

Galloping Gertie: The Collapse of the Tacoma Narrows Bridge

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Process Paper

In choosing our topic, we came up with several historical events relating to the theme, triumph and tragedy. We then narrowed the list, eliminating topics that were too common, uninteresting, or difficult to do research on. Finally, we chose the Tacoma Narrows Bridge Collapse as our topic. It was an appealing local event that would help us learn more about the area we live in. Because it was a local topic, we decided we could find helpful primary sources and artifacts without having to travel a great distance. As we did some “pre-research,” we discovered that the Tacoma Narrows Bridge Collapse was a unique and interesting subject that we were willing to study further.

We began our research by finding basic background information on the bridge. Once both of us were sufficiently informed, we went more in-depth. We found several sites and divided up the research amongst us, each of us taking notes on a portion of the sites. We also emailed the director of the Gig Harbor museum for more information, and following her information, contacted historian Richard Hobbs who had done extensive research on the bridge. He gave us information, and we used it to set up an interview with Howard Clifford, the last person off the 1940 bridge before it collapsed. After using books, websites, films, and interviews for research, we began planning the documentary.

A documentary seemed to be the best presentation category for our topic. First of all, we were familiar with the software. Also, the other categories did not seem appropriate for the type of information we were presenting. Our topic included interesting film clips so a display would not have been effective. A performance would have been inappropriate because our topic focused more on the bridge itself and its “life” more than the people. An essay would not have been an effective choice because our topic includes

many enhancing pictures. Before actually beginning to record the narration and transfer the pictures to the software, we created a script and storyboard. We started with an outline to show, in general, what topics the documentary would address. The script was then modeled from this outline. Next, we added the pictures based on the script. All we had left was to piece everything together using our program.

One of the main reasons the Tacoma Narrows Bridge Collapse appealed to us was its direct relation to the theme, triumph and tragedy. Its tragedy was obvious-the collapse of the bridge and the disappointment of the hopes resting upon it. However, my partner and I found it important to emphasize its much more significant triumph. The bridge's collapse revolutionized science and architecture all around the world, ending the trend of artistic but flimsy bridges. By going through many steps in our researching process, we were able to move farther towards our goal in our documentary-to edify the audience about the less apparent but momentous triumph of a clearly tragic event.