

COMPARE TEXTS

Background On August 29, 2005, Hurricane Katrina ripped through the Gulf coast. It was one of the strongest storms to hit the United States in the last 100 years. With winds of more than 125 miles per hour, Katrina caused massive damage all along the coast. But no city was affected more than New Orleans. Almost 80 percent of the city was underwater; thousands of people were left homeless. Almost 2,000 people lost their lives, and hundreds more were missing. Years after the hurricane, parts of the city have still not been rebuilt.

from After the Hurricane

Watcher After Katrina, 2005

Poem by Rita Williams-Garcia

Poem by Natasha D. Trethewey

Rita Williams-Garcia (b. 1957) was writing stories and trying to get them published by the time she was twelve years old. Today, her writing draws on her experiences growing up in New York City and, more significantly, the issues faced by urban black teenagers in the modern world. For Williams-Garcia, writing for young people is her passion and her mission. She believes that teens hunger for stories that reflect their circumstances, and she hopes her writing strengthens their understanding of themselves and others.



Natasha D. Trethewey (b. 1966) has deep ties to the Gulf coast. She was born in Gulfport, Mississippi, and returned to the Gulf coast often as a child, spending her summers there with her mother's family and in New Orleans with her father. Her father, also a poet, encouraged her to write poems on long car trips to keep her from getting bored. Trethewey was named poet laureate of the United States in 2012. Her collection of poems *Native Guard* won the Pulitzer Prize in poetry in 2007.



SETTING A PURPOSE As you read each poem, pay attention to the events that take place and how each speaker reacts to them.

After the Hurricane

Poem by Rita Williams-Garcia

- If toilets flushed,
if babies slept,
if faucets ran,
old bodies didn't die in the sun,
5 if none of it were real,
if we weren't in it,
this could be a disaster movie with
helicopters whipping up sky overhead,
Special Effects brought in to create Lake George
10 and not the great Mississippi
meeting Lake Pontchartrain.
Out-of-work waiters would pose as policemen,
locals as extras paid in box lunches.
For set design, dump raw sewage, trash everywhere,
15 news trucks, patrol cars, army tanks, Humvees.
- If none of it were real,
if we weren't in it,
this could be a big-budget disaster flick
King, Jasper, and I'd rent
20 after band practice
like we did last Tuesday watching *Titanic* on Grandmama's
sofa.
That Jasper could *laaaugh* at all the actors drowning
while the band played—*glub, glub, glub*—to the death.
- 25 But this ain't that. We're waist high in it.
Camera crews bark, "Big Mike! Get this, over here!"
"Roll tape."
"Got that?"
"Good God!"
30 "Shut it down."

This ain't hardly no picture.
We're not on location.
We're herded. Domed in,
feels like for good

35 unless you caught a bus like Ma
or Jasper's family (save Jasper).
I still want to smash a camera,
break a lens, make them stop shooting.
But King says, "No, Freddie. Gotta show it.
40 Who'd believe it without film?"

Still no running water, no food, no power, no help.
The world is here but no one's coming.
The Guard¹ is here with rifles pointed.
The Red Cross got their tables set up.
45 Weathermen, anchors,² reporters, meteorologists,
a fleet of black Homeland SUVs.
The world is here
but where is the water? The food? The power?
The way to Ma or Jasper's people.
50 They just herd us, split us, film us, guard us.
No one said feed us. No one brought water.
The world is here but no one's coming.
Helicopters overhead beat up on our skies.

* * *

Miracle One.
5 King noses around the news guys,
runs back to Jasper and me.
"There's water trucks held up on the highway.
Gallons, girl! Water by the gallons.
Fresh drinking water.
0 Clean shower water.
See that, Freddie. The water company loves us.
Somebody thought to send us water."
Even with our trumpets drowned, King's chest swells.
He booms, "Brass Crew, are you with me?
5 Let's get outta here, bring back some water."

¹ **The Guard:** the National Guard of the United States, units of reserve soldiers that are controlled by each state of the United States. The National Guard responds to both the federal (national) and state governments for a variety of emergency needs, both in this country and abroad.

² **anchors** (āng'kərs): people who organize and read the news on media newscasts (television, radio, online); they work with a team of reporters, camera operators, and so on to report the news.



How can I leave TK and Grandmama?

How can I leave, and be happy to leave?

Watch me. Just watch me

high step on outta here

70 for the water I say I'll bring back.

Honest to God, I heard "Brass Crew" and was gone.

I heard *Elbows up,*

natural breath!

That was enough.

75 How can I leave, and be happy to leave?

Easy. As needing to breathe new air.

King's got a First Trumpet stride. Jasper walks.

I lick the salt off my bare arms,

turn to look back at the people

80 held up by canes, hugging strollers, collapsible

black and newly colored people,

women with shirts for head wraps.

Salt dries my tongue.

I turn my eyes from them and walk.

85 I don't have to tell myself

it's not a school project for Ms. LeBlanc,

"The Colored Peoples of Freddie's Diorama."³

³ **diorama** (dī'ə-rām'ə): a three-dimensional scene in which models of people, animals, or other objects are arranged in natural poses against a painted background.

Green pasted just so, around the huts just so.
 The despair just right.
 90 It's not my social studies diorama
 depicting "Over There," across the Atlantic,
 the Pacific. Bodies of water.
 Way, way over there.
 The refugees of the mudslides,
 95 refugees of the tsunami,
 refugees of Rwanda.
 No. It is US. In state. In country.
 Drowned but not separated by
 bodies of water or by spoken language.
 100 The despair is just right, no translation needed.
 We are not the refugees in my social studies diorama.
 We are 11th graders,
 a broken brass line,
 old homeowners, grandmamas, head chefs, street
 105 performers, a saxophonist mourning the loss of his Selmer
 horn of 43 years and wife of 38 years. We are aunties,
 dry cleaners, cops' daughters, deacons, cement mixers,
 auto mechanics, trombonists without trombones, quartets
 scattered, communion servers, stranded freshmen, old
 110 nuns, X-ray technicians, bread bakers, curators,⁴ diabetics,
 shrimpers,⁵ dishwashers, seamstresses, brides-to-be, new
 daddies, taxi drivers, principals, Cub Scouts crying, car
 dealers, other dealers, hairstylists, too many babies, too
 many of us to count.
 115 Still wearing what we had on when it hit.
 When we fled,
 or were wheeled, piggybacked, airlifted, carried off.
 Citizens herded.
 We are Ms. LeBlanc, social studies teacher, a rag wrapped
 120 around her head,
 And Principal Canelle. He missed that last bus.

* * *

⁴ **curators** (kyōō-rā'tərs): people who manage and oversee; most often describes those who manage a museum and its collection of art.

⁵ **shrimpers** (shrimp'ərs): people who catch shrimp—small edible sea animals with a semi-hard outer shell.

Minor Miracle.

We walk past the Guard.

You'd think they'd see us

125 marching on outta here.

You'd think they'd stop us. Keep us domed.

But we're on the march, a broken brass line.

King, Jasper, and me, Fredericka.

King needs to lead; I need to leave.

130 Been following his lead since

band camp. Junior band. Senior band.

Box formations, flying diamonds, complicated transitions.

Jasper sticks close. A horn player, a laugh. Not a talker.

See anything to laugh about?

135 Jasper sticks close. Stays quiet. Maybe a nod.

Keeping step I would ask myself,

Aren't you ashamed? No.

Of band pride? No.

You band geek. So.

140 Aren't you ashamed? No.

You want to parade? So.

Raise your trumpet? So.

Aren't you ashamed? No.

To praise Saint Louis?

145 "Oh, when the saints go marching in?"

Aren't you ashamed? No.

Of strutting krewe⁶

On Mardi Gras? The Fourth of July?

These very streets

150 Purple and gold, bop

Stars and Stripes, bop

Aren't you ashamed?

To shake and boogie?

Aren't you ashamed?

⁶ **krewe** (krōō): any of several groups of people who organize and participate in the annual Mardi Gras carnival in New Orleans.

155 To enjoy your march,
while Grandmama suffers
and no milk for TK?
Tell the truth. Aren't you ashamed?
No. I'm not ashamed.

160 I step high, elbows up.
Band pride.

King asks, "Freddie, what you thinking?"
I say, "I'm not thinking, King."
But I'm dried out on the inside.

165 Hungry talks LOUD, you know.
"Let's try the Beauxmart. The Food Circle. Something."

King knows better. He doesn't say.
Still, we go and find (no surprise)
the Beauxmart's been hit. Stripped. Smashed.

170 Forget about Food Circle and every corner grocery.
Nothing left but rotten milk,
glass shards.⁷ Loose shopping carts.
Jasper sighs. Grabs a cart.

Stomach won't shut up.

175 Talking. Knotting. Cramping. I whine,
"Let's go to Doolie's."

Again, King knows better. Still, we go,
almost passed right by. Didn't see it until
Jasper points. King sighs.

180 Check out the D in Doolie's, blown clear off.
The outside boarded up, chained up, locked.
Black and red spray-painted:
LOOTERS WILL BE SHOT.

⁷ shards (shårds): small pieces of something that has been broken.

I can't believe it.

- 185 Doolie who buys block tickets to home games
Doolie who sponsors our team bus
Band instruments, uniforms (all underwater),
Chicken bucket championships. The band eats half-price.
My eyes say, *Freddie, believe the spray paint:*
190 *Big Sean Doolie will shoot the looters.*
Yeah. Big Sean Doolie.
Believe.

- King (First Trumpet) was right,
he doesn't make me (Second) like I'm second.
195 A simple, "Come on, Brass. Let's get this water."
I follow King. Jasper pushes the cart.
First, Second, Third. No bop step,
high step, no feather head shake,
no shimmy⁸ front, boogie back.
200 Just walk.

- "Hear that?"
Another helicopter overhead.
Another chopper stirring up the Big Empty.
Wide blades good for nothing but whirling up
205 heavy heat, heavy stink on empty streets
full of ghosts and mosquitoes.
Swat all you want. Look around.
Nothing here but us in Big Empty.

⁸ **shimmy** (shīm'ē): to do the shimmy, a dance involving rapid shaking of the body.

Analyze Structure

COMMON
CORE RL 5

A poem's **form** is the way its words and lines are arranged on a page. Some forms are also defined by poetic devices, such as rhyme and rhythm. A poem's form is closely linked to its meaning, which makes the poem's form important to its message.

Free verse is a form of poetry with no regular patterns of rhyme, rhythm, or line length. When poets write free verse, they can create rhythms that they think will best communicate their ideas.

"After the Hurricane" is written in free verse, which the poet can use to portray the sounds and rhythms of everyday speech. In lines 16–24, the poet uses both short and long line lengths to create rhythms that make the words sound like a person telling you a story. Line length can also be used to call attention to certain words and ideas.

To analyze free verse, ask questions such as the following:

- What ideas is the poet expressing? How does the use of free verse support those ideas?
- What rhythms are created by the line lengths in the poem? How do these poetic devices add to my understanding of the poem?

Notice where the poet ends each line as you analyze "After the Hurricane."

Analyzing the Text

COMMON
CORE RL 1, RL 2, RL 4,
RL 5, RL 6

Cite Text Evidence Support your responses with evidence from the text.

- 1. Summarize** Reread lines 1–30. How does the speaker describe what happens after the hurricane? What does the speaker compare the scene to?
- 2. Analyze** Review lines 101–121 and examine how the poet arranges the words and lines. Describe the variations in line lengths. What circumstances is the poet trying to explain, and how does the form support those ideas?
- 3. Compare** Review lines 129–161, in which the speaker tells about the friends' roles in the band. Compare these ideas with those in lines 184–200. How has the hurricane affected the friends' roles and changed the speaker's feelings? Explain which words show this.

Watcher

After Katrina, 2005

by Natasha D. Trethewey

At first, there was nothing to do but watch.
For days, before the trucks arrived, before the work
of cleanup, my brother sat on the stoop¹ and watched.

He watched the ambulances speed by, the police cars;
5 watched for the looters who'd come each day
to siphon² gas from the car, take away the generator,

the air conditioner, whatever there was to be had.
He watched his phone for a signal, watched the sky
for signs of a storm, for rain so he could wash.

10 At the church, handing out diapers and water,
he watched the people line up, watched their faces
as they watched his. And when at last there was work,



¹ **stoop** (stōōp): a small porch or staircase that leads up to the door of a house or other building.

² **siphon** (sī'fən): to move a liquid up and out of a container, over a barrier, and into a new container, using an inverted, U-shaped tube.

he got a job, on the beach, as a *watcher*.

Behind safety goggles, he watched the sand for bones,
15 searched for debris that clogged the great machines.

Riding the prow of the cleaners, or walking ahead,
he watched for carcasses³—chickens mostly, maybe
some cats or dogs. No one said *remains*.⁴ No one

had to. It was a kind of faith, that watching:
20 my brother trained his eyes to bear
the sharp erasure⁵ of sand and glass, prayed
there'd be nothing more to see.

COLLABORATIVE DISCUSSION With a partner, use evidence from the poems to discuss what happened during Hurricane Katrina and how people who experienced it were affected.

³ **carcasses:** (kär'kəs-əz): dead bodies; usually referring to dead animals that have been killed for food.

⁴ **remains** (rī-mānz'): all that is left after other parts have been taken away, used up, or destroyed; here, refers to dead bodies of people.

⁵ **erasure** (ī-rā'shər): an act or instance of erasing—removing by rubbing, wiping, or scraping; the state of being erased.



Analyze Structure



Many poems are written in traditional form. Poems in **traditional form** follow fixed rules, such as a certain number of lines, a rhyme scheme, and a definite structure.

A **line** of poetry is simply that: the text that appears on one line. The line is the core unit of a poem and can be a complete sentence, part of a sentence, or even a single word. Poets use **line breaks**, or the places where lines of poetry end, to add emphasis to certain words and phrases.

A **stanza** is a group of two or more lines that form a unit in a poem. A stanza is like a paragraph in prose. Depending on the form, the stanzas of a poem

- may or may not have the same number of lines
- will, most often, express a separate idea or emotion

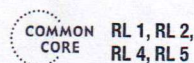
In a traditional form, the stanzas are often a determined length.

When you analyze traditional forms of poetry, think about questions like the following:

- What specific idea does each stanza express?
- Why might the poet have chosen to use this form to structure the poem?
- Taken together, how do the stanzas help build the poem's meaning?

In the poem "Watcher," notice the number of lines in each stanza and how the ideas in the stanzas are connected through the use of the poem's form.

Analyzing the Text



Cite Text Evidence

Support your responses with evidence from the text.

- 1. Interpret** Reread lines 1–3 of "Watcher." What do you notice about the length of each line? How does the shortest line contribute to the poem's meaning?
- 2. Draw Conclusions** Reread lines 4–9 of "Watcher." What clues tell you that these stanzas work together as a complete idea? Do other stanzas in the poem work the same way? Why do you think the author chose to structure the poem this way?

Determine Meanings of Words and Phrases

COMMON
CORE RL 4

One of many poetic elements poets use is called alliteration. **Alliteration** is the repetition of consonant sounds at the beginning of words. This line from "After the Hurricane" includes two examples of alliteration:

Out-of-work waiters would pose as policemen,

The repeated *w* and *p* sounds add a bouncing rhythm to the line. The rhythm creates an almost lighthearted feeling for this part of the poem, where the poet shows how the speaker's situation could be a movie, except that it is actually happening.

By adding rhythm and repetition, alliteration can also affect meaning and tone. **Tone** refers to the poet's attitude and how he or she feels about a topic. The repeated *w* sound in lines 45–49 in "After the Hurricane" points out important words, such as *Weathermen*, *world*, *where*, *water*, and *way*. It helps create a tone that shows that the topic makes the poet feel a certain way about the incidents taking place in the aftermath of the storm.

Look for more examples of alliteration and its effect on tone as you analyze the two poems.

Compare and Contrast Poetic Forms

COMMON
CORE RL 9

To compare and contrast poetic forms, especially free verse and traditional forms, examine the following:

- the structure of the stanzas, including number of lines and line length
- emphasis created by line breaks
- the use of rhythm
- rhyme scheme or lack of rhyme
- imagery
- the use of alliteration

Notice how "After the Hurricane" and "Watcher" convey meaning through the use of their different forms.