**Dear 5th grade family,**

This week, your child will start a new Elementary Literacy Unit in the classroom. We’d like to share more information and explain what they will be learning, how they will be learning, and provide ideas for how you can support their learning at home.

**Guiding Questions and Big Ideas**

* How do natural disasters affect the people and places that experience them?
* *Natural disasters can devastate people and places.*
* How can we prepare for a natural disaster?
* *We can prepare for a natural disaster by learning about what to do in the event of a natural disaster and preparing an emergency preparedness kit.*

**What will your student be doing at school?**

In Unit 1, students build background knowledge about natural disasters to understand how they affect the places that experience them. In the first half of the unit, they research natural disasters in expert groups, focusing on answering the question: “How do natural disasters affect the people and places that experience them?” Students work with a variety of sources, including videos, informational texts, and websites, as they investigate their group’s natural disaster and learn about how to stay safe during it. As they research, they think about how authors use reasons and evidence to support particular points, identifying which reasons and evidence support which point(s). For the mid-unit assessment, students read a new text about a natural disaster, explaining how reasons and evidence support points the author makes, and identifying which reasons and evidence support which point(s).

The second half of the unit opens with a Science Talk, allowing students to share their research about the natural disaster they studied in the first half of the unit, and draw conclusions about ways to stay safe during one. Throughout the rest of the unit, students plan, draft, and revise a public service announcement (PSA), explaining how to stay safe during the natural disaster they researched. As they write, they consider how to ensure their PSA is appropriate for the task, purpose, and audience, and learn how to use commas to set off words and phrases as a technique to engage the audience. Students also learn how to use punctuation to separate items in a series. For the end of unit assessment, students record their PSA and edit a paragraph for correct use of commas and semicolons.

**Working to become effective learners** is a habit of character that is emphasized in this unit. Students practice showing perseverance, collaborating, taking responsibility, and taking initiative as they work in expert groups and write their PSAs. Students also continue to work to contribute to a better world by applying their learning to help the community by explaining how to stay safe during a natural disaster in their PSAs.

The Language standards that students will focus on in this unit require them to:

* Use punctuation to separate items in a series.
* Use a comma to set off the words *yes* and *no* (e.g., *Yes, thank you*), to set off a tag question from the rest of the sentence (e.g., *It’s true, isn’t it?*), and to indicate direct address (e.g., *Is that you, Steve?*).
* Use context (e.g., cause/effect relationships and comparisons in text) as a clue to the meaning of a word or phrase.

**Using Punctuation in a Series**

A *series* is a list of similar things that come one after another in a sentence.

**Rule 1:** Use a comma to separate each item in the series.

Examples:

These storms can bring destructive winds, icing, sleet, and freezing rain.

Before the blizzard, make sure you have an emergency kit, dress warmly, and have extra blankets in case you lose power.

**Rule 2:** Use a semicolon to separate each item in the series when they already include commas. This avoids confusion between the listed items.

Example:

Some major blizzards in the United States include the Great Blizzard of 1888, March 11–13, 1888; the Chicago Blizzard of 1967, January 26-27, 1967; and the Storm of the Century, March 12–15, 1993.

**Using Commas to Set Off Words and Phrases**

Writers use commas to set off words and phrases like the words yes or no, a question, or a direct address. They include these words and phrases in their writing to emphasize a point and to engage the audience.

**Rule 1:** Use a comma to set off the words yes or no.

Example: Yes, even kids can prepare for blizzards.

**Rule 2:** Use a comma to set off a tag question from the rest of the sentence.

Example: Blizzards sound scary, don’t they?

**Rule 3:** Use a comma to indicate direct address.

Example: New Yorkers, be sure to think about how to stay safe during a blizzard!

**How can you support your student at home?**

* Read informational texts (e.g., books, articles, and websites) about natural disasters.
* Watch movies or documentaries about the impact of natural disasters.
* Analyze how an author uses reasons and evidence to support particular points in a text.
* Analyze which reasons and evidence support which point(s) in a text.

Please let me know if you have any questions or would like for me to connect you to your classroom teacher regarding this information. Thank you for partnering with us on your child’s learning!