After the Storm:
Charleston Earthquake of 1886

Historical Background
“The Charleston earthquake of 1886 devastated the city of Charleston, already suffering from economic decline, urban blight and a category 3 hurricane that damaged 90% of the homes in the city the previous year. Measuring 6.6 on the Richter scale, it was the largest earthquake in the United States to that time and was felt by two-thirds of all Americans. The initial earthquake was felt as far away as Toronto and Cuba with strong aftershocks experienced for days and lesser ones for months. Because of building construction that relied on masonry rather than wood frames, which would move better with the earth, over 2,000 buildings were destroyed, accounting for ¼ of the assets of the city and 5 to 6 million dollars in property damage [$100.5-121.2 million in 2006 dollars]. Racism prevented an accurate count of the number of people who were killed. Some estimates place the number as high as 500. Without state and federal assistance, the people of Charleston affected the most rapid, humane and financially responsible recovery from the destruction of a large scale disaster in American history up to that time. Charlestonians were back to work repairing their city in a week and had rebuilt the city in 14 months. Outpourings of sympathy and assistance came from all over a country that had recently been divided by the Civil War, despite South Carolina’s leadership in it. Additionally, much of what is generally now known about earthquakes was a result of the scientific study of the Charleston quake. As a result of the area’s hard work, the people of Charleston won the respect and admiration of much of the rest of the country and the city was again seen as one that should be visited.”

South Carolina Standards
8-5.5 Summarize the human, agricultural, and economic costs of natural disasters and wars that occurred in South Carolina or involved South Carolinians in the late nineteenth century, including the Charleston earthquake of 1886, the hurricane of 1893, and the Spanish American War.

Objectives
- Students will assess the damage done by the earthquake of 1886 by analyzing pictures from the 1886 Charleston Earthquake Collection.
- Students will use information inferred from images to create a specific plan of action for a farmer living in Charleston in 1886 after the Earthquake

Time Required
1 class period

Recommended Grade Level
Middle

Lesson Materials
- The 1886 Charleston Earthquake Collection via the University of South Carolina’s Digital Collections Library
Analyzing Photographs sheet. Go to http://www.loc.gov/teachers/usingprimarysources/guides.html for this resource. (Download the Analyzing Photographs and Prints document.)

Lesson Preparation
1. Visit the 1886 Charleston Earthquake collection via USC’s Digital Collection Library
2. Navigate the site to become more familiar.
3. Download the presentation of photographs attached to this lesson packet.
4. Develop a list of information that is important for students to understand about the damage to farms and livelihood caused by the 1886 Charleston Earthquake. (Refer to the background passage above.)

Lesson Procedure
1. Explain to students that there were many causes for the decline of farming in South Carolina. One cause was the 1886 Charleston Earthquake. Explain to students that they will be using photograph analysis skills to assess the damage caused by the Earthquake. After their assessment, students will write out a plan of action for a farmer living in Charleston after the earthquake.
2. As the teacher displays each image, she/he helps students observe, reflect and make inferences about each.
3. After the photo analysis phase, students should be instructed to assess (summarize) the damage to Charleston farm life by answering the following questions:
   a. Where would a farmer stand financially after such a disaster?
   b. What options would a farmer have after such a disaster?
   c. If a farmer decided to restore his farm, how difficult would it have been?
   d. Given what you know about history, what industry might be the next best investment for a farmer who decided to find a different career after the earthquake? (This question may be used for students who may have advanced knowledge of the time period.)
4. Add information from your own presentation to help students understand the impact of the earthquake just twenty-one years after the end of the Civil War. Emphasize how devastating it would be to undergo a major war, natural disaster and changing social climate.
5. Ask students: What would you do if you were a farmer after the 1886 Charleston Earthquake? Direct students to create a plan of action for a farmer living in Charleston after the earthquake.
6. Allow students to share their plan of action either with the entire class or with a partner.
Assessment
Have students create a newspaper headline that may have been written for the topic we are studying and to capture the main idea of the event.

Lesson Extension Options
- Have students illustrate their headline
- Have students research to find newspapers articles of the time that help explain how people reacted.

Digital Collections Information
This lesson plan is based on images and/or documents derived from the 1886 Charleston Earthquake collection available from the University of South Carolina’s Digital Collections Library.

To see other collections that may be helpful to your search, visit the Digital Collections homepage or visit SCDL’s collections.
After the Storm
CALHOUN ST., NEAR AND EAST OF MEETING ST.
View in CHARLESTON, S. C., after the Earthquake,
August 31st, 1886.
Tent-life after the earthquake. Rubble & tents.