



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
2014 Volume II: Exploring Community through Ethnographic Nonfiction, Fiction, and Film

Communities Responding to Natural Disasters: Two Forces to be Reckoned With

Guide for Curriculum Unit 14.02.03
by Mary C. Elmore

Since we find the ethnographic concept of "community" sandwiched between the mythic ideal and the ordinary, every-day reality, it must be analyzed with honesty and intelligence. In order to arrive at a clear understanding of one's own community and the value systems that drive it, we must be boldly honest and probingly self-reflective since a great deal can be discovered in one's own needs, desires and priorities. There is, on the one hand, the mythic community and its idyllic structures evoked by advertisements and political campaigns. On the other hand, there are communities that actually exist with all of their power structures, shared value systems, devious and dysfunctional counterparts, resources or lack thereof. Since communities, regardless of their realistic circumstances, are ever striving to be that ideal community, there seems to be a tendency in human behavior to look away from what is in order to focus on what could or should be. It is sometimes only in the face of absolute disaster that a community is put to the test and its true qualities emerge.

Through my curriculum unit, I strive to raise my students' awareness of their integral roles within their classroom and school community as well as their neighborhood community. In order to impact their notions of responsibility towards their communities, my curriculum unit takes them on an exploration of community through an ethnographic study of the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. Upon identifying those characteristics which both failed and did manage to come to the rescue of this traumatized community, I will guide my students to be self-reflective and determine what kinds of moral value systems they intend to act upon as they live and develop within their various communities.

(Recommended for English Language Arts and Social Studies, grades 3-5)

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