

TEACHING AMERICAN HISTORY PROJECT
Lesson Title -National Disasters
From Michael Meyer

Grade -11

Length of class period -84

Inquiry - (What essential question are students answering, what problem are they solving, or what decision are they making?)

How should a President respond to national disasters?

Objectives (What content and skills do you expect students to learn from this lesson?)

Students will analyze a primary source.
Students will identify perspectives and bias.
Students will read for information.

Materials (What primary sources or local resources are the basis for this lesson?) –
(please attach)

Address to the Nation: The Challenger Disaster -Attached
President Obama concerning the Massey Coal Mine Disaster-Attached
Address to the Nation on the Civil Disturbances in Los Angeles, California
Discussion Questions-Attached

Activities (What will you and your students do during the lesson to promote learning?)

Intro: Students will write an answer to the question " How should a President respond to national disasters?"

Main Activity: Students will read the transcripts or listen to the recordings of each of the 3 speeches and answer the attached questions.

Discussion: After answering the questions students should have a teacher moderated discussion about the questions.

Conclusion: Students will respond again on the same piece of paper as the intro activity to the same question and hand it in.

How will you assess what student learned during this lesson?

- Intro and Conclusion Questions
- Main Activity Questions
- Discussion Participation

CT State Standards:

Educational experiences in **Grades 9-12** will assure that students:

- Demonstrate an understanding of significant events and themes in United States history.
- Access and gather information from a variety of primary and secondary sources.
- Interpret information from a variety of primary and secondary sources
- Use evidence to identify, analyze and evaluate historical interpretations

Address to the Nation: The Challenger Disaster-Ronald Reagan

January 28, 1986

Nineteen years ago, almost to the day, we lost three astronauts in a terrible accident on the ground. But, we've never lost an astronaut in flight; we've never had a tragedy like this. And perhaps we've forgotten the courage it took for the crew of the shuttle; but they, the Challenger Seven, were aware of the dangers, but overcame them and did their jobs brilliantly. We mourn seven heroes: Michael Smith, Dick Scobee, Judith Resnik, Ronald McNair, Ellison Onizuka, Gregory Jarvis, and Christa McAuliffe. We mourn their loss as a nation together.

For the families of the seven, we cannot bear, as you do, the full impact of this tragedy. But we feel the loss, and we're thinking about you so very much. Your loved ones were daring and brave, and they had that special grace, that special spirit that says, 'Give me a challenge and I'll meet it with joy.' They had a hunger to explore the universe and discover its truths. They wished to serve, and they did. They served all of us.

We've grown used to wonders in this century. It's hard to dazzle us. But for twenty-five years the United States space program has been doing just that. We've grown used to the idea of space, and perhaps we forget that we've only just begun. We're still pioneers. They, the members of the Challenger crew, were pioneers.

And I want to say something to the schoolchildren of America who were watching the live coverage of the shuttle's takeoff. I know it is hard to understand, but sometimes painful things like this happen. It's all part of the process of exploration and discovery. It's all part of taking a chance and expanding man's horizons. The future doesn't belong to the fainthearted; it belongs to the brave. The Challenger crew was pulling us into the future, and we'll continue to follow them...

There's a coincidence today. On this day 390 years ago, the great explorer Sir Francis Drake died aboard ship off the coast of Panama. In his lifetime the great frontiers were the oceans, and a historian later said, 'He lived by the sea, died on it, and was buried in it.' Well, today we can say of the Challenger crew: Their dedication was, like Drake's, complete.

The crew of the space shuttle Challenger honored us by the manner in which they lived their lives. We will never forget them, nor the last time we saw them, this morning, as they prepared for the journey and waved good-bye and 'slipped the surly bonds of earth' to 'touch the face of God.'

President Obama concerning the Massey Coal Mine Disaster

THE PRESIDENT: Good morning, everybody. On April 5th, the United States suffered the worst mine disaster in more than a generation. Twenty-nine lives were lost. Families have been devastated. Communities have been upended. And during this painful time, all of us are mourning with the people of Montcoal and Whitesville and Naoma and the Coal River Valley. The people of West Virginia are in our prayers. But we owe them more than prayers. We owe them action. We owe them accountability. We owe them an assurance that when they go to work every day, when they enter that dark mine, they are not alone. They ought to know that behind them there is a company that's doing what it takes to protect them, and a government that is looking out for their safety.

In the immediate aftermath of the tragedy, I asked the officials standing with me – Labor Secretary Hilda Solis, and Joe Main and Kevin Stricklin with the Mine Safety and Health Administration – to lead an investigation into what caused the explosion at Massey Energy Company's Upper Big Branch mine. I asked them to report back with preliminary findings this week.

We just concluded a meeting, where they briefed me on their investigation. I want to emphasize that this investigation is ongoing, and there's still a lot that we don't know. But we do know that this tragedy was triggered by a failure at the Upper Big Branch mine—a failure first and foremost of management, but also a failure of oversight and a failure of laws so riddled with loopholes that they allow unsafe conditions to continue.

So today I've directed Secretary Solis, Assistant Secretary Main, and Administrator Stricklin to work closely with state mining officials to press ahead with this investigation—so we can help make sure a disaster like this never happens again. Owners responsible for conditions in the Upper Big Branch mine should be held accountable for decisions they made and preventive measures they failed to take. And I've asked Secretary Solis to work with the Justice Department to ensure that every tool in the federal government is available in this investigation.

But this isn't just about a single mine. It's about all of our mines. The safety record at the Massey Upper Big Branch mine was troubling. And it's clear that while there are many responsible companies, far too many mines aren't doing enough to protect their workers' safety.

President George H.W. Bush

Address to the Nation on the Civil Disturbances in Los Angeles, California

May 1, 1992

Tonight I want to talk to you about violence in our cities and justice for our citizens, two big issues that have collided on the streets of Los Angeles. First, an update on where matters stand in Los Angeles.

Fifteen minutes ago I talked to California's Governor Pete Wilson and Los Angeles Mayor Tom Bradley. They told me that last night was better than the night before; today, calmer than yesterday. But there were still incidents of random terror and lawlessness this afternoon.

In the wake of the first night's violence, I spoke directly to both Governor Wilson and Mayor Bradley to assess the situation and to offer assistance. There are two very different issues at hand. One is the urgent need to restore order. What followed Wednesday's jury verdict in the Rodney King case was a tragic series of events for the city of Los Angeles: Nearly 4,000 fires, staggering property damage, hundreds of injuries, and the senseless deaths of over 30 people.

To restore order right now, there are 3,000 National Guardsmen on duty in the city of Los Angeles. Another 2,200 stand ready to provide immediate support. To supplement this effort I've taken several additional actions. First, this morning I've ordered the Justice Department to dispatch 1,000 Federal riot-trained law enforcement officials to help restore order in Los Angeles beginning tonight. These officials include FBI SWAT teams, special riot control units of the U.S. Marshals Service, the Border Patrol, and other Federal law enforcement agencies. Second, another 1,000 Federal law enforcement officials are on standby alert, should they be needed. Third, early today I directed 3,000 members of the 7th Infantry and 1,500 marines to stand by at El Toro Air Station, California. Tonight, at the request of the Governor and the Mayor, I have committed these troops to help restore order. I'm also federalizing the National Guard, and I'm instructing General Colin Powell to place all those troops under a central command.

What we saw last night and the night before in Los Angeles is not about civil rights. It's not about the great cause of equality that all Americans must uphold. It's not a message of protest. It's been the brutality of a mob, pure and simple. And let me assure you: I will use whatever force is necessary to restore order. What is going on in L.A. must and will stop. As your President I guarantee you this violence will end.

Now let's talk about the beating of Rodney King, because beyond the urgent need to restore order is the second issue, the question of justice: Whether Rodney King's Federal civil rights were violated. What you saw and what I saw on the TV video was revolting. I felt anger. I felt pain. I thought: How can I explain this to my grandchildren?

Civil rights leaders and just plain citizens fearful of and sometimes victimized by police brutality were deeply hurt. And I know good and decent policemen who were equally appalled.

I spoke this morning to many leaders of the civil rights community. And they saw the video, as we all did. For 14 months they waited patiently, hopefully. They waited for the system to work. And when the verdict came in, they felt betrayed. Viewed from outside the trial, it was hard to understand how the verdict could possibly square with the video. Those civil rights leaders with whom I met were stunned. And so was I, and so was Barbara, and so were my kids.

But the verdict Wednesday was not the end of the process. The Department of Justice had started its own investigation immediately after the Rodney King incident and was monitoring the State investigation and trial. And so let me tell you what actions we are taking on the Federal level to ensure that justice is served.

Within one hour of the verdict, I directed the Justice Department to move into high gear on its own independent criminal investigation into the case. And next, on Thursday, five Federal prosecutors were on their way to Los Angeles. Our Justice Department has consistently demonstrated its ability to investigate fully a matter like this.

Since 1988, the Justice Department has successfully prosecuted over 100 law enforcement officials for excessive violence. I am confident that in this case, the Department of Justice will act as it should. Federal grand jury action is underway today in Los Angeles. Subpoenas are being issued. Evidence is being reviewed. The Federal effort in this case will be expeditious, and it will be fair. It will not be driven by mob violence but by respect for due process and the rule of law.

We owe it to all Americans who put their faith in the law to see that justice is served. But as we move forward on this or any other case, we must remember the fundamental tenet of our legal system. Every American, whether accused or accuser, is entitled to protection of his or her rights.

In this highly controversial court case, a verdict was handed down by a California jury. To Americans of all races who were shocked by the verdict, let me say this: You must understand that our system of justice provides for the peaceful, orderly means of addressing this frustration. We must respect the process of law whether or not we agree with the outcome. There's a difference between frustration with the law and direct assaults upon our legal system.

In a civilized society, there can be no excuse, no excuse for the murder, arson, theft, and vandalism that have terrorized the law-abiding citizens of Los Angeles. Mayor Bradley, just a few minutes ago, mentioned to me his particular concern, among others, regarding the safety of the Korean community. My heart goes out to them and all others who have suffered losses.

The wanton destruction of life and property is not a legitimate expression of outrage with injustice. It is itself injustice. And no rationalization, no matter how heartfelt, no matter how eloquent, can make it otherwise.

Television has become a medium that often brings us together. But its vivid display of Rodney King's beating shocked us. The America it has shown us on our screens these last 48 hours has appalled us. None of this is what we wish to think of as American. It's as if we were looking in a mirror that distorted our better selves and turned us ugly. We cannot let that happen. We cannot do that to ourselves.

We've seen images in the last 48 hours that we will never forget. Some were horrifying almost beyond belief. But there were other acts, small but significant acts in all this ugliness that give us hope. I'm one who respects our police. They keep the peace. They face danger every day. They help kids. They don't make a lot of money, but they care about their communities and their country. Thousands of police officers and firefighters are risking their lives right now on

the streets of L.A., and they deserve our support. Then there are the people who have spent each night not in the streets but in the churches of Los Angeles, praying that man's gentler instincts be revealed in the hearts of people driven by hate. And finally, there were the citizens who showed great personal responsibility, who ignored the mob, who at great personal danger helped the victims of violence, regardless of race.

Among the many stories I've seen and heard about these past few days, one sticks in my mind, the story of one savagely beaten white truck driver, alive tonight because four strangers, four black strangers, came to his aid. Two were men who had been watching television and saw the beating as it was happening, and came out into the street to help; another was a woman on her way home from work; and the fourth, a young man whose name we may never know. The injured driver was able to get behind the wheel of his truck and tried to drive away. But his eyes were swollen shut. The woman asked him if he could see. He answered, "No." She said, "Well, then I will be your eyes." Together, those four people braved the mob and drove that truck driver to the hospital. He's alive today only because they stepped in to help.

It is for every one of them that we must rebuild the community of Los Angeles, for these four people and the others like them who in the midst of this nightmare acted with simple human decency.

We must understand that no one in Los Angeles or any other city has rendered a verdict on America. If we are to remain the most vibrant and hopeful Nation on Earth we must allow our diversity to bring us together, not drive us apart. This must be the rallying cry of good and decent people.

For their sake, for all our sakes, we must build a future where, in every city across this country, empty rage gives way to hope, where poverty and despair give way to opportunity. After peace is restored to Los Angeles, we must then turn again to the underlying causes of such tragic events. We must keep on working to create a climate of understanding and tolerance, a climate that refuses to accept racism, bigotry, anti-Semitism, and hate of any kind, anytime, anywhere.

Tonight, I ask all Americans to lend their hearts, their voices, and their prayers to the healing of hatred. As President, I took an oath to preserve, protect, and defend the Constitution, an oath that requires every President to establish justice and ensure domestic tranquility. That duty is foremost in my mind tonight.

Let me say to the people saddened by the spectacle of the past few days, to the good people of Los Angeles, caught at the center of this senseless suffering: The violence will end. Justice will be served. Hope will return

Judging the Presidents

Directions: Read each of the following presidents speeches that followed disasters of their presidency. Look through their speech and see if they answered the questions that most Americans want to know from their presidents

Ronald Reagan-The Challenger Disaster

What happened?

Who's fault is it?

What will be done to make sure it doesn't happen again?

What lessons can be learned from this?

Is there anything else this can be related to in history?

George H.W. Bush- The LA Riots

What happened?

Who's fault is it?

What will be done to make sure it doesn't happen again?

What lessons can be learned from this?

Is there anything else this can be related to in history?

Barak Obama- Massey Mine Collapse

What happened?

Who's fault is it?

What will be done to make sure it doesn't happen again?

What lessons can be learned from this?

Is there anything else this can be related to in history?

PART 2

What do you think is the most important thing that a President should have to say after a disaster?

Which presidents brought in religion?

Which of these disasters was the worst?

Who handled their disaster the best? Explain

Who handled their disaster the worst? Explain

Are these comparable disasters? Why or Why not?

Is a longer or shorter response more effective? Why?