

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Class: \_\_\_\_\_

## Coconuts

By Dagmar Kost  
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*Hurricanes are large storms with high speed winds. They form over warm water in areas like Florida and the Caribbean. In this story, a boy named Jason learns that a hurricane is coming. As you read, take notes on Jason's point of view on preparing for the hurricane.*

[1] This is how I learned about Calvin.

I came out of my room this morning and found Mom and Dad standing in front of the TV. Standing meant they weren't watching for fun something was happening. On the screen, Tony Verrazo pointed to an orange pinwheel. Calvin, he said, had turned west and was headed for land.



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I didn't understand what was happening, but suddenly Mom and Dad were in a big hurry to do stuff.

"I'm going to check on the generator,"<sup>1</sup> said Mom.

[5] "I'm going to the grocery store," Dad said. He turned to my brother, Mike. "You can start closing the shutters while I'm gone."

"You pick up coconuts, Jason," Dad said, pointing at me.

"Coconuts?" I couldn't think of anything else to say, so he left.

I fixed my own cereal and went outside to look things over. We had a bunch of palm trees and *plenty* of coconuts, but we'd never bothered with them before. Why pick them up now? I found Mom and Mike in the utility room.

"The barometer<sup>2</sup> has gone down again," Mom was saying.

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1. A generator is a machine that can be used for electricity if the power goes out.

2. A barometer is a tool that is used to predict weather changes.

[10] "That'll pull Calvin right in," answered Mike.

"Have I ever been in a hurricane?" I asked before they could talk more Martian.

"Yes," Mom nodded. "Its name was Flora, but I bet you don't remember anything about it."

"You were too little," said Mike. "You had a babysitter while we got ready."

I wanted to ask about the coconuts, but Mom shook her head.

[15] "I'm sorry, Jason, but I don't have time for more questions," she said. "And you have a job to do."

I had been too little. No wonder I felt as if I'd landed on Mars. I had no idea what was going on.

I kicked a few coconuts until my toes hurt and then unlatched the back gate and walked down to the beach. I wanted to be the first one to spot Calvin, but I wasn't really sure what to look for.

The beach was deserted except for two men in street clothes standing in the sand. One held a camera on his shoulder. The other, with his back to the ocean, was talking into a microphone. I'd recognize Tony Verrazo anywhere. He was the same guy I'd seen on TV this morning.

"Folks," Tony Verrazo was saying, "we have a hurricane watch for Calvin, which means hurricane conditions are possible in the next thirty-six hours. Stay tuned for another update in thirty minutes."

[20] "Hi, kid," said Tony Verrazo, smiling. "Wazzup?"

"I'm just hanging out," I said.

"You're not helping your folks?"

"Oh, I am. I'm taking a break from picking up coconuts," I fibbed.

I expected him to laugh; instead, he took a pen and small notebook out of his pocket.

[25] "Coconuts," he said thoughtfully. "I forgot all about them."

He started writing while walking away. Halfway up the beach, he turned around. "Hey, kid, you want to be on TV? Stand over here and tell the camera who you are and what you're doing."

"Hi," I said awkwardly, taking the microphone. "My name is Jason. I'm picking up coconuts because Calvin is coming."

"Thanks, kid," Tony Verrazo said, taking back the mic. "I have to get going. You better head home and finish your job!"

I think being mad gave me energy to pick up coconuts.

- [30] Dad gave me this silly job, Mom didn't fix breakfast, and Mike didn't come help me. But mostly I was mad at Tony Verrazano for making me tell all of America what I was doing — or not doing. I was trapped.

After hours of working, I'd filled every trash bag I could find. At last, Mike came to get me.

"You better clean up while we still have running water," he said.

I had been too busy to notice the blackening sky. The ocean, too, had gotten dark and angry. Large waves broke hard and fast on the beach, and globs of sea foam blew in my face.

"Calvin?" I asked.

- [35] "It's coming," said Mike.

When we got inside, history was repeating itself — Mom and Dad were standing in front of the TV, and Tony Verrazo was talking.

"Folks," he was saying. "We're going to show you this footage again because if you haven't done so already, you need to go pick up coconuts."

"I saw this before," Mike said, grabbing my arm and pulling me in front of the TV. "It's so cool. See, they take a coconut and put it inside a wind tunnel. At eighty miles an hour, the coconut busts through a board as if somebody shot it out of a cannon. You've never seen anything like it."

I tried to understand.

- [40] "Don't you get it?" asked Mike. "Hurricane-force winds can make flying coconuts really dangerous!"

Tony Verrazo's face came back on the screen. "Folks, we want to give credit to the person who gave us the idea for this story."

And suddenly there I was, holding the mic and saying, "Hi, my name is Jason. I'm picking up coconuts because Calvin is coming."

"Way to go, Jason!" said Tony Verrazano after I faded out.

"Wow!" Mike grinned and nudged me with his elbow.

- [45] I finally found my voice again. "All day, I thought I had to pick up coconuts just because I was little and had to stay out of everybody's way."

"And yet you did it anyway?" asked Mom.

"I picked up every single one," I told her. "Tony Verrazo made me."

"Tony Verrazo? I can't wait to hear *that* story," said Mom. "But first, let's go over the checklist."

She nodded at the rest of us. "The generator is ready to run if the power goes out."

[50] "The windows are OK, and the shutters are locked tight," said Mike.

"We have plenty of food and drinking water," Dad said. "There's gas in the car in case the water gets too high and we have to leave."

They turned to me.

"There are no coconuts on the ground," I said proudly.

"Then we're agreed," Dad said. "This family is ready!"

[55] After hearing about Calvin all day, I was *more* than ready.

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## Text-Dependent Questions

**Directions:** For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. What is a theme of the text?
  - A. Parents should teach young children to be more responsible.
  - B. When there is danger, it is best to listen to directions.
  - C. It is hard to know what to do during a hurricane.
  - D. Predicting hurricanes can be a fun but scary job.
  
2. How does paragraph 33 help the reader understand the story?
  - A. it tells the reader how the main character feels
  - B. it helps the reader understand the setting
  - C. it shows how to solve the problem
  - D. it introduces the problem
  
3. How does Tony Verrazo feel about Jason's job picking up coconuts?
  - A. He thinks Jason is wasting his time.
  - B. He thinks it is a very smart thing to do.
  - C. He thinks it is too difficult of a job for a young kid.
  - D. He thinks Jason is not helping his parents enough.
  
4. In "Coconuts," how does Jason's point of view impact what the reader understands about the hurricane?

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## Discussion Questions

***Directions: Brainstorm your answers to the following questions in the space provided. Be prepared to share your original ideas in a class discussion.***

1. Have you ever been in a place when a natural disaster, like a hurricane, earthquake, or forest fire is happening? If so, what did you do to stay safe? If not, what steps do you think are important to follow when a natural disaster is happening?
2. In the story, Jason does not understand why his parents tell him to pick up coconuts. Have your parents, teachers, or coaches ever asked you to do something and you did not understand the reason why? How did you respond? Was your response more similar or different to Jason's?
3. At the end of the story, Jason feels prepared for the hurricane. Think of an event that may be scary or stressful, like an upcoming game or test. What could you do to prepare? How do you think being prepared might help you feel better before a big event?