

# Is It Natural?

## Directions

Read the excerpt below and work as a group.

1. Kendra Pierre-Louis talks about *hazards* vs. *disasters*. What is the difference between these two things according to her?
2. Summarize the big ideas from the excerpt. What is the author's main point? Underline or highlight parts of the article that support your argument.
3. Discuss what you agree with and disagree with in this article.

## Excerpt From Article

*Popular Science*, “There’s Actually No Such Thing as a Natural Disaster,” by Kendra Pierre-Louis, October 2, 2017, <https://www.popsci.com/no-such-thing-as-natural-disaster>

Whatever you call these disasters, don’t ever call them natural. There’s nothing “natural”—which is to say, nothing inevitable—about a disaster.

Most of what we call natural disasters (tornadoes, droughts, hurricanes) are indeed natural, though human contributions may increase their likelihood or intensity. But they aren’t disasters—they’re hazards. If a hurricane slams into land where no one lives, it isn’t a disaster; it’s weather. A disaster is when a natural hazard meets a human population. And often, that intersection is far from natural.

If you knowingly built your house in the path of a moving train, most wouldn’t call the inevitable collision an accident.

To be clear, this isn’t to blame any one person—or group of people—for their misfortunes. Many live in risky areas because the risks weren’t made clear to them, or because the areas only became risky after the fact as humans further altered the landscape. Wealth is, of course, a factor. Stymied by policies that have made it hard for the U.S. territory to be financially solvent, Puerto Rico hasn’t exactly been able to prioritize investment in infrastructure. And in some places, government policy has pushed people onto marginal land, forcing them to eke out their existence in places particularly primed for disasters.

When hurricane Sandy battered New York City, for example, some of the hardest hit communities were located on the Rockaway Peninsula. As its name suggests, the location is essentially an 11-mile-long barrier reef, with Jamaica Bay on one side and the Atlantic Ocean on the other. Its location makes it a magnet for tropical storms, and a disaster waiting to happen: evacuation is difficult, especially if you don’t have a car. And yet, the city deliberately pushed poor people, disabled people, and the elderly onto the land.