

### Overview:

Natural disasters affect everyone. No matter what region of the world you reside in, you will probably experience a natural disaster or extreme weather, such as a hurricane, earthquake, tornado, blizzard, tsunami, forest fire, dust storm, or a flood. Alexander Hamilton, an important Founder of the United States, experienced first-hand the hardship and devastation of natural disaster. As a teenager living on St. Croix he witnessed a hurricane strike the island on August 31st, 1772. Destruction spread through the neighboring islands of Nevis and St. Kitts with earthquakes and tidal waves that same afternoon. Hamilton was just seventeen years old.

Having worked as a clerk at Beekman and Cruger, Hamilton had learned how to write in an articulate and expressive manner, despite never receiving a formal education prior to college. Going through this devastation as an orphaned youth, Alexander Hamilton wrote a detailed letter describing the hurricane, a week after the storm, to his father, James Hamilton. Hamilton's ability to convey the scene and entertain with prose caught the eye of a gentleman neighbor, who published the letter in the *Royal Danish American Gazette* newspaper on October 3rd. Hamilton's language was so descriptive and vivid that he had to reassure everyone that it was true:

“I am afraid, Sir, you will think this description more the effort of imagination than a true picture of realities. But I can affirm with the greatest truth, that there is not a single circumstance touched upon, which I have not absolutely been an eye witness to.”

From Alexander Hamilton to *The Royal Danish American Gazette*, 6 September 1772:  
<https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-01-02-0042>

Hamilton painted a picture of the destruction of the landscape, the pain of the people around him, and his fears on that frightening night.

## Grades 3-5

### **Purpose of this lesson:**

- To use *Hamilton* and hurricanes to discuss the effects of natural disasters. In addition, students will use the imagery of a natural disaster to produce a piece of original writing that shows student synthesis of Hamilton's primary document and the connection between the text and their own experiences.

### **Common Core Standards:**

ELA/Literacy

RI.3.9: Compare and Contrast the most important points and key details presented in two texts on the same topic.

W.3.1: Write opinion pieces on topics or texts, supporting a point of view with reasons

### **Next Generation Science Standards**

ESS3.B: Natural Hazards: A variety of natural hazards result from natural processes. Humans cannot eliminate natural hazards but can take steps to reduce their impacts. (3-ESS3-1) (Note: This Disciplinary Core Idea is also addressed by 4-ESS3-2.)

### Lesson:

Recent hurricanes such as Hurricane Irma, Hurricane Harvey, and Hurricane Katrina have devastated regions from Puerto Rico and across the United States. There is a strong likelihood that your students have either experienced a natural disaster or know someone who has. This interdisciplinary lesson aims to connect Science, Writing, and Social Studies, by using the story of Alexander Hamilton's 1772 letter in the *Royal Danish American Gazette* together with the science behind hurricanes. The lesson will begin with an exploration of the science behind hurricanes. Students will then read Hamilton's descriptive letter about the St. Croix hurricane. From this, students will be prompted to write a letter describing an eyewitness experience to a natural disaster or a weather event.

### Activator:

Start off the class by asking if someone could define a natural disaster to the class and if they could provide an example. Then, ask the students to raise their hands if they have ever experienced a natural disaster, or if they know someone that has? This will start the conversation about how many people are affected by such hazards. Depending on the region in which your school is located, you could talk about your local natural hazard (i.e. New England schools could talk about blizzards). You can then even broaden the conversation to encompass examples of extreme weather, such as thunder & lightning storms, etc.

### Activity #1: The Science Behind Hurricanes & Hamilton's Letter

Play this video explaining what a hurricane is and the science behind it.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xKubdY2mHXc> (video is 4 minutes)

Ask the students,

- What are hurricanes?
- What do they do?
- Where do they come from?
- What happens when a hurricane hits somewhere?

Show a video about the recent Hurricane, Harvey.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PKIv9Cz9WQY>

Students will then read the article, Hurricane Harvey Slams Into Southern Texas, which has been adapted for young students. You can reach the article here,

<https://www.dogonews.com/2017/8/26/hurricane-harvey-slams-into-southern-texas>

After reading the article, students will be asked to complete the following questions with a partner,

- What was the weather like when Hurricane Harvey hit Texas?
- If you were to tell someone, who was not in Texas, about Hurricane Harvey, how would you describe the storm to them?
- What problems do you think the people living in that area had to deal with during and after Hurricane Harvey?

Pass out the lyrics to the *Hamilton* song, "Hurricane". Encourage students to follow along with the lyrics while listening to the song. The song and lyrics can be found at

<https://genius.com/Lin-manuel-miranda-hurricane-lyrics>. Explain to the students that Alexander Hamilton experienced a hurricane, too, but in 1772!

After hearing the song and reading the lyrics, ask the students to work with a partner to compare Hurricane Harvey to the hurricane that Alexander Hamilton talks about.

Explain the story of Hamilton on St. Croix when the hurricane hit in 1772 and how he wrote a letter to his father that was later published in the *Royal Danish American Gazette*.

### Activity #2: Writing About Their Own Natural Disaster or Extreme Weather Experience

For a writing assignment, tell the students that they will be writing for a newspaper or magazine. For their publication, they will have to write a letter, similar to how Hamilton wrote a letter to his father, that describes a weather event that they have experienced.

### Closure:

Have a few students volunteer to share their letters to the class.

Resources used:

- Video Explaining what a hurricane is for Elementary students:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xKubdY2mHXc>
- Video Putting Hurricane Harvey into Perspective  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PKIv9Cz9WQY>
- Article on Hurricane Harvey  
<https://www.dogonews.com/2017/8/26/hurricane-harvey-slams-into-southern-texas>
- “Hurricane” audio + lyrics <https://genius.com/Lin-manuel-miranda-hurricane-lyrics>

Additional Links:

- Hurricane bingo [https://secoora.org/hurricane\\_bingo\\_terms/](https://secoora.org/hurricane_bingo_terms/) (grades 5-12)
- For additional classroom resources on Hurricane Harvey:  
<http://sciencenetlinks.com/lessons/hurricanes-1-the-science-of-hurricanes/>