



About the USA – Virtual Classroom Newsletter for English Teachers

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*"Summertime and the living is easy
Fish are jumping, and the cotton is high"*

Porgy and Bess. George & Ira Gershwin.

Summertime. Why are the fish jumping?

The sturgeon jump high and fast on Florida's [Suwannee River](#) in the summer. This year, leaping sturgeon have injured three people on the Suwannee this year; eight people were hit last year. To reduce the dangers of collisions between sturgeon and boaters (for both the fish and the boaters), some people would like to see reduced boat speed limits on the parts of the river where sturgeon congregate as they migrate to the Gulf of Mexico. Gulf sturgeon can grow up to eight feet long and weigh 200 pounds. Their bodies are covered with sharp, bony plates. Although they are not very pretty, they have no teeth or temper. No one knows exactly why they like to jump all summer long.

"Pretty much because they can," says the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. The jumping is not for reproductive reasons. Apart from occasional alligators, they have no freshwater predators so jumping is probably not an escape response. One theory is that sturgeon jump to let other sturgeon know they have found a good spot. They seem to gather mainly within short, narrow stretches of the Suwannee where there are deep holes, so they do not have to waste energy fighting the current. After spawning in the spring, the fish relax all summer. Many people, too, also come to relax on the riverbank just to watch the fish jump.

Sturgeons, however, are not the only fish to impress people with their jumping skills. Today, a leisurely trip down the [Missouri River](#) can be shattered by a creature that neither [Lewis nor Clark](#) recorded in their journals. The [silver carp](#), an Asiatic invader, launches itself high into the air, endangering boaters and water skiers. The silver carp was imported in the 1970s by fish farmers as a means of controlling algae and plankton in fish ponds. By the 1990s, the carp had escaped impoundments and established themselves in the wild. The exact reason is unknown, but it is believed that silver carp jump as a flight response when disturbed.

Links

- [Giant Jumping Sturgeon Stir Up Mystery](#) (National Geographic)
- [Fear the Fish](#) (St. Petersburg Times)
- [Asian Carp: Can't Beat Them? Eat Them](#) (NPR)

For sightings of jumping whales, flying dolphins or marlins, tourists also visit the park areas at national and state parks on United States' most beautiful seashores (total U.S. seashore is 95,000 miles).

Links

- [Point Reyes National Seashore](#)
- [Cabrillo National Monument \(California\)](#)
- [Glacier Bay \(Alaska\)](#)
- [Channel Islands \(California\)](#)
- [Cape Cod \(Massachusetts\)](#)
- [New Bedford Whaling \(Massachusetts\)](#). Walk in the footsteps of Herman Melville. New Bedford was the mid 19th century's preeminent whaling port and for a time "the richest city in the world."



Gulf Sturgeon
@ Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission



Whale Watching



National Seashore Massachusetts © NPS

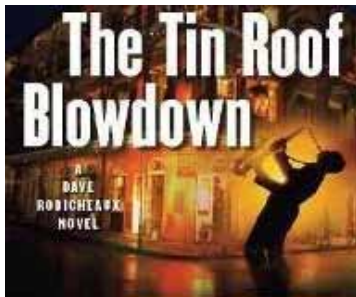
*"A man may stand there and put all
America behind him."
Henry David Thoreau*

Hurricane Katrina – Two Years Later



© Dallas Morning News, Smiley N. Pool.

[2006 Pulitzer Prize for Breaking News](#) was awarded to the staff of *The Dallas Morning News* for its vivid photographs depicting the chaos and pain after Hurricane Katrina engulfed New Orleans.



The Tin Roof Blowdown (July 2007)

Excerpt: *"My worst dreams have always contained images of brown water and fields of elephant grass and the downdraft of helicopter blades. The dreams are in color but they contain no sound, not of drowned voices in the river [...]"* [More](#)



[When the Levees Broke: A Requiem in Four Acts](#)

© HBO

"Tonight, I want to talk about one New Orleans and one future, a story of determination, a story of strength, a story of love. We have endured and survived more than many thought possible. Our finances are stable and improving. Many of our citizens have returned and more are planning to rebuild. And people throughout the nation and world continue to demonstrate their love, support and compassion for New Orleans..."

Twenty one months ago, our citizens, long accustomed to riding out hurricanes that came our way, were devastated when the federal levees designed to protect us failed and allowed our city to flood, claiming lives and livelihoods that lay in its path. You know the story, New Orleans was 80 percent flooded and totally evacuated. Nearly 1,700 people died in the region, thousands were left stranded on roof tops, attics, bridges, and in shelters of last resort. An unprecedented number of homes and businesses were destroyed and many assumed our city would live again only in the history books. But we believed this city was worth saving. We weren't willing to give up the place we called home."

[New Orleans Mayor C. Ray Nagin, May 29, 2007. First State of the City Address Since Hurricane Katrina](#) | [Press Release](#)

Links

- [Rebuilding the Gulf Coast](#) (White House)
- [Louisiana Recovery Authority](#) (State of Louisiana)
- [New Orleans Journey to Recovery & Rebuilding](#) (City of New Orleans)
- [Hurricane Katrina](#) (CNN Special Report 2006) –
- [National Hurricane Center](#)

Hurricane Katrina in Books and Film

"The Tin Roof Blowdown" & "Jesus Out to Sea" by James Lee Burke

James Lee Burke has written frequently about New Orleans and Southern Louisiana. In an interview, Burke said: "For a writer, South Louisiana is a gift from God, because there's no other place quite like it." The latest book in his Dave Robicheaux detective series, *The Tin Roof Blowdown*, captures the chaos and heartbreak wrought by Hurricane Katrina. It has been nominated for the National Book Prize. [Excerpt](#)

In *Jesus Out to Sea*, the title story in a new anthology of Burke short stories, "the devastated New Orleans becomes a kind of archetypal backdrop against which [Burke] can explore his most persistent theme - the pitting of the powerless against the powerful." [Excerpt \(from Esquire fiction\)](#)

More

- [James Lee Burke's Homepage](#)
- [James Lee Burke's Fictional Take on Katrina](#) (National Public Radio)

Sugarcane Academy: How a New Orleans Teacher and his Storm-Struck Students Created A School to Remember by Michael Tisserand

The author and his wife evacuated their two children before the storm and wound up near Lafayette, La. Together with some other evacuee families they set up a one-room school in nearby New Iberia. The students named it Sugarcane Academy, after a nearby cane field where they went for recess occasionally.

Submerged: An Evacuee's Journal

Tisserand also wrote a 10-part series of articles about his experiences in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. [Articles](#)

Spike Lee - When the Levees Broke: A Requiem in Four Acts

Like many who watched the unfolding drama of Hurricane Katrina on television news, director Spike Lee was shocked not only by the scale of the disaster, but by the slow and disorganized response of the emergency and recovery effort. He was moved to document this modern American tragedy. Each chapter of the story has a musical prologue and epilogue that lends the film the flavor of a traditional New Orleans funeral procession.

More

- [Agony of New Orleans, Through Spike Lee's Eyes](#) (New York Times)

9/11 in Literature

"Falling Man" by Don DeLillo (May 2007)

"When he appeared at the door, it was not possible, a man come out of an ash storm, all blood and slag, reeking of burned matter, with pinpoint glints of silvered glass in his face." [Excerpt \(published as "Still Life" in the April 9, 2007 issue of the New Yorker\)](#) | [Audio: Listen to Don DeLillo read from "Falling Man" at a PEN event](#)

"In the opening pages of *Falling Man*, Neudecker emerges from the smoke and ash of the burning tower where he worked and makes his way to the apartment of his ex-wife and young son uptown. Throughout this bold and haunting novel, DeLillo traces the way the events of September 11 kindled or rekindled relationships, reconfigured our emotional landscape, our memory, and our perception of the world. *Falling Man* is a direct encounter with the enormous force of history, yet the story is told through the intimate lives of a few people immediately affected. It is beautiful, heartbreaking, and ultimately, redemptive." Scribner Publishers

"Don DeLillo's novels since 1985 have turned their attention to the paradoxes and contradictions of postmodern culture... His is a world in which the mode of production associated with modernism has given way to the postmodern mode of information in which television shapes perceptions and creates its own self-referential world. As he moved into the 1990s we see that his novels become concerned with what might be called the "global postmodern," the point at which media spectacle itself becomes a world-wide phenomenon, the point at which every interstice of the international world is saturated in capital. His is a global landscape traversed by the indeterminate circulation of signs, by messages of resurgent nationalisms and religious fundamentalism, as well as the violence of international terrorism." (from *Contemporary Literary Criticism Online, Gale Biography Resource Center*) ****Contact your IRC for a copy of this article.**

Reviews & More

- [The Clear Blue Sky](#) Frank Rich. *New York Times*, May 27, 2007
- [Intensity of a Plot: An interview with Don DeLillo](#), *Guernica*, July 2007
- [After the Fall](#). Szalai, Jennifer. *Harper's Magazine*, July 2007 *[Download article](#)
- The Towers, the Terror and a Cosmic Domestic Drama. *Thomas Mallon*, *Wall Street Journal*, May 19, 2007 * [Download article](#)
- [Don DeLillo: An Annotated Bibliography](#)

More Fictional Accounts of September 11, 2001

The Good Life by Jay McInerney (January 2006)

The attacks of September 11, 2001, forced many Americans to reshape their lives. This novel relays the stories of a group of New Yorkers whose sense of identity and community was shaken, and ultimately strengthened.

Dear Zoe by Philip Beard (April 2006)

Tess's half-sister Zoe was killed in a car accident just as thousands were dying on September 11, 2001. Tess had been watching Zoe but left her alone for a few minutes to watch the news on television. She is tormented by personal guilt as well as grief over 9/11.

Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close by Jonathan Safran Foer (April 2006)

Oskar Schell is like any nine-year-old, except that his father has just died in the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center. Oskar sets out on the ultimate scavenger hunt through New York City to discover more about a key he finds among his father's belongings.

Windows on the World by Frederic Beigbeder (March 2006)

This French novel has two interlocking narratives: one follows minute by minute the deadly struggles of a father and his two young sons trapped in Windows on the World, the restaurant on top of the World Trade Center. In the other, a Parisian writer sitting in a restaurant two years after the attacks talks about the novel he is writing about 9/11.



"It was not a street anymore but a world, a time and space of falling ash and near night."

Don DeLillo. *Falling Man*.



The Falling Man. AP Richard Drew

[The Falling Man](#). Tom Junod. *Esquire*, September 2003 Do you remember photographs like this? Children who witnessed people jumping from the towers thought they were birds. 9/11 was probably the most photographed and videotaped day in the world. How were these images used? How do people make sense of them today?

[Side by Side. U.S. Embassy to Berlin, December 2001](#). How Germany and the world reacted to the events of September 11.

Talking About 9/11 in the Classroom

- PBS: [America Responds](#)
These resources, still relevant in 2007, help educators teach students about peace, tolerance, war, patriotism, geography, and related issues.
- New York Times: [America Attacks](#)
Interdisciplinary lesson plans using editorials, cartoons and ethical issues about news reporting on current issues.
- NPR: [Understanding America after 9/11](#)
How did 9/11 change U.S. society and how has country come to terms since then?"
- Poets.Org: [Poems for Tragedy and Grief](#)
"Poems of tragedy and grief address the occasions where words are difficult, from personal heartbreak to the Vietnam War to 9/11." See also: [Literature of War](#)
- Social Science Research Council: ["After September 11" Essay Collection](#)
The events of 9/11 are an extraordinary "teachable moment" to discuss the global context and consequences of terrorism.

Questions for Classroom Discussion

- Where were you on September 11?
- Where did you get the news on September 11? Evaluate media coverage of September 11.
- How should future generations be educated about September 11? Will people's perceptions of the attacks change as time passes? How best should 9/11 be commemorated?
- Has September 11 impacted American and German culture?



Washington National Opera Production of [Porgy and Bess](#). © NPR

"Summertime" - Porgy and Bess by George Gershwin

A Uniquely American Classic, Porgy and Bess is an opera with music by George Gershwin, libretto by DuBose Heyward, and lyrics by Ira Gershwin and Dorothy Heyward. It was based on Heyward's novel *Porgy* and the play of the same name that he co-wrote with his wife Dorothy. It deals with African American life in the fictitious Catfish Row in Charleston, South Carolina, in the early 1930s. Many critics consider *Porgy and Bess* to be the first and finest example of American opera.

Links

- [Porgy and Bess](#) (Library of Congress)
- [The Official Website](#) (George and Ira Gershwin)
- [George Gershwin](#) (PBS)
- [Porgy & Bess: A Brief Outline](#) (Classical Net)
- [Music and Musical Instruments](#) (Smithsonian)

American Culture in Germany

Cindy Sherman: An Icon of American Photography

One of the most striking aspects of Cindy Sherman's photography is her use of self-portraits to 're-invent' fictional and famous situations and characters. She made her breakthrough between 1975 and 1980 with a series of 69 portraits. "Untitled Film Stills" featured her in various disguises that resemble characters from Hollywood melodramas. Her later works are more brutal – confronting the visitor with deformed, disfigured, or demented images.

Links

- ["Untitled Film Stills"](#) Cindy Sherman
- [Cindy Sherman's Biography](#) Guggenheim Museum - [Cindy Sherman Interview](#), Tate Modern –
- [Interview](#). Journal of Contemporary Art
- Sherman talks to David Frankel, *Art Forum*, 03/2003 * [Download article](#)
- Cindy Sherman: Retrospective, *Art Forum*, 05/2006 * [Download article](#)
- "Untitled Film Stills", *Art Forum*, 10/2004 * [Download article](#)



© "Untitled Film Still #21" Series

[Cindy Sherman Retrospective 1975-2005](#)

Berlin, Martin-Gropius-Bau
June 15-September 10, 2007

Webchat Station

Democracy Dialogues [SIGN UP](#)

Learn about the essential role that civil society organizations play in a democracy and their contributions to democratic societies.

August 7, 2007, 3:00 pm

Principles of Effective NGO Governance

August 15, 2007, 3:00 pm

NGOs and Policy Advocacy

Talking About Media

[TakingITGlobal.org](#) is an online community that connects youth to find inspiration, access information, get involved, and take action in their local and global communities. It's the world's most popular online community for young people interested in making a difference, with hundreds of thousands of visitors each month. TIG's highly interactive website provides a platform for expression, connection to opportunities, and support for action.



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About the USA is a digital collection of background resources on American society, culture, and political processes. In addition to featuring selected websites, it provides access to documents in full text format (E-Texts) on topics ranging from the history of German-American relations, government and politics to travel, holidays and sports.

This newsletter is produced by the Information Resource Centers/U.S. Diplomatic Mission to Germany.

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