

**HANDOUT 1**
Economics Lesson 1**Analyzing Scarcity—The Economics of Disaster: Worksheet**

Using the information provided by your teacher, you will identify and describe the major areas of scarcity in New Orleans before Hurricane Katrina struck. Then, after viewing documentary film clips, you will identify the major areas of scarcity in New Orleans during and after the onset of Hurricane Katrina.

<i>Before Katrina: Areas of Scarcity</i>	<i>During and After Katrina: Areas of Scarcity</i>

Handout 1, “Analyzing Scarcity—The Economics of Disaster: Worksheet”

Handout 2, “Analyzing Scarcity—The Economics of Disaster: Discussion Questions”

Unfolding of the Lesson

- A.** Using the “New Orleans scarcity resources” materials and other material that can be found, students identify the major problems with scarcity of goods and services that may have had an effect on the ability of some residents to flee the storm.
- B.** After viewing the selected excerpts from the film, students discuss the experiences of individuals confronted with the decision of whether to leave or ride out the storm.
- C.** In groups, students identify the connection between pre-Katrina scarcity and post-Katrina scarcity. Students will also postulate how various institutions did or did not contribute to the problem of scarcity and what these institutions could have done to prevent scarcity. For example,

there was a fleet of school buses that went unused in evacuating those without cars from New Orleans. Mayor Ray Nagin of New Orleans says he had no drivers and that the number of buses would have been insufficient to evacuate all the poor and elderly (see <http://mediamatters.org/items/200509120005>). Should there be alternative modes of transportation available in a city to evacuate residents who cannot do it themselves?

- D.** Students can also investigate how these shortages may have affected certain groups in very different ways, and how they could have been prevented.
- E.** Ask students to wrap up with a brief reflective essay on the following question:
 - ◆ Choose three areas of scarcity and discuss the ways in which each one influenced the situation of New Orleans in the aftermath of Katrina. Propose solutions for the future in dealing with such problems in New Orleans and other American cities.

Closure

Given what students have learned about the problem of scarcity in New Orleans in August 2005, answer the question of why some people did not leave New Orleans before the hurricane struck. Consider the follow-up question of what can and should be done in the future in circumstances like this in New Orleans and in other parts of the United States.

Students can also follow up by investigating ongoing issues of scarcity in post-Katrina New Orleans:

- Housing shortages in New Orleans: <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=5242517>
- Medicine and scarcity in New Orleans: <http://www.medicalnewstoday.com/medicalnews.php?newsid=56312>
- Shortage of mental health services: <http://www.medicalnewstoday.com/medicalnews.php?newsid=56312>

Taking Action

Students can create a plan for preparedness in their local communities based on how certain types of scarcity will magnify the problems created by natural disasters. Their critiques of the local problems they uncover and their plans for addressing these problems should be communicated to local officials and news outlets.

**HANDOUT 2**
Economics Lesson 1**Analyzing Scarcity—The Economics of Disaster: Discussion Questions**

- ◆ Is there a connection between various instances of scarcity before and after the onset of Hurricane Katrina? How so?
- ◆ Do some groups (social class, racial) seem to experience scarcity both before and after the onset of Hurricane Katrina? Explain.
- ◆ Who was responsible for various instances of scarcity both before and during the onset of Hurricane Katrina? Explain.

LESSON 2

**“If We Want to Put a Man on the Moon ...
We Find the Money”
Spending the Taxpayers’ Money
in Response to Disasters**

Katrina and the resulting breach of the levees is only one of many disasters to befall the nation over its history. Hurricanes, earthquakes, terrorist strikes—all are part and parcel of modern American life. If the predictions of global warming are accurate, then the country may be in for more experiences of this sort. A legitimate question may be raised about the degree to which government, whether it be federal, state, or local, should expend resources to help out those who are victims of such events, especially when citizens choose to “live in harm’s way,” for example, in coastal areas susceptible to hurricanes.

Essential Question

- ◆ What should be the government’s economic responsibility to victims of a disaster?

Key Concepts

Market economy/command economy, bureaucracy, economic responsibility, opportunity costs, externalities

Skills Orientation

- Formulating and supporting positions on political and economic issues
- Modifying positions using feedback from other perspectives
- Evaluating the economic impact of political decisions

Relevant Sections of the Film

Act I, Chapter 3, “Explosions”
Act I, Chapter 6, “The City That Care Forgot”
Act II, Chapter 2, “We Shoot Looters”
Act II, Chapter 3, “Brownie, You’re Doin’ a Heck of a Job”
Act III, Chapter 3, “American Citizens”

Related Curriculum Standards

- NCEE Standard 16: Role of Government—“Students will understand that: There is an economic role for government in a market economy whenever the benefits of a government policy outweigh its costs. Governments often provide for national defense, address environmental concerns, define and protect property rights, and attempt to make markets more competitive. Most government policies also redistribute income.”
- NCEE Standard 17: Using Cost/Benefit Analysis to Evaluate Government Programs—“Students will understand that: Costs of government policies sometimes exceed benefits. This may occur because of incentives facing voters, government officials, and government employees, because of actions by special interest groups that can impose costs on the general public, or because social goals other than economic efficiency are being pursued.”

Materials Used in the Lesson

Handout 1, The Economic Role of Government During Hurricane Katrina: Discussion Questions



HANDOUT 1

Economics Lesson 2

The Economic Role of Government During Hurricane Katrina: Discussion Questions

Answer the following questions according to your own opinion and experience in order to prepare for today’s lesson.

- ◆ What is the economic responsibility of government in helping victims of a crisis?
- ◆ What are the minimum and maximum limits to this responsibility?
- ◆ How does this responsibility vary with level of government, i.e., local, state, and federal?
- ◆ Does the responsibility vary with social class? In other words, does the government have a greater burden in addressing the needs of the poor, elderly, children, etc.?
- ◆ What are the competing perspectives that surface in discussing this question? Can these divergent viewpoints be reconciled?

Views on government economic responsibility:

The American Prospect: <http://www.prospect.org/web/page.w?section=root&name=ViewWeb&articleId=10391>
The Heritage Foundation: <http://www.heritage.org/Research/GovernmentReform/sr05.cfm>

Handout 2, Assessment of the Economic Role of Government During Hurricane Katrina

Handout 3, Roundtable Discussion: Talking Points

Unfolding of the Lesson

- A. Begin with discussion of the general questions posed in Handout 1.
- B. Utilizing clips from the film, students complete a graphic organizer (Handout 2) in which they evaluate how various levels of government responded to the Katrina crisis (e.g., prevention, evacuation, shelter/food, temporary space, displacement, returning home, rebuilding homes, rebuilding schools, etc.).
- C. In group roundtable discussions utilizing the “Talking Points” worksheet (Handout 3), students examine how the various levels of government failed or succeeded in helping the economic needs of the public. They then analyze the reasons behind what they uncover.
- D. [Optional] Students can engage in an investigation of how citizens around the world in both command (that is, an economy centrally controlled by the government) and market (that is, a market that operates according to free exchange of goods and services and is not planned by government) economies define the economic responsibility of government.
- E. [Optional] Students can develop a “report card” for grading all levels of government in their responses to this and other disasters.
- F. Students come up with their own individual responses to the question of why (or why not) the government should respond to victims of a disaster. They also consider the

**HANDOUT 2**
Economics Lesson 2**Assessment of the Economic Role of Government During Hurricane Katrina**

<i>Type of Economic Responsibility as It Pertains to Hurricane Katrina</i>	<i>What Level of Government Was Involved?</i>	<i>What Action Was Taken?</i>	<i>Did the Government Fulfill Its Economic Role, in Your Opinion?</i>
<i>Prevention</i>			
<i>Evacuation</i>			
<i>Shelter/Food/Water</i>			
<i>Temporary Space/Traveling Needs/Returning Home</i>			
<i>Rebuilding</i>			

limits of that response from both philosophical and fiscal standpoints and the particular level of government (local, state, federal) with the greatest responsibility. Students may wish to investigate what has occurred in New York City since September 11, 2001, in terms of governmental response and compensation of families of the victims.

Closure

Students return to the essential question posed in this lesson and debate: What should be the government's economic responsibility in the aftermath of a disaster? As part of this

debate, which can be structured in any way most workable for the group, educators should encourage students to listen, respond, and be respectful of alternative viewpoints from their own. The teacher may then wish to introduce this issue: The United States helped rebuild Europe after World War II and is committed to the rebuilding of Iraq. Students should discuss why the same commitment seems to be lacking for rebuilding New Orleans and Louisiana.

Taking Action

Students will develop a public opinion survey to be distributed to people in their local area, asking questions about issues raised by this lesson. Students will share the analysis of the survey results with their class and school and community members, if possible.

**HANDOUT 3**
Economics Lesson 2**Roundtable Discussion: Talking Points**

In small groups, discuss the following questions related to Hurricane Katrina and government economic responsibility.

- ◆ In what areas was each level of government successful in its response to Hurricane Katrina?
- ◆ In what areas did each level of government fail in its response to Hurricane Katrina?
- ◆ What were the major reasons behind success or failure?
- ◆ Did governments fulfill their economic responsibility during and after Hurricane Katrina? Which levels and in what circumstances? Why or why not?
- ◆ Have your ideas on the responsibilities of government changed as a result of this lesson? Explain why or why not.

LESSON 3**Were the Citizens of the Ninth Ward Trapped Long Before the Levees Broke?**

For many people in the United States and around the world who watched the unfolding of the tragedy in New Orleans, the scenes of the poor and dispossessed were shocking. Some questioned whether what they saw could be images of the "richest country in the world." Why were so many Americans surprised by what they saw? How could they be unaware of the problem of poverty in this country?

Perhaps the answer lies, in part, in the concentration of poverty and the presence of a seemingly permanent underclass in inner-city neighborhoods. Of course, the poor are also present