NO PREP

Understanding 9/11 Through Victim Stories

More Than a Number

Includes: Student reading, case study, differentiated questions, teacher key

Name: Period: Date:

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More Than a Number

The September 11 attacks killed 2,977 people. A number that large can numb the mind, which is exactly why historians and memorial designers insist on telling individual stories. The victims came from more than 90 countries and ranged in age from two to eighty-five. They were traders and dishwashers, secretaries and generals, tourists and flight attendants, priests and probationary firefighters.

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More Than a Number

The September 11 attacks killed 2,977 people. A number that large can numb the mind, which is exactly why historians and memorial designers insist on telling individual stories. The victims came from more than 90 countries and ranged in age from two to eighty-five. They were traders and dishwashers, secretaries and generals, tourists and flight attendants, priests and probationary firefighters. Eight of the dead were children traveling aboard the planes, the youngest of them two years old. Each name carved into the bronze parapets of the National September 11 Memorial belonged to a person with morning routines, inside jokes, unpaid bills, and plans for the weekend that never came. Learning even a few of their stories transforms the attacks from a statistic into a human event. Consider the youngest victim. Christine Lee Hanson was two years old, traveling with her parents, Peter and Sue Kim Hanson, aboard United Flight 175 on her first trip to Disneyland. Peter called his father, Lee, from the plane, describing the hijacking in a low voice; the elder Hanson was on the phone with his son when the aircraft struck the South Tower on live television. Three generations of one family were shattered in a single moment. Christine's grandparents later said they kept her tiny sneakers by the door for years.

The Flight Attendant Who Kept Calm

Betty Ong had been a flight attendant for American Airlines for fourteen years, known to her family as the fun aunt who organized trips and told the best stories. On the morning of September 11, working in the rear of Flight 11, she picked up an air phone moments after hijackers stormed the cockpit and calmly reported everything she could see: which seats the hijackers had occupied, that two flight

attendants had been stabbed, that a passenger's throat had been cut, that the cockpit was not answering. Her twenty-three-minute call, made in a steady, professional voice while the plane flew erratically, gave authorities their first detailed account of what was happening. Investigators later used the seat numbers Betty provided to identify the hijackers within days. Aviation officials have called her call an act of extraordinary composure, and recordings of her voice, level and precise until the line went dead, are now part of the historical record studied by the 9/11 Commission. Her family established a foundation in her name that runs recreation programs for children in San Francisco's Chinatown, where she grew up. Betty Ong was not the only crew member on Flight 11 who chose to report rather than hide. Madeline Amy Sweeney, another flight attendant, reached an American Airlines manager on the ground and described the hijackers' seat assignments as well, adding details about the injured crew and the plane's altitude. Her final words on the call, spoken as the plane turned toward Manhattan, described what she could see out the window. Together the two calls gave investigators a record of the first hijacking that no camera on the ground could have provided.

The Chaplain and the Farmer-Pilot

Father Mychal Judge, sixty-eight, was the chaplain of the New York City Fire Department, a Franciscan friar famous across the city for ministering to homeless New Yorkers, AIDS patients, firefighters, and anyone else who needed him. When the towers were struck, he rushed to the scene with the firefighters he served, prayed over bodies in the street, and entered the North Tower lobby. He was killed by falling debris when the South Tower collapsed, and a photograph of five men carrying his body from the rubble became one of the day's most famous images. The city recorded him as Victim 0001, the first official casualty of the attacks. John Ogonowski, fifty, was the captain of American Airlines Flight 11, the first plane to be hijacked. Away from the cockpit he was a farmer in Dracut, Massachusetts, who had turned much of his 150-acre farm over to newly arrived Cambodian immigrant families, teaching them American growing seasons and lending

them equipment so they could farm as they had in Southeast Asia. Friends said he saw no contradiction between flying jets and driving tractors. After his death, the farmland program he championed was preserved in his honor, and Cambodian families still work plots on the land he shared.

An Office, a Windows Restaurant, and a Company Erased

Some stories on September 11 are about entire communities. Cantor Fitzgerald, a bond-trading firm, occupied floors 101 through 105 of the North Tower, directly above where Flight 11 struck. No one who reported to work there that morning survived. The firm lost 658 employees, more than any other company, including brothers, best friends, and coworkers who were engaged to be married. The chief executive, whose own brother died that morning, survived only because he was taking his son to his first day of kindergarten. The company later pledged years of profits to the victims' families, and kept the promise, distributing roughly one hundred eighty million dollars to them over the following five years. One hundred six floors above the street, the staff of Windows on the World, the famous restaurant atop the North Tower, was serving a breakfast conference. All seventy-three workers on shift died, many of them immigrants from Bangladesh, Ecuador, Haiti, Mexico, and Ghana who had come to New York seeking better lives. Their families later helped found a restaurant staffed by surviving colleagues, and a training program that has helped thousands of immigrant restaurant workers build careers. Grief, in their case, was converted into opportunity for others. Cantor Fitzgerald turned that pledge into a permanent ritual. Every year on September 11 the firm holds a charity day on which it donates its global revenues for the day to charities chosen partly by the families of the employees it lost, an event that has raised hundreds of millions of dollars since the attacks.

The Longest Search

In the weeks after the attacks, the streets of New York filled with homemade flyers. Families photocopied pictures of missing husbands, daughters, coworkers, and friends and taped them to walls, lampposts, and hospital entrances, each flyer a plea that someone, somewhere, had seen the person alive. Train stations and hospital fences became walls of faces; one wall outside a Greenwich Village hospital became so dense with photographs that New Yorkers simply called it the Wall of Hope and Remembrance. As hope faded, the flyers changed meaning: they became memorials, and many were preserved by museums as some of the most powerful artifacts of the tragedy. For the city's forensic scientists, the work of returning victims to their families had only begun. The collapse of the towers left remains so fragmented that identification became the largest forensic investigation in American history, relying on DNA samples that relatives provided from toothbrushes, hairbrushes, and razors. The effort has never stopped. The New York City medical examiner's office still tests remains with newer technology each year and still makes new identifications decades after the attacks, yet roughly forty percent of the World Trade Center victims have never had any remains identified. For their families, a name on the memorial is the only grave, which is part of why the memorial treats every single name with such care. Memorial designers had a choice after September 11: build a monument to an event, or a monument to people. They chose people. The two reflecting pools in Manhattan are ringed by the names of every victim, arranged not alphabetically but by "meaningful adjacency," so coworkers, friends, and family members rest side by side, and each name can be touched. Designers honored roughly twelve hundred requests from families about where a loved one's name should sit, placing colleagues next to colleagues and friends next to friends. At the museum below, visitors hear recorded voicemails, see recovered wedding rings and red bandanas, and watch families describe the empty chair at every holiday since. Telling individual stories is how a democracy remembers: not as a faceless casualty count,

but as thousands of distinct lives whose loss still ripples outward through families, companies, and neighborhoods decades later.

Key Information: The Victims of September 11

Fact	Details
Total victims	2,977 people from more than 90 countries, ages 2 to 85
Christine Lee Hanson	Youngest victim, age 2, aboard Flight 175 with her parents
Betty Ong	Flight 11 attendant whose 23-minute call first described the hijacking
Father Mychal Judge	FDNY chaplain recorded as Victim 0001
John Ogonowski	Flight 11 captain who shared his farm with Cambodian immigrant farmers
Cantor Fitzgerald	Firm on floors 101-105 of the North Tower; lost 658 employees
Windows on the World	Restaurant atop the North Tower; all 73 workers on shift died
Memorial design	Names arranged by "meaningful adjacency" around two reflecting pools

Case Study: The Name on Panel N-74

Grace Lin volunteered as a docent at the 9/11 Memorial every Saturday. One October afternoon, a teenager on a school trip stopped at the north pool, pointed at a name, and asked, "Did you know any of them?" Grace rested her hand beside the carved letters of a name on panel N-74. "This one," she said. "Rosa. We waited tables together at the restaurant on the 106th floor while I was in college. She sent half of every paycheck home to Ecuador and still covered my shift when my mom got sick." The student looked at the endless rows of names, suddenly quiet. "There are so many," he said. "That's why I come," Grace answered. "If nobody tells you about Rosa, she's just letters in bronze. You can't miss someone you never met, but you can remember them. That's the job now." The student took a photograph of the name, and asked Grace to tell him another story before his bus left.

1. Grace says, "You can't miss someone you never met, but you can remember them." Using the narrative and the reading, explain the difference between missing and remembering, and why memorial designers built the site around individual names.

_____

_____

2. How does Rosa's story in the narrative echo the real experiences of the Windows on the World workers described in the reading? Why do such details matter to how history is told?

_____

_____

Multiple Choice

1. Why do historians and memorial designers emphasize individual victim stories rather than casualty totals?
    a) Large numbers numb the mind; single stories make it human
    b) The exact number of victims was never determined
    c) Families requested that totals never be published
    d) Individual stories are much easier to verify than statistics

2. How did Betty Ong's phone call help investigators after the attacks?
    a) It recorded the hijackers' names and seat numbers as announced
    b) It allowed the plane to be diverted from its target
    c) Her seat numbers helped identify the hijackers within days
    d) It warned the military in time to scramble fighter jets

3. What happened to the farmland program championed by Captain John Ogonowski after his death?
    a) It was sold to developers to fund the 9/11 memorial gardens quickly
    b) It was preserved in his honor, and families still farm the land
    c) It was moved to Southeast Asia
    d) It ended because no one continued his work

Matching

Write the letter of the correct definition on the line next to each term.

Term	Definition
1. ___ Betty Ong	A) Two-year-old aboard Flight 175, the youngest victim of the attacks

2. ___ Christine Lee Hanson	B) Bond-trading firm that lost 658 employees, more than any other company
3. ___ Cantor Fitzgerald	C) Restaurant on the 106th floor where all 73 workers on shift were killed
4. ___ Windows on the World	D) Memorial arrangement placing coworkers, friends, and relatives side by side
5. ___ Meaningful adjacency	E) Flight attendant whose calm 23-minute call became part of the historical record

Fill-in-the-Blank

1. The victims of September 11 came from more than _____ countries.

2. Father Mychal Judge was recorded by the city as Victim _____.

3. Many Windows on the World workers were _____ from other countries.

Short Answer

Answer each question in 2-4 complete sentences.

1. Choose one victim from the reading and explain what their final actions reveal about them.

_____

_____

_____

2. How did survivors of Cantor Fitzgerald and Windows on the World turn grief into something good?

_____

_____

_____

3. What does "telling individual stories is how a democracy remembers" mean? Do you agree?

_____

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