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Did You Know?

The word “terrorism” was first used during the French Revolution (1789–1799). The years 1783–1784 were called the Reign of Terror.

Key Terms

hijack—to take control of a car, bus, plane, or train, etc., by force

hostage—a person held against his or her will by a terrorist

terrorism—using force or threats against people

CHAPTER 1 | Introduction

Some disasters happen by accident. But terrorists destroy things on purpose. And that's when loss of life is most cruel.

Thousands died in terror attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on September 11, 2001. It was the deadliest terror disaster in history.

What is terrorism?

Terrorism is violence against normal people. It is not the same as war. Terrorists do not belong to a country's armed forces. They don't often act for any one country.

Most terror groups are small. Only a few people may be involved in any one attack. They hijack planes. They hold people hostage. They threaten to kill hostages, and sometimes do.

They explode bombs. They destroy property and kill people. Many times, families and children are the victims.

Terror groups want to scare people. They do this to get power. Sometimes they have a goal in mind. They may want to free others who are in prison.

Some think that they are helping others by killing. They call themselves “freedom fighters.” They say they are fighting for freedom. But they are spreading pain.

The United States and others around the world are working to stop terror so people can live in peace and without fear of attack.