

# Hope After Helene

*This lesson can be presented over 1-2 sessions. Instructors should feel free to use whichever discussion questions and activities you think best for your class or group. We advise giving students the sheet with the definitions of the virtues before the discussion questions.*

## Lesson Goals

Help students...

- Develop empathy for victims of natural disasters, with a focus on the challenges faced by those affected by Hurricane Helene.
- Appreciate the power of community support, both local and distant, and the role of collective action in overcoming challenges.
- Identify and value diverse acts of generosity that contribute to recovery efforts.
- Understand how hope and resilience enable individuals and communities to recover and adapt to difficulties.
- Cultivate a deeper and more authentic sense of gratitude for basic necessities, for each other and for our communities.

## Highlighted Virtues and Character Traits

**Caring:** to help others; a caring person lives with empathy, compassion and generosity

**Empathy:** trying to understand another person's situation, entering into the feeling or spirit of others and imagining yourself in another person's situation.

**Compassion:** feeling of sympathy for the distress of others, with the desire to help

**Generosity:** giving freely of our own possessions, time and/or talent.

**Gratitude:** the quality of being thankful; readiness to show appreciation

**Hope:** confident expectation of achieving a goal or wish; hopes are realized in building and implementing a strategy to achieve a goal

**Resilience:** the ability to recover from, or adjust to change and difficulties; choosing to use setbacks as an opportunity to learn and grow.

**Solidarity:** unity from a shared common purpose and / or interest; active loyalty within a group; mutual support within a group; being present with others

### Leader Introduction:

Imagine losing nearly everything—your home, your school or work, and even your neighbors and other people whom you love. That’s what happened to the small town of Swannanoa and larger regions of North Carolina when Hurricane Helene struck in September. Unfortunately, as we head into the holidays many people in this region are still suffering from destroyed homes, lost income, the cold and grieving. But despite the devastation, the people of this community are coming together to help one another, and with people from across the country, showing incredible strength and care for each other. Volunteers are working tirelessly to provide food, shelter, and other support, proving that even in the hardest times hope, unity and even gratitude can shine through.

As we watch their story, think about how their example can inspire us, not just during the holiday season, but all year long.

### Lesson Video:

This first video provides a good overview of the disaster and some of the relief efforts.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GFan-8X8Xvk>

This second video digs more deeply into the story of one young woman helping her neighbors in need.

[Nurse honored as Hyundai Hometown Hero for Helene relief efforts](#)

### Leader Summary:

The people of North Carolina are showing us how to be resilient in rebuilding their lives step by step, coming together in solidarity to feed their neighbors, provide other basic necessities, find shelter for each other, and provide hope for a better future. Another inspiring theme expressed in these stories is a strong sense of gratitude for even the smallest assistance provided, for the gift of each other, for their communities and the opportunity to rebuild. Hurricane Helene may have destroyed thousands of homes and businesses, but it couldn’t destroy the spirit of the individuals and communities of North Carolina.

As we move into the discussion, let’s consider how the people of North Carolina can help us to focus in the holiday season on what’s truly important.

### Discussion Question Options: *(discussion prompts / answers are in parentheses)*

Before beginning our discussion, let’s read over the virtues and their definitions, found in the online lesson as a separate document.

1. What challenges are the people of North Carolina facing after Hurricane Helene?  
(loss of homes, lack of basic necessities like electricity and running water, destroyed businesses, financial struggles, emotional hardships, loss of loved ones and neighbors)

Let’s practice **empathy** in trying to place ourselves in another person’s situation. What do you think it would be like, and how would you feel, if suddenly a storm or another event destroyed your home and left you and most of your community without necessities like food or water?

2. How have the people of Swannanoa and the woman in the second story, Jennifer Triplett, demonstrated their **care** for each other after the hurricane?  
(the owner of the pretzel shop converted his business into a community food hub; the massage therapist is providing free massages; Triplett is organizing donations of appliances, furniture and food; the local residents are encouraging each other that together they will recover)

What are some examples of how the larger community and volunteers from outside of the town worked together to help after the storm? (providing shelter through donated RVs, the “flush brigade”)

In all of these actions of coming together to help others, what virtues are being lived out? (caring in acting to help, **empathy** in trying to understand another person’s situation, **compassion** in having a desire to help, **generosity** in giving their time, effort, and resources, **solidarity** in individuals joining together unified by the cause of helping others in need)

3. Why do you think community support—both from neighbors and people far away—is important to those going through hard times? (The practical assistance provided helps to ease their suffering. Those in need experience a sense of unity with others and the inspiration to keep going knowing that they are not alone.)
4. What virtue gives the residents of North Carolina the belief that their situation can improve, and is helping motivate them to rebuild their lives? (**Hope**)

Let’s share some stories of when we experienced a sense of **hope** when working toward a goal or overcoming a setback?

5. Many people in North Carolina are expressing a strong sense of **gratitude**, even in extremely difficult circumstances. What are they grateful for?  
(simply being alive, each other and their renewed sense of community, basic necessities, acts of generosity from volunteers)
6. What are some things in your life—big or small—that you feel especially grateful for?

How can we show gratitude for even the simplest things that we have in our lives?  
(expressing gratitude and then doing something to show our gratitude such as helping out within our family, teachers, coaches, those who clean our school; taking care of the things that we have)

7. Let’s share some stories of when we were faced with a setback or challenge in our lives and lived out the virtue of **resilience** in engaging the setback or challenge to move forward with our lives.
8. If our community were struck with a disaster similar to Hurricane Helene in scope and damage, do you think we would respond as well as the people of North Carolina have?

### Journal Writing Options:

1. List three things in your life that you're grateful for, even if they're small. Why are these things meaningful to you, and how can you show gratitude for them?
2. Based on what you've learned about the people of North Carolina, write about one virtue they demonstrated that inspires you the most. How can you live out that virtue in your own life?
3. Write about a challenge you once faced in your life and successfully engaged it with a sense of hope and proved to yourself that you are resilient.

### Extended Activities:

1. In small groups of 2-4, have students brainstorm strategies for responding to different types of setbacks or challenges that they may experience in their lives. Assign each group a different scenario to work on. Examples can be losing a game that they should have won, struggling with a subject in school, moving to a new community, bullying, serious illness within their family.

2. Discuss as a class or group the different ways you can raise money for a charity that benefits the victims of Hurricane Helene. Then choose a charity / charities to support.

These charities have been reviewed and vetted by NBC News [How to Help Hurricane Helene Victims](#). Follow these links to donate and find out how you can help.

- [Baby2Baby](#): Supplies for children and families
- [The Humane Society of the United States' Emergency Animal Relief Fund](#): Helping animals
- [World Central Kitchen](#): Offering food and fresh water
- [Save the Children](#): Helping children and schools
- [American Red Cross](#): Many ways to help, including [Disaster Mental Health](#)
- [BeLoved Asheville](#): Delivering food and vital supplies
- [Manna FoodBank](#): Feeding hurricane victims
- [Direct Relief](#): Providing much-needed medical resources

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