

## Activity 4.1 “Writing Up a Storm”

“Weather is a fact of life. All humans experience it from their first breath to their last. It has made a difference in battles, love affairs, and sports. But more than with most things, we take its daily variations for granted. It takes weather anomalies—blizzards, tornadoes, hurricanes or temperature extremes—to remind us that the world is still governed by nature.”  
Science writer Francesca Lyman, quoted in David Laskin’s “Braving the Elements”

### Teacher Background

(Please note that this Activity allows your students either to “Act Locally” *or* “Connect Globally” or both, depending on whether you choose to integrate the Internet. Either way you’ll expose students to other aspects of weather and climate in addition to the strictly scientific. You may also, depending on school circumstances, wish to involve English or Social Studies teachers.)

Often students watch television shows or read about storms in newspapers or magazines, but still feel unconnected to the human impact of the event. When students read stories written by their classmates, focusing on incidents specific to youngsters’ lives, storms become more real. Still more excitingly, via the Internet, students who live in Florida can experience Midwestern blizzards. Students who live in Illinois’ Tornado Alley can experience hurricanes—from an “insider’s” perspective. West Coasters can read about nor’easters and international students can report on typhoons in Japan or the rainy season in South America. By reading such stories, the student will learn about weather he or she would not otherwise experience. By writing about the biggest weather event in a student’s life, he or she can relive it and perhaps add the additional perspective of explanatory scientific principles developed during LFSTORM. This Activity links learning science to a favorite student past-time, discussing their personal experiences. The Writing Rubric worksheet will help you, the teacher, score the resulting stories, and remind students of some key features of good writing.

As an extension or an alternative to this classroom Activity, P2K offers the “WRITING UP A STORM” online collaboration. These online activities have been a high point of previous modules (“The Great Planet Debate” during LIVE FROM THE HUBBLE SPACE TELESCOPE, the “Planet Explorer Toolkit” (PET) in LIVE FROM MARS and the “Backyard Biodiversity Survey” (BBS) during LIVE FROM THE RAINFOREST.) Similar activities in PASSPORT TO WEATHER AND CLIMATE will appeal both to those who want to follow severe weather and real data online mentored by NOAA researchers (see “FOLLOW THAT STORM!”), and to those for whom “writing across the curriculum” is desired.

### Materials

Access to archival materials from local and national newspapers (school or local library)  
WEATHERlogs  
4.1 Writing Rubric (for both teacher and students)  
US map and/or world map  
reference materials on weather (books, internet sites, local library, local meteorologists)  
LFSTORM Standards Correlation sheet for teacher reference

## Objectives

Students will recall, research and write up a report on a significant weather event in their lives. Students will connect types of weather with different regions of the US and/or the world. Older students will extend activities to other types of presentations (oral presentations, web pages, illustrations, newsletters.)

## Engage

Ask the students to think of a time when weather (or climate—think of floods or droughts associated with El Niño) made an impact on their lives. Have them share these incidents, and list them in their WEATHERlogs. If you have students from diverse national origins you'll have an even more interesting mix of events: encourage contributions from all. Make as large a list of the different kinds of weather as possible on the board. (The LFSTORM website also provides a checklist of significant weather events. See the "Hot Spots of Severe Weather" in the WHERE section.) Identify the places around the United States or across the world where these occurred. Mark a US or world map with symbols for these types of weather. Read a sample story already submitted by other students, from the LIVE FROM THE STORM website.

## Explore/Explain

Tell the students that they'll be writing up a personal account of the time when weather and climate most dramatically affected their lives. Assign them to write a first draft: distribute copies of the Writing Rubric, discuss and respond to questions. Establish a clearly understood time frame for each phase of the Activity: preparation of the story; first draft; editing by you, student-peer, or parent; rewrite, proofing and submission of final draft. Then unleash your students to "Write Up a Storm" and submit the results to P2K!

## Expand/Adapt/ Connect

An alternative to the essay mode suggested above is to allow or assign poems, or to have them follow the format of a newspaper article, a 3:00 minute TV news or documentary segment, or a web page with illustrations and their own choice of links. There's more than one way to write up the emotional heart of a storm.

Applying the scientific content of PASSPORT TO WEATHER AND CLIMATE from the videos and website, have them add meteorological data to an account of a hurricane, snowstorm or tornado. How did pressure, temperature and wind change during the human events described? Just as is done in LFSTORM program 1, "Hurricane Dennis—Blow by Blow", they might add a timeline to the written account.

Make a list of local "records" for your town or region: the most snow, the wildest winds, the hottest and the coldest, and then research local libraries and newspaper archives for stories relating to these events. What's the oldest account surviving?

Older students can create written "Survival Kits: How to prepare for specific weather disasters?" Go online to LIVE FROM THE STORM/INTERACT and participate in the "Great Emergency Preparedness PSA Contest."

Interview survivors and the all-important people who help victims of extreme weather events, for example, rescue crews, medical mission teams, local Red Cross members.

Invite a local meteorologist or a professor from a local college or university to visit your class and describe the skills needed to forecast severe weather events.

Suggested URLs

<http://passporttoknowledge.com/cgi-bin/lwgate/lwgate/WRITE-STORM/archives>

Visit the WRITE-STORM archives to see stories that have already been posted.

<http://passporttoknowledge.com/cgi-bin/lwgate/lwgate/WRITE-STORM/subscribe.html>

Subscribe to WRITE-STORM

<http://passporttoknowledge.com/hst/events/debate.html>

“The Great Planet Debate”, LIVE FROM THE HUBBLE SPACE TELESCOPE

<http://passporttoknowledge.com/lfm/events/shoebox.html>

The “Planet Explorer Toolkit” (PET), LIVE FROM MARS

<http://passporttoknowledge.com/rainforest/Interact/Collaborative/Collaborative.html>

“Backyard Biodiversity Survey” (BBS), LIVE FROM THE RAINFOREST