Mount Rushmore

Pre-reading

Questions: What do you know about Mount Rushmore? What more would you like to know about it?
Definitions: Depression – a time in the 1930’s when business was very bad and many people were jobless. Dedicate – to unveil a monument or open a building, usually with a ceremony.

Reading*

Carved into the southeast face of a mountain in South Dakota are the faces of four presidents. It is a memorial to American history. The faces of George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Theodore Roosevelt and Abraham Lincoln look down from their stony heights and remind everyone that even the impossible is possible.

In 1923, South Dakota state historian Doane Robinson envisioned colossal carvings of western heroes in the mountains of the Black Hills of South Dakota. His hope was to attract more people to the area. Congress passed legislation authorizing the mountain carving in what is now Black Hills National Forest.

In 1924, Robinson contacted Gutzon Borglum, a famous American artist and sculptor. He agreed to come to the Black Hills. The plan was to carve tall granite figures into a large rock grouping called the Needles. However, Borglum found it to be too thin and weathered to support sculpture on a grand scale.

When Borglum saw Mount Rushmore he pointed to it and said, “America will march along that skyline.” Borglum liked Mount Rushmore because it faced southeast which meant it would receive good light throughout most of the day. It was also the highest peak in the immediate vicinity, and the granite was very resistant, eroding only one inch every 10,000 years.

Borglum felt the subjects of the carving should be of a national focus, not of western heroes. Robinson agreed. Borglum selected George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Theodore Roosevelt, and Abraham Lincoln. He created a plaster model form from which measurements were taken. The model was 12 times smaller than the mountain carving; one inch on the model was equal to one foot on the mountain.

On October 4, 1927, the first actual work of carving began. The workers had to endure harsh weather conditions that varied from blazing hot to bitter cold and windy. Each day they climbed 700 steps to the top of the mountain to punch-in on a time clock. Then 3/8 inch thick steel cables lowered workers over the front of the 500 foot face of the mountain. Some of the workers admitted being uneasy with heights, but during the Depression, any job was a good job.

Ninety percent of the mountain was carved using dynamite. It was dangerous work. The men would cut and set charges of dynamite of specific sizes to remove precise amounts of rock. Then the surface was worked smooth.

Work began on George Washington first. Then Thomas Jefferson was started on Washington’s right. After about two years of working on Jefferson, the granite was found to be badly cracked. Jefferson had to be blasted off the mountain. He was started again on the left side of Washington.

With fanfare, Washington’s face was dedicated on July 4, 1934. Local women from Rapid City made a 39 by 70 foot flag to cover the face before it was revealed to the public. Thomas Jefferson was dedicated in 1936 with President Franklin Roosevelt in attendance.

Abraham Lincoln was dedicated on September 17, 1937. In 1939, the same year modern plumbing and night lighting was installed at the memorial, Theodore Roosevelt’s face was dedicated. Work continued on the mountain for two more years as details and finishing touches were made.

In March of 1941 Borglum died suddenly of an embolism. His son, Lincoln, took over the project for the next seven months, until funding ran out. The carving of Mount Rushmore was then shut down and the presidential faces were complete as they stood.


Level 8.0
Understanding

1. What does the word **resistant** mean? _____________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________

2. Who chose which presidents to carve? _____________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________

3. Why do you think those presidents were chosen? _________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________

4. Describe the working conditions of those who worked on Mount Rushmore. ______________
   __________________________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________

5. What does the word **colossal** mean? _____________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________

6. Where is Mount Rushmore (place and state)? __________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________

7. Why were those who worked on Mount Rushmore grateful for their jobs? ______________
   __________________________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________

8. Why was the Mount Rushmore site chosen for the project? __________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________

Writing

**Choice A:** Summarize the reading in your own words.

**Choice B:** If you have traveled to Mount Rushmore write about your time there.

**Choice C:** What faces would you have put on Mount Rushmore? Why those faces?

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Mount Rushmore – Level 8.0