

Teaching about Natural Disasters with Materials from the North Carolina State Archives

Overview

Natural disasters happen every day, and in North Carolina in 2011 we seemed to have had more than other years. Natural disasters bring out many emotions in students, and adults, as well. Fear predominates, but there are other feelings, such as anger, insecurity and anxiety. One effective way to deal with natural disasters is to study them historically. It is often helpful for students to talk about what led up to the disaster and what people did after it to cope and carry on. This puts students on an intellectual footing when confronted with the uncontrollable. It gives a non-emotional avenue to pursue and channels negative, albeit it, necessary emotions in more productive ways. Many areas of the world are prone to certain types of natural disasters, just because of their location. North Carolina's geography lends itself to large numbers of hurricanes and shipwrecks, so there are many examples of those types of disasters in our history.

Preparation

Discuss with students the definitions of the words disaster, natural disaster, accident, and tragedy. Discuss how these words are used by the media when reporting terrible events. Brainstorm disasters and then natural disasters, making a list of each session's suggestions. Use the list provided with this lesson plan to add some of the natural disasters that have happened in North Carolina to the classroom lists.

Activities

- Students, alone or in groups, should do online and traditional research on a particular North Carolina natural disaster. They may choose a disaster from the attached list or choose one of their own. Students may produce written papers or oral reports about the disaster they have chosen.
- Using the provided list of songs about disasters, listen to or read the lyrics of some of the songs and discuss why people write songs about such sad, tragic events. Are students surprised that some of the songs are about disasters?
- Find newspaper articles about North Carolina natural disasters. Using the contemporary information, create a spreadsheet that tallies some of the statistics provided about each disaster in order to compare and contrast them.
- Study the photographs of disasters in North Carolina. What problems were created by the disasters and how could they have handled them when they occurred? How would they handle them differently now?

Enrichment and Extension

- Study the types of occupations that are called upon to deal with natural disasters. Examples are emergency relief workers, utilities workers, police officers, firefighters, emergency preparedness workers, and medical personnel. What training do people who are interested in these occupations need?
- In North Carolina it is important to be as prepared as possible for disasters, such as hurricanes. Investigate what is included in, and explain to the class the importance of items in, a hurricane kit.
- Study newspaper articles about various natural disasters from different time periods. How was the coverage of the disaster different in the past than it is now?
- Compare various media representations of a disaster. How do songs, photographs, newspaper accounts and historical accounts differ in their representation? Does one medium seem more reliable than another? Does one medium appeal more to the senses than the intellect? Why?

Music and Natural Disasters

"The Wreck of the Edmund Fitzgerald"	Gordon Lightfoot	shipwreck
"Louisiana 1927"	Randy Newman	flood
"Dust Bowl Blues"	Woody Guthrie	drought
"The Cyclone of Rye Cove"	Carter Family	cyclone/tornado
"Backwater Blues"	Bessie Smith	flood
"Mighty Day"	Chad Mitchell Trio	hurricane
"Run Come See, Jerusalem"	Blind Blake Higgs	hurricane
"Ring Around the Rosy"	nursery rhyme	plague
"Bangladesh"	George Harrison	famine

Students can write their own songs about a natural disaster. They can also create a music video for their own or another song using photographs and videos of the disaster that they find on the internet and in other sources.

Study the lyrics to these songs and others about natural disasters. What do the lyrics have in common?

Why would someone write a song about a natural disaster?

How is a song's representation of the disaster different from a newspaper's (or other media)?

Many of these songs were written and performed in the days before music videos. Is the song more or less effective now that photographs or videos can be added to the song?

Interested students may perform a chosen disaster song.

Natural Disasters in North Carolina

Earthquakes

1874
1886

Epidemics

Small Pox	1711
Cholera	1834
Yellow fever	1862
Spanish flu	1918
Polio	1948

Floods

Raleigh	1865
Asheville	1916,
1928	
Raleigh	1939
Hurricane Floyd	1999

Hurricanes

San Ciriaco	1899
Hugo	1989
Hazel	1954

Lightning Strikes

Fort Bragg	1957
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Nor'easters

Ash Wednesday	1962
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Shipwrecks

Chrissie Wright	1886
Steamer Olive	1903

Tornadoes

Steamer Olive	1903
Western NC	1974
	1984
Raleigh	1989

Winter Storms

1899
1915
1927
1960

North Carolina Natural Disasters Bibliography

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