Lesson 1  Nonfiction, pp. 4-9  Featured Skill: Descriptive Details

America’s Deadliest Disaster
What happens when a killer hurricane strikes a major American city?

About the Article
Levels
Lexile Level: 600L-700L
Guided Reading Level: N
DRA Level: 28

Learning Objective
In this narrative nonfiction article about the deadly Galveston hurricane of 1900, the author’s use of descriptive details helps students visualize the impact of this natural disaster on the city and its residents.

Content-Area Connections
Social studies: U.S. history, geography
Science: meteorology
Social-emotional learning: responsible decision making (solving problems, ethical responsibility); relationship skills (teamwork)

Key Skills
Descriptive details, inference, author’s craft, cause and effect, character, main idea

Standards Correlations
This article and lesson support the following standards:
Common Core anchor standards: R.1, R.2, R.3, R.4, R.7, W.2, SL.1, SL.2, L.5, L.6
TEKS: 3.2, 3.3, 3.4, 3.9, 3.12, 3.16, 3.20, 3.23

Your Teaching Support Package
Here’s your full suite of materials, all of which you’ll find at StoryworksJr.scholastic.com:

Activities to print or project
• Pause and Think Questions
• Vocabulary
• Close-Reading and Critical-Thinking Questions
• Quiz

Differentiated articles
• Beginner level: for struggling readers
• Lower-Lexile version
• Higher-Lexile version

Video
• Video Read-Aloud: The story is narrated along with images and footage.

Audio
• Audio versions of the article on every level
Step-by-Step Lesson Plan
Close Reading, Critical Thinking, and Skill Building

1. Preparing to Read
Watch a Video/Preview Text Features
(25 minutes)
- This story is accompanied by a Video Read-Aloud narrated by author Lauren Tarshis. Riveting photos and footage help students imagine what it was like to experience the Great Galveston Hurricane of 1900. The video can be used as a “first read.”
- Look at pages 4-5 with the class. Direct students to the title, subtitle, and photo. Ask: What do you think the story will be about? What key words in the subtitle tell you where and when the story events take place? Point to the photo caption. Ask: How did the hurricane affect Galveston?
- Point to the map and caption on page 6. Have students identify Galveston, the Gulf of Mexico, and Galveston Bay. Ask: Why did Galveston flood during very bad storms?

Introduce Vocabulary
(15 minutes, activity sheet online)
- We have highlighted in bold seven words that may be challenging and defined them on the page. Preview these words by projecting or distributing our vocabulary activity and completing it as a class. You may also play our Vocabulary Slideshow, where images and audio help students with comprehension and fluency.
- Highlighted words: devouring, streetcar, mansions, trillions, predictions, storm surge, wreckage

Set a Purpose for Reading
(5 minutes)
- Call on volunteers to read aloud the Think and Read and Think and Write boxes on pages 5 and 9. These support the story’s featured skill, descriptive details. As they read, ask students to look for descriptive details that help them imagine what it was like to live in Galveston during the hurricane.

2. Close Reading
Reading and Unpacking the Text
- First read: Read the story as a class. Use the Pause and Think questions at the end of each section to check comprehension.
- Second read: Distribute Close-Reading and Critical-Thinking Questions to the class. Preview them together. Ask students to read the article again and answer the questions as a class or in small groups.

Close-Reading Questions
(30 minutes, activity sheet online)
- Read the first section. What descriptive details help you imagine what the ocean looked like to Harry? (descriptive details) The author describes the ocean as a furious beast that was devouring Harry’s neighborhood, swallowing trees, and tearing houses apart. What descriptive detail helps you imagine what the wind sounded like to Harry? The text says that his ears “hurt from the screaming wind.” “Screaming” helps readers imagine how loud the wind was.
- Read “The Richest City.” Why do you think that many people went to the beach on September 8 to “cheer the crashing waves”? (inference) The big waves were probably exciting to watch. People didn’t realize how serious the storm would be.
- Read the last sentence in “The Richest City.” Why does the author say the city would be “slammed by a hurricane” instead of “hit by a hurricane”? (author’s craft) The word slammed is more descriptive. It helps readers imagine how powerful the storm was.
- In “The Biggest Killer,” what details help you understand the power of hurricanes? (descriptive details) Hurricane winds can shatter buildings and lift trains off their tracks. Trillions of gallons of rain can fall over several days.

Turn the page for differentiation and more!
Have students write a newspaper article from 1900 about the Great Galveston Hurricane. The article should include details and made-up quotes from eyewitnesses. Remind them to include a catchy headline. Students can read their articles in small groups.

Critical-Thinking Question
(10 minutes, activity sheet online)

What are some examples of descriptive details that help you picture Galveston and the hurricane? (descriptive details) Answers will vary but may include details such as: The ocean is like a furious beast that is devouring Harry’s neighborhood by swallowing trees and tearing houses apart. The crushed oyster shells that paved Galveston streets sparkle like diamonds. During big storms, the streets of Galveston turned into rushing streams.

3. Skill Building

- Distribute our Descriptive Details Activity. Have students work with a partner to complete it.
- Discuss the writing assignment in the Think and Write box on page 9. Remind students to use the first person pronoun “I” in their journal entries. Looking at the photos in the article will help them imagine Harry’s experience during the hurricane. Students can complete their journal entries in class or as homework.

FOR GUIDED READING

Read the article together. Ask students to look for details that describe Harry’s life before, during, and after the hurricane. How do students think Harry felt at each stage of his experience? Ask students to give reasons for their answers.

FOR STUDENT PARTNERS

Ask students to look for descriptive details as they read silently. Then have them role-play interviews on the day after the storm between a newspaper reporter and one of the Galveston citizens.

FOR ADVANCED READERS

Have students write a newspaper article from 1900 about the Great Galveston Hurricane. The article should include details and made-up quotes from eyewitnesses. Remind them to include a catchy headline. Students can read their articles in small groups.

FOR STRUGGLING READERS

Read the lower-Lexile article as students follow along. Ask them to underline details that describe Galveston before the hurricane, after the hurricane, and today. Have students share their details with the group.

CUSTOMIZE YOUR CLASS

Differentiate Your Teaching