Hurricane Gilbert

A hurricane is a violent storm with extremely strong winds and heavy rain.

Hurricane Gilbert was one of the most powerful tropical storms to ever originate from the Atlantic Ocean. It raged for nine days in total, and devastated many areas of the Caribbean and the Gulf of Mexico. 318 people lost their lives due to the storm, and it caused over £5 billion in damages.

It started as a tropical wave (an area of low pressure, made up of air, not water, as the name suggests) on 8th September in 1988, but soon intensified into a tropical storm, and

Category	Wind Speed (mph)	Damage
1	74-95	Minimal
2	96-110	Moderate
3	111-130	Extensive
4	131-155	Extreme
5	155+	Catastrophic

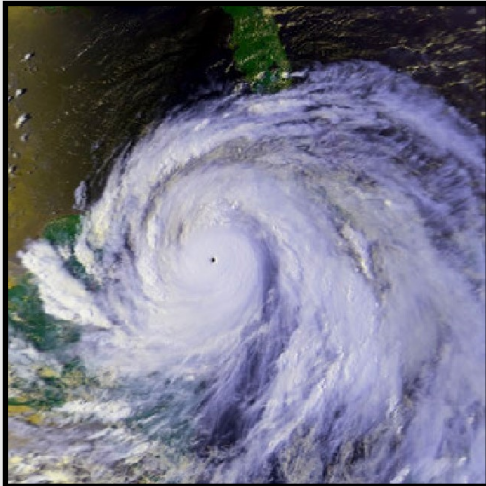The Saffir-Simpson Hurricane Scale is used to measure how strong a particular hurricane is.

steadily strengthened as it travelled west towards the Caribbean. It arrived in Jamaica on 12th September as a Category 3 hurricane, and caused widespread devastation to the island.

On 14th September, the storm arrived at the Yucatán Peninsula of Mexico, as a Category 5 hurricane. Winds of over 180mph and torrential downpours were experienced. As the storm raged on, 60,000 homes were destroyed on land, and 83 ships sank off the east coast of the region. In the coastal city of Cancún, waves reached over seven metres tall. A fishing boat weighing 150 tons was heaved out of the water and smashed into a hotel by the high winds. More than half of the beaches in this popular tourist resort were washed away. Many visitors who had been on holiday in the area could not get home - the control tower at Cancún airport had been damaged, and so it was days before any flights were able to leave.

This map shows the path of Hurricane Gilbert.

The hurricane travelled north-west. On 17th September, the city of Monterrey suffered high winds, torrential rain and flash floods. Many homes had no power or drinking water, and the telephone lines were down. Satellite dishes were blown off roofs and thrown around by the wind like giant frisbees.

A satellite image of Hurricane Gilbert as seen from above.

When the water finally began to recede, overturned vehicles appeared in the streets, covered in mud and filled with rocks. Many hotels in popular tourist resorts were reduced to rubble or badly damaged, with entire walls missing.

Hurricane Gilbert continued to wreak havoc in the American states of Texas, Oklahoma and Missouri before eventually losing strength and turning into a minor storm only.

Many survivors of the event told of how lucky they felt to still be alive. One man said, "Now I think I know how it must feel to drive in a Formula 1 race at 180mph." Another eyewitness likened the event to a different natural phenomenon: "It was as destructive as an earthquake, but one that went on for hours and hours." On returning to his devastated hotel room, one holiday-maker told how one of the walls had completely disappeared, leaving him with a 'sea-view'.

The hurricane had many long-term consequences for the areas that it hit -

people had lost their homes, many businesses were destroyed, and the landscape was ruined. It would take a long time for the affected areas to recover. Hurricane Gilbert was nicknamed 'the storm of the century'. Due to its devastating impact, 'Gilbert' is no longer used as a name for a hurricane any more.

The devastation caused by Hurricane Gilbert.

Imagine you are a news reporter in 1988! Create a news report about Hurricane Gilbert as it is happening.

Try to include the following:

- explain what a hurricane is
- how hurricanes are categorised
- where Hurricane Gilbert started
- which areas it affected and how
- eyewitness statements
- the after effects

Make sure you keep your listeners engaged!