What caused the Great Depression? Check out our newest primary source set to explore sources that will help you explore this question with your students. If you are interested in learning more about this topic, mark your calendars for February 15th. We will be partnering with the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta – Nashville to offer a workshop in Murfreesboro. Registration information will be announced soon!

Are you looking for more resources to teach immigration? Check out our two new-est teacher-created lesson plans: Immigration in 19th-Century America for 8th grade Social Studies by Taylor Kilgore (Whitwell Middle School, Marion County Schools), and Life in America for “New” Immigrants for high school U.S. History & Geography by Barbara Marks (Watertown High School, Wilson County Schools).

“AWESOME” SOURCE OF THE MONTH:

Get set for striking lightning [1947]
What are these people doing? They are “two riggers installing a lightning rod atop a pole extending 60 feet above the topmost pinnacle of the Empire State Building.” Why are they doing this? How many times does the ESB get hit by lightning every year?

THEME: NATURAL DISASTERS

Natural disasters aren’t exactly a curricular area in Social Studies or English Language Arts, but they are often a topic of current events. The recent hurricanes Irma, Maria, and Harvey; the wildfires engulfing Glacier National Park in Montana; earthquakes in Mexico—these stories have dominated television screens in students’ homes for weeks. You may want to take advantage of current events to connect students to natural disasters that took place in the nation’s past, and look at how people reacted to and rebuilt after those events.

This would also be a good opportunity to work interdisciplinary elements into the classroom, perhaps by coordinating with science teachers who can explain the mechanics of these weather events, while humanities classes can look at the human impact.

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Lesson Idea—The Devastation of a Hurricane

Camille, Hugo, Andrew, Sandy, Irma, and Katrina are just a few names that residents of the Atlantic and Gulf coastal areas will never forget. Hurricanes are tropical cyclones that produce high winds in the Atlantic basin. These powerful storms also can produce significant flooding through rainfall and storm surge. Hurricanes can cause widespread loss of life, and emergency management works hard to encourage people to evacuate areas prior to a hurricane’s landfall. The damage caused by a direct hit from a hurricane can devastate communities and take years to recover from.

Begin by having your students analyze the Atlantic Hurricane Tracking Chart. Why was this chart produced? What are the dangers emphasized in this document? Where might this chart be distributed? Next analyze the image to the left and Only steps left. What can we determine about the effects of Hurricane Katrina of the Louisiana and Mississippi Gulf coast? How do these compare with recent images from Hurricanes Harvey, Irma and Maria?

Next ask your students to read Emily Brauninger’s story about living through Hurricane Katrina. Allow your students a chance to share their thoughts about her story. Then ask them to write a reflection on how hurricanes impact coastal communities. Students should be encouraged to bring in thoughts and feelings on recent storms and the impact of climate change.

This lesson idea meets state standards for grades 6-12 for English Language Arts (Reading: Informational Text and Writing).

Lesson Idea—Great Chicago Fire of 1871

The Great Chicago Fire of 1871 may not technically be a “natural” disaster. However, most of the wildfires plaguing parts of the U.S. today are similarly manmade disasters, though “natural” factors like wind patterns and draught contribute greatly to the fires’ spread. The destruction of the Great Chicago Fire was certainly made worse by the strong southwesterly wind on top of preexisting drought factors in the city.

The population of Chicago was rapidly increasing in the mid-19th century. The growing population combined with new engineering breakthroughs, such as the “raising” of the city and the creation of new sewage systems, to create factors for dense settlement and hastily constructed buildings. On October 8-10, 1871, a fire broke out in a stable southwest of downtown. (No, it probably wasn’t caused by Mrs. O’Leary’s cow— that myth was debunked by a Nashville Union reporter [see page 2].) You can find a timeline of events and newspaper articles about the “great conflagration” here, which provide insight into the challenges of risk management in a densely populated city.

Show students this map, a bird’s-eye view (a.k.a. perspective) map of Chicago immediately before the fire. Ask them to imagine what about this illustration would have changed as a result of the fire. Did they imagine the whole city went up in smoke? Then show them this bird’s-eye view map of the city after the fire. Where is the “burnt district”? Are they surprised? Why or why not? For another look at the damage, look at this map. Find DeKoven Street on this map. Now search 558 West DeKoven Street in Google Maps. What’s at that location today? Note the warehouse district that sprang up in the wake of the fire, close to the canal and railroad lines. Also note the ethnic neighborhoods nearby. Why would immigrants (and Jane Addams’ Hull House) move into a neighborhood that was hastily rebuilt in the 1880s? Look at the corner of West DeKoven and South Jefferson in Street View— what do you see that reminds you that this was Ground Zero for the 1871 fire?

This lesson idea meets state standards for high school U.S. History & Geography (US.7).

Important Links:
- Natural Disaster: Nature’s Fury (lesson plan)
- Lesson Idea: Earthquakes (newsletter)
- Primary Sources in Science Classrooms: Severe Weather and Community Resilience (blog)
- Climate and Wildfires in the 21st Century (video)
- The San Francisco Earthquake of 1906 (presentation)
- The Dust Bowl (teacher’s guide)
- Nature and the Environment (themed resources)
LESSON IDEA—THE 1937 FLOOD

When natural disasters strike, the aftermath can sometimes be more devastating than the initial destruction. Ask students to think of a natural disaster that has occurred during their lifetime. Students may remember wildfires in the western part of the United States, an earthquake and tsunami in Japan in 2011, or Hurricanes Harvey or Irma. What do they know about these events? Where did they gain their information? Was it a newspaper or television program? Did they read about it on their phones? Do they remember hearing about a plan to handle the crisis, such as an evacuation notice beforehand or a cleanup efforts afterward?

Begin by showing the class a rainfall map from February 1937 and asking them to predict how the highlighted areas may have been affected. Then ask students to analyze a series of photographs from the 1937 flood in the Tennessee and Ohio River valleys, an event that devastated communities and displaced millions of Americans. Have students reflect on what they find in the photos. What sort of damage did the flood cause? What happened to people who lost their homes?

Next, split students into groups to read about the government’s reaction to the flood using the TVA Flood Relief Operations recorded by T.B. Parker, TVA’s Chief Engineer, and the National Weather Service’s history of the flood. What did the relief effort include? How was the clean-up effort organized? What did city leaders or prominent community members have to say about the flooding? What changes were made in the areas where the 1937 flood occurred?

Once students have a grasp of the historical event, ask them to write a response comparing the relief efforts in 1937 to how we handle natural disasters today. Are we better prepared now? What organizations or individuals are involved in relief efforts? How can we continue to prepare and provide relief when natural disasters occur?

This lesson idea meets states standards for high school U.S. History & Geography (US.49), World History & Geography (W.8, Primary Documents and Supporting Texts to Consider), and English Language Arts (Reading: Informational Text).

FEATURED FEATURE—NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE

The potential for lesson plans and cross curricular involvement are copious with the topic of weather and natural disasters. The National Weather Service has many resources to help teachers and parents educate their children on climate change, weather patterns, and severe storms. Students can access games and activities on the National Weather Service’s “Kids and Teens” page.

Keeping citizens and their property safe is a major part of the work that the National Weather Service does. The NWS therefore issues publications and brochures for various crises such as droughts, floods, heat advisories, rip currents, and winter storms. Scrolling through the digitized publications can give students a better understanding about how to prepare for natural disasters or severe weather, as well as teach them about the broad scope of potential environmental hazards. Consider having students choose a topic from the list to research before creating their own pamphlet or public service announcement.
**Freak Hail Storm Hits D.C.**

Freak hail storm hits Capitol, Washington, D.C. [29 April 1938].

What is happening in this photo? Where do you look for weather forecasts? How do you prepare yourself and your property for inclement weather?

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**“The White Tornado”**

Sculpture “The White Tornado” at the Frank Carlson Federal Building & U.S. Courthouse, [2009 July]

What type of art do you see pictured? Why might this piece be displayed in Topeka, Kansas? Click here to view more information on tornadoes in Kansas.

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**San Francisco Earthquake & Fire**

Destruction of San Francisco by earthquake & fire [n.d.]

Chicago-based publishers Kurtz and Allison were commissioned to create this piece. What is its purpose? What do you notice about the city when looking closely at the depiction? How might the piece have been used by people in San Francisco after the natural disaster occurred?

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**“Fighting Forest Fire”**

Mural "Fighting Forest Fire," by Ernest Fiene at the Department of Interior Building, Washington, D.C. [2011 September]

This 1938 mural is displayed at the Department of the Interior. Artist Ernest Fiene was commissioned by the WPA to create the piece. What do you notice about the men in the mural? Describe their actions. Why do you think forest fires were chosen as the topic for this piece?