

1E

Vocabulary in Context

Read the passage.

Faces in the Mountain

Visitors to South Dakota find that a trip to Mount Rushmore is almost **obligatory**, for there they can see one of America's most awe-inspiring monuments. Carved into a granite mountainside, the colossal heads of four United States presidents are visible for a distance of sixty miles. Side by side, the **visages** of George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln, and Theodore Roosevelt range from fifty to seventy feet in height. They are the work of the remarkable American sculptor and dramatic personality Gutzon Borglum.

Born in Idaho in 1867, Borglum led an artist's **vagabond** life in America and Europe for twenty years before settling in New York City in 1901. There, he soon achieved an international reputation as a sculptor. The idea that "Small is beautiful" would not have applied to Borglum; his view was that "Bigger is better."

The **impetus** for the Mount Rushmore project came in 1926 when the state historian of South Dakota, knowing Borglum's views, invited him to create a monumental work of art for the Black Hills mountain region. Borglum accepted the challenge immediately, but the project he proposed did not meet with universal approval. Many felt that the carvings would **detract** from the area's natural beauty. Cora Johnson, a South Dakota journalist, expressed such feelings when she wrote: "Man makes statues, but God made the mountains. Leave them alone." Borglum, however, was not one to heed this advice.

The question of which national figures to honor caused much debate. Sioux Chief Red Cloud, who had fought against white encroachment on Native American lands, was one of the names proposed. Another was Susan B. Anthony, who had **bewailed** nineteenth-century women's lack of the right to vote in political elections, and led the struggle to **emancipate** them from this deprivation. The final decision, however, was left to Borglum. Washington, Jefferson, and Lincoln were obvious choices, but Borglum had a personal reason for his fourth selection, a man of

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enormous energy who **extolled** physical fitness and vigorous activity. In his own life, Borglum strove to emulate his hero, so Theodore Roosevelt became the fourth figure honored at Mount Rushmore.

Money to pay for the project was a problem from the beginning, and work proceeded **intermittently**, especially after 1930, when the country was in the grip of the Great Depression. During those years, Borglum made frequent visits to the nation's capital seeking financial assistance. Loath to stoop to **wheedling**, the sculptor managed to convince a reluctant Congress to provide funding to go on with the project. Nor was lack of funds the only problem Borglum had to grapple with. Because of the hard granite rock, the difficulties of carving out the faces had at first seemed **insuperable**, but Borglum solved the problem by exploding small charges of dynamite to remove pieces of rock. Under his supervision, workers in harnesses suspended from the mountaintop drilled, chipped, and chiseled away at the rock. So skillful was Borglum that his eye for precise measurement enabled him to tell if a line was **plumb** to a quarter of an inch.

During his lifetime, Borglum had earned enormous sums from the sale of his works. However, he did not embrace Benjamin Franklin's **maxim** "A penny saved is a penny earned." Instead, he lived a **flamboyant** lifestyle. His daughter, Mary Ellis, recalls: "He loved flashy cars and hired chauffeurs to drive them." So careless was he about money that he died **destitute** on March 6, 1941, before he'd finished Mount Rushmore. It was left to his son Lincoln, who had assisted him throughout, to complete the project eight months later.

► **Answer each question with a sentence. If a question does not contain a word from the lesson, use one in your answer. Use each word only once.**

1. Why might the original **detractors** of the Mount Rushmore project have a different view of it today?

2. Why would it be incorrect to refer to the Mount Rushmore sculptures as statues?

3. Why might a biographer of Borglum have difficulty describing what his subject was doing before 1901?

4. List two **maxims** that Borglum did not believe in.

5. Why was Susan B. Anthony considered a candidate for one of the places of honor on Mount Rushmore?

6. Why might Borglum's children have **bewailed** his **flamboyant** lifestyle?

7. What was the **impetus** for Borglum's trips to Washington, D.C., in the 1930s?

8. What were two almost **insuperable** problems that Borglum faced with this project?

9. What skill did Borglum possess that would be especially useful when working on a large monument such as Mount Rushmore?

10. How do you know that the state historian of South Dakota did not have to **wheedle** to get Borglum to take on the Mount Rushmore project?

11. Why might Borglum's son have felt it was **obligatory** to complete the monument?

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Fun & Fascinating FACTS

- A **flamboyant** person is someone who attracts attention by behaving in a showy way. The word *flamboyant* reflects this. It comes from the French verb *flamboyer*, which means "to blaze."
- The word **plumb** comes from the Latin root *plumbum*, meaning "lead." Some other words come from that root. One

is *plumber*, a person who installs and repairs kitchen and bathroom pipes (which were once made of lead). The other is *plummet*, a verb meaning, "to fall straight down; to plunge." That meaning comes from the fact that a string with a lead weight attached to it is called a *plumb line*. It is lowered into the water and plunges, or plummets, to the bottom, giving a measure of depth.