

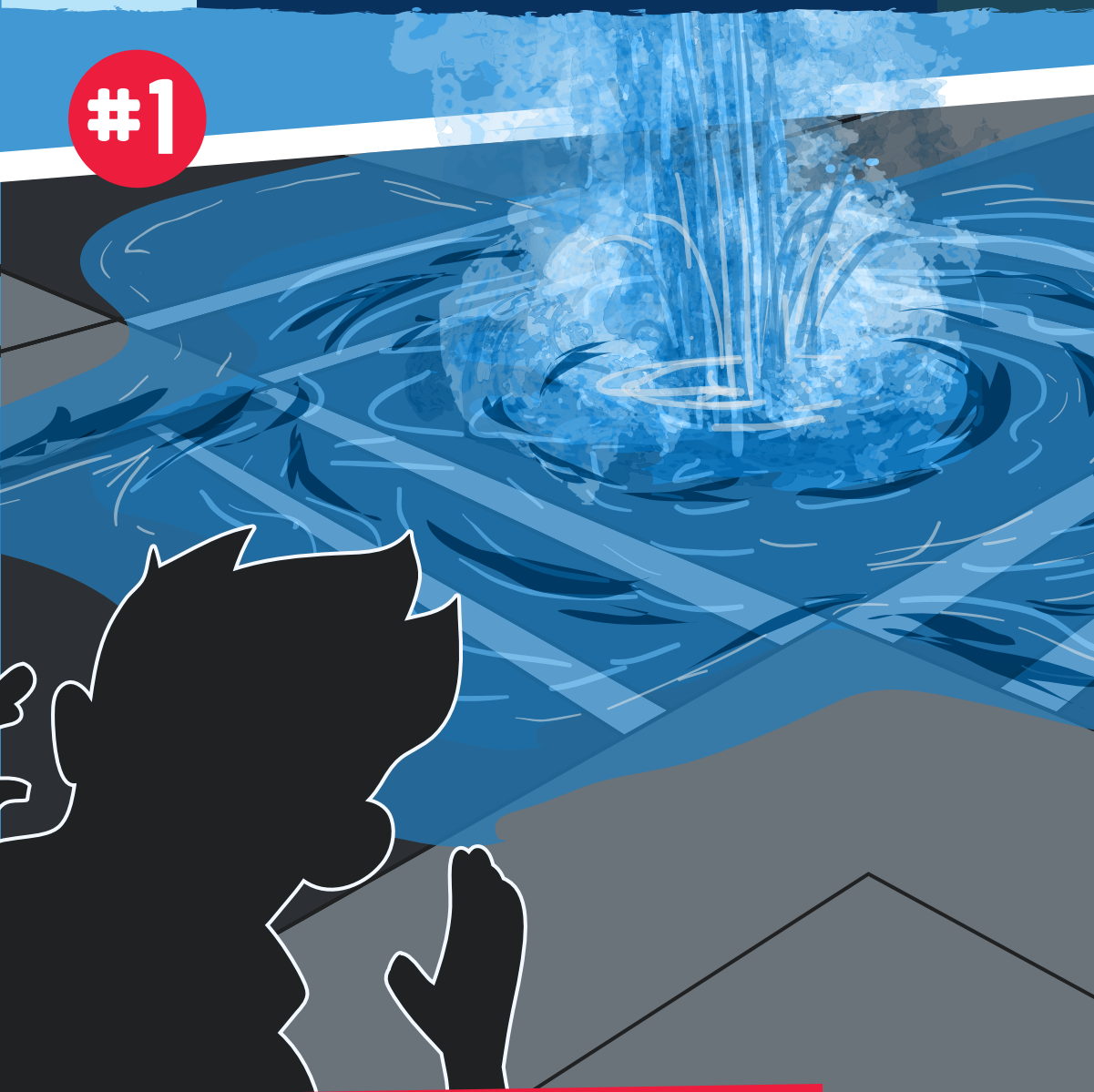
NYC

Office of Emergency Management
Department of Education



CHOOSE YOUR OWN PATH TO
PREPAREDNESS

#1



Sharks in the Crosswalk



Office of Emergency Management
Department of Education

Bill de Blasio, Mayor

Ready New York

Choose Your Own Survival Story



Sharks in the Crosswalk

Ben liked playing a pickup game of basketball after school. Being in middle school, he spent a lot of the day sitting at a desk, so an hour or so running up and down the court gave him energy. When the game was over, he grabbed his sweatshirt and wiped the sweat from his neck.

“Where are you going?”

“Got to run home to shower before I pick up my little sister from her afterschool program,” Ben told his friend Mikey as he made his way off the basketball court.

Ben headed toward his apartment building, listening to music. When he rounded the corner, Ben saw that his street was lined with city trucks, utility vehicles, orange cones, and wooden barriers. A police cruiser was parked behind one of the barriers, its lights flashing. The garbled sound of two-way radios was everywhere. And a strange, rushing, *whooshing* made the block sound less like the city and more like a riverside. What in the world was going on?

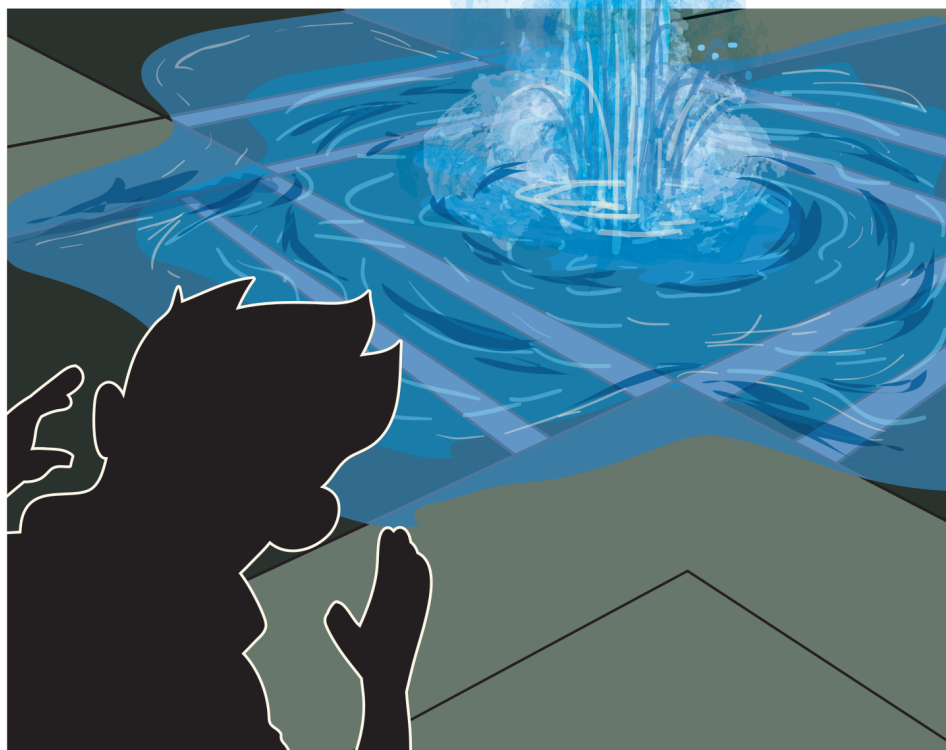
Ben climbed the front stairs of a neighboring building to get a better look. In the middle of the intersection, by the entrance to his apartment building, a burbling, gurgling mound of water seemed to boil up out of the street. Water was rushing everywhere.

“Kid! Hey, kid!”

Ben looked down and saw a man in a green vest pointing up at him with a walkie-talkie.

“You live in one of these buildings? I’m with the Community Emergency Response Team,” the man with the walkie-talkie said, holding up his ID badge. “See, it’s written as ‘CERT’ on my badge. The name’s O’Meara.”

“What’s going on, Mr. O’Meara?” Ben asked.



“Water main break and the power’s been turned off,” the man said. “These buildings are being evacuated. What’s your name?”

“My name’s Ben. I live there,” Ben said, pointing at the neighboring building.

“Okay, Ben. I can help you. Do you have somewhere to go—someplace where your family can find you? Or do you need to go up to your apartment?”

IF BEN DECIDES TO GO TO A FRIEND’S HOME, TURN TO PAGE 7.

IF BEN DECIDES TO GO UP TO HIS APARTMENT, TURN TO PAGE 6.

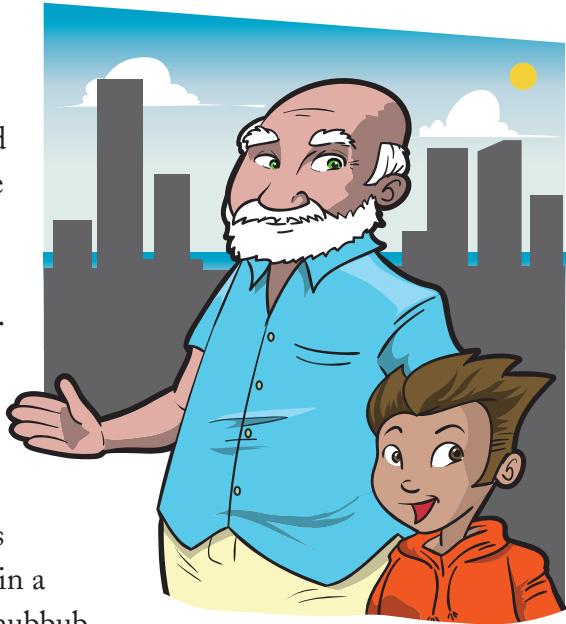
BEN DECIDES TO GO UP TO HIS APARTMENT.

“I need to go up to my apartment,” Ben told Mr. O’Meara. “I have some things I need to get up there. My family has a meeting place written on an emergency card that’s on our refrigerator. And I have a Go Bag.”

Mr. O’Meara smiled. “That’s great, Ben. You’re probably not going to be able to stay here tonight, so having a Go Bag is a smart idea. I’ll take you in through the back entrance to your building. Then you can go up to your apartment and get what you need.”

Ben and Mr. O’Meara walked together past a barricade where a police officer stood with a clipboard and a walkie-talkie. Ben gave her his name and apartment number and was cleared to be escorted into the building. Then another CERT member walked with him up to his floor.

Ben unlocked the door and went inside. Alone in his apartment, it felt good to be in a safe, familiar place after the hubbub on the street. He went to the window and looked down. He could see the gaping hole, the white water rushing out on the street, and the emergency workers going in every direction. *Maybe I’ll just watch the action for a few minutes*, Ben thought. But he also knew he had to get his Go Bag and look on the refrigerator to remind himself where his family’s emergency meeting place is.

**IF BEN DECIDES TO WATCH, GO TO PAGE 9.****IF BEN DECIDES TO GET HIS GO BAG AND HEAD TO THE FAMILY MEETING PLACE, GO TO PAGE 10.**

BEN DECIDES TO GO TO A FRIEND'S HOUSE.

"I think I'll go to my friend's house," Ben told Mr. O'Meara. "I can stay there until my parents are off work."

"Has your family designated an emergency meeting place? How will they know where you are?"

"They'll know I'm with Marcus," Ben insisted. But he wasn't certain. He figured he could call his mother or father from Marcus's house.

Just then, the warning beep of a backhoe reversing down the street sounded. As they watched the backhoe, Mr. O'Meara spoke: "Listen, kid, you get yourself wherever your family has agreed is a safe meeting place. You can't stay here. The water's been shut off to this building, and the power has been turned off."

"No worries," Ben said. "Thanks, I'm out of here."

Quickly slipping his headphones back on, Ben walked to Marcus's apartment. Maybe he and Marcus could play some video games or head back to the basketball court. He reached Marcus's brownstone and raced up the stairs.

"Hey, what are you doing here?" Marcus asked as he opened the door.

"I had nowhere else to go. You ought to see my street. It's crazy!"

"Why? What happened?" Marcus asked, stepping aside to let Ben in.

"Water main break and the power's out," Ben replied, dropping his backpack inside the door. "They wouldn't let me stay. So I thought I'd come here. Is that okay?" Ben asked, turning to Marcus's mom.

"Sure, that's fine. But do your parents know you're here?" she asked. "And what about your sister?"

Marcus's mother got her phone and handed it to Ben. "I think you need to call them right away and tell them where you are."



Ben's mother picked up on the first ring. She'd just gotten a call from a neighbor about the water main break and was worried about where Ben was. She quickly reminded him where to go and that he needed to make sure he had his Go Bag like they'd practiced.

"I have to go," he told Marcus. "Need to go back to my apartment and get my Go Bag before I meet my family." Ben headed out the door and straight back to his apartment building. He kept his eyes open for Mr. O'Meara or another CERT member, knowing they would help if needed.

GO TO "BEN DECIDES TO GO UP TO HIS APARTMENT" ON PAGE 6.

BEN DECIDES TO WATCH THE ACTION FOR A WHILE.

After just a few minutes, Ben grew tired of watching water gush onto the street. As odd as the sight was, it was like watching the same ten seconds of video over and over and over again.

Turning from the window, Ben grabbed his handheld video game and started playing the game he'd saved. He had no idea how long he'd been playing when he heard a loud knock at the door. He walked to the door and peered through the peephole. Mr. O'Meara was outside.

"You said you were coming right back down. Are you alright?" Mr. O'Meara asked. Then Mr. O'Meara saw the video game and raised an eyebrow. He watched as Ben grabbed his Go Bag and checked the emergency card on the refrigerator.

"I think you have more important things to think about than playing a video game right now, Ben. Your family might be waiting for you," Mr. O'Meara said as he moved down the hall and Ben closed the door.



GO TO "BEN DECIDES TO GET HIS GO BAG AND HEAD TO THE FAMILY MEETING PLACE" ON PAGE 10.

BEN DECIDES TO GET HIS GO BAG AND HEAD TO THE FAMILY MEETING PLACE.

Ben went straight to his bedroom. In his closet was his bright red Go Bag packed with everything he'd need in just about any emergency. As tempted as he was to gather his video games to take with him, he knew there might not be time. He also remembered that he had a few comic books in his Go Bag to help him keep busy.

On the way out of his bedroom, Ben grabbed his small flashlight and then went into the kitchen. There he saw the emergency card on the refrigerator.

"Duh. Of course!" Ben said. "The elementary school. That's our family meeting place!"

With his Go Bag in hand, Ben locked his family's apartment and set off down the hallway.

"It sure is quiet around here," someone said behind him.

Turning, Ben saw his neighbor, Mrs. Hawthorne.

"Are you going to a shelter or something?" Ben asked.

"I don't know what to do," Mrs. Hawthorne said from her doorway. "I have to take care of Mr. Melvin."

"Mr. Melvin," Ben repeated. "Your cat."

Heading toward the elevator, Ben added, "You know you can bring your cat to the emergency shelter. You just need to have him in a carrier. Talk to the guy in the green vest. But we're not allowed to stay here tonight."

Once he was back on the street, Ben went straight to Mr. O'Meara and showed him his Go Bag.



“You know where you’re going to meet your family?”

“Yes, sir. The elementary school. I just checked our emergency card. My little sister is there in the afterschool program.”

“Get to your sister, kid. Be safe.” Mr. O’Meara said.

Ben snapped his headphones around his head but then pulled them back down again. “Oh, one other thing,” he said. “My neighbor in apartment 3D is still upstairs. She’s worried about her cat. Can someone go talk to her?”

“Sure will. Thanks for telling me,” Mr. O’Meara said. “Peace out.”

Ben walked away smiling. *Peace out? Who says that anymore?* he thought to himself.

Ben felt good. He’d made the right choice to go where he and his parents agreed they should go. And, just by chance, his sister’s elementary school also had been designated as the local emergency shelter. In just another block, he’d be there.

“Hey, Ben! Hey, Ben! Where are you going?”

Ben had been lost in his thoughts and didn’t even see his friends Adam and Mike D. approaching. Mike D. put out his hand to shake Ben’s.

“What’s up, Ben?”

Mike D. asked.

Taking off his headphones, Ben replied, “It’s been the weirdest afternoon.”

“Did you hear about the water main break?” Adam asked. “I think it’s down near where you live, Benny! They say the street’s under five feet of water and a garbage truck fell in the hole! We’re going to check it out.”



“I saw it. It’s right in front of my apartment,” Ben said.

“Seriously?” both boys said.

Ben laughed and said, “Yeah. There’s no garbage truck. Just a lot of water.”

“Come on. Let’s go check it.” Adam said.

“Yeah, come on, Ben. Show us,” Mike D. chimed in.

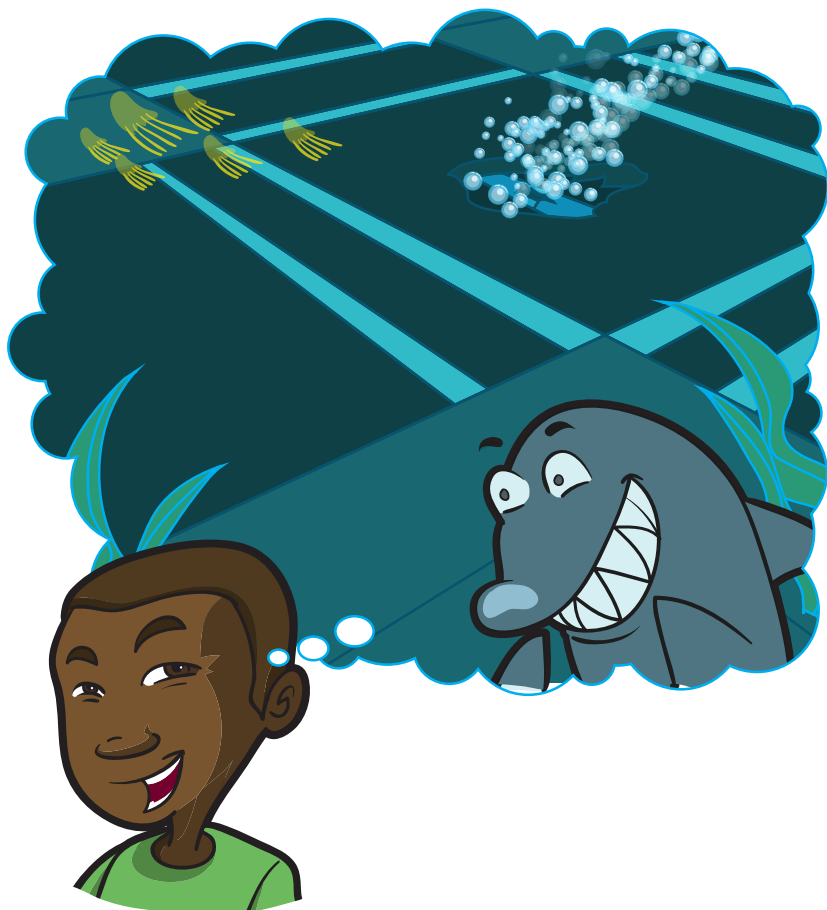
**IF BEN DECIDES TO TAKE ADAM AND MIKE D. TO SEE
THE WATER MAIN BREAK, TURN TO PAGE 13.**

**IF BEN DECIDES TO CONTINUE TO THE MEETING PLACE,
GO TO PAGE 15.**

**BEN DECIDES TO TAKE ADAM AND MIKE D. TO SEE
THE WATER MAIN BREAK.**

“Okay,” Ben agreed. “I bet we can go check it out for a minute.”

Mike D. and Adam were giddy. Ben had no idea what could be so exciting about seeing a water main break. But to hear his friends talk about it, maybe they would see a shark swimming uptown or jellyfish headed for Queens.



Once they got back to the block, Ben found the scene to be pretty much the same as when he'd left. No jellyfish. No Broadway-bound sharks. Not even as much water any more.

Mike D. bounded up onto the back of a parked truck and pointed to the intersection.

“What? It’s just a hole in the street!” he shouted.

Just then, Mr. O’Meara walked over from the barricade on the sidewalk. He motioned for Mike D. to get down off the truck. Pointing at Ben, he said, “Did you forget something?”

“My friends wanted to see the break.”

“Where’s all the water?” Adam asked. “How could a garbage truck sink into that little hole?”

Mr. O’Meara raised his eyebrows and repeated, “Garbage truck?”

“They heard a garbage truck was lost in a hole created by the break,” Ben said.

“I think you have some place to go, Ben,” Mr. O’Meara said.

Ben shook his head. “You’re right. I do. Come on, guys.”

With Mike D. still struggling to get a look down the street, the trio turned away and began walking back toward where they’d met up.

A few minutes later, Ben was finally at the elementary school. It didn’t take long for him to find his family. His little sister’s eyes were red, and she was sniffing. Ben’s mother had her arm around her. One glance at his parents’ faces showed that they were angry with Ben.

“Where have you been?” his father asked.

“We’ve been worried sick,” his mother added. “And your sister was scared. We made a family emergency plan. Why didn’t you follow it?”

Ben thought back on the afternoon. So much action, so many decisions. Why didn’t he stick to the plan? Looking at his parents and his sister, he wished he could do it all over again. He wished he’d stayed with the plan. Ben knew that if another emergency ever came up, he would follow the plan for sure.

BEN DECIDES TO CONTINUE TO THE MEETING PLACE.

Ben thought about the laughs he might have if he joined up with Mike D. and Adam to go see the water main break. But he'd already been there, and what was there to see, really? There was no garbage truck in a gaping hole.

"I'm going to skip it, guys," Ben told his friends. "It's not much to see."

"Suit yourself," Adam said as the boys bounded off.

Ben soon arrived at the elementary school. Volunteers from the afterschool program stood at the front doors along with several people in green CERT vests and some police officers. School personnel recognized Ben and pointed to his sister, who was playing on the playground.





Ben's sister saw him and came running. "Did you hear? Did you hear? We're sleeping in the school tonight!" she said excitedly.

"Oh yeah?" Ben asked.

"Come on, I'll show you. They're setting up cots in the gym."

Ben smiled. The last place he really wanted to spend the night was at his old school, but he was happy to see that his sister saw this as an adventure.

After visiting the gym, Ben and his sister went outside where they saw their mother and father coming toward the school. His sister ran to their parents and hugged them.

"Did you hear? Did you hear? We're sleeping in the school tonight!" Ben rolled his eyes, and his parents smiled. Sleeping in the gym wasn't ideal, but it was safe. All in all, the situation wasn't so bad. Maybe Ben would write about the story for his next creative writing assignment—though he'd be sure to add the part about a garbage trunk sinking in the hole and sharks swimming toward Broadway.

