

The Hurricane of '38

Teacher's Guide

The film *The Hurricane of '38* and this website offer insights into topics in American history, including: oral histories, community responses to disasters, the growth of and reliance upon infrastructure like roads, bridges, railways, and telephone lines, the history of weather forecasting, and, indirectly, the Munich appeasement of 1938. You can use part or all of the film, or delve into the rich resources available on this website to learn more, either in a classroom or on your own.

The following activities are grouped into four categories: history, economics, geography, and civics. You can also read a few helpful hints for completing the activities at the bottom of the page.

History

1. Read the [U.S. Storm Disasters Timeline](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/timeline/hurricane-timeline/)

(www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/timeline/hurricane-timeline/) and use it to create a map of major storm disasters in the United States. Label the year and summary of each disaster next to its location on the map.

2. Write a description of the most dramatic weather-related event you have ever witnessed or experienced. Then ask an adult -- preferably an older adult -- to describe his or her most dramatic weather-related experience. Select one of these two stories and tell it to the class. When everyone has presented a story, discuss the similarities and differences among them: Do several stories concern the same storm? Was the person's reaction to the storm primarily fear, curiosity, excitement, or something else? Did the storm bring out the best in people, or the worst?

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Economics

1. Imagine that you live in Providence, Rhode Island during the Hurricane of 1938. As the storm recedes, you see a group of your friends enter stores damaged by the storm and begin to carry off merchandise. How do you respond? Why? Write a letter to a friend in which you describe the situation and your response.

2. Read about [the Hurricane's aftermath](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/general-article/hurricane-aftermath/)

(www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/general-article/hurricane-aftermath/) to get a sense of the extent of the cleanup that was necessary after the Hurricane of 1938, and to learn about the involvement of the American Red Cross in aiding the victims. To find out how the Red Cross is aiding victims of recent disasters, visit its [website](http://www.redcross.org) (www.redcross.org). Use the information on the site to prepare a poster or collage on the Red Cross's response to a recent disaster. You might, for example, include information on the number of people the Red Cross has helped, the amount of money and blood it collected for victims, and portions of the news stories on the site.

Geography

1. Read about and examine a map of [the hurricane's path](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/image/hurricane-path)

(www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/image/hurricane-path). Use the information you find to draw your own map tracing the route of the hurricane from its origins in the Cape Verde Islands to its end in arctic Canada. Include the dates and times listed.

2. Visit the website of the [Federal Emergency Management Agency](http://www.fema.gov) (www.fema.gov), the part of the federal government assigned to prepare for and respond to disasters. Type the name of your state into the search engine at the site to find information on times when federal disaster relief was provided to parts of your state. As a class, create a wall map of your state and label these events on the map, including the dates, the areas that were declared disaster areas, and the specific cause of each disaster.

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Civics

1. Read a brief history of the [National Weather Service](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/general-article/hurricane-brief-history/), (www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/general-article/hurricane-brief-history/). Today, weather-related information is much more widely available than in 1938. To prove this point, hold a class contest: select an upcoming day (such as the coming Saturday) and see who can find weather forecasts for that day for your community from the largest number of sources. Sources can include newspapers, radio and television stations, and websites. Only one forecast can come from each source: for example, forecasts from two different newspapers count as two sources, but forecasts from two different editions of the same newspaper only count as one source. Students should list their sources and the specifics of the forecast itself, such as the temperature and the possibility of precipitation.

2. As the film notes, the Hurricane of 1938 was overshadowed by events in Europe, so it received relatively little press coverage. Follow radio, television, newspaper, and/or Internet coverage of world events for one week. Look for examples of disasters in other countries that were caused by weather or other factors. Report on these events to the class. Did these events receive prominent media coverage, and if not, what events received greater attention that day? Do you think the disasters should have received more coverage?

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Hints for the Active Learning Questions

History

1. Maps should reflect the information in the timeline.
2. You might wish to broaden the discussion by asking students what weather-related stories they recall from books, movies, and television, such as the classic Jack London story, "To Build a Fire," or the book (and later movie) *The Perfect Storm*.

Economics

1. Students should explain the reasons for their actions. You might want to challenge students by noting that in 1938, Americans had suffered through nearly a decade of the Great Depression and/or by asking if students would be more tempted to permit or join in the looting if they knew the storeowner was insured.
2. You might point out that a part of the [Red Cross](http://www.redcross.org/portal/site/en/menuitem.53fabf6cc033f17a2b1ecfbf43181aa0/?vgnextoid=1fd7dcd760f8e110VgnVCM10000089f0870aRCRD) (<http://www.redcross.org/portal/site/en/menuitem.53fabf6cc033f17a2b1ecfbf43181aa0/?vgnextoid=1fd7dcd760f8e110VgnVCM10000089f0870aRCRD>) website is devoted to youth services and includes information on volunteer opportunities with the Red Cross.

Geography

1. Maps should correspond to the information in the description.
2. Note that some of the documents retrieved will not be related to specific cases of disaster relief. Students also could try searching by the name of your community.

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Civics

1. You might have each student make his or her own prediction for that day, based on the forecasts, and assign bonus points to the student whose prediction is most accurate.
2. So that students understand the legitimate importance of the Munich crisis of 1938, you also might want to ask them what they know about it and discuss its role in leading to the start of World War II in Europe.

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