

The Wobbly Bridge

Lead-in

In Britain, to mark the start of the new Millennium, many new pieces of architecture were commissioned. These included the Millennium Dome and the Millennium Bridge in London.

What do you think? Discuss these questions with a partner.

- 1 Do you think it is important to a country's or a city's pride and sense of identity to build important or imposing pieces of architecture?
- 2 Would you be pleased or angry if the government in your city decided to spend a lot of taxpayer's money on commissioning a beautifully-designed new bridge or museum or theatre? Why?
- 3 Imagine Sydney without its Opera House or Paris without the Eiffel Tower. Both these buildings were criticised by many people when they were first built. Why do people react so strongly to these big projects?
- 4 Is there a newly-built building in the city you live nearest to which people have criticised? What do you think of it?

Reading 1

You are going to read a newspaper article about the new Millennium Bridge in London. When the bridge first opened in May 2000 so many people walked across it that it wobbled. It was closed and the architects and engineers had to repair it. Naturally, the British Press was very critical, and it was embarrassing for the government and the architects. This article was written at the time of its reopening in February 2002.

Look at the sentences below and check you understand all the words. Then read the passage and decide which are true and which are false.

- | | | | |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------|
| It's a suspension bridge | <input type="checkbox"/> | It's a roadbridge for cars | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| It's a walkway for pedestrians | <input type="checkbox"/> | It's a traditional structure | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| It's an original design | <input type="checkbox"/> | It's attractive | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| It's long | <input type="checkbox"/> | It's strong | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| It's heavy | <input type="checkbox"/> | It's dangerous | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| It cost a lot | <input type="checkbox"/> | It's still wobbly | <input type="checkbox"/> |

London's Millennium bridge finally stops wobbling after \$7m worth of repairs by Jonathan Glancey

Nobody knew whether or not the Millennium bridge in London would wobble when it reopened last month. One newspaper invited a confident young lady in a bikini to pose with a plate of jelly for its photographers. This was a little unfair as it was a particularly windy day, so of course the jelly wobbled. A brisk westerly wind whipped along the River Thames threatening umbrellas, wigs and jellies. At nine o'clock that morning, a group of bigwigs including Lord Foster of Thameside, Sir Anthony Caro and the engineers from Arup who designed the structure, together with at least one bishop, and the media, stepped foot on the bridge. It was closed within three days of its first opening in May 2000 after members of the public were alarmed by the violent shake and wobble of the structure.

Did the wobbly bridge live up to its name? No. Over the past 20 months, \$7m has been spent installing over eighty dampers (or shock absorbers) beneath the 4m-wide walkway that was shaken by no fewer than 160,000 pedestrians in those infamous first three days. "This is the world's first lengthy lateral suspension bridge," said Ken Shuttleworth, a partner of Lord Foster. "It has never been dangerous, but it was a leap

of faith. What happened was that the bridge 'lozenged' – wobbled in a lozenge-like pattern, when so many people marched across it at once. It won't do that again." So what sort of load will it take now? "Elephants, horses, sure," said Mr Shuttleworth, as he looked at all the steel rods and braces that support the walkway linking Tate Modern art museum on the south bank to St Paul's Cathedral on the north.

The bridge's design appears uncompromised by the work of the past 20 months, and it remains a lovely piece of lightweight engineering. The shock-absorbing dampers are, for the most part, tucked away beneath the 320m-long walkway.

The Foster-Caro-Arup "blade of light" design beat more than 200 entries to build the bridge because it is elegant and discreet. Its design interferes very little with the surrounding cityscape. At night it is lit from below by a fine arc of fluorescence.

After all the problems not even a spit of rain, much less a blustery wind, could dampen the spirits of thousands of people who crossed the bridge formerly known as Wobbly.

The Guardian Weekly 7-3-2002, page 21

Reading 2

Read the passage again and answer the questions. Discuss them with a partner.

Why do you think...

- 1 a newspaper took photos of a girl in a bikini on the bridge?
 - 2 they had to close the bridge after three days in May 2000?
 - 3 the engineers hadn't expected the bridge to wobble?
 - 4 the dampers were tucked (hidden) away beneath the walkway?
 - 5 this bridge design was chosen?
- Do you think the writer of this article is critical of or impressed with the bridge?

Vocabulary in context

Find the words in italics in the passage, then answer the questions.

- 1 Do you think *bigwigs* think they are important people in the local community?
- 2 If the wind is *brisk* or *blustery*, do you think it is very strong, very light or somewhere in between?
- 3 Do you think *a leap of faith* means jumping over the river or taking a risky decision to do something without any proof it will happen.
- 4 Which of the following are used to a. hold up the bridge, b. stop it shaking, and c. light it up?
rods *dampers* *cables* *an arc of fluorescence* *braces*
- 5 If something *dampens your spirits* do you feel happy or depressed?

Follow-up

Think of a controversial building project in your city or country. Answer these questions.

- 1 What was it and when was it built? Describe what it looks like and how it was built in detail.
- 2 What's your opinion of it?
- 3 How did people react to it when it was first opened?

Talk to your partner.

Teacher's notes - the Wobbly Bridge

Lead-in

It is a good idea to find pictures of recent modern structures, particularly suspension bridges, to help introduce the lesson and some of the vocabulary. You could put them on the board, ask the students what they are pictures of, whether they like them and how they would describe them.

If you have a monolingual class of students from the same country, you could ask them what were the most important millennial projects commissioned in their country. Were they successful?

Read through the introduction with the students, then ask them to discuss the questions with a partner. Have a brief class feedback.

Answers

Students' own ideas.

Reading 1

Read through the introduction and the sentences with the students. Check they understand all the words. Then ask them to read the passage and decide which sentences are true and which are false. Let the students check with a partner before feedback.

Answers

It's a suspension bridge.	T
It's a roadbridge for cars.	F
It's a walkway for pedestrians.	T
It's a traditional structure.	F
It's an original design.	T
It's attractive.	T
It's long.	T
It's strong.	T
It's heavy.	F
It's dangerous.	F
It cost a lot.	T
It's still wobbly.	F

Reading 2

Ask the students to look back at the passage again and find the answers to the questions. The questions require the students to interpret or infer meaning from the passage. Let the students discuss the questions with a partner before feedback.

Answers

- 1 It was probably a tabloid newspaper, and they wanted to make a joke about how the bridge still wobbled. Tabloid newspapers tend to introduce girls in bikinis to their stories to make them more ‘interesting’.
- 2 They had to close the bridge after three days in May 2000 because so many people walked across it that it started to shake. Although it wasn’t dangerous, the general public were alarmed.
- 3 The engineers hadn’t expected the bridge to wobble because they had never built such a long bridge of this type before.
- 4 The dampers were tucked (hidden) away beneath the walkway in order not to spoil the elegant style of the bridge’s design.
- 5 This bridge design was chosen because it is elegant and discreet. Its design interferes very little with the surrounding cityscape.

The writer of this article is impressed with the bridge.

Vocabulary in context

Ask the students to find the words in italics in the passage, then answer the questions. They could use dictionaries to check their answers.

Answers

- 1 *Bigwigs* think they are important people in the local community.
- 2 If the wind is *brisk* or *blustery*, it is somewhere in between strong and light.
- 3 *A leap of faith* means taking a risky decision to do something without any proof it will happen.
- 4 a. hold up the bridge: *rods, cables, braces*
b. stop it shaking: *dampers*
c. light it up: *an arc of fluorescence*
- 5 If something *dampens your spirits* you feel depressed.

Follow-up

Give the students a few minutes to think of a controversial building project in their city or country, and prepare things to say in answer to the questions. When they are ready put the students in pairs or small groups to tell each other about their structures.