

Thursday 10 January 2013 – Morning

GCSE ENGLISH/ENGLISH LANGUAGE

A680/01/RBI Information and Ideas (Foundation Tier)

READING BOOKLET INSERT

Duration: 2 hours



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The following two texts are newspaper articles written during a period of severe weather.

There's nothing freaky about our 'freak' weather

So, why all the fuss about our 'freak' weather? Recently the media were astonished that a tornado could rip through quiet residential streets of London, leaving 100 houses damaged and several people injured. 'Freak' was the favourite description – after all this is the sort of weather you get in Oklahoma City, not London.



But tornados have been ripping through Britain for centuries. London was hit by an even worse tornado in 1944, which left a scene of devastation. And the deadliest tornado in British history struck in October 1913, when six people were killed in Glamorgan, South Wales.

There is nothing freaky or unusual about tornados in this country, though they only become headlines when big urban areas are affected. Back in 2006 a village near Aberystwyth was badly hit when a tornado turned over caravans, sent chimneys crashing and left debris scattered up to 20 miles away. It was barely mentioned in the national media.

The trouble is that we seem to think British weather is a bit of a pussycat – soft and mild most of the time, with the occasional outburst when it gets temperamental. But in reality our 'freak' weather is not so freakish after all.

No, the British weather is a beast, not a pussycat, and demands respect. We live on the battlefield between warring air masses: bitterly cold Atlantic air to the north, and warm, subtropical air to the south. This is the source of our current storms, downpours, winds and, of course, tornados.

In some cases our weather can be truly monstrous. The floods of 1953 along the East Coast and Thames estuary killed more than 300 people, and came close to submerging London. This led to the Thames Barrier being built. The great storm of October 1987 killed 19 people, destroyed 15 million trees and cost around £1.5 billion. In 2003 more than 2000 deaths were blamed on the blistering hot summer.

Lightning is reckoned to cause £24 million of damage each year in the UK to electronic equipment, computers, fax machines, scanners, printers and telephones – even when equipment is switched off but still plugged into wall sockets.

Britain has always been a dangerous place. It was no accident that the first Roman invasion 2,000 years ago got blown off course by a storm in the English Channel, as was the Spanish Armada in 1588.

There was a great deal more respect for the weather when ships were driven by the winds and much of the population worked the land. In modern life we are protected from the elements, but the violence of the weather is finally becoming clearer – in home buildings insurance. The insurance industry knows well that natural disasters are growing worse and more expensive as sea levels rise, storms turn more violent, and heat-waves reach subtropical proportions.

This week, the rains may be crashing down, storm-force winds howling and tornados raging. But they are all a timely reminder that Britain's weather can be wild and furious and that it is growing steadily worse. The so-called 'freak' incidents are going to become horribly familiar in the future.

THE BIG PUDDLE

▶ 16 die as tropical storm hits New York ▶ Millions flee their homes in flood chaos

THE Big Apple got a big ducking yesterday – and was left counting the cost as tropical storm Irene swept through.

Mercifully the one-time hurricane – nearly 500 miles across – had lost some of its power as it struck New York.

But winds of 65mph still caused chaos, flooding coastal suburbs and knocking out electricity to three million homes.

At least 16 died as America's eastern seaboard was pounded, with damage running into billions of dollars.

Up to 65 million people had been put on high alert – the largest number of Americans ever affected by a single storm.

Thousands of flights were grounded as the hurricane lashed North Carolina, Virginia and Florida. All public transport in New York was shut down.

Millions of homes were evacuated, and a nuclear reactor in Maryland was closed after being damaged by flying debris.

In the lower Manhattan district of New York about a foot of water swamped roads. Heavy rains and wind forced the closure of three bridges leading to The Rockaway Peninsula facing the Atlantic.



RAIN DANCE Teenagers defy storm in Times Square

Further east, sand barriers built to hold off the flooding and to protect coastal businesses appeared to have failed.

The storm dumped up to eight inches of rain in the area outside Washington. However most cities in the area appeared to have avoided major damage.

Rick Meehan, the Mayor of Ocean City, Maryland, said: 'It looks like we dodged a missile on this one.'

From the Carolinas to Maine, tens of millions of people were in the path of Irene, which howled ashore in North Carolina on



DELUGE A New York cab is stranded in floodwater

Saturday, bringing torrential rain, felling trees and causing widespread disruption to power supplies.

In New York, the city that never sleeps, Times Square was virtually deserted apart from emergency workers – and a handful of brave young revellers who went dancing and

singing in the rain.

Broadway shows were cancelled and stores closed as most people heeded the Mayor of New York's warning to stay indoors.

Earlier about 370,000 New York residents in low-lying areas were ordered to leave their homes.

Hotel doorman Scott Baxter said: 'You could see newspaper stands floating down the street.' As the centre of the storm passed over Central Park at mid-morning, floodwater reached the two-foot wheel arches of cars stranded in Manhattan, and a mini tidal wave deluged streets in the Queens district.

But many New Yorkers breathed a sigh of relief after the storm didn't come close to inflicting the kind of catastrophic damage that had been feared.

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