

Video Activity 5

THE BROOKLYN BRIDGE

The Brooklyn Bridge has been designated a New York City Landmark. The Brooklyn Bridge has been an inspiration to artists of all disciplines. Since its completion, numerous poets have paid tribute to the bridge and its neo-Gothic towers and lacework of steel wire.

1 Answer the questions before watching the video.

1. Have you ever seen a photo of the Brooklyn Bridge?
2. Have you been to NYC and seen the real bridge?
3. Do you know what building materials have been used for its construction?
4. How old do you think it is?
5. In Italy there are some famous bridges. Do you know where they are?



Video Activity 5: "THE BROOKLYN BRIDGE"

As the Statue of Liberty rose on its pedestal in New York Harbor, an equally impressive monument had just been finished on the Eastern side of Manhattan Island. The Brooklyn Bridge was completed in 1883.

The East River between Manhattan and Brooklyn was congested with ferry traffic. Walt Whitman commemorated his experience of the maritime and social chaos in his poem "*Crossing Brooklyn ferry*".

Hundreds of craft was (sic) navigated routinely between Brooklyn and Manhattan. When the bridge was finished, that traffic moved effectively to wheel and foot, high above the river.

Spanning 1595 feet in its center section, the Brooklyn Bridge rises with Gothic elegance to suspend a final of steel cables, a new technology at the time of its construction.

Sealed pressurized caissons around the feet of the bridge held back water and allowed workers to dig the foundations well below sea level. The bridge's designer John Augustus Roebling died early in the project; his son and daughter-in-law, Washington and Emily Warren Roebling, finished the job. Washington Roebling became paralyzed by decompression sickness from his frequent visits to the caissons and counted on his wife for support and intelligence as they crafted the bridge. Over twenty other workers died in the construction effort. ▶

The bridge embodies unique application of Hegelian philosophy, according to the American Studies scholar Allen Trachtenberg. John Augustus Roebling enrolled at Berlin's Polytechnic Institute where Hegel taught. Roebling took cables notion of opposites and applied it to engineering to balance tension and mass at great distances. The solution gave structure to the bridges cable system.

Curiously the same philosophical system guiding Roebling provided the underpinning for Karl Marx's Communist Manifesto.

Despite the cost, the bridge was celebrated as a success when it opened. Washington and Emily Roebling were cheered and thanked.

The bridge inspired artists for generations. Walt Whitman saw a near completion.

In 1930, Hart Crane wrote a book-length work called "The Bridge" which became a landmark of modern American literature.

2 Watch the video and choose the most appropriate option (A, B or C).

1. The Brooklyn Bridge is
 - A. in New York harbor.
 - B. on the Eastern side of Manhattan Island.
 - C. on the Western side of Manhattan Island.
2. The title of Walt Whitman poem is
 - A. Crossing Brooklyn ferry.
 - B. Crossing Brooklyn bridge.
 - C. Crossing Brooklyn ship.
3. The Brooklyn Bridge is feet large in its center section.
 - A. 1,565
 - B. 1,595
 - C. 1,535
4. John Augustus Roebling enrolled at Berlin's Polytechnic Institute where Hegel
 - A. studied.
 - B. thought.
 - C. taught.
5. The Brooklyn Bridge was a success and
 - A. Washington and Emily Roebling were cheered and thanked.
 - B. John Augustus Roebling was cheered and thanked.
 - C. Hegel was cheered and thanked.

3 Watch the video again and answer the questions.

1. When was the bridge completed?
2. What happened to the traffic when the bridge was finished?
3. What new technology for the time was applied in the construction?
4. What was the main aim of sealed pressurized caissons around the feet of the bridge?
5. Who finished the job after the designer's death?
6. What happened to Washington Roebling?
7. Why can the construction of the bridge be considered an application of Hegel's philosophy?
8. What is the link between Roebling and Karl Marx?
9. Who wrote the poem "The Bridge"?