



WHEN THE WATERS RISE

When the Waters Rise

By Alex Shultz

- 1 On Saturday, August 26, 2017, the night before the worst of Hurricane Harvey struck Houston, Texas, Liam Conner and his brother, Declan, stayed in to watch a boxing match with their friends. The school year had only just begun. Their friends were saying that the hurricane might get them a day or two out of class.
- 2 Liam and Declan’s parents didn’t think Harvey would be as bad as the Memorial Day Flood two years earlier. That one had ruined their home, but they hoped the elevated house they’d rebuilt would be okay this time. Still, Declan, Liam, and a couple of friends had traveled south days before to retrieve Declan’s boat from Galveston, and the brothers had stocked up on water and snacks just in case.
- 3 Liam woke around 6 a.m. on Sunday morning. From his bedroom window, he saw that it was raining hard. He went to the garage and heard “stuff floating around.” He ran upstairs to wake the rest of his family.

A view of a hurricane from space



Categories of Hurricanes

CATEGORY	WIND SPEED
TROPICAL STORM	Slower than 74 miles per hour
1	74-95 miles per hour
2	96-110 miles per hour
3	111-129 miles per hour
4	130-156 miles per hour
5	157 miles per hour or faster

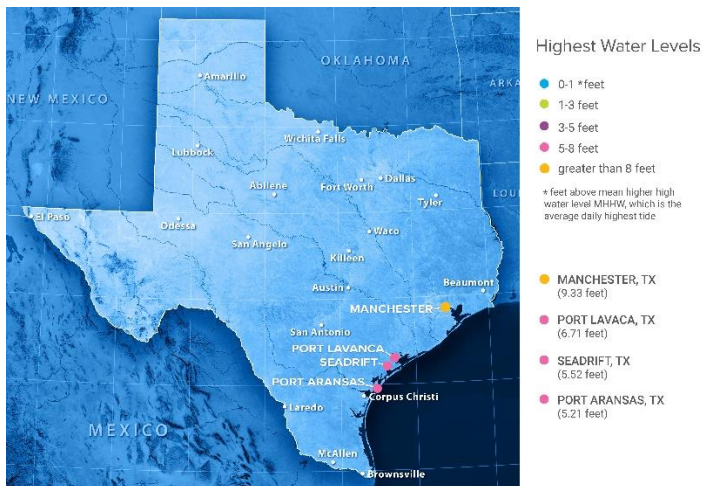
- 4 Hurricane Harvey turned out to be much worse than anyone expected. Between Wednesday, August 23, and Thursday, August 24, it morphed from a tropical storm into a Category 1 hurricane as it glided toward the Gulf of Mexico. At 2 p.m. on Friday, it was a Category 3 hurricane. Just four hours later, it had grown to a Category 4. By the time Harvey had made a **sustained** landfall in southeast Texas, it returned to tropical storm status. But it refused to dissipate, and the **sheer** amount of rainfall it caused was devastating.

DOK 1: Why did hurricane Harvey turn out to be worse than expected?

DOK 2: What does the dissipate mean in paragraph 4?

5 According to The Weather Channel, “The areal coverage of locations picking up at least 20 inches of rain was greater than the state of West Virginia, while the 40-inch-plus zone was larger than Delaware.” Entire communities were completely flooded. In Nederland, Texas, the rainfall exceeded 60 inches over the course of a week, which is the highest total ever recorded after a storm in the United States. Harvey led to more than 80 deaths. Texas Governor Greg Abbott estimated damages between \$150 and \$180 billion, while the Center for Business and Economic Research at Ball State University estimated \$200 billion.

DOK 3: Based on the information in paragraph 5, what can you infer about this tropical storm?



Deadliest Hurricanes

Hurricane	Death toll
Great Galveston (year 1900)	80,000
Lake Okeechobee (year 1928)	2,500
Katrina (year 2005)	1,600
Harvey (year 2017)	62
Floyd (1999)	56

DOK 4: According to the chart, how many more deaths resulted from hurricane Katrina than hurricane Harvey?

6 The economic ramifications are staggering, but there are also long-term emotional and psychological effects in the aftermath of a natural disaster like Harvey. Studies conducted following Hurricane Katrina, for instance, showed a sharp rise in depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress syndrome (PTSD). In 2008, the Nature journal concluded that a year after Katrina (and months after originally interviewing survivors), there was a six percent increase in interviewees experiencing PTSD symptoms. The death of a loved one or reliving unpleasant memories from the hurricane accounted for much of that increase. Still, many

affected by Katrina were especially shaken after being displaced from their homes, which caused the loss of a sense of routine or normalcy. Though the precise numbers might never be known, Hurricane Harvey also displaced tens of thousands from their homes.

DOK 5: What organizational pattern does the author utilize in paragraph 6?

DOK 6: How does hurricane Harvey compare to hurricane Katrina?

- 7 The boys hadn't planned on using Declan's boat. They brought it from Galveston to keep it from being lost or damaged in the hurricane, not to motor it down the streets of their neighborhood. That Sunday morning, however, helicopters whirled overhead and neighbors cried for help from nearby rooftops. A neighbor asked Declan and Liam if he and his wife could be taken on the boat to the local Kroger, which was located on higher ground.
- 8 The boys' parents were nervous about letting them go. Cars in the area were submerged. Tree limbs and other debris choked the waters. The current was powerful.

DOK 7: Why were their parents reluctant to let them go?

- 9 But people needed help, so Liam and Declan's parents allowed them to head out. Two friends, Thomas Edwards and Richard Dickason, joined them. Declan was just a freshman in high school, three grades below the other boys, but he steered the boat. "When we were driving through the street, it was really nerve-wracking," he said. "There were cars underwater, and you can't see that or the fire hydrants."
- 10 When they reached the local Kroger, the boys fully realized the seriousness of the situation. Entire families had narrowly escaped the flooding. They gathered in the parking lot with their pets and whatever belongings they could scrounge together. Police officers were everywhere trying to control the chaos. From that point onwards, the boys' mission was to bring as many people to safety as they possibly could.

Flooding caused by Hurricane Harvey



- 11 That mission wasn't easy. For one, the teens had the only boat in sight, which meant they were overwhelmed with requests. They had to **prioritize** —people over pets (though they rescued plenty of animals too)—and they paid special attention to anyone whose life was in immediate danger. “Every time we rescued somebody, there was somebody down the street screaming, ‘Please come back and rescue us!’ Of course, we had to say yes,” Liam said.
- 12 Sometimes the boys had to convince the individuals they were attempting to help to hop on board. Some **skeptical** neighbors even asked if the foursome was just joyriding around for fun. “A lot of people were in disbelief to see people pulling up to their houses in a boat,” Thomas said. “Some of them were **reluctant**, I guess, because they were waiting for the Coast Guard or actual rescue personnel to come, not four teenage boys in basketball shirts with their shorts on.”
- 13 Police officers were doing their best at the local Kroger, but they had little other than rafts. After the four boys had proven themselves, law enforcement asked them for guidance. “It was just really funny, the fire department was basically taking orders from us,” Thomas said. “They were like, ‘Do y’all know where to go? What should we do?’ Declan was kind of bossing them around.”
- 14 In the early afternoon, a photojournalist from the Houston Chronicle spotted the teens and took a ride on their boat. He snapped pictures and video that quickly spread on Twitter. Thomas took advantage of the newfound fame and tweeted out Declan’s phone number. The power of social media was quickly evident: phone calls and texts bombarded Declan, and not just from people in Texas. “People were calling me from California,” Declan said, “people were calling me from everywhere saying, ‘I know this person that lives there. They really need help, can you please help them?’”



- 15 Though the teens used technology to identify neighbors in need, their methods for rescuing were more old-fashioned. Declan’s boat was only supposed to hold three or four people, but sometimes there were as many as thirteen people on it. To reduce the weight, Thomas and Liam rode on a paddleboard tied to

the back. Even though he was a swimmer and water polo player, Liam struggled to keep up with the strong current. Foul smelling garbage littered the water, and fire ants stung his exposed skin.

16 At one point in the day, the boys found two older city workers who had gone out the previous night in their dump truck to rescue others. The dump truck had flooded and neither worker could swim. They had been clinging to tree branches for hours. It wasn't easy, but Liam was able to paddle to the tree branch, drag the workers onto the paddleboard, and transport them back to the boat. "I think that was one of our most memorable rescues because they went from being really upset and scared to being really happy," Liam said. In total, the boys rescued several dozen people—too many for them to count.

17 As the floodwaters dissipated, the boys continued to make themselves available. The next day, Liam, Thomas, and Richard patrolled the neighborhood with an ax in case anyone was stuck in a home. Later in the week, the boys teamed up with Thomas's dad to help neighborhoods affected by flooding. Strake Jesuit High School, where the boys attend school, set up a Facebook page to coordinate additional volunteer work. "It was one of those life-changing moments where it was just crazy to see everybody helping out and how nice and kind everyone was," Liam said.

18 The teens' lives have returned to a sense of normalcy, though Thomas admits, "Whenever I drive around Liam's neighborhood, and whenever I turn down one of his streets, I remember, 'Oh wow, all of this was underwater.'"

19 Despite the national attention the boys received, they say they haven't been treated any differently by peers or neighbors, and they aren't seeking recognition. As Liam put it, "I know this is **cliché** to say, but all of us think that we're not heroes. We were just lucky to have a boat, and we didn't deserve any of the credit that we got. I think anyone in our neighborhood would've done that."