

teacher's guide

A Place Where Hurricanes Happen



by Renée Watson ✦ illustrated by Shadra Strickland

A profound tribute to the power of friendship to heal and give us hope in troubled times. This book explores the impact of a national tragedy in the most personal terms, and is engaging and whimsical at the same time — an impressive achievement.

~Caroline Kennedy

ABOUT THE BOOK

Natural and man-made disasters are becoming more commonplace in children's lives, and this touching free-verse picture book provides a straightforward account of Hurricane Katrina. In alternating voices, four friends describe their lives before, during, and after the storm and how, even though the world can change in a heartbeat, people define the character of their community and offer one another comfort and hope even in the darkest hours.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Pre-reading Activities

-Find out if any student in your class has been affected by Hurricane Katrina or any natural disaster. Consider sending a brief note to parents letting them know how you will be handling this subject matter in your classroom.

-Ask students if they know what a natural disaster is. Make a list of types of natural disasters and briefly explain the differences and similarities.

-Make a list of what makes your city or town special and unique. What are the tourist attractions? What are you "known for?" Introduce New Orleans to students if they are unfamiliar with the city. New Orleans is known for jazz, cajun and creole food, the French Quarter, and lots more. Show students a map and point out Louisiana. Play music that embodies New Orleans and ask students what emotions they feel as they listen to the music.

After reading A PLACE WHERE HURRICANES HAPPEN

Re-read sections according to the themes and poetry assignments you want to explore deeper. Each character's vignette can be used as an example poem for students. Use this guide as a resource for poetry to use in the classroom in addition to the book and for project ideas.

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ADRIENNE'S STORY

Adrienne loves spending time with her friends. She is raised by her grandmother and their house is the place where the neighborhood children hang out. Adrienne goes to Baton Rouge with her grandmother to wait out the storm.

Writing Activity:

OUR FAVORITE THINGS TO DO

**Refer to Poems About Favorites for example poem to share with students.*

- Read Adrienne's vignette on pages 8 - 9.
- Ask students what they learn about Adrienne and her friends based on the words.
- Ask students what they learn about Adrienne and her friends based on the illustration: Besides playing hide-n-go-seek, what does the illustration tell you about what Adrienne likes to do? What about Michael? Tommy?
- As a class, brainstorm a list of activities students enjoy doing with their friends or family.
- Ask students to write a free-verse poem about their favorite thing to do with their friends. Encourage students to use specific details.

Writing Activity:

FAMILY & LOVED ONES

**Refer to Poems About Family for example poems to share with students.*

Though readers never hear Granny's voice, there is a sense that she is caring and loving towards not only her granddaughter, Adrienne, but other children in the neighborhood. Granny's story can be used to inspire students to talk and write about the adults in their lives who care for them.

- Ask students what they learn about Granny in the story. What actions show her love for Adrienne and the children of the community?
- Ask students to make a list of adults in their lives that care for them (parents, teachers, pastors, etc.).
- Ask students to choose someone off of the list and brainstorm at least three actions the person does that shows they care.
- Ask students to write a poem about one of the adults from their list.

KEESHA'S STORY

Keesha likes to cook with her mom and she loves her collection of teddy bears. When Katrina hits her neighborhood, her family evacuates to the Superdome.

Writing Activity:

FAMILY TRADITIONS & FOODS

**Refer to Poems About Food for example poems to share with students.*

- Read Keesha's vignette on page 12.
- Ask students to write about their favorite family dish.

Writing Activity:

COLLECTIBLES

- Read Keesha's vignette on page 14.
- Reflect with students on Keesha's love for her teddy bears.
- Ask students to think about what collections they keep: video games, stickers, special pens, shoes, etc.
- Ask students to write about their collection using descriptive details and including how they started their collection and where they keep it.

Poetry Resource List

Use these poems to support the reading of
A Place Where Hurricanes Happen

POEMS ABOUT FAVORITES

- Knoxville, Tennessee By Nikki Giovanni
- Sea Joy, by Jacqueline Bouvier

POEMS ABOUT FAMILY

- My Grandmother Is Waiting for Me to Come Home By Gwendolyn Brooks
- Little Girl Speakings By Maya Angelou

POEMS ABOUT FOOD

- Butter By Elizabeth Alexander
- Why I Like Chocolate By Nikki Giovanni

POEMS ABOUT CHANGE & LOSS

- Homesick Blues By Langston Hughes
- Eating Together By Li-Young Lee
- Grandfather By Andrei Gurrarianu

POEMS ABOUT HOPE, CELEBRATION & OVERCOMING

- Mother to Son By Langston Hughes
- Still Here By Langston Hughes
- Hey! & Hey! Hey! By Langston Hughes
- A Light Exists in Spring, By Emily Dickenson

Online Poetry Resources

- www.poetryfoundation.org
- www.poets.org
- www.poemhunter.com



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Renée Watson has worked as a teaching-artist for more than ten years, teaching creative writing and theater to elementary, middle and high school students. In 2006 Renée traveled to New Orleans where she facilitated poetry and theater workshops with children coping with the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.

Her one woman show, *Roses are Red, Women are Blue*, debuted at New York City's Lincoln Center at a showcase for emerging artists.

Her poetry and articles have been published in *Rethinking Schools*, *Theatre of the Mind*, and *With Hearts Ablaze*. She graduated from The New School, where she studied Creative Writing and earned a certificate in Drama Therapy. Renée currently lives in New York City.

For booking information visit
www.reneewatson.net

about the author



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TOMMY'S STORY

Tommy doesn't understand why everyone's making a big deal about the hurricane. He can't wait until he gets to Houston. He believes that in Houston, he'll have so much fun spending time with his cousins that he won't even miss New Orleans at all. But once he's there, he realizes he was wrong.

Writing Activity:

HOMESICK BLUES

- Read Tommy's vignette on page 28.
- Discuss Tommy's story: he thinks he's going to have lots of fun once he gets to Houston. Does he? Why or why not? Help students understand that many families moved from New Orleans after Katrina. Ask students, What new things did Tommy experience? How would it feel to start a new school? What do you think Tommy misses about New Orleans?
- Read "Homesick Blues" by Langston Hughes. Discuss. How does this capture Tommy's feelings? Have you ever been homesick?
- Create a list as a class naming the first time students did something. Some examples might include: first day of school, first sports game, first time spending the night at a friend's house, first time at a camp, first night in a new house, first day living in a new town/neighborhood.
- Ask students to write a short narrative about one of their firsts: was it what they thought it would be?

Writing Activity:

GRATEFULNESS

- Read Tommy's vignette on page 28.
- Discuss the conversation between Tommy and his father. What does it mean to be grateful?
- Ask students to write a List Poem about the things and people they are grateful/thankful for.

MICHAEL'S STORY

Michael is a budding artist. He enjoys drawing pictures of his neighborhood and he is a caring big brother--always looking after his sister. When the storm comes, his family has no means to evacuate. After living at a shelter, he returns to his neighborhood to find out many of his neighbors have moved or have passed away. To honor them, he hangs his picture as a memorial.

Art Activity:

MY NEIGHBORHOOD

- Read Michael's vignette on pages 10 and 11.
- Ask students to draw or map out their neighborhood noting important places and people.

Art Activity:

WHAT DID MICHAEL LOSE?

- Read Michael's vignettes on pages 26, 27 and 32.
- Discuss with students. Ask prompting questions: Based on what we read, what did Michael lose because of the storm? Looking at the illustrations, what were other things destroyed in the storm? What else might have been destroyed?
- Have you ever lost something or someone you cared about? Create a tribute honoring what you lost. Give students the option to draw or write their tribute.

HOPE, CELEBRATION & OVERCOMING

Each child in A PLACE WHERE HURRICANES HAPPEN is faced with great sorrow, but also experiences joy. Although they have to adjust to their new neighborhood, with many of their loved ones gone, the children are strengthened by their friendship and faith that the sun will shine again.

ART MAKING ACTIVITY

Choose one of the poems from Hope, Celebration, and Overcoming. After reading the poem and discussing what it means, have students illustrate the poem.

projects for the classroom & community.	classroom	community
	cookbooks Keesha loves to cook with her mom. Ask each student to bring in a family recipe and create a classroom cookbook for each student to have.	community service Both Adrienne and Michael have special relationships with the elderly. Have your class volunteer at a nursing home or community center that has programming for the elderly. Students can share their poems, art, and play games with the residents.
	soundtrack Michael talks about all the music he hears in his neighborhood. Ask students to bring in their favorite song and create a classroom soundtrack.	donate Do you know of a community, city, state, or country that has experienced a natural disaster? Set up a food drive and coordinate your donation with a local agency.
	open mic & gallery Have a day for students to share the poetry and art they created with each other. Serve light snacks to make it special. Invite another class to the open mic and gallery.	field trip The news plays an essential part in relaying warnings, information, and updates about natural disasters. Visit a local news station and get a tour. Talk with the weatherman and learn how information is gathered to predict a forecast.