

Triumph and Tragedy: The Challenger Disaster

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Documentary

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Process Paper

How did we choose our topic?

We discovered our topic by researching events in history that represented triumph and tragedy. We found a few other ideas—like Anne Frank’s diaries—before we came to a consensus. However, we decided on the topic of the Challenger Space Shuttle disaster. We are all curious about space related things, so we found it fitting to have our topic be the Challenger. We wanted to find out the cause of the disaster, what led up to the disaster, and what was triumphant about the mission. Lastly, we were interested in the news coverage that showed the Challenger launching live. We wanted to make a project that could include that. In the end, we decided on a documentary.

How did we conduct our research?

Our research began in the library in a search for books that had background information. However, most of our research was done online. We found our primary sources with the help of our librarian and NASA’s archives. Our sources were recorded in a shared notebook, but we each had a personal notebook to write down information. The most important sources were the Rogers Commission and the Investigation. They both had detailed and exact information about how the Challenger exploded and how it changed NASA. Then, we began trying to contact people for an interview. We found one of the finalists for the Teacher In Space Program, Robert Foerster. We ended up interviewing him over the phone.

How did we construct our project?

To make our documentary, we realized we needed a program or online movie maker that was compatible with a Chromebook. We were first interested in the program Windows Movie Maker, but it couldn’t be installed on our Chromebooks. Then, one of our group members found an online video maker called Adobe Spark. It let us make our documentary in chunks that we could add a picture or video to and voiceover individually. While it did take a while, Adobe Spark was a valuable tool in the making of our documentary.

How does our topic relate to the theme?

Our topic, the Challenger, relates to the theme of triumph and tragedy greatly. The Challenger's most obvious tragedy was that it killed all seven of the crew members. Also, NASA was scheduled to launch 24 flights that year, and that created extreme stress throughout the agency. That led to them rushing the launch of the Challenger, which in the end, was part of the cause of the disaster. However, there were also triumphs. Because of the Challenger, NASA now takes more precautions during spaceflight and doesn't rush missions. They made over 100 changes to their shuttles, which improved the safety of the program. NASA also learned to listen to their engineers. Finally, the families of the astronauts made the Challenger Center. The center helps spread STEM, a program that teaches science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. Without the Challenger Disaster, NASA could have never learned the valuable lessons they now know.