

BLACKOUT

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by John Rocco

Ages: 4 - 8; Grades: PreK - 3

Themes: Families, Problem-Solving, Feelings

Running Time: 7 minutes

SUMMARY

It was a normal, hot, busy night in the city, when suddenly... **all** the lights went out. A young boy and his family are broken away from their usual distractions and discover how fun life can be when everything is different. From block parties on the roof, to free ice cream, to the starry sky, the family re-discovers the city and each other.

OBJECTIVES

- Students will make text-to-self and text-to-world connections.
- Students will compare and contrast a nonfiction account of a blackout with the movie.
- Students will identify the pros and cons of losing power and form an opinion about this event.
- Students will use a mentor text to write about a time when something unusual happened with their family.

BEFORE VIEWING ACTIVITIES

Review that strong readers make connections with the text. Explain that readers can connect a text to their own lives (text-to-self) or to things that happen in the real world (text-to-world). Ask students for examples of connections that they have found with books that they're reading independently, or with books that the class has shared. Then, tell students that they're going to watch a movie about night in New York City when the power went out. Ask students if they have ever experienced losing power, and invite them to share some of their stories. Encourage them to watch and listen for text-to-self or text-to-world connections that they can make with the movie. Stop the movie periodically to give students time to share their connections.

Define the concept of pros and cons for students. Give some examples that are easy for them to relate to, such as the pros and cons of having a babysitter. Then, challenge them to think about the pros and cons of losing power. Scribe their ideas on a T-chart. If students are stuck, ask:

- What kinds of fun things might you do if the power were out that you wouldn't normally do?
- What kinds of things do you like to do, that you couldn't do without power?
- What would be more difficult to do without power?
- Do you think you would like not having power? Why or why not?

Tell students that they are going to see a movie about a boy and his family who live in New York City when the power goes out. Encourage them to decide whether they think this is a positive or negative experience for the family and why they think that. Then, revisit the T-chart after viewing the movie to add to the pros and cons.

AFTER VIEWING ACTIVITIES

Revisit the pros/cons T-chart that you created before viewing the movie. Ask students if they have anything to add after seeing the movie. Then, have them complete an opinion essay, paragraph, or sentence, synthesizing the chart. Provide them with a sentence to fill in such as: "I think losing power is _____ because..." if necessary.

Find an archived newspaper or magazine article about a real blackout in New York City. Read it aloud to the students and provide them with a copy, if possible. As you read, discuss how the fictional and true accounts of the story differ. Guiding questions:

- What kind of information do you learn from the fiction story? What do you learn from the article?
- How is the power outage described in the story? How is it described in the article?
- Who is the narrator in the story? Who is the narrator in the article? How is the point of view different?
- What information is the same in both accounts?

After students have had time to discuss, use a Venn diagram to compare and contrast the fiction story, *Blackout*, with the nonfiction article.

Give a writing mini-lesson about how writers zoom into small moments and tell them with great detail. Read aloud from part of *Blackout* and ask students to identify when the story takes place. Emphasize that the author, John Rocco, chose to just write about the brief time from the power going out, to when it came back on, several hours later. He didn't write about the whole day leading up to the power outage, what caused it, or what happened in the days following. Then, prompt students to brainstorm about times when something unusual happened with their family. After they have listed their ideas, guide them to narrow in on small moments in those times, and to describe them in sequential detail. Carry students through the writing process, and give them the opportunity to share their published stories with classmates and family.

Guide students through a web-based author study on Lois Lowry. His official website is: www.roccoart.com. Here, students can access an annotated book list, biography, art work, and information to contact him. Encourage students to broaden their searches as well. Collect some other books by Rocco and make them available in the classroom library for check out.

OTHER THEME-RELATED TITLES FROM WESTON WOODS

- **Arnie and the Doughnut** by Laurie Keller
- **Naked Mole Rat Gets Dressed** by Mo Willems
- **No Roses for Harry** by Gene Zion, ill. by Margaret Bloy
- **The Other Side** by Jacqueline Woodson
- **Pete's a Pizza** by William Steig

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