

THE HISTORY CHANNEL CLASSROOM STUDY GUIDES

Modern Marvels

Golden Gate Bridge

This episode of *Modern Marvels* presents the story of the construction of the Golden Gate Bridge. The Golden Gate Bridge is one of the foremost man-made tourist attractions in the United States. But at one time, critics said it could never be built. From the start, the project looked impossible. The span of the bay was too wide. The shore was too unstable, the tides too turbulent. Storms battered workers, fog shrouded construction. Yet engineer Joseph B. Strauss' plans proved to be a masterpiece of design and function. In four years, the longest, highest, most spectacular suspension bridge on earth opened to the public, and became one of the greatest symbols of American ingenuity.

The Golden Gate Bridge would be useful for classes on American history, History of Science and Technology, American Culture, Labor History and civics. It is appropriate for middle school and high school.

- agile
- arrogant
- articulated
- bawdy
- boisterous
- cacophony
- calamity
- choreographed
- collateral
- computations
- consensus
- defiance
- demeanor
- dilemma
- eccentric
- escalated
- excavate
- exultation
- facades
- hedonistic
- insufficient
- jaunts
- lascivious
- lofty
- monstrosity
- monumental
- notoriously
- overwhelming
- overzealous
- prestige
- puritanical
- relentless
- resonance
- resonated
- retribution
- self determination

- solidarity
- strenuous
- transcends
- treacherous
- turbulent
- unwittingly
- vanguard
- vernacular
- zeal

Discussion Questions

1. The narrator, Jack Perkins, calls architecture “frozen music.” What does he mean by this term? Can the Golden Gate Bridge be considered a work of art?
2. The vision of building the Golden Gate Bridge was called “a madman’s dream.” What other “mad man’s dreams” have come true in the twentieth century?
3. The Golden Gate Bridge is the child of industrialization. How did mass production lead to, and enable, the construction of the bridge?
4. How did the concept of the suspension bridge overcome the obstacles presented by the Golden Gate Bay?
5. The Golden Gate Bridge was constructed during the worst economic depression in American history. How did the construction of the bridge aid the community during the Great Depression?
6. Because of the dangerous nature of work on the bridge, bridge workers enjoyed some of the best protections and wages for their era. How did the bridge workers' conditions influence the other workers in the area? How did the conditions influence unionization?
7. Why was the construction of the Golden Gate Bridge considered a true community project?
8. Why was the Golden Gate Bridge considered the “framework for the future?”

Extended Activities

1. Imagine that you are a reporter for a paper such as The San Francisco Chronicle. Write an article in which you cover the opening day festivities for the Golden Gate Bridge.
2. Imagine that you are an union organizer. Prepare a list of grievances regarding the safety of your fellow workers to present to the builders of the Golden Gate Bridge.
3. On a poster, create a detailed drawing of the Golden Gate Bridge. Or, using materials such as (wire, string, popsicle sticks, etc.) construct a model of a suspension bridge. With your model or illustration, explain the concept of the suspension bridge, and why it is necessary for the Golden Gate Bridge to be a suspension bridge.