

***Bearkats Read to Succeed
2011-2012***

ISAAC'S STORM

*A Man, a Time, and the
Deadliest Hurricane in History*

by Erik Larson

**Discussion, Resources, and
Learning Activities Guide**

www.shsu.edu/fye/read.html



ABOUT THE BOOK

"An absurd delusion" is how Isaac Cline, a dedicated and highly trained first-generation employee of the new U.S. Weather Bureau, characterized the fear that any hurricane posed a serious danger to the burgeoning city of Galveston, Texas. Based partly on Cline's expert opinion, Galveston dismissed a proposal to erect a seawall, claiming it a needless, wasteful expense. In 1900, Cline's words reflected not only his own opinion but also the spirit -- what would one day be seen as the hubris -- of his time.

At the turn of the century, Galveston was booming. It was the nation's biggest cotton port, its third-busiest port overall, and the second-most-heavily-traversed entry for immigrants arriving from Europe, nicknamed the "Western Ellis Island." The city had more millionaires, street for street, than any other in America. The nation, too, was bursting at its borders with optimism and confidence. Victory in the Spanish-American War granted the U.S. a heady new status as a global power. The nation was also being transformed in other ways, from an agrarian culture to an industrial one, from rural to urban, from scientific backwater to technological powerhouse. Nothing seemed impossible. American warships steamed to China. American engineers prepared to take over construction of the Panama Canal.

Even weather itself seemed at last under the control of man. The recently established U.S. Weather Bureau oversaw a weather monitoring network that included 158 regular observatories, 132 river outposts, 48 rainfall monitors, 2,562 volunteer observers, 12 West Indies stations, 9 coastal stations, and 96 railway posts throughout the country. One newspaper editorialist in 1900 called weather prediction "a complete science."

It wasn't. The hard lesson that nature cannot be predicted, especially at the extremes of its behavior, was delivered to Isaac Cline, to the city of Galveston, and to the entire nation on September 8, 1900. On the evening of that day, the worst natural disaster in U.S. history roared out of the Gulf of Mexico and confronted Galveston with its own powerlessness in the face of nature's fury.

The unnamed storm was born as a small plume of warm air off the African coast. As it moved deliberately but inexorably across the ocean it fed on the heat of the summer waters, drinking in energy until it had grown huge with the potential for destruction. On September 7, cables started arriving in the Weather Bureau's Washington headquarters, relaying ships' encounters with the growing storm in an area off Cuba. The storm then crossed Florida and arrived in the Gulf, but instead of meandering in the manner of most Gulf storms, it turned and aimed straight for Galveston. The track allowed its winds to blow unobstructed for hundreds of miles over waters made unusually warm by a particularly tropical summer. The storm added to its vast store of energy and pushed a huge wall of water along its leading edge.

On the evening of September 8, the tempest of wind and water slammed into Galveston. In the language of today's National Weather Service, it would be called an extreme hurricane, or X-storm. Within a few hours of making landfall, the storm had scoured vast sections of the city clean of any man-made structure, deposited towering walls of debris in other areas, and killed upward of 10,000 people. Among the dead was Isaac Cline's wife.

The Galveston storm remains the worst natural disaster ever to strike the U.S., its death toll eclipsing the combined carnage of the Johnstown Flood of 1889 and the San Francisco Earthquake of 1906. Isaac's Storm is a fascinating look at the physics and meteorology of hurricanes (especially the X-storms that scientists say are a statistical certainty in our own future), a suspenseful re-creation of the track of the 1900 Galveston storm, and an electrifying account of the day the storm released its unfathomable fury on Galveston. Most of all, it is an appreciation of the human face of the tragedy, as focused in the story of Isaac Cline, whose pride was the pride of his nation and his time, and whose education in the unpredictable power of nature is one that if we forget today we do so at our peril.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Erik Larson is the author of three *New York Times* bestsellers, including *The Devil in the White City*, which remained on the *Times* hardcover and paperback lists for a combined total of over three years. It has sold more than 2.3 million copies. It won an Edgar Award for nonfiction crime writing and was a finalist for a National Book Award; the option to make a movie of the book was acquired in November 2010 by Leonardo DiCaprio. DiCaprio plans to play the serial killer, Dr. H. H. Holmes.

Erik's new book, *In the Garden of Beasts* (May 2011), tells the story of an American father—the new U.S. ambassador to Nazi Germany—and his 24-year-old daughter as they experienced Hitler's first full year in power. Publishers in Britain, France, Australia, New Zealand, Poland, and Hungary have already acquired rights to publish the book abroad.

Erik's research has taken him to far-flung locales, and down innumerable strange alleys. For his 2006 bestseller, *Thunderstruck*, Erik traveled to London, Munich, Rome, Nova Scotia, and Cape Cod, as he sought to chronicle the strange intersection in the careers of Guglielmo Marconi, inventor of wireless radio, and Hawley Harvey Crippen, England's second-most-famous murderer (after Jack the Ripper). To broaden his understanding of Marconi and his roots, Erik studied Italian; he achieved an elementary grasp of the language while developing an advanced appreciation for Italian red wines.

Erik also wrote *Isaac's Storm*, published in August 1999. In addition to becoming an immediate *Times* bestseller, the book won the American Meteorological Society's prestigious Louis J. Battan Author's Award. The *Washington Post* called it the "Jaws' of hurricane yarns."

Erik graduated summa cum laude from the University of Pennsylvania, where he studied Russian history, language, and culture. He received a master's in journalism from Columbia University. After a brief stint at the *Bucks County Courier Times*, Larson became a staff writer for the *Wall Street Journal*, and later a contributing writer for *Time*. He has written articles for *The Atlantic*, *Harper's*, *The New Yorker*, and other publications.

MAJOR CHARACTERS

- **Adolphus W. Greely** – Chief of the Signal Corps in 1887, which later became the Weather Bureau; sent Isaac Cline to the Galveston station
- **Allie May Cline** – eldest daughter of Isaac Cline; survived the hurricane
- **August Rollfing** – German immigrant; housepainter; entire family survived hurricane
- **Cora Cline** – pregnant wife of Isaac Cline; would meet a tragic fate
- **Esther Bellew Cline** – youngest daughter of Isaac Cline who considered Esther “his” baby; survived the hurricane
- **H.H.C. Dunwoody** – Weather Bureau's chief liaison in Cuba; worked with Moore to have the US War Department ban weather cables from Cuba's government-owned telegraph lines except those from Weather Bureau officials.
- **Isaac Cline** – Weather Bureau scientist assigned to Galveston; believed that a hurricane hitting Galveston was an “absurd delusion”
- **Joseph Cline** – younger brother of Isaac Cline; forecaster in Weather Bureau; Joseph would never again speak to Isaac in the years after the storm
- **Judson Palmer** – Secretary of the Galveston YMCA; important society member; lost his wife in the hurricane
- **Louisa Rollfing** – German immigrant; wife of August Rollfing; her adversity-filled passage to America gave her the strength to get her family through the hurricane
- **Rosemary Cline** – middle daughter of Isaac Cline; survived the hurricane
- **Samuel Young** – Secretary of the Galveston Cotton Exchange and an amateur meteorologist who was friendly with Isaac Cline; he and his family survived the hurricane
- **William Stockman** – Weather Bureau's local forecast official for the Havana office; ran the station's daily operations; stodgy bureaucrat who was suspicious of the Cubans
- **Willis Moore** – arrogant, brash Chief of the Weather bureau in 1900; dismissed any information from Cuba regarding the deadly storm.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Given the tools and knowledge the U.S. Weather Service had in 1900, could the Galveston disaster have been prevented? Larsen himself, in an interview with Powell's bookstore, says the book is 'so much about attitude.' What does he mean?
2. Why were Isaac Cline's warnings so hesitant, as the barometer continued to drop and the storm raced toward the City of Galveston?
3. Imagine if the hurricane had not hit Galveston. Would it have remained the 'New York of the Gulf Coast' as it was in 1900?
4. Consider Hurricanes Katrina and Ike. Are we better prepared for storms and their impact today? Does awareness of potential disaster translate into a different response now as compared to then?
5. According to the book, several methods were used to dispose of the 10,000 bodies after the storm. How would it have been handled had that many died in Hurricane Katrina or Hurricane Ike?
6. How did this book's descriptions of the devastation hit you emotionally?
7. Does this book have a hero? How does it affect the story for you as a reader?
8. Some wish the book had accompanying pictures. Can you visualize the situation and the damage?
9. A reviewer in the New Statesman said the book had 'just enough science.' Do you agree?
10. Were you familiar with the Galveston Hurricane of 1900 before reading this book? If so, where did you learn about it?
11. How does the destruction of the Galveston Hurricane of 1900 compare with the more recent Hurricane Katrina in 2005 and Hurricane Ike in 2008? Did we learn anything from the Galveston 1900 hurricane?
12. What did you think of Isaac Cline? Was he as great a meteorologist as he thought he was? Why or why not?
13. Both Isaac Cline and his brother Joseph were employed in the Weather Bureau. How did this impact the relationship between them?
14. Several minor characters were mentioned in the book. Did you feel a connection with any of them? If so, which characters did you like? Which characters could be described as villains? Why?
15. Why was there "bad blood" between the Cubans and the US Weather Bureau? Why did the US look down upon the Cubans even though the Cubans could more accurately predict hurricanes?
16. What material were the roofs of nearly all the city of Galveston's buildings made of in 1900? Why were they made this way? What happened to this roofing material during the storm?
17. Houston and Galveston "were traditional rivals." What were both cities competing for in 1900? Was Galveston able to recover that rivalry?
18. What happened to Isaac and Joseph Cline after the hurricane? Where did they go? How did these actions further impact their relationship?
19. Willis Moore was punished for politicking within the Bureau. What was his punishment? Did you think it was justified?
20. How many hurricanes did Galveston suffer through in the 20th century? Is Galveston still a major target in the age of 21st century meteorological technology? How?

WEBSITES ABOUT THE AUTHOR

www.randomhouse.com/features/isaacsstorm/book/author.html
www.identitytheory.com/interviews/birnbaum95.html
www.powells.com/authors/larson.html
<http://inf.uoregon.edu/notable/larson.html>
www.bookpage.com/0302bp/erik_larson.html

WEBSITES ABOUT THE BOOK

www.randomhouse.com/features/isaacsstorm
<http://archives.conn.com/2000/books/news/09/07/isaacs.storm/>
www.1900storm.com/isaaccline/isaacsstorm.lasso

WEBSITES FOR STUDY GUIDES (for purchase)

www.bookrags.com/lessonplan/isaacs-storm/intro.html

WEBSITES FOR MULTIMEDIA SOURCES

www.youtube.com/results?search_query=GALVESTON+HURRICANES&aq=f (videos)
<http://library.shsu.edu/research/databases/databasesbysubject/videosonline.html> (Films On Demand - A multi-curricular digital film collection from the Newton Gresham Library)

WEBSITES FOR CRITICAL THINKING EXERCISES

www.archives.gov/education/lessons/worksheets/

WEBSITES ABOUT GALVESTON HISTORY

www.galvestonhistory.org/hurricane-resource-center.htm
www.1900storm.com
www.galvestonhistory.org
www.rosenberg-library.org/
www.islandnet.com/~see/weather/almanac/arc2000/alm00sep.htm (1900 storm reported around songs)

Adapted from documents and websites from the Madison Public Library, Burleson Public Library, San Antonio Public Library, & Licking County Library.



INTERESTED TO KNOW MORE?
A SAMPLING OF RELATED BOOKS
IN THE LIBRARY



GALVESTON & THE 1900 STORM

A Weekend in September

John Edward Weems

F394.G2 W4 1980

Death from the Sea: Our Greatest Natural Disaster, the Galveston Hurricane of 1990

Herbert Molloy Mason

F394.G2M3

Galveston and the 1900 Storm: Catastrophe and Catalyst

Patricia Bellis Bixel

F394.G2 B59 2000

Galveston: A City on Stilts

Jodi Wright-Gidley & Jennifer Marines

F394 .G2 W75 2008

Storms, Floods and Sunshine: An Autobiography

Isaac Monroe Cline

On Order

Story of the Galveston Flood

Nathan C. Green

F394.G2G74

Through a Night of Horrors: Voices from the 1900 Galveston Storm

Casey E. Green & Shelly Henley Kelly (Eds.)

F394.G2 T49 2000

Windows of Heaven: A Novel of Galveston's Great Storm of 1900

Ron Rozelle

PS3568 .O994 W56 2000

GALVESTON HISTORY

Battle on the Bay: The Civil War Struggle for Galveston

Edward T. Cotham

E474.1 .C67 1998 (Ebook)

Cottonclads!: The Battle of Galveston and the Defense of the Texas Coast

Donald S. Frazier

E474.1 .F739 1996

Galveston Bay

Sally Antrobus

QH105 .T4 A55 2005

The Alleys and Back Buildings of Galveston: An Architectural and Social History

Ellen Beasley

NA8301 .B43 2007

OTHER STORMS AND HURRICANES

1 Dead in Attic: After Katrina

Chris Rose

HV636 2005 .L8 R67 2007

...And the Winds Blew

Harry E. Moore

F391.2.M6

After Ike: Aerial Views from the No-fly Zone

Bryan Carlile

F392 .G9 C37 2009

Hurricanes on the Texas coast

Walter K. Henry

QC944 .H87

Living on the Edge: Collected Essays on Coastal Texas

Stephen J. Curley

GF8 .C87 1989

Path of Destruction: The Devastation of New Orleans and the Coming Age of Superstorms

John McQuaid & Mark Schleifstein

HV636 .L8 M37 2006

Rising Tide: The Great Mississippi Flood of 1927 and How It Changed America

John M. Barry

F354 .B47 1997

The Great Deluge: Hurricane Katrina, New Orleans, and the Mississippi Gulf Coast

Douglas Brinkley

HV636 2005.L8 B75 2006

WEATHER FORECASTING & DISASTER MANAGEMENT

Hurricane Watch: Forecasting the Deadliest Storms on Earth

Bob Sheets & Jack Williams

QC944 .S533 2001

The Weather of the Future: Heat Waves, Extreme storms, and Other Scenes from a Climate-changed Planet

Heidi Cullen

QC903 .C85 2010

Weather's Greatest Mysteries Solved!

Randall S. Cerveny

QC870 .C47 2009

What Goes Up: The Global Assault on Our Atmosphere

John J. Nane

QC981.8.G56 N36 1991

DISASTER MANAGEMENT & CRISIS COMMUNICATION

A Paradise Built in Hell: The Extraordinary Communities that Arise in Disaster

Rebecca Solnit HV553 .S59 2009

Crisis and Disaster Management for Tourism

Brent W. Ritchie G155 .A1 R543 2009

Designing Resilience: Preparing for Extreme Events

Arjen Bion & Chris C. Demchak (Eds.) HV551.2 .D47 2010

Disaster Response

Debra A. Miller (Ed.) HV555 .U6 D583 2009

Disrupted Cities: When Infrastructure Fails

Stephen Graham HV551.2 .D59 2010

Encyclopedia of Disaster Relief

K. Bradley Penuel & Matthew Statler REF HV553 .E53 2001

Facing Catastrophe: Environmental Action for a Post-Katrina World

Robert R. M. Verchick GE180 .V47 2010

Just Seconds from the Ocean: Coastal Living in the Wake of Katrina

William Sargent GB460 .A2 S27 2007

Leading Through a Crisis

Harvard Business Press HD57.7 .L43758 2009

Nurses on the Front Line: When Disaster Strikes, 1878-2010

Barbra M. Wall & Arlene W. Keeling (Eds.) RT116 .N57 2011

Shelter from the Storm: Repairing the National Emergency Management System after Hurricane Katrina

William L. Waugh H1 .A4 V. 604

The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism

Naomi Klein HB95 .K54 2007

The Human Side of Disaster

Thomas E. Drabek HV551.2 .D713 2010

Active Learning Activities

Activity	Critical Thinking	Communication (Written/Oral)	Creativity	Inquiry & Analysis	Intercultural	Quantitative Literacy	Teamwork & Problem Solving	Community Engagement	Fine Arts	Business	Criminal Justice	Education	Humanities	Sciences	Social Sciences
How has instrumentation of monitoring hurricanes changed since 1900? Try to find illustrations of those used in 1900 and those used now. What kind of monitoring do we still need to pursue to improve monitoring and prediction?	x	x	x	x										x	
Research the various food banks in your area and determine what kinds of foods are appropriate for a food bank to store. Work with colleagues to gather appropriate foodstuffs to contribute to a food bank. In 300 words or less, reflect on the idea of food banks and your experience gathering food and contributing it.	x	x		x			x	x					x		x
Research how deceased bodies, as a result of the storm, were buried in 1900 and compare that to what happened with the bodies after Katrina in 2005. Be sure to include what agencies are responsible and where they obtain the workers charged with this task. Prepare an essay on the similarities and differences then and now.	x	x		x	x					x			x		x
When Issac's Storm was written, naming of hurricanes had not begun. Research when hurricanes began to be named, the fallout from having only women's names for hurricanes, and how it has now branched to international names. Develop a timeline to illustrate how naming hurricanes has progressed.	x	x	x	x								x	x	x	
Generate a photo essay of Katrina, Rita, or Ike.	x	x	x	x					x			x	x		x
Discuss how grading categorization of hurricanes came to be and the mathematical calculations involved in categorizing each hurricane.	x	x				x						x		x	
In the book, the American meteorologists did not trust the Cuban meteorologists. 1. Brainstorm the reasons for the turn of events. 2. Watch a weather forecast on an English speaking television station and one from a Spanish-speaking television station. How are they similar and how do they differ?	x	x		x	x					x		x	x	x	
With a team, demonstrate the dances of the period – 1900 (i.e., waltz, polka, etc.)			x						x			x	x		
Develop a list of volunteer sites in need of help during a hurricane. Include a list of tasks for each volunteer site.		x		x				x					x		x
Compare and contrast hurricanes like, Rita, Katrina, and Issac's storm.	x	x		x										x	x
Compare vocabulary used to describe people of color or other cultures in 1900 and 2011. In 500 words or less, present findings and suggest reasons for similarities and differences.	x	x		x	x							x	x		x
Choose a picture from the 1900 hurricane pictorial archive and in 500 words or less provide a description and incorporates both objective and subject elements.	x	x		x								x	x		x
Interview a family member, friend, acquaintance, who is at least 30 years your senior, requesting that he or she share a life experience that taught him/her a lesson and/or contributed to his/her character. Write a 3-5 page essay in which you narrate both your interview experience as well as the interviewee's narrative.		x	x	x								x	x		x
Choose a term used in the book <i>Isaac's Storm</i> and in 500 words or less, using textual examples, provide an extended definition(s) of the chosen term.	x	x		x								x	x		x

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Working within your chosen discipline or a discipline of interest, write a 4-8 page cause and effect essay in which you utilize additional research materials as well as use the text <i>Isaac's Storm</i> as a secondary source.	X	X		X		X			X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Looting was a salient event during Katrina. What are some of the environmental characteristics that lend themselves to looting, and how might those characteristics be addressed in other ways?	X	X		X	X					X	X		X		X
What are the roles law enforcement plays during a disaster such as a hurricane?	X	X		X							X				X
Choose a family you know (can be related) and help them evaluate their preparation for a hurricane. Of course, you must first determine what it means to be prepared for a hurricane. Make a checklist to use with the family to check off what is in place and indicate what is not in place for a disaster.	X	X		X			X					X			X
During Katrina there was some uproar about the use of terms, refugees and evacuees. Research the issues and the political ramifications of using each term.	X	X		X	X							X			X
Research some of the disaster relief organizations around the world. Use some reporting device such as a table or chart to compare and contrast the source of the disaster funds and how contributions are distributed including what percentage actually goes to disaster victims and how much goes to agency overhead.	X	X		X	X	X				X			X		X
The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) currently plays a significant role in disaster management. Research the history and report it in graphic form of some sort to show the evolution of the agency.	X	X		X	X					X		X	X		X
Form a group with several colleagues. Gather photos from the 1900 Galveston hurricane and photos from Katrina, Rita, and Ike. You can use other hurricanes as well. Work together to make a collage of the photos that show a progression from 1900 to the present.		X		X	X		X		X						
What happens to children during and after a hurricane? How do schools manage evacuees from disaster areas? You may use Hurricane Katrina as a case to assess? How effective is school management of evacuees, and how could it be improved?	X	X		X	X							X	X		X
Analyze how cities (or universities) prepare their citizens (or students) for hurricanes. What is effective and what is not effective?	X	X		X	X					X		X	X		X
What kinds of crimes emerge during a disaster such as a hurricane? How do law enforcement agencies prepare for hurricanes?	X	X		X	X						X	X			X
How do politicians tend to handle disasters? Compare and contrast how various politicians react. One method might be to examine similarities and differences of politicians who are from the hit area and those not from the area.	X	X		X	X					X		X			X
What kind of disaster response training is given to teachers and school administrators? How does a school district manage its preparation? Give an example		X		X	X					X		X			X

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The history of the modern haiku dates from Masaoka Shiki's reform, begun in 1892, which established haiku as a new independent poetic form. Shiki's reform did not change two traditional elements of haiku: the division of 17 syllables into three groups of 5, 7, and 5 syllables and the inclusion of a seasonal theme. Choose a meaningful issue or part of the book for you and write a haiku poem. An example: Dave McCroskey the morning paper harbinger of good and ill -- I step over it From Haiku for People www.townmasu.com/haiku/#howtowritehaiku	X	X	X	X	X	X			X			X			
What happens in prisons when there is a hurricane threat? In selected groups, interview people who have lived in hurricane prone areas. If they consent, interview them and record the interview. Then, as a team, you can edit, include photos, and even add narration if desirable. Share your video documentary with your classmates.	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X			X	X		X
Find films that are about storms. Create an annotated list of films.		X		X					X			X	X		X
Use the film form on the Library of Congress website to analyze the cartoon.	X	X		X	X				X				X		X
Research how much the U.S. budgets for disaster relief for its states. How do they determine how much money to allot for a disaster such as Hurricane Katrina or Ike? From your findings, prepare a budget for a hurricane such as Ike hitting the gulf coast.	X	X		X		X				X			X	X	X
What are the psychological effects of losing your home or all your belongings? How would a social worker's interventions differ from a psychotherapist in helping someone deal with traumatic events such as these?	X			X	X							X	X		X
Many of the grocery store chains sponsor food drives such as "Bowl of Soup" during the Super Bowl hype. Work as a team to determine how successful these campaigns are and how they might be tweaked to bring in even more donations.	X			X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X			X
Create a poster encouraging individual citizens to contribute to a food bank or clothing drive.	X	X	X		X			X	X	X		X			X
Read some of the poems about hurricanes at the following website: www.poets.org/viewmedia.php/prmMID/20675	X	X	X						X				X		
Then write at least a two-stanza poem reflecting your thoughts on Isaac's Storm.															
There are agencies that have clothing for distribution to people in need after a disaster. How successful are these agencies in gathering clothing and distributing it to those in need? Choose some friends to help you research this issue and report their success and problem-solve how to make their service even better.	X	X		X	X		X	X							X

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In pioneer times, when someone stole something, like a horse, they might be hanged. What would be just punishments for looters after a hurricane, such as happened in New Orleans after Katrina? What could businesses do to dissuade looters?	X	X		X	X					X	X				X
As a result of Hurricane Rita, the Harris County area made a number of improvements to evacuating people from areas where hurricanes are predicted to hit. What were those improvements and what difficulties remain?	X	X		X						X				X	X

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