as above: Brooks establishes an official tone that students can model as they work on their own written projects.

Deraniyagala, Sonali. *Wave*. New York: Vintage Books, 2013.

First-hand accounts of the deadly Thailand Tsunami in 2005. Shows narrative in a personal, eyewitness type of voice.

Fink, Sheri. *Five Days at Memorial: Life and Death in a Storm-Ravaged Hospital*. New York: Crown Publishers, 2013.

Pulitzer-prize winning nonfiction book about the days during/following Hurricane Katrina; pays special attention to first responders and medical professionals so that students can grasp the point of view of those who are surviving and helping others.

Frey, James. *Bright, Shiny Morning*. New York: Harper Perennial, 2008.

Novel about various characters in Los Angeles, the city itself is a bit of a character. We will only be using a segment of the book that documents how “disaster-prone” Los Angeles is, and students may choose Los Angeles as a starting point for a writing topic, or begin researching some of the disasters that are currently and perennially affecting California.

King, Stephen. *On Writing: A Memoir of the Craft*. New York: Pocket Books, 2000.

We will be reading portions of this book both prior to and throughout the writing portion of the unit to establish good writing habits and to learn from the Master himself.

Kingsolver, Barbara. *The Poisonwood Bible*. New York: Harper Collins. 1998.

Wonderful novel that shows both the stark contrast between cultures (specifically White Americans vs. everybody else), one portion in particular will be used to demonstrate strong narrative of disaster, especially in regards to point of view, voice, and sensory language.

Larson, Erik. *Dead Wake: The Last Crossing of the Lusitania*. New York: Broadway Books, 2015.

Larson writes nonfiction. Students can learn from his use of high drama, detached narrator, changing points of view and objective vs. subjective tones when describing the sequence of events that can cause disaster.

Larson, Erik. *Isaac's Storm: A Man, A Time and the Deadliest Hurricane in History*. New York: Vintage Books, 2000.

Same as above; Larson's writing style will be particularly helpful when introducing tension and plot to students. Also will be useful to demonstrate context: can writing on a disaster become obsolete when another disaster has supplanted the topic of the writing? (pre-Katrina writings on hurricanes vs. post-Katrina)

McCarthy, Cormac. *Blood Meridian or The Evening Redness in the West*. New York: Vintage Books, 1985.

Will be used to teach dialogue, plot, point of view, and descriptive language.

McCarthy, Cormac. *The Road*. New York: Vintage Books, 2006.

Will be used to teach character, pacing and sequence, theme and voice.

National Commission on Terrorist Attacks. *The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States*. New York: WW. Norton & Company, Inc. 2004.

Students will read portions of this text for the purpose of cause-and-effect and how it relates to disaster events. Essential Question: why was 9/11 preventable? What could/should have been done? Students will apply this questions to various types of disasters.

St. John Mandel, Emily. *Station Eleven*. Toronto: Vintage Books, 2014.

Novel set in a post-apocalyptic world that demonstrates mankind's relationship to art in times of disaster, our attachment to art, and how it relates to the idea of survival.

Strunk, White. *Elements of Style: 4th Edition*. Edinburgh Gate: Pearson Educational Limited, 1998.

Will be used to supplement the writing process.

Winchester, Simon. *Krakatoa: The Day the World Exploded*. New York: Harper Collins. 2003.

Highly-acclaimed book on the eruption of Mount Krakatoa. I chose this book because I want to provide context and contrast so as to keep the students examining how our responses to/views on/ability to mitigate disasters changes over the centuries (what if Mt. Krakatoa erupted today? How would it be different? Etc.)

Articles/Essays/Interviews

Brinkley, Douglas. "The Flood that Sank George W. Bush." *Vanity Fair*. 2015.

Article will be used to discuss leadership, legacy and politics in relation to disasters. Essential Question for this text is: what is the president's role when disaster strikes? What should he/she do? How do our current and past leaders measure up to these requirements? How can disaster impact the legacy and memory of a leader?

Gabour, Jim. "A Katrina Survivor's Tale: They Forgot Us and That's When Things Started to Get Bad." *The Guardian*. August 27, 2015.

Will be used to establish the theme of man vs. government (or man and government) when it comes to disasters. Will be used to foster discussion about the role that government can and should play in disaster preparedness and response. The theme of race, SES and disaster will be a common one throughout the unit, so this will help to stimulate thinking about said theme.

Hicks, Erin. "Student Essays Explore Meaning of 9/11." *New Jersey Herald*, 2012.

Provides reflections and narratives written by teens, can help to establish voice and point of view as students begin to write their own narratives about disaster.

Litvinov, Yuryi. "A Survivor Reflects on Chernobyl Disaster, 25 Years Later." NPR: Tell Me More by Michel Martin, 2011.

This, along with a website that provides beautiful and haunting photographs of Chernobyl today, will be used in a lesson on context, long-term effects of disaster, as well as providing inspiration for students workshopping sensory details and descriptive language (what does Chernobyl look like? Smell like? Sound like?)

Scanlon, Joseph. *Research About The Mass Media and Disaster: Never (Well Hardly Ever) the Twain Shall Meet*. Emergency Communications Research Unit, Carleton University. <https://training.fema.gov>.

This essay, a resource used by FEMA, discusses the role that the mass media have in disasters, revealing dichotomies between scholarship on said role and common misconceptions about how and why the media not only plays such an important role, but how the media can affect disasters and people involved with disasters.

Zimmer, Carl. "The Famine Ended 70 Years Ago but Dutch Genes Still Bear Scars." *The New York Times*, January 31, 2018. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/31/science/dutch-famine-genes.html>

I thought this might be a great way to draw a connection between war/conflict and disasters that result from that conflict, whether intentional or not. More than simply saying "war affects the innocent," I would really love to see a student say, "these specific circumstances of war caused an event that was in and of itself disastrous for millions, even if the connection to the conflict is indirect).

Videos/Films

“JFK’s ‘Cuban Missile Crisis’ Speech (10/22/62) (Complete and Uncut).” *Youtube*. Uploaded by David Von Pier’s JFK Channel. August 30, 2013. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EgdUgzAWcrw&t=1s>

Students will analyze the tone, structure and style of various presidential speeches and evaluate the effectiveness of each while also paying close attention to context and background.

“CBS News Archives: Carter’s Famous ‘Malaise Speech’.” *Youtube*. Uploaded by CBS News, July 15, 2011. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0tGd_9Tahzw. Same as above

“President George W. Bush Addresses a Joint Congress About the War on Terror.” *Youtube*. Uploaded by AP Archive, July 31, 2015. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9vzRMaHCysU>

Same as above

“President Obama: ‘Newtown, You Are Not Alone.’” *Youtube*. Uploaded by PBS NewsHour, Dec. 17, 2012. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ftlT41LpIOY&t=1s>

Students will analyze this speech a little differently, especially with an eye for oratory style and presentation. Students will analyze the body language and pacing of President Obama and compare this event/context with the others.

“George W. Bush Full Speech on Katrina From Jackson Square.” *Youtube*. Uploaded by Kevin Ortega. Feb. 9, 2014. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YJpcbV6FNc8&t=1s>

Same as above

“Trump Gives Puerto Rico Hurricane Response Team a ‘10.’” *Youtube*. Uploaded by CBS News. Oct. 19, 2017. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vhjB-9yCQRg>

Same as above

“How Puerto Ricans See President Trump’s Hurricane Response.” *Youtube*. PBS NewsHour. Oct. 3, 2017. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oCkMAFQxE4o>

Same as above

“FDR Fireside Chat- The Dust Bowl.” *Youtube*. Uploaded by Faith Moore. Feb. 27, 2014. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HjwZz9t9INo&t=111s>

Bay, Michael. *Armageddon*, directed by Michael Bay (1998; Los Angeles: Touchstone Pictures, 1998). DVD

As part of our genre study, students will compare reality with fiction, analyzing creative choices by writers and directors and comparing them with real-world (though hypothetical) disaster processes and technology.

Donaldson, Roger. *Dante's Peak*, directed by Roger Donaldson, (1997; Los Angeles: Universal Pictures, 1997). DVD.

Will be useful in genre study; students can compare the plot devices of this film with true accounts of Mt. St. Helen's or other volcanic eruptions in developed nations. Students may also compare the events of this film to more historic volcanic eruptions with an eye for cultural perspective and point of view (Pliny the Younger vs. an experienced researcher/seismologist/geologist, climatologist, etc.)

Mankind: The Story of All of Us, episode 1, “Inventors,” directed by Nick Brown, aired November 13, 2012 on The History Channel.

Clips of this series will be used to show how humans respond to disasters, how human resourcefulness can be inspired by disaster, and how disaster forces us to evolve and improve.

Emmerich, Roland. *The Day After Tomorrow*, directed by Roland Emmerich, (2004; Los Angeles: Twentieth Century Fox, 2005). DVD.

Will be used when discussing real-world context and weather-related events, which will be happening more and more in our students' futures.

De Bont, Jan. *Twister*, directed by Jan de Bont, (1996; Los Angeles: Warner Brothers, 1997). DVD.

Genre study: fiction vs. real-world. How accurate is this technology? Students may be inspired to focus on tornadoes and how they regularly affect many Americans every year. What is it like to live in a region that is regularly struck by disaster? How does this affect daily life?

Forster, Marc. *World War Z*, directed by Marc Forster, (2013; Los Angeles: Paramount Pictures, 2014). DVD

After reading portions of the book, students will watch the film for the purpose of seeing a great disaster book turned into a mediocre movie that makes no attempt to be faithful to the source material. How would the book really look if it were made into a film? How would you do it differently?

Websites

Institute for Economics and Peace, Global Peace Index 2018. This source focuses more on man-made disasters and violent conflict, but it is a rich source for statistical data. The website offers a map of the world and students can pick and choose virtually any country on the planet and look at information regarding poverty, violence, geopolitical events, racial demographics, etc. In the past with other assignments, I've had students start with a country that interests them for whatever reason, and from there they begin researching the history of that country, and I thought it would be a perfect place to start, especially with some of my more visual students. The countries on the map are often color-coded according to how much conflict is occurring in that country, so they might pick El Salvador because their family is from there, while another may pick The Netherlands, which may be green (peaceful) on the map, but not without its share of disasters (which I will refer to again in this prospectus). (<http://visionofhumanity.org/app/uploads/2018/06/Global-Peace-Index-2018-2.pdf>)

10 Worst Disasters in African History (AnswersAfrica.com-- I know this is not the best source, but it's a good place to start)

10 Worst Natural Disasters in US History (livescience.com)

Student Resources

Schoology: All materials will be kept in a folder as well as readily available in hard copy. Students will submit the majority of their work through Schoology and this unit is designed for students who are familiar with Schoology and have used it before. This unit is also designed assuming that students have access to personal laptops and the internet.

Appendix A: Implementing State Standards

Reading (Informational Texts and Literature)

Key Ideas and Details (CCSS. ELA-Literacy. RL. 11-12. 1)

Students must be able to support their claims and ideas with evidence from a variety of texts both in discussion and in their writing. This standard will be especially important during the Socratic Seminar.

Determining Theme (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.3)

Students will determine and discuss theme in their book groups and track the progress of this element through their reading. They will ultimately produce their own creative writing that requires a strong thematic element.

Author's Choice, Elements of Drama (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.3)

Students will be reading a variety of texts from authors with a variety of backgrounds, and part of being a critical and analytical reader is being able to examine the choices of an author as it relates to audience, genre and purpose. They will examine this aspect of literature and informational texts both as a reader and as a writer.

Author's Choice, Structure (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.5)

Students will examine this aspect of literature especially when comparing written literature on a disaster event with film portrayals and nonfiction works. Examining when and how to use drama will be an important part of their culminating writing assignment.

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.7)

As above, students will read multiple versions of the same story, or multiple perspectives on the same event, while also comparing the interpretive voice of a film director to a poet to a journalist to an essayist.

Writing

Introducing Claims (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.A)

Students will introduce precise, knowledgeable claims, establish the significance of those claims, distinguish those claims from alternate or opposing claims, and create an organization that logically sequences claims, counterclaims, reason and evidence. Students will be required to demonstrate this skill while analyzing and evaluating both real events and selected texts.

Establish Tone (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.1.D)

Students must learn how to establish tone based on the narrator or the author and his/her purpose. Developing an understanding of objectivity vs. subjectivity is one of the most difficult things for a student to learn, and it will be crucial if they are to write creatively and immerse themselves in a speaker or narrator who has a specific point of view on their disaster scenario.

Using Precise Language (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.D)

Students must use precise language, domain-specific vocabulary, and techniques such as metaphor, simile and analogy to manage the complexity of the topic. This skill will be crucial in this unit, as students must adopt the voice of a specific character (so a

police officer would use different terminology than a child bearing witness to a disaster or a politician speaking on a disaster after the fact).

Write Narrative to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences. (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.3 A-E).

Engage and orient the reader by setting out a problem, situation, or observation and its significance, establishing one or multiple points of view, and introducing a narrator and/or characters; create a smooth progression of experiences or events.

Use narrative techniques such as dialogue, pacing, description, reflection and multiple plot lines to develop experiences, events, and/or characters.

Sequence events so they build on one another to create a coherent whole and build towards a particular tone and outcome.

Use precise words and phrases, telling details and sensory language to convey a vivid picture of the experiences, events, settings and/or characters.

Provide a conclusion that follows from and reflects on what is experienced, observed, or resolved over the course of the narrative.

Notes

1. Steve Sternberg, "Battle Scarred: The Personal Stories of the Katrina Rescuers." USNews.com, August 28, 2015.
<https://www.usnews.com/news/articles/2015/08/28/battle-scarred-the-personal-stories-of-the-katrina-rescuers>
2. Addis Ababa. Disasters & Emergencies Training Package. WHO/EHA Panafrican Emergency Training Center. March, 2002/ accessed August 10, 2018.
3. Danielle Page, "The Science Behind Why We Can't Look Away from Tragedy," NBCNews.com, September 28, 2017.
4. Erwann Michel-Kejan, "Prepare Yourself, Natural Disasters Will Only Get Worse," Washingtonpost.com. Sept. 13, 2011.
5. Sandra Diamond Fox, "9/11 First Responder, Survivor, Share Stories of Renewal at New Canaan Event." NewCanaan Dailyvoice.com, Sept. 13, 2016.
<http://voicesofseptember11.org/month-in-review/911-first-responder-survivor-share-stories-renewal-new-canaan-event>