

***Hurricane Song* by Paul Volponi (Viking Juvenile Publishers, 2008, 144 pgs., ISBN #0670061603)**

**Plot
Summary:**

(Includes a lead)

“The wind and the rain beat down on the Superdome like it was a giant drum....Then I heard a baby cry with a shriek that nearly stopped my heart cold. And for the life of me, I don’t know if that baby was being born or dying.” Katrina – a monster hurricane – struck New Orleans just after Miles decided to move there to live with his father - whom he barely knew – to get away from the crowded conditions caused by his mother’s remarriage and suddenly large family. He is not prepared for the storm that will forever change both the city and him. Just as Miles is beginning to accept his father’s consuming love of jazz music, Katrina hits, and almost takes them both away.

This book chronicles the storm, and the horrific circumstances of their stay in the Superdome, where restrooms fail, hunger is constant, and violence and death surround everyone. But can Katrina bring Miles closer to his father and the jazz music culture his father so dearly cherishes? Will his father ever cherish Miles as much as the music?

**Character
Analysis:**

Miles, a teenage boy around the age of 15, leaves his mother and his new step-family in Chicago, to live with a father he barely knows in New Orleans. Miles, who loves his mother, cannot stand the cramped conditions of his new home, and although he knows it will not be easy to live with his father, he decides that being ignored for jazz is better than being ignored in a crowd of new siblings.

Throughout the story, Miles struggles to understand his father’s deep connection with jazz music, and believes his dad loves his trumpet more than his own son. Miles is only interested in football, until Katrina hits, and everything changes. Suddenly, he and his father must depend on one another to survive. Miles begins to slowly understand his dad’s need for jazz, as it comforts them both during their stay in the Superdome. Miles is given another opportunity after the disaster to return to his mother’s home, so he must make a final choice about whether or not to continue this life journey of coming to understand his father. Katrina forces Miles to grow up quickly and decide the type of man he wants to become.

**Compare/
Contrast to
News Article:
“Hot, Filthy
Dome – but a
welcome
refuge”
(MSNBC.com)**

Throughout the book, Volponi comes back to the horrible conditions of life in the Superdome both during and after Katrina. In the novel, Volponi paints a picture of filth, stench, and most importantly, gang violence. Miles and those around him struggle to hold on to what little they have left as teenage thugs burn, beat, and destroy whatever tries to stand in their way. Miles and his father feel like prisoners, being held because they were too poor to evacuate.

In the news article published during the days after Katrina, this is not the same picture. While the title does suggest the conditions are not the best, quotes from those arriving and staying at the Superdome appear to be thankful and content. Though both works mention the stench of the air inside the Superdome, the article suggests that those in the shelter are safe and kind to one another. The article makes it seem as if all the “guests” are being well fed, and have plenty of water, a direct contrast to how Volponi describes the scene. In the novel, the Superdome becomes a prison, but in the article it is a safe haven.

Evaluation:

I would rank this book 3 out of 5 stars. It would definitely be labeled as “Young Adult” in our school library due to some language and situations, but the book is an interesting look at life for those stuck in New Orleans after Katrina, especially those left to survive the storm in the Superdome. Volponi does a good job of capturing the struggle within Miles to both understand and accept his father for who he is, especially as Miles struggles to understand himself and the type of man he wants to become. Lacking in the book is enough insight into the emotions and thoughts of other characters, a flaw only because the entire book is written as a journal. Miles, a teenage boy, does not have the insight to capture the subtle hints of others’ emotions – so we often see only his point of view.