Golden Gate Bridge

Pre-reading

Questions: What do you know about the subject of this reading? What question do you have about it?

Definitions: Suspend – to hang from above
            Toll – a fee paid for the right to do something

Reading

What sights do you think of when you picture the city of San Francisco, California? Do you think about the massive and lovely 4,200 foot orange painted steel suspension bridge known as the Golden Gate Bridge? This site attracts over nine million visitors each year.

The famous bridge was completed and opened to pedestrian traffic on May 27, 1937. The next day, with a push of a telegraph button in the White House, President Franklin Roosevelt opened the bridge to cars, too. Until 1964, it was the longest suspension bridge in the world. Today, the Akashi-Kaikyo Bridge in Japan boasts the longest span at over 6,500 feet.

How did the bridge get its name? The area known as the Golden Gate is the channel formed where the mouth of the San Francisco Bay meets the Pacific Ocean. People used the name Golden Gate as early as 1846, even before the gold rush and long before the bridge.

Construction of the bridge began in 1932, during the Great Depression, when jobs were scarce. The men working on the four and half year Golden Gate Bridge project were greatly envied. Even though the work was dangerous, the bridge workers were grateful to have employment.

Chief Engineer, Joseph Strauss, designed something to combat the dangerous working conditions on the bridge. He introduced the hard hat and a safety net that stretched end to end under the bridge. Nineteen workers fell. Saved by that net, they called themselves the Half Way to Hell Club.

Unfortunately, on February 17, 1937, the net did not hold. Up until that date, there had been only one fatality during the construction of the Bridge. On that sad February day, ten men lost their lives when a section of scaffold carrying twelve men fell through the safety net.

Painting the Bridge is an ongoing task and the primary maintenance job. The paint protects the Bridge from the high salt content air that rusts and corrodes steel components. The Bridge has always been painted orange vermilion, deemed “International Orange.” Morrow, the main architect, chose the color because it blends well with the span’s natural setting.

In May 1987, the bridge celebrated its 50th anniversary. Some 300,000 people reenacted “Pedestrian Day ’37” with an event dubbed “Bridge-walk ’87.” Two years later, the gracefully suspended bridge withstood a 7.1 magnitude earthquake without incident.

Today, more the 41 million vehicles cross the Golden Gate Bridge annually. Drivers must pay a $5.00 cash toll to cross the Bridge. While driving on it, make sure not to speed. The speed limit on the Bridge is 45 miles per hour, and it’s a double-fine zone.

Source: Library of Congress’ America’s Story from America’s Library; Golden Gate Bridge, Highway and Transportation District
Understanding

1. What safety measures were in place while building the Bridge? Who is credited for them? 

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2. During what era in U.S. history was the Bridge built? 

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3. What do we know about the integrity of the Bridge? 

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4. When did the Bridge first open and to whom? 

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5. What makes the Bridge so unique? 

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6. What was the Half Way to Hell Club? Why would those in the club name it that? 

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7. What is the main maintenance job on the Bridge? Why? 

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8. What does the word **annual** mean in this reading? 

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Writing

Option A: Summarize the reading in your own words.

Option B: Have you every visited the Golden Gate Bridge? If yes, write about it. If no, write about another bridge you have seen or crossed.

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Golden Gate Bridge – Level 7.5