

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

Night of the Twisters

by
Ivy Ruckman

Book Information

Ivy Ruckman, Night of the Twisters
Quiz Number: 628
HarperCollins Publishers, Inc, 1984
ISBN 0-06-440176-6; LCCN
153 Pages
Book Level: 4.7
Interest Level: MG

A twelve-year-old relates an account of the night that freakish and devastating tornadoes hit Grand Island, Nebraska.

Topics: Adventure, Survival; Disasters, Storms;
Read Now with Power Up Recommended
Lists, Count on Me: Responsibility; U.S.
States/Regions, Nebraska

Main Characters

Arthur Darlington the twelve-year-old boy who is Dan's best friend and companion throughout the disaster

Aunt Goldie Dan's flighty aunt

Daniel John Hatch (Dan, Danny, D.J.) a twelve-year-old boy who learns the value of his family when a tornado destroys his town

Eustacia Marie Darlington (Stacey) Arthur's responsible fourteen-year-old sister, who has a skill for comforting people

Grandpa and Grandma Hatch Dan's farmer grandparents, with whom Dan's family lives during the summer after the storm

John Hatch Dan's father, who values being helpful to family

Karen Darlington Arthur's good-natured mother, who has six daughters besides her son Arthur; she is pregnant when the tornadoes strike

Linda Hatch Dan's mother, who expects Dan to take care of his baby brother

Mr. Darlington Arthur's father, who works at Law's Greenscape during the day and at the National Guard Armory at night to support his large family

Mrs. Belle Smiley Dan's kind eighty-one-year-old neighbor, who generously feeds people while the town rebuilds

Mrs. Minetti the matron at the police station, who takes care of Dan, Arthur, and Stacey

Officer Kelly the quick-thinking policeman who brings the children to the police station

older kid on minibus a young man who generously gives his seat to Mrs. Smiley

Ryan Oliver Hatch Dan's baby brother, whom Dan blames for disrupting his happy home life

Veronica Vae Darlington (Ronnie Vae) Arthur's ten-year-old sister, who is traumatized when she is pulled out the window during the tornado

Vocabulary

armory a place where military equipment is stored

buffeted hit repeatedly

casualty a person injured or killed in an accident or disaster

devastated ruined, destroyed

hypothermia dangerously low body temperature

lull a temporary calm or inactive moment

Synopsis

On a warm June 3 afternoon, twelve-year-olds Dan Hatch and Arthur Darlington lie on the beach after swimming near their homes in Grand Island, Nebraska. When the clouds block the sun and the wind picks up, the boys leave to have dinner at Dan's house. Shortly afterward, as Dan's father prepares to leave for Phillips to repair Grandpa Hatch's tractor, he asks Dan to help his mother with chores; Dan's mother is tired from taking care of Baby Ryan, who is fussy because he is teething. Arthur volunteers to help Dan with some household chores, although Dan is annoyed with Ryan, whom Dan feels always gets most of the attention. Arthur "invites himself" to stay overnight.

At eight o'clock a tornado watch announcement appears on the television. Mrs. Hatch leaves to warn Mrs. Smiley, the family's elderly hearing-impaired friend, about the impending storm. When a warning siren sounds shortly thereafter, Dan phones his grandparents' house and warns Grandma about the tornado. Although this siren stops abruptly, another begins just as the radio goes dead. Dan lifts Ryan

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

Night of the Twisters

by
Ivy Ruckman

out of his crib and joins Arthur in the basement. They huddle under a blanket in the shower during the worst part of the tornado as the storm destroys the Hatch house and pelts the three boys with freezing rain and hail. Both Dan and Arthur worry about the safety of their families.

When the winds subside, Arthur's older sister Stacey arrives and helps the boys escape from the rubble-filled basement. She tells Arthur that their family is safe, but their house has been destroyed. Stacey volunteers to go with the boys to look for Dan's mother. Meanwhile, Dan and Arthur are stunned by the devastation they see around them. When they find Mrs. Hatch, she has an emotional reunion with Dan and Ryan but then tells them that Mrs. Smiley is trapped in her basement. The children persuade Mrs. Hatch to board the evacuation bus with Ryan and seek shelter in Kmart while Dan, Arthur, and Stacey rescue Mrs. Smiley.

At Mrs. Smiley's house, the boys find the elderly woman asleep in her basement. With Stacey's help, they manage to help Mrs. Smiley climb out of a basement window. The children hurry Mrs. Smiley to a minibus that is being used to evacuate storm survivors. While a young man gives up his seat to make room on the bus for Mrs. Smiley, the three children ride in Officer Kelly's police car. On their way to Kmart, the car encounters another tornado! Officer Kelly is struck in the eyes by flying glass, so Dan drives the group to the police station. While Officer Kelly receives medical attention, Mrs. Minetti, the jail matron, gives Stacey, Dan, and Arthur food and a place to sleep in the jail.

The next morning Mrs. Minetti delivers Arthur and Stacey to their father in the armory; however, when she attempts to take Dan to Kmart to join his mother and brother, she discovers that there is no way for a car to reach the store. Dan decides to run to Kmart, only to discover when he arrives that all civilians have been transferred to other sites throughout the town. Dan decides to go home since he hopes his father will look for the family there; as he walks across the park to his home, he hears his father's truck approach. Dan's parents and baby Ryan are

riding in the truck, and the family joyously reunites.

That summer Dan's family stays with Grandma and Grandpa Hatch on their farm until they can get housing. Arthur joins them because his family is so large it must be split up temporarily. People come from everywhere to join government and private agencies in rebuilding the town. Mrs. Smiley provides area survivors with home-canned food from her basement and a place to gather for support and encouragement. On the first anniversary of the tornado disaster, Dan sadly reflects that Mrs. Smiley died three months earlier -- too soon to join in the town's survival celebration. He hears his mother preparing food in the kitchen, sees his Grandma setting the table, and knows his father and Grandpa are at work in the garage. Baby Ryan, now able to toddle, is chasing the cat, and Arthur is anxious for the feast to begin. Things are returning to normal.

Open-Ended Questions

Use these open-ended questions as the basis for class discussions, student presentations, or extended writing assignments.

Initial Understanding

Why does Dan's father tell Dan the world does not rise and set on him?

He is angry because Dan does not want to help his mother, who is tired from taking care of Ryan. He feels that Dan should be more willing to help with chores since Dan's mother allowed him to have a guest for dinner. Dan's father also may sense Dan's resentment of Ryan, because he says that Dan ought to baby-sit Ryan once in a while.

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for Night of the Twisters by Ivy Ruckman

Literary Analysis

How does the storm complicate Dan's efforts to reunite with his family?

First, a tornado prevents Officer Kelly from taking Dan and his friends to Kmart, where Dan's mother and brother have found shelter. Also, Dan cannot inquire about his father because telephone lines are either nonfunctioning or overworked. In addition, debris left by the storm makes travel difficult, so Dan has to walk to Kmart from Mrs. Minetti's car. When he does reach Kmart, he finds as well that the rising water in the building has forced people like his mother and brother to transfer to other sites throughout the city for temporary shelter.

Inferential Comprehension

Why does Dan agree that "the real story" happens after a tornado?

For Dan, the meaningful part of the event is how people survive and help one another during difficult times. Throughout the book Dan notices what people like Stacey, Officer Kelly, and Mrs. Smiley do to help one another. He says very little about people doing unpleasant things in desperation or panic. He feels that the miracle of strangers from many places offering help and the brave, generous way the townspeople treat each other is more meaningful than the horror of the storm. It becomes a triumph of human spirit.

Constructing Meaning

Which character in this story is the most heroic? Defend your answer with examples from the book.

Answers will vary. Some students may feel that Dan is most heroic, since he saves his baby brother and volunteers to rescue Mrs. Smiley. Others may feel that Arthur is most heroic because he uses his creative intelligence to devise a method to reach Mrs. Smiley. There may be some students who feel that Stacey demonstrates the most heroic behavior; she goes to rescue Dan and Arthur, keeps Ryan warm, helps to reassure and rescue Mrs. Smiley, and comforts the baby in the police station. In addition, some students may cite Officer Kelly's bravery when he perseveres in the storm to get the children to shelter, despite the damage the glass caused to his eyes.

Teachable Skills

Recognizing Setting The text of the story is based on real events that occurred in Nebraska in 1980. Have students research tornadoes as well as the climate and topography of the south-central area of Nebraska. Based on their research, ask students to write a short paragraph that explains why this region might be particularly vulnerable to severe weather.

Responding to Literature As Dan and Arthur huddle under the blanket with baby Ryan, Dan worries that they will all be buried. Just then, he "hears" his father's voice: "The shower's the safest place." He leads Arthur and Ryan to safety by remembering his father's words. Ask students to write about a piece of advice they received from a parent or another person that has helped them.

Recognizing Plot This story is so full of traumatic events that it is easy for the reader to be overwhelmed by the story. Have the students create a plot line of the significant events so they get a clear sense of how the story unfolds.

Extending Meaning Dan encounters a wide variety of responses to the disaster, from the young man who gives up his seat to help a

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

Night of the Twisters

by

Ivy Ruckman

stranger, to the policewoman who responds rudely to Arthur's questions, to the man who is walking around in shock. Have the students try to find at least five different human responses to the disaster. Students should identify the characters' actions as well as the probable emotions that prompt these responses.