

Name _____ Date _____

THE BROOKLYN BRIDGE

The Brooklyn Bridge isn't the oldest or longest in the world, but it is certainly among the most famous ones. In its time of construction it was a marvelous technical achievement.

Today Brooklyn is 'only' a part of New York, but in 1860 it was the third largest city in America, with a population of nearly 300,000. The Brooklyn Bridge was built to connect Long Island (where Brooklyn is situated) to the mainland, spanning the East River.

After sixty years of discussions, John A. Roebling's plan was approved, and construction began in 1869. After fourteen hard years the bridge was finally completed and opened on May 24, 1883.

From the very beginning, the construction was slowed by various problems. A fire and an explosion destroyed parts of the bridge, there was also a fraud involved when the cable contractor supplied the builders with weaker and cheaper steel wires than needed. However, the worst disaster didn't involve loss or destruction of material, which could always be replaced, but the irreversible loss of human lives. All in all, twenty-seven men died during the construction of the Brooklyn Bridge, including John Roebling, the bridge's first chief engineer. After his death, his son Washington took over, but not even he escaped unharmed, as he suffered an attack of caisson disease (also known as "the bends" or "decompression sickness") and was left painfully paralyzed. Nevertheless, he continued to direct the construction from his bedroom window with spyglass in hand. Other causes of death included falling, and being hit by falling equipment and by cables during their rigging.

The bridge itself was a record-breaking structure in its time. With a main span of 1595 feet and 6 inches, it was by far the longest suspension bridge in the world. It was also the first to use steel cables. Before then, steel had not been considered a trustworthy material.

The bridge looks much as it did a hundred years ago, and it is certainly what John Roebling hoped it would be: a true monument and an American symbol.

ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS ABOUT THE BROOKLYN BRIDGE

1. The Brooklyn Bridge is
 - a. the longest bridge in the world.
 - b. one of the world's most famous bridges.
 - c. the world's oldest bridge.
 - d. one of the world's widest bridges.

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2. Brooklyn
- a. is another name for New York today.
 - b. is the third largest city in America, with a population of 300,000.
 - c. is situated on the mainland.
 - d. was one of the largest American cities 150 years ago.

3. Which of these disasters occurred during the construction?

- a. A fire which destroyed worker's housing.
- b. Faulty cables made of aluminum were supplied by the cable contractor.
- c. Washington Roebling died.
- d. People were killed by falling equipment.

4. The article states that steel

- a. was not used in constructing the bridge at all
- b. was considered a trustworthy material for many years before the bridge was built
- c. had been considered an untrustworthy material before the bridge was built
- d. cables were invented by John Roebling

5. Which of the following statements is false?

- a. The worst disasters included great loss of material due fires and explosions.
- b. Washington Roebling was paralyzed after an attack of the bends.
- c. The main span of the bridge is 1595 feet and 6 inches.
- d. John Roebling hoped the Brooklyn bridge would be a symbol of America.

6. Explain how Washington Roebling oversaw the construction of the bridge after being paralyzed. _____

7. How might Washington Roebling solve that problem today? _____

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**ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS
ABOUT THE BROOKLYN BRIDGE**

1. b

2. d

3. d

4. c

5. a

6. He directed the construction from his bedroom and saw everything with a spyglass.

7. Answers will vary, and may include cell phones, remote cameras....