

## What a disaster! by Carolyn Flores

**Age:** Teenagers / Adults  
**Level:** Intermediate–advanced  
**Time:** 90–120 minutes  
**Objectives:** to practise communication skills around a familiar topic: natural disasters  
**Key skills:** Speaking  
**Materials:** One copy of the worksheet per student

### Procedure

#### Warmer

The lesson starts with a short opening text followed by three general warmer questions that students read individually and then discuss either in a small group or with a partner. Answers are then compared with the rest of the class to stimulate interest and engage all students prior to moving on with remainder of the lesson.

#### Reading 1

- a. The first reading section introduces the lesson's main topic. Students read the newspaper headlines. With a partner or in a group, they decide if each disaster sounds like a natural one or a man-made one.

**Key:** 1. N; 2. N; 3. MM; 4. N; 5. N/MM; 6. MM; 7. N; 8. N; 9. N; 10. N

- b. Next, pairs of students match the newspaper headlines with the type of disaster.

**Key:**

headline number	type of disaster
4	drought
1	earthquake
5	wildfire
10	flooding
2	heat wave
7	hurricane
9	winter storm
6	bomb
3	oil spill
8	tsunami

- c. In this language-focus activity, students match the verbs from the newspaper headlines with their meanings. Then, they compare their answers with a partner.

**Key:** 1. b; 2. f; 3. g; 4. c; 5. i; 6. h; 7. d; 8. j; 9. e; 10. a

#### Conversation

These topic-specific conversation questions are designed to stimulate the sharing of ideas, views and opinions. Help out with language as needed, although, in order to ensure students express themselves freely, minimal interruption is recommended.

Have students read and then discuss the **Did you know?** text. You can discuss whole class if you prefer.

#### Reading 2

This second reading section provides another short, though more formal, passage related to the main topic of the lesson. As with the first reading section, students work in a small group or with a partner on follow-up comprehension activities after reading the passage.

**Key:** 1. l; 2. f; 3. d; 4. a; 5. k; 6. i; 7. e; 8. j; 9. h; 10. b; 11. g; 12. c

Now, students discuss the conversation questions with a partner or in a group.

#### Conversation plus

This is the 'wrap-up' section of the lesson. Working in a small group or with a partner, students choose one of three dynamic speaking or writing activities to demonstrate and reinforce their understanding of the lesson's ideas and vocabulary. Students are then encouraged to share and present their work to the rest of the class.

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### Warmer

When we think of disasters, concepts like damage, destruction and loss usually come to mind. Environmental disasters often have far-reaching and devastating social, financial, and human consequences including property damage, the destruction of habitats and the loss of life. Some parts of the world are more likely to experience natural disasters, while other parts are more likely to experience man-made disasters. In either case, these disasters can happen without warning and the time it takes for a region to recover from a natural or man-made disaster is often measured in years – or even decades.

**Discuss the following questions with a partner or in a group. Then, compare your answers with the rest of the class.**

1. What is the difference between a natural and a man-made disaster? Name as many examples as you can.
2. Have you ever been the victim of a disaster? Explain.
3. What was the last disaster you read about or saw on TV? Describe it in as much detail as possible.

### Reading 1

**a. Read the newspaper headlines. With a partner or in a group, decide if each disaster sounds like a natural one (N) or a man-made one (MM).**

1. Hillside residents take cover as ground trembles
2. Dozens collapse as hot air hovers over city
3. Sea life threatened as toxic substances leak out into the Gulf of Mexico
4. Wheat prices rise as farmlands continue to dry up
5. Evacuations in effect as blaze spreads across Red River Valley
6. Massive explosion set off in financial district
7. East coast prepares for worst as winds and rain pick up
8. Residents forced to evacuate as high waves hit east coast
9. Icy conditions shut down roads and close schools across the city
10. Torrential rains show no sign of letting up

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**b. Complete the table by matching the newspaper headlines with the type of disaster. Compare your answers with a partner.**

headline number	type of disaster
4	drought
	earthquake
	wildfire
	flooding
	heat wave
	hurricane
	winter storm
	bomb
	oil spill
	tsunami

**c. Match the phrasal verbs and verb phrases from the newspaper headlines with their meanings. Compare your answers with a partner.**

1. dry up	a. close
2. set off	b. lose water
3. hover over	c. come out of an object
4. leak out	d. hide
5. spread across	e. become stronger
6. let up	f. make something explode
7. take cover	g. stay somewhere
8. forced	h. slow down
9. pick up	i. gradually affect a larger area
10. shut down	j. made to do something

### Conversation

**Discuss the following questions with a partner or in a group.**

1. What kinds of disasters are most common in your country?
2. What are some causes of man-made disasters?
3. What do you think is more damaging: disasters in developed countries or those in developing countries? In which is the cost of recovery greater?

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### Did you know?

Children experience high levels of stress and anxiety when they hear about or see deadly disasters. While they may not be directly affected by the disaster when it happens, they're still exposed to the stories and photos depicting the destruction and loss of life. This kind of information can be overwhelming and incomprehensible for them and they often need to talk about the experience with a parent, friend or teacher. Some children may be traumatized by the experience. Having the calming, reassuring and nurturing presence of an experienced adult to help put things into perspective can make a world of difference to children's ability to recover.

**Idiom:** *To make a world of difference means to improve something greatly.*

**Do you feel that children should be sheltered from the type of information routinely communicated through mainstream and social media? Why? Why not?**

### Reading 2

**Read the following and then discuss the questions below with a partner or in a group.**

#### Help is always on the way

Authorities cannot always prepare citizens for natural or man-made disasters. However, when disaster strikes, it's the response of those in authority that makes all the difference. Emergency services are usually the first to arrive. Depending on the nature of the disaster, the first focus is often on clearing away debris to rescue trapped or injured people.

If the disaster is severe enough to overwhelm local police and ambulance services, then outside agencies and organizations are usually called in to help support relief efforts and manage the chaos. These agencies and organizations tend to have specific expertise and resources. Some focus on ensuring access to clean drinking water, food and medical supplies to prevent water contamination, malnutrition and disease from quickly taking their toll. Military, medical personnel and volunteers are also often found on site in the aftermath of a disaster. The process of cleaning up and rebuilding damaged infrastructure can take several years, or even decades, if the disaster is very severe.

Regardless of where you live, having some sort of contingency plan, such as a disaster shelter or emergency supplies for at least 72 hours, can help you to increase your chances of survival in case a disaster strikes.

**Discuss the following questions with a partner or in a group.**

1. Who is prepared to help when a disaster happens?
2. Why is a well-managed recovery plan needed?
3. If your family was stranded at home, what items would you need to survive the first 72 hours following a disaster?

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Match the following words from the text with their meanings. Compare your answers with a partner.

1. take a toll	a. the broken pieces that are left when something large has been destroyed
2. severity	b. confusion and mess
3. provisions	c. hit
4. debris	d. supplies
5. aftermath	e. make certain that something happens or is done
6. contamination	f. seriousness
7. ensure	g. be so bad that someone cannot deal with it
8. contingency	h. structure and services
9. infrastructure	i. pollution
10. chaos	j. done to prepare for a possible bad event
11. overwhelm	k. the effects and results of something bad or important
12. strike	l. harm or damage

### Conversation

Discuss the following with a partner or in a group.

1. Have you ever donated to a disaster-relief fund or been part of a fundraising initiative? If so, explain.
2. Why do you think there has been an increase in worldwide natural disasters?
3. Why are we so attracted to disaster and Doomsday movies? Can you name some?

### Conversation plus

Choose one of the following activities to complete with a partner or in a group. Be sure to use vocabulary from this lesson.

1. Choose one of the newspaper headlines from Reading 1 and write a full story that would match it. Be sure to answer the 'wh- questions' (Who? What? When? Where? Why? How?). Present your news story to the rest of the class.
2. Discuss the possible social, environmental and economic consequences of a natural disaster and a man-made disaster. Share your work with the rest of the class.
3. Research five deadly natural or man-made disasters that have happened in the world in the last ten years. Include the following information: year, type of disaster, location, death toll, recovery/clean-up plan, interesting facts and any updates. Present your findings in two to three sentences for each disaster to the rest of the class.

There are two big forces at work: external and internal. We have very little control over external forces such as tornadoes, earthquakes and floods. What really matters is the internal force. How do I respond to those disasters? – Leo Buscaglia