LESSON TITLE: **HEROES AMONG US**

**Common Core Standards**

**RL 7** Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.

**SL 3** Evaluate a speaker’s point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric.

**W 2** Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.

**Key Questions/Issues Addressed**

What are the traits of a hero?

How can we use past experiences to prepare for future crises and emergencies?

**Lesson Goals/Objectives**

Students will be able to describe the heroic actions of others.

Students will be able to explain how learning from the past can help in the future.

**Key Terms**

Emergency, EVAC chair, Evacuation, Quadriplegic, Triage

**Materials**

Slide 65 from PowerPoint and audio from Storycorps at the 9/11 Memorial website: www.911memorial.org/storycorps (Click on the story of John Abruzzo)

Bill Biggart’s photograph of the evacuation of John Abruzzo: www.billbiggart.com/911_13.html

See Appendix A:

Image of EVAC chair

WTC Fire Watch Backpack and contents
Background for lesson

John Abruzzo is a quadriplegic confined to an electric wheelchair. On September 11, 2001, he was working as an accountant for the Port Authority in the North Tower of the World Trade Center. Abruzzo escaped the building with the help of 10 colleagues who carried him down 69 flights of stairs in an emergency evacuation chair. As part of a StoryCorps memoir, Abruzzo spoke with Michael Curci, one of the ten who helped him to safety. The following summary is courtesy the 9/11 Commission Report:

The 1993 Terrorist Bombing of the WTC and the Port Authority’s Response.

“Unlike most of America, New York City and specifically the World Trade Center had been the target of terrorist attacks before 9/11. At 12:18 P.M. on February 26, 1993, a 1,500-pound bomb stashed in a rental van was detonated on a parking garage ramp beneath the Twin Towers. The explosion killed six people, injured about 1,000 more, and exposed vulnerabilities in the World Trade Center’s and the city’s emergency preparedness.

The towers lost power and communications capability. Generators had to be shut down to ensure safety, and elevators stopped. The public-address system and emergency lighting systems failed. The unlit stairwells filled with smoke and were so dark as to be impassable. Rescue efforts by the Fire Department of New York (FDNY) were hampered by the inability of its radios to function in buildings as large as the Twin Towers. The 911 emergency call system was overwhelmed. The general evacuation of the towers’ occupants via the stairwells took more than four hours.

Several small groups of people who were physically unable to descend the stairs were evacuated from the roof of the South Tower by New York Police Department (NYPD) helicopters. At least one person was lifted from the North Tower roof by the NYPD in a dangerous helicopter rappel operation - 15 hours after the bombing. General knowledge that these air rescues had occurred appears to have left a number of civilians who worked in the Twin Towers with the false impression that helicopter rescues were part of the WTC evacuation plan and that rescue from the roof was a viable option for those who worked on upper floors. Although they were considered after 1993, helicopter evacuations in fact were not incorporated into the WTC fire safety plan.

To address the problems encountered during the response to the 1993 bombing, the Port Authority spent an initial $100 million to make physical, structural, and technological improvements to the WTC, as well as to enhance its fire safety plan and reorganize and bolster its fire safety and security staffs.

Substantial enhancements were made to power sources and exits. Fluorescent signs and markings were added in and near stairwells. The Port Authority also installed a sophisticated computerized fire alarm system with redundant electronics and control panels, and state-of-the-art fire command stations were placed in the lobby of each tower.

To manage fire emergency preparedness and operations, the Port Authority created the dedicated position of fire safety director. The director supervised a team of deputy fire safety directors, one of whom was on duty at the fire command station in the lobby of each tower at all times. He or she would be responsible for communicating with building occupants during an emergency.
Background for lesson (continued)

The Port Authority also sought to prepare civilians better for future emergencies. Deputy fire safety directors conducted fire drills at least twice a year, with advance notice to tenants. “Fire safety teams” were selected from among civilian employees on each floor and consisted of a fire warden, deputy fire wardens, and searchers. The standard procedure for fire drills was for fire wardens to lead co-workers in their respective areas to the center of the floor, where they would use the emergency intercom phone to obtain specific information on how to proceed. Some civilians have said that their evacuation on September 11 was greatly aided by changes and training implemented by the Port Authority in response to the 1993 bombing.

But during these drills, civilians were not directed into the stairwells, or provided with information about their configuration and about the existence of transfer hallways and smoke doors. Neither full nor partial evacuation drills were held. Moreover, participation in drills that were held varied greatly from tenant to tenant. In general, civilians were never told not to evacuate up. The standard fire drill announcement advised participants that in the event of an actual emergency, they would be directed to descend to at least three floors below the fire. Most civilians recall simply being taught to await the instructions that would be provided at the time of an emergency. Civilians were not informed that rooftop evacuations were not part of the evacuation plan, or that doors to the roof were kept locked. The Port Authority acknowledges that it had no protocol for rescuing people trapped above a fire in the towers.

Six weeks before the September 11 attacks, control of the WTC was transferred by a net lease to a private developer, Silverstein Properties. Select Port Authority employees were designated to assist with the transition. Others remained on-site but were no longer part of the official chain of command. However, on September 11, most Port Authority World Trade Department employees-including those not on the designated “transition team”- reported to their regular stations to provide assistance throughout the morning. Although Silverstein Properties was in charge of the WTC on September 11, the WTC fire safety plan remained essentially the same.”

- Courtesy of the 9/11 Commission Report

Instructional Activity/Procedures

1. Show students the picture of the “EVAC chair.” (See Appendix A). Ask them what they notice. *What is this? What is it used for?*

2. Explain to students that the World Trade Center was bombed in 1993. Explain how they learned from this attack to make changes for the future (see background information). They did not have an EVAC chair during the 1993 bombing. After the 1993 attack, they also provided each tenant of the buildings with fire safety backpacks and information (See Appendix A).

3. Utilizing the information about the changes to procedures, ask students what other changes they would make for the future.

4. Ask them to explain the importance of following directions and having practice drills in their schools.

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5. Ask students if they know what the word *quadriplegic* means. Discuss how a person who is a quadriplegic has paralysis of (cannot move) all four limbs or the entire body below the neck.

6. Ask students how they think a quadriplegic is able to move around. Then ask them what they think would happen in the event of an emergency or evacuation.

7. Discuss with the students how elevators do not work in such a situation. *In such circumstances, how would someone in a wheelchair get down from upper levels of buildings?*

8. List to the audio of John Abruzzo and Michael Curci: www.911memorial.org/storycorps (Click on the story of John Abruzzo).

9. Pause audio at 0:51. Discuss how they explain that people were calm and not panicking. Ask students what they would do if given the choice to leave their friend behind or continue to descend down 69 flights of stairs. Be sure to explain to students what *triage* means.

10. Continue to listen to audio, stopping at 1:20. Discuss how it took them six hours in the 1993 attack to get out of the building. Discuss whether they think the “new” procedures helped people get out more quickly and safely on 9/11.


12. Have students write a paragraph explaining what they learned from this survivor story.

13. Have students share their responses.

**Evidence of Understanding**

Students will be assessed through class discussion, as well as the information provided in their “lessons learned” explanation.

**Extension Activities**

Research other personal survivor and/or heroic stories from 9/11 and share with the class.