



Maggie's Activity Pack

Name _____

Date _____

Haiti: A Country in Need

On January 12, 2010 shortly before 5:00 in the afternoon, a 7.0 earthquake shook the country of Haiti. Because the center of this earthquake was so close to the capital city of Port-au-Prince, thousands of people were affected by this disaster. By the next day, needed aid started to pour into the country. Rescue teams and their dogs were packing up to offer help to the Haitian people. This terrible earthquake means that the people of this country will need support for a long time. Where is this country? What did it look like before the Earthquake of 2010? People who want to help may want to know more about Haiti.

The Geography of Haiti

The Republic of Haiti is located on a large island in the Caribbean known as Hispaniola. It shares this island with the country, the Dominican Republic. Haiti is the third largest country in the Caribbean while the Dominican Republic is the Caribbean's second largest country. Just a short 45 nautical miles away is the Caribbean's largest country, Cuba.

Haiti's terrain varies from tall mountainous regions to beautiful river valleys. Many species of birds live in Haiti's mountains. Thousands of plants grow on these mountainsides. But, unfortunately, in recent years, these forests have been cut down causing erosion. Adding to the environmental troubles of Haiti are the recent hurricanes that have resulted in flooding and even mudslides.

Troubled History

Haiti has had a troubled history since Christopher Columbus "claimed" the area for Spain. Europeans brought diseases to the island. Those who lived on Haiti were forced to work for these rulers. Soon people from Africa were brought to Haiti as slaves. Later, France took over parts of the island. In the early 1900s, the United States occupied Haiti. In recent years, Haiti has had many political troubles. U.S. President Jimmy Carter has tried to help this nation.

Haiti's Culture

Haiti's history means it has a rich and unique culture. To this day, French is spoken in Haiti. The other official language of the country is Haitian Creole which reflects the African heritage of many of the people. There are many African influences along with aspects of French culture in the music of Haiti. *Kompa* is one of these musical styles that uses French ballroom dancing and the rhythms of African music.

Education in Haiti

Even before the earthquake, many organizations were working to help Haiti. This country is one of the poorest countries in the Americas. About 80% of people live below the poverty level. About half of the people cannot read or write. Many children struggle to even reach sixth grade. Like other developing countries, children are needed to work at home and on the family farms. Organizations from various countries are trying to build schools. These agencies also run orphanages and offer food to those who need help.

Need for Help

Haiti has been a country in need of support. Now with the devastation caused by the earthquake, the people of Haiti need even more help. Many organizations are rushing to support this island nation. How can you help?

Thinking About Haiti

These questions will help you better understand the serious problems in Haiti today. Use the information in the article to help you write complete sentence answers.

1. Describe the consequences of cutting down trees. Consider what this means for both people and the environment.

2. As you read, several devastating hurricanes have hit Haiti in recent years. How might these storms have hurt an already poverty-stricken country?

3. Haiti has a low literacy rate. Many children leave school before reaching sixth grade. Others may not attend at all. How might this contribute to the problems in this country?

4. Cities like San Francisco have strict codes to make sure buildings can withstand an earthquake. Imagine buildings and homes in a country like Haiti. Why do you think so many buildings were destroyed?

5. Use your answers above to write your thoughts about these critical questions: Why might the consequences for an earthquake in Haiti be more severe than the consequences for an earthquake in California? What factors might make relief efforts difficult? Now participate in a class discussion. Share your ideas.

Dear Colleague,

Like you, we at Maggie's Earth Adventures, were saddened to hear about the terrible earthquake that hit Haiti on January 12, 2010. We knew you would be talking about this tragedy with your students and wanted to help you educate your class about this country. As you are aware, Haiti is a country that has struggled both historically and in recent years. In discussing this issue with Mason Bryant Howard, our Executive Director, we thought about Vygotsky and the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Unlike stage theorists, Vygotsky suggests children can and will understand "big" ideas if we ask the correct questions and get them closer and closer into the "zone" where this thinking can take place and will result in critical conclusions. We knew it would be important for your students to better understand the many factors that must be taken into consideration as rescue teams make their way to this island nation. So, while the final questions might seem advanced, we carefully planned the preceding questions to get your students into the ZPD to better consider the "big" ideas. Below, we offer some thoughts to these questions and even suggestion for scaffolding questions to help you guide your students.

1. Deforestation means that soil is more easily eroded. If this is all your students say, you can follow-up by asking what soil erosion might mean for the amount of food being grown. Students should be questioned to result in the idea that this erosion means farms will not produce the number of crops necessary to both sustain a family and sell any excess. This leads to greater poverty. You can then ask if they would stay on a farm that wasn't growing enough food or if they would go in search of a job. This may have led to even more crowding in the city, Port-au-Prince, where the earthquake struck.
2. Recent storms mean that many buildings, roads, and coasts are already damaged, making them even more vulnerable to the effects of the earthquake. You may want to talk about climate change. Scientists tell us that storms, like the hurricanes that hit Haiti, will become more severe due to our changing climate. Encourage children to consider how this impacts people in the poorest nations who often must build shelter using poor building materials.
3. Ask children to think about all they are learning because of this activity. Children who do not go to school do not have these opportunities. They may not understand the role of deforestation or of climate change. Additionally, during the relief effort, it is likely that pamphlets and signs will be posted explaining the help that is available. Those who cannot read will be at a disadvantage as they struggle to find the necessary assistance.
4. Depending on the background information of the students in your class, you may need to show them photos of homes in Haiti. Discuss how these homes do not have steel beams, etc to help protect against earthquakes thus resulting in a great deal of devastation.

It is our hope that the above questions and answers will lead to a meaningful discussion in your class that helps children understand the immense devastation in Haiti. As we write this activity, there are many relief efforts being mobilized. Please let us know what your school is doing!

Thank you,
Kathy and Mason

Goals:

Students will read an article that briefly explains the history, geography, environmental factors, and current situation in Haiti. Follow-up questions are designed to get students into the Zone of Proximal Development so they can critically consider why the consequences of the Earthquake of 2010 are so severe for this island nation. This activity is available on the primary and intermediate levels and correlates with the National Social Studies Standards: Culture; Power, Authority, and Governance; and Civic Ideals and Practices.