



Lesson:

Rescue from Ground Zero

Grades 9-12



A remarkable story of survival and resilience that shined light through the darkness of September 11, 2001.

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Implementation Schedule

It is recommended that the lesson implementation take place at any time during the school year, especially on or near September 11.

Lesson Description

This lesson is intended to teach students about the experiences of three people at the World Trade Center (WTC) on September 11, 2001. Two of the people were trapped for many hours and rescued and the other person is one of many first responders involved in the rescue.

Background for the Teacher

Video Summary



Lt. John McLoughlin (top left) and Police Officer Will Jimeno (top right) are World Trade Center survivors. Fire Lt. John Kiernan (bottom left) is one of many first responders involved in the rescue.

Lieutenant John McLoughlin from the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey Police Department (PAPD), Police Officer Will Jimeno from the PAPD and Lieutenant John Kiernan from the Fire Department of the City of New York (FDNY) discuss their experiences on September 11, 2001. Lieutenant McLoughlin recounts the morning of September 11, 2001, when he was Sergeant in the PAPD. Upon learning there was a problem at the World Trade Center (WTC) all units were called back to their desks to mobilize and go down to the WTC to assist. Lieutenant McLoughlin asked for volunteers who knew how to use SCOTT air packs to go into the building. Officer Jimeno and other officers volunteered. They gathered safety equipment and headed across the WTC concourse to Tower 1, also known as the North Tower of the Twin Towers. While they were in the concourse between Tower 1 and Tower 2, which was the South Tower of the Twin Towers, Lieutenant McLoughlin looked into the lobby of Tower 2 and could see it rolling towards them. Officer Jimeno saw a large fireball from Tower 2 and looked up to see everything shaking. The men did not know the building was collapsing, and Lieutenant McLoughlin ordered his crew to run towards a freight elevator lobby, hopeful that the huge debris field would keep rolling past them and they could seek shelter from the walls of the elevator lobby. Officer Jimeno grabbed his PAPD radio and started yelling into it, "Officers down." Three of the men were able to make the turn into the freight elevator lobby and were alive, but trapped, when the building came down. Lieutenant McLoughlin was unable to hear or see immediately after the collapse, but then when his senses came back, he asked everyone to sound off, or say their names aloud, to see what their situations were. The only officers who answered were Officer Jimeno and Officer Dominick Pezzulo. Officer Pezzulo was trapped, but able to free himself. The men still did not know that the entire building had collapsed on them. Lieutenant McLoughlin asked Officer Pezzulo to try and dig Officer Jimeno out first, then dig him out, however Officer Jimeno was trapped

under concrete and Officer Pezzulo was unable to free him. When Tower 1 collapsed they heard another loud roar and debris started falling into the area where they were trapped. A piece of debris fatally hit Officer Pezzulo. Lieutenant McLoughlin became even more trapped, with debris crushing his bones. Fireballs were coming through the area, burning Officer Jimeno's arm, but he was able to throw dirt on the fires to put them out. Officer Pezzulo's gun started to discharge, and bullets started firing in the area where Officer Jimeno and Lieutenant McLoughlin were trapped. After hours had passed Officer Jimeno heard someone and yelled to them. Two men from the Emergency Service Unit (ESU) and a former paramedic managed to work their way to Officer Jimeno with the help of many other first responders. They removed debris and crawled into the hole to rescue Officer Jimeno. Officer Jimeno asked them to rescue his Sergeant, but the men thought he was talking about Officer Pezzulo, who was deceased, so they covered Officer Pezzulo's body and told Officer Jimeno they had to get him out first. The men were told to leave Officer Jimeno behind, because the conditions were very dangerous, but they refused the orders. After working for hours, they were able to free Officer Jimeno, and they realized that Lieutenant McLoughlin was buried beneath him. Lieutenant Kiernan and other rescuers made their way to the area where Officer Jimeno was extricated, and Lieutenant McLoughlin was buried deeper. Lieutenant Kiernan along with the group of responders began digging with their hands and crawling through the hole to try and reach Lieutenant McLoughlin, who was trapped several feet below Officer Jimeno. The space was small so Lieutenant Kiernan and the responders could not use any equipment or safety gear. They crawled through the hole with fires and smoke around them until they made a passageway to Lieutenant McLoughlin. Once they were able to free Lieutenant McLoughlin up to his armpit, they

were able to bring in a paramedic to give him an IV and help slow the crush syndrome that was setting in and beginning to shut down Lieutenant McLoughlin's organs. After working for hours and rotating crews of people under the supervision of the Rescue Units, they were able to free Lieutenant McLoughlin. When Lieutenant McLoughlin was extricated and moved to a hospital, he was put in a medically induced coma for six weeks. He was in a wheelchair for two years and had occupational and physical therapy for three years to learn to walk again. Altogether, he has had 34 operations and he still has open wounds that doctors have been unable to close. He also has health issues with his sinuses, lungs and stomach from the debris that was pushed into his body. Officer Jimeno uses a leg brace to walk and has many scars, but he is grateful for all the people who risked their lives to help them.

The movie, *World Trade Center*, directed by American film director and screenwriter Oliver Stone, tells the heroic tale of Lieutenant John McLoughlin and Police Officer Will Jimeno. During the film's production, Oliver Stone called upon many of the brave rescuers to give details about their experiences and help make the movie as authentic as possible. After many conversations on set about the technique and skill used to rescue Officer Jimeno and Lieutenant McLoughlin, many of the rescuers played themselves in the movie's rescue scene, rescuing Lieutenant McLoughlin, who was played by actor Nicholas Cage.

1. Begin With an Essential Question

What was the experience of someone who lived through September 11, 2001?

(The Essential Question is not designed to be answered directly. It is the overarching or big question. Its answer is contained within student responses to the guided questions.)

2. Introduce the Lesson

Teacher reads the overarching question of the lesson.

Teacher asks students to share if they have any prior knowledge of the 9/11 attacks.

Teacher explains, “On September 11, 2001, America was attacked in multiple cities by a group named al-Qaeda. The group hijacked four planes and crashed them into multiple locations. Two planes were crashed into the Twin Towers, two of the world’s tallest buildings located in New York City. One plane was crashed into the Pentagon, which is headquarters for the U.S. Department of Defense. Passengers on board the fourth plane fought against their hijackers and the plane was brought down in an empty field near Shanksville, PA, about 20 minutes flying time from Washington D.C. According to the 9/11 Commission Report it is believed that the hijackers’ target for that plane was likely the White House or the U.S. Capitol. Today we are going to be focusing on the attack in New York City at the Twin Towers. The Twin Towers were two buildings that were part of a group of buildings that made up the World Trade Center. When the buildings were struck with planes hundreds of emergency personnel were called to help evacuate the area and contain the damage that was caused. With civilians and emergency personnel trapped inside, the Twin Towers collapsed. 2,753 people lost their lives in New York City on September 11, 2001. There were only a few people who were alive and rescued from Ground Zero, the area in NYC where both buildings collapsed. Today we are going to watch a video that shows the experience of the last two men who were rescued after being buried under the ruins of the World Trade Center and one of the many rescuers who worked tirelessly to help get them out.”

3. Introduce the Video

Teacher says, “We are going to view a video where two Port Authority Police Department Officers, Lieutenant John McLoughlin, who was a Sergeant at the time, and Officer Will Jimeno recount their morning and the hours they spent trapped in the rubble on September 11, 2001. We will also see Lieutenant John Kiernan from the Fire Department of the City of New York discuss what the rescue of Lieutenant McLoughlin was like. As we watch, let’s focus on the different experiences that each of them had, despite being a part of the same tragic event in American history.”

Teacher then plays the video of Rescue from Ground Zero located [here](https://www.t2t.org/lesson-rescue-from-ground-zero) [T2T.org/lesson-rescue-from-ground-zero].

4. Students’ Task

After viewing the video, students should answer the following questions.

1. What were the conditions like when Lieutenant McLoughlin and Officer Jimeno were first trapped? How did those conditions change after the second Tower fell?
(Responses may vary, but the officers were trapped between concrete and debris. Lieutenant McLoughlin and Officer Jimeno were unable to move most of their bodies and it was very painful. Officer Dominick Pezzulo was able to free himself and tried to free Officer Jimeno but was unable to. When the second Tower fell, debris fell in the area where they were trapped, fatally injuring Officer Pezzulo, and crushing Lieutenant McLoughlin further. The conditions became extremely painful for Lieutenant McLoughlin and Officer Jimeno. As time went on, fire was burning Officer Jimeno and bullets were discharging from Officer Pezzulo’s gun.)

2. When Lieutenant Kiernan and the other responders began digging to reach Lieutenant McLoughlin, what challenges did they face?

(Responses may vary, but Lieutenant Kiernan and the other responders had to crawl through the debris without any gear or equipment to reach Lieutenant McLoughlin. There was fire and smoke and they needed to move the debris without any tools, because the space was too small to fit the machinery they would typically use. The rescue took hours, so the crews of people working painstakingly to free Lieutenant McLoughlin had to be rotated.)

3. What challenges did Lieutenant McLoughlin and Officer Jimeno face when they were finally rescued from Ground Zero?

(Responses may vary, but Lieutenant McLoughlin suffered from crush syndrome and his lungs and kidneys started shutting down. Luckily, a paramedic was able to give him an IV, while trapped, to help suppress it until he could reach a hospital for more medical help. When Lieutenant McLoughlin was extricated and moved to a hospital, he was put in a medically induced coma for six weeks, he was in a wheelchair for two years and had occupational and physical therapy for three years to learn to walk again. Altogether, he has had 34 operations and he still has open wounds that doctors have been unable to close. He also has health issues with his sinuses, lungs and stomach from the debris that was pushed into his body. Officer Jimeno uses a leg brace to walk and has many scars.)

Teacher should go over the answers to the questions and allow the students time to share their answers with the class.

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