

***When the Hurricane Blew:***  
**A hurricane story by the students of**  
**Gulf Breeze Elementary School**

By Kimberly Perkins, *Just Read, Florida!*

In 2004, the town of Gulf Breeze in Florida's Panhandle was devastated by direct hits from two major hurricanes. When schools reopened after 19 days, Shelley Mann and her 4<sup>th</sup> grade students at Gulf Breeze Elementary School discussed the aftermath of the hurricanes and how the students had been personally affected by the storms. Teachers had been urged by school psychologists to help the children process the events. The healing process began by hanging big sheets of butcher paper in the halls for the students to relate their experiences.

The sheets of butcher paper hung on the walls like murals of emotion. Each sheet was categorized with various topics such as who was affected, what did individual houses look like, did students evacuate, how did students spend their time without electricity, what were the most vivid memories and what did it feel like when people came to help. Ms. Mann began to examine and contemplate the thoughts and ideas on the butcher paper, and she decided to use these ideas for a Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) writing project.

In preparation for the writing project, Ms. Mann decided to use the framework from the National Scholastic Book Contest. Using chart paper and a PowerPoint presentation to organize the pages, Shelley and her students worked on the project for days, and she would often chant with enthusiasm, "Give me another adjective. I need a juicy detail. We need some luscious language." These inspiring words assisted the children in their FCAT-style story about Hurricane Ivan. The children decided to write from the perspective of a grandfather telling a story to his grandchildren.

"Pictures, pictures, pictures are needed to enhance this story," said Ms. Mann. The school's art teacher and a local graphic artist stepped in to assist the children in developing illustrations for the heart-wrenching story. Finally, Ms. Mann was so captivated and enamored by the writing project that she decided to have it published into a book. A group of classroom parents helped with the copyright and publishing portion of the book. The Community Relations Manager at the local Barnes & Noble Bookstore committed to selling the book and hosting a book signing once the book was published. The enthusiasm and support lead to the published book titled ***When the***

***Hurricane Blew: The Story, The Tips, The Games by Hurricane Kids for Hurricane Kids*** by Mann's Miracles.

The story is a warm, and sometimes humorous, tale told by a grandfather who as a child experienced a direct hit from a major hurricane. At the urging of his grandson, the grandfather tells the story from the moment the principal announces the closing of the school. The grandfather tells about the family preparations, evacuation, returning to his damaged home, cooking out under the stars while the power was out and the challenges of extended displacement until his home could be repaired. The book includes a list of tips for before and after the hurricane created by the kids, such as "Get your special things packed in the car before your sister fills it up with her clothes." Also included is a collection of games and activities kids can enjoy in the car during the evacuation and while the power is out.

Although the thought of a published book never crossed their minds when they began the project, this dynamic teacher and her students created a book that began as a healing tool for a few children and evolved into a beautiful literary expression for children around the world.

**For more information about the book and the Hurricane Kids Network, visit their Web site at: <http://www.hurricanekidsnetwork.org/default.asp>**