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Johnston Public Library Book Discussion Questions

Isaac's Storm by Erik Larson

Summary

September 8, 1900, began innocently in the seaside town of Galveston, Texas. Even Isaac Cline, resident meteorologist for the U.S. Weather Bureau failed to grasp the true meaning of the strange deep-sea swells and peculiar winds that greeted the city that morning. Mere hours later, Galveston found itself submerged in a monster hurricane that completely destroyed the town and killed over six thousand people in what remains the greatest natural disaster in American history—and Isaac Cline found himself the victim of a devastating personal tragedy.

Using Cline's own telegrams, letters, and reports, the testimony of scores of survivors, and our latest understanding of the science of hurricanes, Erik Larson builds a chronicle of one man's heroic struggle and fatal miscalculation in the face of a storm of unimaginable magnitude. Riveting, powerful, and unbearably suspenseful, *Isaac's Storm* is the story of what can happen when human arrogance meets the great uncontrollable force of nature.

Discussion Questions

1. Given the tools and knowledge the U.S. Weather Service had in 1900, could the Galveston disaster have been prevented? Larsen himself, in an interview with Powell's bookstore says the book is 'so much about attitude.' What does he mean?
2. Why were Isaac Cline's warnings so hesitant, as the barometer continued to drop and the storm raced toward the City of Galveston?
3. Imagine if the hurricane had not hit Galveston. Would it have remained the 'New York of the Gulf Coast' as it was in 1900?
4. Consider Hurricane Katrina. Are we better prepared for storms and their impact today? Does awareness of potential disaster translate into a different response now as compared to then?
5. According to the book, several methods were used to dispose of the 10,000 bodies after the storm. How would it have been handled had that many died?

in Hurricane Katrina?

6. How did this book's descriptions of the devastation hit you emotionally?
7. Does this book have a hero? How does it affect the story for you as a reader?
8. Some wish the book had accompanying pictures. Can you visualize the situation and the damage?
9. A reviewer in the New Statesman said the book had 'just enough science.' Do you agree?

Summary from the publisher. Discussion Questions from the Burleson, TX Library and
Madison Public Library