

Unit 2: Disaster Decisions

4th Grade Humanities

45 Class Meetings

Revised June 2026

Essential Questions

- How have natural disasters shaped communities and people in U.S. history?
- How can we use storytelling to explore different perspectives and outcomes in historical events?
- How do cause and effect relationships play a role in both history and storytelling

Enduring Understandings with Unit Goals

EU 1: Investigating geographical and human settlement patterns related to natural disasters.

- Identify and describe different types of natural disasters that have occurred in the United States, including earthquakes, hurricanes, tornadoes, wildfires, and floods.
- Analyze geographic patterns to understand where natural disasters are most likely to occur and how geography influences their impact.
- Explain how human settlement patterns are influenced by geography, climate, and the risk of natural disasters.

EU 2: Exploring primary and secondary sources about historical disasters.

- Understand the difference between primary and secondary sources and explain their importance in learning about historical events.
- Analyze and compare primary and secondary sources to determine how different perspectives shape our understanding of historical disasters.
- Use evidence from sources to describe the causes, impacts, and responses to historical natural disasters in the U.S.

EU 3: Investigating how to prepare for, respond to, and recover from disasters

- Analyze the impact of disasters and the effectiveness of disaster preparedness plans.
- Investigate real historical natural disasters and evaluate the decisions made by people before, during, and after the events.

Standards

CT Social Studies Standards:

4.Inq.1.a.: Explain why compelling questions about a United States region are important to others (e.g., peers, adults).

4.Inq.1.b.: Explain how supporting questions help answer compelling questions in an inquiry about a United States region.

4.Inq.1.c.: Determine the kinds of sources that will be helpful in answering compelling and supporting questions, taking into consideration the different opinions people have about how to answer the question.

4.Inq.3.a.: Gather relevant information from multiple sources about an event or issue in a United States region.

4.Inq.3.b.: Identify evidence response to a compelling question while determining fact and opinion to determine the credibility of multiple sources.

4.Inq.3.c.: Use evidence to develop claims in response to a compelling question by using evidence related to the geography of a United States region.

GEO 4.3: Explain how culture influences the way people modify and adapt to their environments

GEO 4.4: Explain how the cultural and environmental characteristics of places change over time.

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GEO 4.5: Describe how environmental and cultural characteristics influence population distribution in specific places or regions.

GEO 4.6: Explain how cultural and environmental characteristics affect the distribution and movement of people, goods, and ideas.

GEO 4.8: Analyze the effects of catastrophic environmental and technological events on human settlements and migration.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.4.1: Refer to details and examples in a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.4.2: Determine the main idea of a text and explain how it is supported by key details; summarize the text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.4.4: Determine the meaning of general academic and domain-specific words or phrases in a text relevant to a *grade 4 topic or subject area*.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.4.9: Integrate information from two texts on the same topic in order to write or speak about the subject knowledgeably.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.4.2: Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas and information clearly.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.4.2.a: Introduce a topic clearly and group related information in paragraphs and sections; include formatting (e.g., headings), illustrations, and multimedia when useful to aiding comprehension.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.4.2.b: Develop the topic with facts, definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information and examples related to the topic.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.4.2.c: Link ideas within categories of information using words and phrases (e.g., *another, for example, also, because*).

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.4.2.d: Use precise language and domain-specific vocabulary to inform about or explain the topic.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.4.2.e: Provide a concluding statement or section related to the information or explanation presented.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.4.4: Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development and organization are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.4.5: With guidance and support from peers and adults, develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, and editing.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.4.6: With some guidance and support from adults, use technology, including the Internet, to produce and publish writing as well as to interact and collaborate with others; demonstrate sufficient command of keyboarding skills to type a minimum of one page in a single sitting.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.4.7: Conduct short research projects that build knowledge through investigation of different aspects of a topic.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.4.8: Recall relevant information from experiences or gather relevant information from print and digital sources; take notes and categorize information and provide a list of sources.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.4.9: Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.4.1: Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on *grade 4 topics and texts*, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

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CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.4.1.a: Come to discussions prepared, having read or studied required material; explicitly draw on that preparation and other information known about the topic to explore ideas under discussion.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.4.1.b: Follow agreed-upon rules for discussions and carry out assigned roles.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.4.1.c: Pose and respond to specific questions to clarify or follow up on information and make comments that contribute to the discussion and link to the remarks of others.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.4.1.d: Review the key ideas expressed and explain their own ideas and understanding in light of the discussion.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.4.2: Paraphrase portions of a text read aloud, or information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.4.3: Identify the reasons and evidence a speaker provides to support particular points.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.4.4: Report on a topic or text, tell a story, or recount an experience in an organized manner, using appropriate facts and relevant, descriptive details to support main ideas or themes; speak clearly at an understandable pace.

ISAAC Vision of the Graduate Competencies

Competency 1: Write effectively for a variety of purposes.

Competency 2: Speak to diverse audiences in an accountable manner.

Competency 3: Develop the behaviors needed to interact and contribute with others on a team.

Competency 4: Analyze and solve problems independently and collaboratively.

Competency 5: Be responsible, creative, and empathetic members of the community.

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Unit Content Overview

1. Settlement Patterns Related to Natural Disasters

- Define and explain earthquakes, hurricanes, tornadoes, wildfires, and floods.
- Investigate real historical natural disasters in the U.S. and their impact on communities.
- Use maps to identify disaster-prone areas in the U.S. (e.g., Tornado Alley, the Pacific Ring of Fire, coastal hurricane zones).
- Investigate why people settle in disaster-prone areas despite risks (e.g., economic opportunities, fertile land, coastal access).
- Analyze how cities and communities prepare for and adapt to natural disasters through infrastructure, technology, and emergency planning.

2. Primary and Secondary Sources

- Define primary and secondary sources.
- Study significant U.S. natural disasters (e.g., the 1906 San Francisco Earthquake, the 1888 Great Blizzard, the 2005 Hurricane Katrina).
- Compare firsthand accounts (e.g., letters, newspaper reports from the time) with later analyses (e.g., textbooks, documentaries).
- Discuss how time and perspective shape the way history is recorded.

3. Preparing for, Responding to, and Recovering from Disasters

- Learn how individuals and communities prepare for disasters (e.g., evacuation plans, emergency supplies).
- Investigate how early warning systems and emergency response teams help reduce risks.
- Discuss the role of government agencies (e.g., FEMA, Red Cross) in disaster preparedness.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of past disaster preparedness and response efforts.
- Explore how communities rebuild after disasters.

Vocabulary and Key Terms: Disaster, Hazard, Emergency, Evacuation, Aftershock, Tremor, Tsunami, Hurricane, Tornado, Wildfire, Floodplain, Drought, Landslide, Epicenter, Fault line, Resilience, Recovery, Relief, Preparedness, Infrastructure, Choice, Consequence, Perspective, Dilemma, Plot, Setting, Character Conflict, Resolution, Foreshadowing, Suspense, Sequence, Decision-making, Multiple outcomes, Alternate ending, Interactive, First-person, Second-person, Pathway, Narrative structure

Interdisciplinary Connection:

- ELA, Science

Daily Learning Objectives with *TWPS*

Students will be able to...

- Types of Natural Disasters & Their Causes: Earthquakes (fault lines, tectonic plate movement)
 - Which natural disaster is the most dangerous: hurricanes, tornadoes, or earthquakes? Why?
- Types of Natural Disasters & Their Causes: Hurricanes (warm ocean waters, storm surge)
 - Is climate change causing more natural disasters to occur?
- Types of Natural Disasters & Their Causes: Tornadoes (weather patterns, atmospheric conditions)
 - Do some natural disasters have positive effects on the environment? Why or why not?
- Types of Natural Disasters & Their Causes: Wildfires (drought, human activity, lightning)
 - Which type of natural disaster is harder to predict: earthquakes or tornadoes?

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- Types of Natural Disasters & Their Causes: Floods (heavy rainfall, river overflow, storm surges)
 - *Which causes more long-term damage to communities: floods or wildfires?*
- Identifying regions most affected by natural disasters
 - *Should people be allowed to rebuild in areas that are frequently hit by natural disasters?*
- Define primary and secondary sources.
 - *Are secondary sources just as important as primary sources when studying historical events? Why or why not?*
- Identify examples of each (e.g., diary entries, photographs, news articles, textbooks).
 - *Are primary sources always accurate, or can they be biased?*
- Discuss why both types of sources are valuable for understanding historical events.
 - *If two primary sources give different information about the same event, how should we decide which one to trust?*
- Study significant U.S. natural disasters (e.g., the 1906 San Francisco Earthquake, the 1888 Great Blizzard, the 2005 Hurricane Katrina). ***
 - *Which disaster had the greatest impact on the people who experienced it: the 1906 San Francisco Earthquake, the 1888 Great Blizzard, or Hurricane Katrina?*
 - *Should people have been better prepared for Hurricane Katrina, or was the storm too strong to fully prepare for?*
 - *If you could go back in time and change one decision made during one of these disasters, what would it be and why?*
- Examine primary and secondary sources related to these events.
 - *Are photographs better primary sources than written documents? Why or why not?*
- Discuss how geography and human decisions influenced the impact of each disaster.
 - *Should cities spend more money on early warning systems or on rebuilding after disasters happen?*
- Discuss how time and perspective shape the way history is recorded.
 - *Should we consider interviews with people who were not at a historical event as primary or secondary sources? Why?*
- Summarize key details about a historical disaster using evidence from multiple sources.
 - *Should people be forced to evacuate during an emergency, or should they be allowed to stay if they choose?*
- Explain the causes, impacts, and responses to the disaster.
 - *Is it more important to focus on preventing natural disasters or preparing for them?*
- Discuss how different sources contribute to our understanding of the event.
 - *How can we analyze if an account of history is accurate?*
- Analyze how disasters impact people, communities, and the environment.
 - *Should schools spend more time teaching students about disaster preparedness? Why or why not?*
- Learn how individuals and communities prepare for disasters (e.g., evacuation plans, emergency supplies).
 - *Should cities spend more money on early warning systems or on rebuilding after disasters happen?*
- Investigate how early warning systems and emergency response teams help reduce risks.
 - *Should major cities be required to have stronger disaster preparedness plans based on past disasters?*
- Discuss the role of government agencies (e.g., FEMA, Red Cross) in disaster preparedness.
 - *Should the government be responsible for helping communities prepare for natural disasters, or should it be up to individuals?*

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- Examine firsthand accounts, news reports, and historical records to understand how people responded.
 - *Is technology the best way to keep people safe from natural disasters, or are other methods more important?*
- Evaluate the effectiveness of past disaster preparedness and response efforts.
 - *Should businesses be required to shut down early when a disaster is predicted?*
- Analyze choices people made before, during, and after disasters.
 - *Is it safer to stay in place or evacuate during a hurricane?*
- Compare different responses to similar disasters and their outcomes.
 - *Is it better for a city to rebuild everything the same way after a disaster, or should they make major changes to prevent future damage?*
- Discuss how lessons from past disasters influence today's preparedness efforts.
 - *After a disaster, should communities focus on rebuilding quickly or take more time to plan a safer future?*
- Explore how communities rebuild after disasters.
 - *If a community does not have enough money to rebuild everything after a disaster, what should they rebuild first?*
- Discuss short-term vs. long-term recovery efforts (e.g., emergency shelters vs. rebuilding infrastructure).
 - *Should communities that receive disaster relief be required to have better preparedness plans?*

Instructional Strategies/Differentiated Instruction

- Whole group instruction
- Paragraph frames and sentence starters
- Teacher modeling
- Graphic organizers
- Accountable talk
- Homework
- Word walls with visuals
- Small group instruction
- Visual exemplars with teacher and student critiques
- Text and video chunking
- Spiraling back to guiding questions
- Close reading with text-dependent questions

EL Differentiation Strategies

- Key vocabulary, Word Banks and Word Walls with visuals
- TWPS (Think, write, pair, share)
- Pre-reading strategies
- Culturally responsive teaching
- Explicit teacher modeling
- Graphic organizers
- Strategic Grouping
- Non-verbal assessments

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Assessments

FORMATIVE ASSESSMENTS:

- Do Now
- Academic Discourse
- Exit Slips
- Accountable Talk Discussions
- Completed notes
- Completed graphic organizers
- Homework
- Performance Task – Choose Your Own Natural Disaster
 - Teacher’s rubric/scoring guide

SUMMATIVE ASSESSMENTS:

- Quiz: Historical Natural Disasters, First and Second Hand Accounts, Preparedness (EU1, EU2, and EU3)
- IAB
- Unit Task: Choose Your Own Natural Disaster (EU1, EU2 and EU3)

Unit Task

Unit Task Name: Choose Your Own Natural Disaster

Description: Upon completing the unit students will research a historical natural disaster that occurred in the United States (EU1, EU2). They will then write a Choose Your Own Adventure that details a character surviving that natural disaster (EU3).

Evaluation: Teacher’s Scoring Guide

Unit Resources

- Google Classroom
- NewsEla
- Google Slides (Teacher’s)
- Student Journals
- Chromebooks
- ReadWorks
- Virtual Fieldtrip
- Can You Survive, You Choose Books