Step One: List of descriptive words students came up with. (students had zero knowledge of picture or it’s context)
destruction
hurricane
weather
remodel
depression
meth house
bad construction
by the sea
mess
plan, what to do next?
graftiti
hoarders
hard time selling that
remains, it was a whole house once
steps front
house came off the foundation, closer to the steps
devastation
was there a deck there?
remodel gone bad
middle of demo/remodel
bad landscaping
was it picked up in a tornado?
was a house moved/relocated?
bad flood

**At this point I told students damage was caused by weather
**Halfway through Step Two I told students the damage was caused by a hurricane

Step Two: Descriptive phrases
Did it happen all at once or slowly over time? Probably all at once, pretty dramatic
It happened recently because there isn’t any moss or fungus; bricks are clean. It happened recently.
Truck that hit the house was going fast
Trees intact, but house is damaged
Possible trailer pass. Are they replacing a trailer home?

Nature didn’t like the house

My depression was caused by the hurricane that ruined my house

Step Three (Final): A short description of image
A hurricane caused the destruction and lifted the house off its foundation. The storm surge pushed the house into the yard. The onlooker surveys the damage.
Once students realized it was caused by the storm surge from a hurricane, they began to discuss if the house was in the neighbor’s yard. Some thought it was, but since they really didn’t know, they decided not to include that in the description.

Students didn’t talk about the person in the image until the very final step. There was some discussion of who the person was (most thought it was an insurance adjustor), but since they didn’t know who it was, they decided on to refer to her as “the onlooker.”

The final description when through a few rounds of group editing. They probably would have continued honing the description if I’d let them, but I just wanted a very simple description based mostly on what they saw. Once they were satisfied, I told them about the image:

It’s a picture I took in Gulfport, Mississippi, three months after Hurricane Katrina. This house was three blocks from the Gulf Coast and the storm surge from Katrina lifted the house off its foundation and pushed it backwards. The house to the left of it was standing but tilting and not inhabitable. The house to the right was being lived in and being repaired. The two blocks between three houses and the Gulf Coast were completely gone; they only thing left were debris and concrete foundations. I also pointed out some things they wondered about: What they thought was grafitti were a set of markings used during the rescue and recovery period after the storm to indicate that the house had been checked for occupants (either dead or alive). Also: the blue tarps past the trees meant people were living in those houses because those were requested by people who were living in their homes.