What is the role of a WITNESS?

When events such as natural disasters, crimes, and wars occur, it’s important that a witness describe what happened so that others can learn from these events. Witnesses have played an important role in reporting everything from local sports to the events in your history textbook. The authors of the accounts you are about to read each witnessed natural disasters. Their writing allowed people from around the world to share in their experiences.

ROLE-PLAY Picture the tornadoes, floods, and snow storms you have seen in the news. Imagine that one of these disasters has just struck your community. With a partner, role-play an evening news broadcast on the disaster. Decide who will be the news reporter and who will be the eyewitness. Then conduct an interview. Remember that your audience will want to know what the disaster looked, sounded, and felt like, as well as how people got hurt or stayed safe.
TEXT ANALYSIS: AUTHOR’S PURPOSE
Writers usually write for one or more of these purposes: to express thoughts or feelings, to inform or explain, to persuade, or to entertain. The authors of the following articles have the same basic purpose for writing: to inform readers about a disaster. However, each has a different, more specific purpose, too. London wants to show how widespread the devastation is. Anderson wants to create empathy for the victims. As you read their accounts, notice how the authors present and develop the ideas in the articles to achieve their purposes.

READING STRATEGY: SET A PURPOSE FOR READING
When you set a purpose for reading, you identify what you want to accomplish as you read. Your purpose for reading the following articles is to compare and contrast how each author achieves his purpose. As you read the first account, begin filling in the chart.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What is the writer’s specific purpose?</th>
<th>“The Story of an Eyewitness”</th>
<th>“Letter from New Orleans: Leaving Desire”</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How much of the disaster area does the writer cover?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Which events and people does the writer focus on?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Which details and images have a big impact on you?</td>
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</tbody>
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VOCABULARY IN CONTEXT
In your Reader/Writer Notebook, write a sentence for each of the vocabulary words. Use a dictionary or the definitions in the following selection pages to help you.

WORD LIST
- compel
- intermittently
- menace
- disconcert
- lavishly
- vigilantly

Complete the activities in your Reader/Writer Notebook.
Upon receipt of the first news of the earthquake, Collier’s telegraphed to Mr. Jack London—who lives only forty miles from San Francisco—requesting him to go to the scene of the disaster and write the story of what he saw. Mr. London started at once, and he sent the following dramatic description of the tragic events he witnessed in the burning city.

The earthquake shook down in San Francisco hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of walls and chimneys. But the conflagration that followed burned up hundreds of millions of dollars’ worth of property. There is no estimating within hundreds of millions the actual damage wrought. Not in history has a modern imperial city been so completely destroyed.

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1. conflagration (kōn’flä-grä’shan): a large destructive fire.
San Francisco is gone. Nothing remains of it but memories and a fringe of dwelling houses on its outskirts. Its industrial section is wiped out. Its business section is wiped out. Its social and residential section is wiped out. The factories and warehouses, the great stores and newspaper buildings, the hotels and the palaces of the nabobs, are all gone. Remains only the fringe of dwelling houses on the outskirts of what was once San Francisco.

Within an hour after the earthquake shock the smoke of San Francisco’s burning was a lurid tower visible a hundred miles away. And for three days and nights this lurid tower swayed in the sky, reddening the sun, darkening the day, and filling the land with smoke.

On Wednesday morning at a quarter past five came the earthquake. A minute later the flames were leaping upward. In a dozen different quarters south of Market Street, in the working-class ghetto, and in the factories, fires started. There was no opposing the flames. There was no organization, no communication. All the cunning adjustments of a twentieth century city had been smashed by the earthquake. The streets were humped into ridges and depressions, and piled with the debris of fallen walls. The steel rails were twisted into perpendicular and horizontal angles. The telephone and telegraph systems were disrupted. And the great water-mains had burst. All the shrewd contrivances and safeguards of man had been thrown out of gear by thirty seconds’ twitching of the earth-crust.

The Fire Made Its Own Draft
By Wednesday afternoon, inside of twelve hours, half the heart of the city was gone. At that time I watched the vast conflagration from out on the bay. It was dead calm. Not a flicker of wind stirred. Yet from every side wind was pouring in upon the city. East, west, north, and south, strong winds were blowing upon the doomed city. The heated air rising made an enormous vacuum. Thus did the fire of itself build its own colossal chimney through the atmosphere. Day and night this dead calm continued, and yet, near to the flames, the wind was often half a gale, so mighty was the vacuum.

Wednesday night saw the destruction of the very heart of the city. Dynamite was lavishly used, and many of San Francisco’s proudest structures were crumbled by man himself into ruins, but there was no withstanding the onrush of the flames. Time and again successful stands were made by the fire-fighters, and every time the flames flanked around on either side or came up from the rear, and turned to defeat

2. nabobs (nä’bōbz’): people of wealth and prominence.
3. lurid (lörd’id): glowing with the glare of fire through a haze.
4. contrivances (kon-tri’von-sēz’): acts of clever planning.
5. flanked (flāŋk’d): placed at the side of.
the hard-won victory. An enumeration of the buildings destroyed would be a directory of San Francisco. An enumeration of the buildings undestroyed would be a line and several addresses. An enumeration of the deeds of heroism would stock a library and bankrupt the Carnegie medal fund. An enumeration of the dead will never be made. All vestiges of them were destroyed by the flames. The number of the victims of the earthquake will never be known. South of Market Street, where the loss of life was particularly heavy, was the first to catch fire.

Remarkable as it may seem, Wednesday night while the whole city crashed and roared into ruin, was a quiet night. There were no crowds. There was no shouting and yelling. There was no hysteria, no disorder. I passed Wednesday night in the path of the advancing flames, and in all those terrible hours I saw not one woman who wept, not one man who was excited, not one person who was in the slightest degree panic stricken.

Before the flames, throughout the night, fled tens of thousands of homeless ones. Some were wrapped in blankets. Others carried bundles of bedding and dear household treasures. Sometimes a whole family was harnessed to a carriage or delivery wagon that was weighted down with their possessions. Baby buggies, toy wagons, and go-carts were used as trucks, while every other person was dragging a trunk. Yet everybody was gracious. The most perfect courtesy obtained. Never in all San Francisco’s history were her people so kind and courteous as on this night of terror.

A Caravan of Trunks
All night these tens of thousands fled before the flames. Many of them, the poor people from the labor ghetto, had fled all day as well. They had left their homes burdened with possessions. Now and again they lightened up, flinging out upon the street clothing and treasures they had dragged for miles.

6. enumeration (ɪ-nəˈməʊ-rənθ): the act of counting or listing one by one.
7. vestiges (ˈvɛstɪdʒz): visible signs that something once existed.
They held on longest to their trunks, and over these trunks many a strong man broke his heart that night. The hills of San Francisco are steep, and up these hills, mile after mile, were the trunks dragged. Everywhere were trunks with across them lying their exhausted owners, men and women. Before the march of the flames were flung picket lines of soldiers. And a block at a time, as the flames advanced, these pickets retreated. One of their tasks was to keep the trunk-pullers moving. The exhausted creatures, stirred on by the menace of bayonets, would arise and struggle up the steep pavements, pausing from weakness every five or ten feet.

Often, after surmounting a heart-breaking hill, they would find another wall of flame advancing upon them at right angles and be compelled to change anew the line of their retreat. In the end, completely played out, after toiling for a dozen hours like giants, thousands of them were compelled to abandon their trunks. Here the shopkeepers and soft members of the middle class were at a disadvantage. But the working-men dug holes in vacant lots and backyards and buried their trunks.

The Doomed City

At nine o’clock Wednesday evening I walked down through the very heart of the city. I walked through miles and miles of magnificent buildings and towering skyscrapers. Here was no fire. All was in perfect order. The police patrolled the streets. Every building had its watchman at the door. And yet it was doomed, all of it. There was no water. The dynamite was giving out. And at right angles two different conflagrations were sweeping down upon it.

At one o’clock in the morning I walked down through the same section. Everything still stood intact. There was no fire. And yet there was a change. A rain of ashes was falling. The watchmen at the doors were gone. The police had been withdrawn. There were no firemen, no fire-engines, no men fighting with dynamite. The district had been absolutely abandoned. I stood at the corner of Kearney and Market, in the very innermost heart of San Francisco. Kearney Street was deserted. Half a dozen blocks away it was burning on both sides. The street was a wall of flame. And against this wall of flame, silhouetted sharply, were two United States cavalrymen sitting on their horses, calmly watching. That was all.

Not another person was in sight. In the intact heart of the city, two troopers sat [on] their horses and watched.

Spread of the Conflagration

Surrender was complete. There was no water. The sewers had long since been pumped dry. There was no dynamite. Another fire had broken out

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8. bayonets (bā’a-nē茨’): blades that fit on the end of rifles and are used as weapons.
further uptown, and now from three sides conflagrations were sweeping down. The fourth side had been burned earlier in the day. In that direction stood the tottering walls of the Examiner Building, the burned-out Call Building, the smoldering ruins of the Grand Hotel, and the gutted, devastated, dynamited Palace Hotel.

The following will illustrate the sweep of the flames and the inability of men to calculate their spread. At eight o’clock Wednesday evening I passed through Union Square. It was packed with refugees. Thousands of them had gone to bed on the grass. Government tents had been set up, supper was being cooked, and the refugees were lining up for free meals.

At half past one in the morning three sides of Union Square were in flames. The fourth side, where stood the great St. Francis Hotel, was still holding out. An hour later, ignited from top and sides the St. Francis was flaming heavenward. Union Square, heaped high with mountains of trunks, was deserted. Troops, refugees, and all had retreated.

**A Fortune for a Horse!**

It was at Union Square that I saw a man offering a thousand dollars for a team of horses. He was in charge of a truck piled high with trunks from some hotel. It had been hauled here into what was considered safety, and the horses had been taken out. The flames were on three sides of the Square and there were no horses.

Also, at this time, standing beside the truck, I urged a man to seek safety in flight. He was all but hemmed in by several conflagrations. He was an old man and he was on crutches. Said he: “Today is my birthday. Last night I was worth thirty thousand dollars. I bought some delicate fish and other things for my birthday dinner. I have had no dinner, and all I own are these crutches.”

I convinced him of his danger and started him limping on his way. An hour later, from a distance, I saw the truck-load of trunks burning merrily in the middle of the street.

On Thursday morning at a quarter past five, just twenty-four hours after the earthquake, I sat on the steps of a small residence on Nob Hill. With me sat Japanese, Italians, Chinese, and negroes—a bit of the cosmopolitan flotsam of the wreck of the city. All about were the palaces of the nabob pioneers of Forty-nine.10 To the east and south at right angles, were advancing two mighty walls of flame.

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9. *flotsam* (flōt’səm): floating wreckage after a ship has sunk.

10. **pioneers of Forty-nine**: reference to the pioneers who came to San Francisco during the California gold rush in 1849.
Comparing Accounts

I went inside with the owner of the house on the steps of which I sat. He was cool and cheerful and hospitable. “Yesterday morning,” he said, “I was worth six hundred thousand dollars. This morning this house is all I have left. It will go in fifteen minutes. He pointed to a large cabinet. “That is my wife’s collection of china. This rug upon which we stand is a present. It cost fifteen hundred dollars. Try that piano. Listen to its tone. There are few like it. There are no horses. The flames will be here in fifteen minutes.”

Outside the old Mark Hopkins residence a palace was just catching fire. The troops were falling back and driving the refugees before them. From every side came the roaring of flames, the crashing of walls, and the detonations of dynamite.

The Dawn of the Second Day

I passed out of the house. Day was trying to dawn through the smoke-pall. A sickly light was creeping over the face of things. Once only the sun broke through the smoke-pall, blood-red, and showing a quarter its usual size. The smoke-pall itself, viewed from beneath, was a rose color that pulsed and fluttered with lavender shades. Then it turned to mauve and yellow and dun. There was no sun. And so dawned the second day on stricken San Francisco.

An hour later I was creeping past the shattered dome of the City Hall. Than it there was no better exhibit of the destructive force of the earthquake. Most of the stone had been shaken from the great dome, leaving standing the naked framework of steel. Market Street was piled high with the wreckage, and across the wreckage lay the overthrown pillars of the City Hall shattered into short crosswise sections.

11. **pall (pôl)**: a covering that darkens or covers.
12. **dun (dûn)**: dull brownish gray.
This section of the city, with the exception of the Mint and the Post-Office, was already a waste of smoking ruins. Here and there through the smoke, creeping warily under the shadows of tottering walls, emerged occasional men and women. It was like the meeting of the handful of survivors after the day of the end of the world.

**Beeves Slaughtered and Roasted**

On Mission Street lay a dozen steers, in a neat row stretching across the street just as they had been struck down by the flying ruins of the earthquake. The fire had passed through afterward and roasted them.

The human dead had been carried away before the fire came. At another place on Mission Street I saw a milk wagon. A steel telegraph pole had smashed down sheer through the driver's seat and crushed the front wheels. The milk cans lay scattered around.

All day Thursday and all Thursday night, all day Friday and Friday night, the flames still raged on.

Friday night saw the flames finally conquered, though not until Russian Hill and Telegraph Hill had been swept and three-quarters of a mile of wharves and docks had been licked up.

**The Last Stand**

The great stand of the fire-fighters was made Thursday night on Van Ness Avenue. Had they failed here, the comparatively few remaining houses of the city would have been swept. Here were the magnificent residences of the second generation of San Francisco nabobs, and these, in a solid zone, were dynamited down across the path of the fire. Here and there the flames leaped the zone, but these fires were beaten out, principally by the use of wet blankets and rugs.

San Francisco, at the present time, is like the crater of a volcano, around which are camped tens of thousands of refugees. At the Presidio alone are at least twenty thousand. All the surrounding cities and towns are jammed with the homeless ones, where they are being cared for by the relief committees. The refugees were carried free by the railroads to any point they wished to go, and it is estimated that over one hundred thousand people have left the peninsula on which San Francisco stood. The government has the situation in hand, and, thanks to the immediate relief given by the whole United States, there is not the slightest possibility of a famine. The bankers and business men have already set about making preparations to rebuild San Francisco.

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When I first saw Lionel Petrie, he was standing on the second-story porch of his house, at the junction of Desire Street and North Bunny Friend, in the Ninth Ward of New Orleans. The house was built of wood, with white siding and peach trim. Petrie, an African-American with salt-and-pepper hair and a mustache, appeared to be in his sixties. A large Akita was standing next to him, ears perked vigilantly. The two of them looked out from across the fenced-in expanse of the front yard. Petrie was clearly an organized man: a painter’s ladder was dangling from the railing of the porch, and a clutch of orange life vests hung within reach of a fibreglass canoe that was tethered to the house. The canoe bobbed on the surface of the stinking black water that filled the street and had engulfed most of the first floor of the house. The spiked parapet of a wrought-iron fence poked up about eight inches above the waterline, etching out a formal square that separated the house from the street.

Petrie's house was different from those of his neighbors, most of which were small brick row houses, or rundown clapboard houses that had deep porches flush with the street. His was set far back in the lot, and had a self-possessed air about it. Near the fence, in what must have been the driveway, the hoods of two submerged cars and a truck could be seen.

I was seated in the back of a four-person Yamaha WaveRunner that was piloted by Shawn Alladio, an energetic woman in her forties, with long blond hair, from Whittier, California. Eight days had passed since Hurricane Katrina made landfall, and Alladio was out on a search for trapped survivors and for what rescuers were calling “holdouts”—residents who didn’t want to leave their homes—in one of the poorest and worst-hit parts of the city, the Ninth Ward, in eastern New Orleans.

Alladio maneuvered the WaveRunner so that we were alongside Petrie’s fence, and, after calling out a greeting to him, she asked him if he wanted to leave; he waved politely in response, but shook his head. She told him that the floodwater was toxic and that he would soon become sick. He said something in reply, but we couldn’t hear him because of the rumble of the WaveRunner’s idling engine. Alladio turned the ignition key off.

Petrie explained that his wife and son and daughter had left the city by car, heading for Baton Rouge, the day before Katrina hit. He didn’t know where his family was now, and, if he left, they wouldn’t know where he was. He said that he intended to wait for them to come back, and for the waters to go down.

Alladio told him that the authorities were not allowing people to return to this part of New Orleans, and that it might be a month before the waters receded. He listened carefully, nodded, and replied that he had stocks of food and some water; that he’d be all right—he’d wait. He patted his dog’s head. “Thank you, but I’ll be fine,” he said. Alladio tried again. “I can promise you that you will not see your family if you stay here,” she told him; it was much likelier that he would pass out and die from the fumes from the water.

He asked whether she would promise that he would be able to join his family.

Alladio paused, and said to me quietly, “I can’t promise him that. If I turn him over to the authorities, like the other evacuees, he could end up anywhere in the country.”

Turning back to Petrie, she asked, “If I drive you to Baton Rouge myself, will you come with me?”

“You would take me yourself?” he asked.

“Yes,” she said. “I promise. Today, when I am done with my work, I will take you there.”

Petrie took a step back on his porch. He raised his head thoughtfully and asked, “Can I take my dog with me?”
“Oh, God,” Alladio said under her breath. “I hate this.” Then she said to him, “I am so sorry, Mr. Petrie, but, no, they won’t allow us to take out animals. You will have to leave him here.”

Petrie gripped the railing of the porch and leaned over again, in a kind of slow, sustained forward lurch, his head down. Then he nodded and said, “O.K.”

Alladio told Petrie to prepare a small bag with his essential belongings, to say goodbye to his dog and, if he wanted, put out some food and water for him. She would be back in an hour to pick him up; in the meantime, she needed to see if there were more people who needed evacuating. He said, “O.K.,” and waved, and went back inside the house. The dog followed him.

Alladio had arrived in New Orleans on Saturday, September 3rd, with a team of California rescue workers and a small flotilla of donated WaveRunners. She and her team were loosely attached to a task force sent by the State of California, but were mostly on their own. We had met at a staging area underneath an elevated section of Interstate 10. As I arrived, evacuees were being brought out of the water to a slightly raised stretch of land where railroad tracks ran under the highway. A boat came up and deposited an elderly black couple. Rescuers carried the woman, who was wearing a denim skirt, a T-shirt, and gold earrings, and sat her down on a fallen telephone pole. She rocked back and forth, with one hand raised, and murmured, “I just want to tell you—thank you, Jesus.” Her husband walked over unsteadily to join her. They had stayed at home until just before the hurricane, and then gone to their church. As the water rose, they took refuge in the choir loft. They stayed there for eight days, drinking the water the storm washed in. “We were down to our last two crackers,” she said. Another man was brought over, shaking, and speaking incoherently. The only words I could make out were “I’m still alive.”

After putting on chest waders to protect ourselves from the fetid floodwaters—which Alladio warned me were “really gnarly”—we set off by boat from Interstate 10. . . .

We passed cargo yards, electrical pylons, and houses with tar-paper roofs that had water halfway up the windows, and other houses that were completely submerged. When we came to the intersection of Louisa Street and Higgins Boulevard, the street signs were at eye level and the traffic lights were barely above the surface of the water. We passed a house with a shattered plate-glass window. Peering down into the living room,

2. flotilla (flō ’tīlē) : a small fleet of ships.
3. fetid (fē’tid) : having an offensive odor.
4. electrical pylons (plō’ lōnz) : steel towers supporting electrical wires.
I saw a sofa floating near a framed photo of Muhammad Ali standing triumphantly over Sonny Liston. At a community swimming pool, a lifeguard seat poked just above the waters. We passed a rowboat carrying two white men and being towed by a black man with dreadlocks, up to his neck in water. Later, we saw them again; all three were in the boat now, and were paddling with broken street signs.

It was a clear, hot day, and the floodwater smelled strongly of oil and raw sewage, and stung the eyes. There were other smells, from islands of rotting garbage, and, intermittently, as elsewhere in the city, the smell of death. Helicopters had been clattering overhead all morning, some of them dumping buckets of water on house fires that had broken out everywhere. Scudding\(^5\) columns of brown and gray smoke shot up from half a dozen points around the city. The towers of downtown New Orleans were visible in the distance.

Until the nineteenth century, the Ninth Ward was a swamp, and, even after it became home to a black and immigrant white community, and was drained (in that order), it was periodically devastated by flooding. During Hurricane Betsy, in 1965, it was hit harder than most of the city, and was underwater for days. The neglect of the Ninth Ward by the city government was notorious; well into the twentieth century, it lacked adequate sewers and clean water. The Norman Rockwell image that the Ninth Ward inspired was that of the first grader Ruby Bridges, a tiny black

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5. \textit{scudding} (skū’dĭng): skimming along swiftly.
girl in a white dress, who was led to school by federal marshals past jeering white crowds—a chapter in a violent desegregation struggle that divided the city in the nineteen-sixties. In the next decades, many of the white residents of the Ninth Ward left; by the time Katrina hit, almost all the students in the school that Ruby Bridges integrated were black.

At 2037 Desire, a block past Petrie’s home, three people stood on the second-floor porch of a large wooden house: a bulky young woman in a white blouse, with dyed orange hair, and tattoos on one arm; a young man with copper skin in a lilac polo shirt . . . and an old man who was bare-chested except for a pair of red suspenders. The ground floor was flooded and a sign above it said, “Winner Supermarket—ATM Inside.” Alladio hailed them and repeated the argument that she had made to Petrie. The young man said that his name was Theron Green, and that he and his father, Alfred Green, the old man, and his fiancée—Trinell Sanson, the tattooed woman—were fine, and were planning to stay. They also had a friend inside the house, they said. Theron Green spoke in a thick local accent, and his eyes were alert and suspicious. He was clearly anxious for us to leave. “We feel comfortable, safe in our own house here,” he said. “Anyway, I don’t want no looters coming here.” Alladio told him that there would soon be forced evacuations, but Green was adamant. “I’ll wait till they force me out, then,” he said. Trinell Sanson said, “We’re fine. If it gets too bad, we’ll catch the helicopter.” . . .

Alladio warned me not to get spattered by the floodwater. “The people who have been in this are going to get sick,” she said. The Environmental Protection Agency had teams out taking water samples to check for toxins, and the rumor—apparently unfounded—was that entire districts were so contaminated that they would have to be razed, along with hundreds of thousands of vehicles. The people who lived there might not realize it, she said, “but once they leave they are never going to see their homes again.” . . .

When we returned to Petrie’s house, he was packed and waiting for us on the second-floor porch, dressed in slacks, a fresh unbuttoned shirt over a T-shirt, and a Marine Corps baseball cap. He leaned down to his dog, dressed in slacks, a fresh unbuttoned shirt over a T-shirt, and a Marine Corps baseball cap. He leaned down to his dog, took both its ears in his hands and caressed them, and then told the dog to go inside. Petrie climbed into the canoe and began paddling over to us. The dog reemerged on the balcony, appearing disconcerted and watchful. Petrie did not look back. He came alongside the fence and we helped him first with a bag and then with a little black case that he said had his wife’s Bible in it. “I know she’d want me to bring that,” he said. He climbed onto the WaveRunner behind me. Alladio gave the vessel a little power, and we began moving off.

The word “disconcert” means to ruffle; to frustrate by throwing into disorder.

**AUTHOR’S PURPOSE**

What event has this article focused on so far? Jot this down as well as any powerful details or images.
As we made our way down Desire, Petrie looked around him at the devastation, his neighbors’ houses submerged in water. He said, “Oh, my God. I had no idea.”

I asked him why he hadn’t left earlier. “You tell yourself that the waters are going to recede, and when they don’t one day you say maybe they will the next,” he answered.

The waters had subsided somewhat after the initial surge, he said. Then he had noticed, as the days went by, that there was an ebb and flow to them, as if a tide were moving in and out. To his mind, the city had become part of Lake Pontchartrain. He had heard on the radio about the levees breaking. When the electricity went out, he had listened to the radio each night, but had turned it off after a little while, to save his batteries.

As we spoke, he seemed to be trying to make sense of his own reaction to the catastrophe. He had understood logically that he was stranded and in danger, and yet he had decided that his first priority was to remain and prepare the house for his family’s return: “Pretty crazy, huh? I even started repairing my roof.” About a third of the roof had been torn away by the hurricane, and he had worked for several days patching it up while the city lay underwater.

When we passed Theron Green’s house, he and his father and his fiancée waved and smiled at Petrie.

Petrie told me that he was worried about his aunt Willa Mae Butler: “She’s about eighty-two, and lives on Bartholomew Street. I’m worried that she’s dead, because this time she said she wasn’t going.”

As we travelled slowly back toward Interstate 10, avoiding debris and downed electrical lines, Petrie began calling out landmarks. He had lived in the neighborhood his entire life. As a child, he had lived on Louisa Street. He pointed to a building that he said was the primary school he had attended from kindergarten through eighth grade.

By now, he was reconciled to his rescue. “I think the good Lord sent you to me,” he said. “I am looking forward to seeing my wife!” Her name was Mildred. He was sixty-four and Mildred was sixty-one. They had married when she was seventeen and he was twenty. “Everyone said we wouldn’t last, but we’ve been together forty-five years, and this is the first time we have been apart.”

After we landed, Shawn Alladio went out on one more tour of the neighborhood to see if there was anyone else to bring in. While we waited for her to return, Petrie and I sat in my rented van in the shade under Interstate 10. Nearby, rescuers stripped down and washed in solutions of water and bleach.
Petrie told me about his own children. Lionel, his namesake, forty-three years old, had been in the Marine Corps for fifteen years and served in the first Gulf War. He had been an aviation mechanic, but when he got out he couldn’t get a job, so he went back to school, at the University of New Orleans, where he was pursuing an undergraduate degree when the hurricane arrived. Lionel owned two houses, one just blocks away from Petrie’s, which he rented out. Petrie’s second son, Bruce, who was thirty-eight, had also been a marine, had an accounting degree, and worked as a shelter supervisor for Girls and Boys Town. Bruce had driven out of the city with his wife and children before Katrina. Petrie smiled when he spoke of his daughter, Crystal, who was twenty-one. She was studying nursing in New Orleans. Lionel had driven her and their mother out of the city.

Petrie hadn’t gone to college; he got hired at a shipyard right after high school. After a couple of years, he decided to train as a welder. “For a year, I went to welders’ school from 8 A.M. to noon and worked at American Marine from 6 P.M. until 6 A.M. Got my certificate as a certified welder around 1962. I went to several places looking for a job as a welder, but never got hired.” When, in 1965, Petrie went to apply for a job at Equitable Equipment, near his home, he saw white welders being hired even as he was told that the only openings were for laborers. He contacted the local N.A.A.C.P. and filed a complaint with the newly formed Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. “They took an interest in my case, and I was the first black to be hired as a skilled worker by Equitable,” he said. “I would sit down to eat my lunch and the white guys would go
sit somewhere else. I didn’t care—I was just there to do my job.” After
working for a decade at Equitable, and then at Kaiser Aluminum until
1983, when it shut down its Louisiana operations, he decided to set up his
own business, Petrie Iron and Construction. He didn’t have insurance,
though, and he figured that he’d lost everything.

Later that evening, Alladio drove Petrie and me to Baton Rouge in a
rented pickup, towing her WaveRunner behind her. She had been told
that forced evacuations would begin soon, and that the operation would
shift toward law enforcement. She was leaving the next day.

In his exhaustion, Petrie had not been able to remember any telephone
numbers, but, as we drove along, cell-phone numbers for his son Bruce and
his daughter came back to him. I handed him my phone, and a minute
later I heard him say, “They’re in Memphis!”

When he hung up, he said that his wife and daughter were staying in
Memphis at a cousin’s house. Lionel had already found some temporary
factory work. Bruce was staying with his wife’s family, in Kentucky. Willa
Mae Butler, Petrie’s aunt, was alive and in Texas. Bruce was going to look
on the Internet for a flight for his father from Baton Rouge toMemphis.

A little while later, as we drove into the night, Petrie said reflectively,
“I don’t know if I want to go back to New Orleans—seeing it how it was,
I don’t think I do.” He doubted, from what he had seen, that much of
it could ever be rebuilt. “The first thing I picture now is the water I saw
when I was coming out,” he said.

A few minutes afterward, Bruce called back to say that the next available
flight was in three days’ time. Alladio suggested that we try the Greyhound
station instead. It was already late when we arrived at the scruffy little
bus station in Baton Rouge, full of refugees from New Orleans. I joined a
long line of people waiting for information and tickets. Half an hour later,
it had barely moved. A man and a woman were arguing, and when the
stationmaster called for passengers for Houston, I heard the man tell her, “I
don’t care what you say—I’m getting on that bus.” After he left, the woman
leaned against a pillar and wiped her eyes. A tall man with a stack of religious
tracts was reciting Psalms from memory, and a woman made subdued sounds
of agreement or said, “That’s right,” in a rhythmic cadence. Two policemen
patrolled the station; there were a number of young men who looked street-
wise and seemed to be loitering among the waiting passengers.

Around midnight, Bruce called again. He had resolved to drive down
from Kentucky to get his father. He would leave shortly with his wife,
Donna. Lionel Petrie would wait for them in the Greyhound station. Bruce
thought that if he and Donna took turns driving they could make the trip
in twelve hours. They were there by noon the next day.
Comprehension

1. Recall  How much of San Francisco does Jack London say was destroyed by the earthquake and the fire that came afterward?
2. Clarify  What span of time does London’s account cover?
3. Clarify  Why is Lionel Petrie reluctant to leave his home?

Text Analysis

4. Analyze Author’s Purpose  For one selection, state the author’s specific purpose, and identify three aspects of the selection that help to achieve it.

5. Evaluate Objectivity  An objective report is one that is fair, neutral, and evenhanded. Do you think that Jack London’s account is objective? Cite evidence from the text to support your opinion.

6. Make Judgments  The authorities forced thousands of people to leave behind their pets during the evacuation of New Orleans. Was it right to ask people to abandon their pets? Why or why not?

7. Evaluate Accounts  Think about the two articles you have just read. Which account do you think is more powerful? Explain your opinion.

Comparing Accounts

8. Set a Purpose for Reading  Now that you’ve read both articles, finish filling in your chart. Then add the final question, and answer it, too.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>“The Story of an Eyewitness”</th>
<th>“Letter from New Orleans: Leaving Desire”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What is the writer’s specific purpose?</td>
<td>To show how widespread the devastation is.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How much of the disaster area does the writer cover?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Which events and people does the writer focus on?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Which details and images have a big impact on you?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How does the author achieve his purpose?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What is the role of a WITNESS?

Based on the accounts you just read, what do you think an eyewitness to a disaster should pay attention to and report on?
Vocabulary in Context

VOCABULARY PRACTICE

Answer each question to show your understanding of the vocabulary words.

1. Would a lavishly decorated home be simple or elegant?
2. Is a menace something to avoid or to look forward to?
3. If you disconcert people, do you confuse them or calm them?
4. If you compel people to do something, are you forcing them or inviting them?
5. Would a person who watches vigilantly be alert or distracted?
6. Which sound would be heard intermittently—thunder or a steady siren?

ACADEMIC VOCABULARY IN WRITING

Imagine you volunteered to help in New Orleans after the hurricane. Using at least two Academic Vocabulary words, describe the circumstances you might have encountered there.

VOCABULARY STRATEGY: THE PREFIX inter-

A prefix is a word part attached to the beginning of a base word or root word. When a prefix is added, a new word is formed. The vocabulary word intermittently contains the prefix inter-, which means “between,” added to the Latin word meaning “to let go.” If you know the meaning of a prefix, it can help you figure out the meaning of an unfamiliar word, especially if you consider the word’s context.

PRACTICE The boldfaced words all contain the prefix inter-. Use your knowledge of this prefix and the base word to write a definition for each word. Remember to use context clues or a dictionary if you need help.

1. The twins looked so similar, they could be interchanged and no one would know.
2. The puzzle pieces interlock so that they won’t come apart.
3. An international commission was established to study world hunger.
4. I have to pass the intermediate course before I can move on to the advanced level.
5. We took the interstate highway on our drive from New York to Ohio.
Comparing Accounts

Writing for Assessment

1. **READ THE PROMPT**

The two articles you’ve just read cover similar subjects in different ways. In writing assessments, you might be asked to compare such texts.

“The Story of an Eyewitness” and “Letter from New Orleans: Leaving Desire” are both eyewitness accounts of natural disasters, but they are written to achieve different goals. State the specific purpose of each account. Then, in four or five paragraphs, contrast the ways each author achieves his purpose. Use details from the articles to show the differences in how people, places, and events are covered.

2. **PLAN YOUR WRITING**

To identify each author’s specific purpose, refer to the instruction on page 411. To recall the ways each covers the disaster, review the chart you completed. In a thesis statement, identify three differences in their disaster coverage. Then think about how you will set up the body of your response.

- Option A: In one paragraph, describe the scope of the first article’s coverage of people, places, and events. In the next paragraph, describe the other article’s coverage.
- Option B: In one paragraph, contrast the way each article covers people. In the next paragraph, contrast the way each covers places. In the third, contrast the number of events covered.

Once you have decided on your approach, create an outline to organize your details.

3. **DRAFT YOUR RESPONSE**

**Introduction**  Provide the titles and authors of both articles, a brief description of what each article is about, a statement of each author’s specific purpose, and your thesis statement.

**Body**  With your outline as a guide, discuss the differences in each writers’ coverage of people, places, and events.

**Conclusion**  Restate your thesis statement, and leave your reader with a final thought about the role that purpose plays in each of these articles.

**Revision**  Double-check to make sure your thesis statement clearly presents the ideas you develop in your body paragraphs.