

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*

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

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

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

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

214 Borglum felt the subjects of the carving should be of a national focus, not of western heroes.
231 Robinson agreed. Borglum selected George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Theodore Roosevelt, and
242 Abraham Lincoln. He created a plaster model form from which measurements were taken. The model was
258 12 times smaller than the mountain carving; one inch on the model was equal to one foot on the mountain.

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

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

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

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

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

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

581 *Source – National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior.

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?
