



Emergency Preparedness and Recovery Graphic Medicine Book Club Guide:

Drowned City: Hurricane Katrina and New Orleans by Don Brown

From the Publisher: On August 29, 2005, Hurricane Katrina's monstrous winds and surging water overwhelmed the protective levees around low-lying New Orleans, Louisiana...The riveting tale of this historic storm and the drowning of an American city is one of selflessness, heroism, and courage—and also of incompetence, racism, and criminality.

Don Brown's kinetic art and as-it-happens narrative capture both the tragedy and triumph of one of the worst natural disasters in American history.

Why a Graphic Novel?

- Research suggests that we are better at understanding and absorbing information presented in visual forms, such as comics.
- Stories are more engaging than factual information alone. How much easier is it to remember and empathize with something a friend experienced versus hard statistics alone?
- Coined by Ian Williams, a physician in the UK, Graphic Medicine “is the intersection of the medium of comics and the discourse of healthcare.”
 - Graphic medicine, then, combines visual storytelling and medicine, creating a unique opportunity for readers to experience and learn about healthcare experiences through comics.

To Learn More...

- www.graphicmedicine.org – The home base for all things graphic medicine.
- *The Graphic Medicine Manifesto* by MK Czerwiec et al. Available from Penn State University Press.



Created by Sarah Levin-Lederer as part of the NNLM Region 7 Graphic Medicine Initiative.

Questions for Discussion

1. Did you appreciate the visual aspects of this book? Do you think the format of a graphic novel is more or less effective for non-fiction than for fiction? How is it different than non-fiction written in prose?
2. Can you point to specific passages/panels that struck you personally? Why?
3. *Drowned City* tells the story of a specific natural disaster, 2005's Hurricane Katrina that devastated New Orleans and the Gulf Coast. How does this story help us think about and plan for emergencies in our own communities?
4. During and after an emergency, local, state, and federal responders have a role to play to keep people safe and help rebuild communities. Responding to Hurricane Katrina, there were a lot of missed opportunities. What lessons can be learned from Hurricane Katrina for responders?
5. Most graphic medicine works tell personal stories of sickness and health. *Drowned City* tells the story of Hurricane Katrina through various events that affect the entire city of New Orleans. How did the author's decision to focus on events instead of personal experiences influence how you felt about the story he was telling? Would telling personal stories have had a greater impact?
6. People remember seeing the images and news stories about Hurricane Katrina as it happened. What was your impression of the events before reading *Drowned City*? Did that perspective change after reading the book?
7. Some people in New Orleans couldn't or wouldn't evacuate. Would that be an issue for people in your community if an evacuation order was given? What can individuals and communities do to help people prepare for emergencies?
8. During and after Hurricane Katrina and other natural disasters, we see survivors portrayed in the news as helpless victims or as non-compliant, aggressive, looters. Did *Drowned City* change your perspective of survivors' actions? If so, how? If not, why not?
9. Surviving natural disasters can take a toll on a person's physical and emotional health. After reading *Drowned City*, how do you think you would handle the stress of such a situation?
10. Have you read other stories, fiction or non-fiction, about natural disasters? How does *Drowned City* compare to them?
11. Would you share *Drowned City* with people in your life? Why or why not?

Remember: These are just suggested questions and there could be many, many more. Let the conversation flow naturally and use these questions as starting points if conversation stalls.