

Name _____ **Literary Non-fiction**

Dealing with Disasters

Literary nonfiction is a type of prose that uses literary techniques, figures of speech and other compositional techniques that you usually find in fiction or poetry to report on persons, places, and events in the real world. Also known as creative nonfiction, this category of writing is broad enough to encompass travel writing, nature writing, science writing, sports writing, biography, autobiography, memoir and public speeches.



DIRECTIONS: Read the article. Identify the type of writing. Then briefly explain the literary elements at work.

On December 26, 1802, what would go down in history as the Great Portsmouth Parade Fire began as a wisp of smoke in a wooden building that housed the New Hampshire Bank. By four a.m. the building was ablaze, and the flames marched briskly down what is today called Market Square and devoured a large swath of the city. By the time the “parade” of flames was over, only the North Church and the Old State House were left standing. The fire, which was the first of what the city of Portsmouth calls “the three fires of Christmas” (1802, 1806 and 1813) not only took up an indelible place in Portsmouth history, it also marked a change in the way that our country now handles the process of recovering from a disaster. The Congressional Act of 1803, passed in Portsmouth in order to provide relief to its citizens following a catastrophic fire is today known as the first piece of American “disaster legislation.” It ushered in a century of subsequent similar ad hoc legislation addressing recovery from hurricanes, earthquakes, floods and other natural disasters. Then the nature of disaster relief changed again in the 1930s when the Reconstruction Finance Corporation was given authority to make “disaster loans” so that public facilities could be repaired and rebuilt after an earthquake. The measure was successful, and the RFC continued to make loans to facilitate recovery after other types of disasters.

Similar measures followed. The Bureau of Public Roads was given authority to provide funding for highways and bridges damaged by natural disasters in 1934, and the Flood Control Act of 1965 gave the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers greater authority to implement flood control projects. But the stovepipe nature of this approach became problematic, and later legislation focused on requiring cooperation between federal agencies, as well as executive oversight and coordination. When massive disasters in the 1960s and 1970 required major federal response and recovery efforts, the Federal Disaster Assistance Administration was established within the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). In 1974, following the National Flood Insurance Act (1968) and the Flood Disaster Protection Act of 1973, President Nixon signed the Disaster Relief Act of 1974, setting the precedent and establishing a process for the president to make disaster declarations.

Disaster response, however, remained fragmented, and depending upon the nature of a disaster, there could sometimes be nearly a hundred federal agencies with some role in

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responding to or recovering from disasters, hazards and emergencies. The area was in tremendous need of some centralized control. So on April 1, 1979, President Jimmy Carter signed the executive order that created the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), whose mission was, and still remains, to lead America to prepare for, prevent, respond to and recover from disasters. Today, a presidential disaster declaration triggers financial and physical assistance at is all coordinated through FEMA.

1. What is the central idea? _____

- A. To tell the story of the Portsmouth parade fire
- B. To tell the history of disaster legislation in the U.S.
- C. To tell the origin of FEMA

2. How did the Portsmouth Parade Fire “change the way our country handles disasters?”

3. Why was it problematic to have multiple organizations involved in disaster recovery?
