

Reading Comprehension Worksheet: Firsthand vs. Secondhand

Read the short story and answer each question.



Two Views of the Tornado

Firsthand Account – Journal Entry by Ellie (Age 10)

May 14

I've never been so scared in my life. The sirens went off just after dinner. My mom yelled for us to run to the basement. I grabbed my backpack and our dog, Rocky. The wind outside was howling like a monster. I could hear things banging against the house. We sat under the stairs, holding hands and listening to the roar. When it got quiet, we came out. Our fence was gone. The big tree in our front yard was lying across the street. But we were safe—and that's all that mattered.

Secondhand Account – Newspaper Report

Storm Hits Lincoln County, Destroys Homes

On May 14, a tornado swept through Lincoln County, damaging more than 30 homes and knocking out power for thousands. Winds reached up to 120 miles per hour, and multiple trees were uprooted. Emergency crews arrived quickly, and no serious injuries were reported. Meteorologists say the storm developed from a fast-moving cold front that collided with warm air in the region. The tornado lasted about 12 minutes before moving out of the area.



Name: _____

Two Wild Worlds

1. Which of the following best describes the difference between the two accounts?

- A. The journal is personal and emotional, while the news article gives facts and statistics
- B. Both focus only on the weather forecast
- C. The newspaper gives more emotion than the journal
- D. The journal talks about power lines being fixed

2. Which sentence would only be found in a firsthand account?

- A. The tornado lasted about 12 minutes
- B. Emergency crews arrived quickly
- C. I grabbed my backpack and our dog, Rocky
- D. Thirty homes were damaged

3. Fill in the blank:

The _____ account describes what the author **saw and felt**, while the **secondhand account** gives a summary of **facts and events**.

4. How do the tone and focus differ between the two accounts? Use examples from both texts.

5. Which account helped you understand what it felt like to be in the tornado? Which helped you understand what happened in the community? Why?



Instructional Guide

Guide Reading Level: P

Lexile Level: 645L-795L

Grade Level: 4th Grade, Beginning of the Year

Genre: Informational Nonfiction – Natural Disaster

Introducing the Text

“Today we’re going to read about a tornado from two different viewpoints. One is from a girl who lived through it, and the other is a news report. We’ll practice noticing how each account tells the story in a different way.”

Vocabulary: firsthand, secondhand, perspective, tone, report

Before Reading Discussion Questions

1. What’s the difference between writing about something you lived through and writing about something you read or heard about?
 2. Have you ever kept a journal or read a news story?
 3. What kind of details would you expect in a news report?
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During Reading Discussion Questions

1. How does Ellie describe what happened during the tornado?
 2. What facts does the newspaper include that Ellie doesn’t mention?
 3. How do the feelings in the journal entry compare to the facts in the article?
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After Reading Discussion Questions

1. Which text gives you a stronger emotional picture of the event?
 2. How do the two texts work together to help you understand the tornado better?
 3. Why is it important to read both firsthand and secondhand accounts?
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Activity Idea

Have students create a two-column chart labeled "Firsthand" and "Secondhand." Ask them to sort phrases from both texts into the correct column. Then they write a short paragraph explaining one key difference between the two perspectives, using evidence from both.

