

EXCERPTS TO WRITE ABOUT

The Hindenburg Disaster

► Directions:

- Read through the first excerpt and highlight examples of text structure. Use the Compare and Contrast Text Structure template to record your thinking.
- Then read the second excerpt and do the same.

What Was the Hindenburg?

by Janet B. Pascal

On Thursday, May 6, 1937, a crowd gathered in Lakehurst, New Jersey. They were there to watch the airship *Hindenburg* land. Although the ship had arrived in Lakehurst several times before, it was still a thrilling sight. The *Hindenburg* was the first flying ship ever to carry passengers over the Atlantic Ocean to America.

A little while before 7:00 p.m., the *Hindenburg* appeared. It was a kind of ship called a *zeppelin*. This is a large balloon on a hard frame, filled with a gas that is lighter than air. It floats through the sky like a helium balloon. To hold enough gas to stay up, zeppelins had to be huge. The *Hindenburg* was almost a sixth of a mile long. It was shaped like a tube with rounded ends. Its surface was a shining silver. Despite its size, it floated lightly and quietly through the air, as much at home as a fish in water. As it began to sink gently toward the airfield, it was a beautiful sight.

More than a hundred workers were waiting on the field to help pull in the ship. The crew dropped two ropes to them. It seemed that the *Hindenburg* had finished another successful voyage.

What happened next would horrify the world and change the future of flying. Most people believed that these majestic, floating bubbles would soon carry passengers all over the world. Until May 6, 1937, it seemed they would someday rule the sky. But after that day, no passenger zeppelin ever flew again.

Note: In these four opening paragraphs, Pascal uses carefully chosen words to paint a picture of promise, technological beauty, and people's investment in these "magical floating bubbles" as vessels to a bright future of glamorous air travel. The zeppelin was not just silver but "shining" silver, and it floated lightly and quietly through the air. One of the most arresting phrases is "as much at home as a fish in water." What's so interesting about that line is that it's an outlier—totally conjecture. In other words, the vessel may have *looked* at home to people, but there is a presumptuousness, or innocence in the line that is not unlike the overconfidence folks had for the safety of the gas-powered *Hindenburg*. Was that intentional on the part of the writer, to plant this line? One of the pleasures of reading nonfiction is to ponder what a writer had in mind as he or she selected details.

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You Wouldn't Want to Be on the Hindenburg! A Transatlantic Trip You'd Rather Skip

by Ian Graham

Introduction

The year is 1936—and this is the most exciting day of your life! You have just learned that you are to join the crew of the *Hindenburg* airship. The LZ129 *Hindenburg* is the world's biggest airship. It's as big as an ocean liner, but it's lighter than air, thanks to the hydrogen gas that fills it. It was built by the Zeppelin company in Germany for luxury flights across the Atlantic Ocean.

You have been working as an airship mechanic for the past five years. Your job is to keep the engines in tip-top condition. At first, you worked in workshops on the ground. Then you flew in the company's smaller airships, looking after the engines during flights. Now, you've been given your dream job in the brand-new *Hindenburg*. It is due to make ten flights from Germany to the United States and seven to Brazil, all in its first year. You'll be going with it—and you can't wait!

Flying Whales

Zeppelin airships have been flying since 1900. They are named after Count Ferdinand von Zeppelin, the German nobleman who developed them. Earlier airships were just big bags of gas; they sometimes collapsed like leaking party balloons. Count Zeppelin's airships are bigger and stronger because they have a metal frame inside. In 1909, Zeppelin formed Delag, the world's first airline. Its airships have carried tens of thousands of passengers—including you—between German cities. The Zeppelin company makes military airships, too.

Note: One glance at the following two heavily illustrated pages and you know both the author and illustrator are out to capture your attention about a gruesome disaster with a touch of . . . humor? Yes, this is an interesting example of a talented team who have a particular purpose in mind: educate younger readers who might not be eager to read history about an important event. The subtitle, for starters, uses understatement—"a transatlantic trip you'd rather skip"—to set a tone. Then, when you let your eyes wander across the page, the fun fonts, the "flying whales" heading, and that white-mustached man who looks more like a man selling breakfast cereal than a German nobleman all combine to invite you into this lighthearted book. Word choice and details like "bag of gas" and "deflated party balloons" not only make the account more relatable to young readers but seem to forecast the human folly and maybe hubris that led to the air disaster. Although it's hard to tell from this excerpt, the author's inclusion of the detail that zeppelins were used as military ships too may be an invitation for a savvy reader to investigate this tidbit more. In fact, just a few years after the 1937 *Hindenburg* disaster, zeppelins were used by Germany to scout and bomb Britain. Look at photos of the *Hindenburg* and you will see a swastika on its side. Is there some element of Ian Graham sticking it to the Germans here? One of the challenges and thrills of reading nonfiction is pondering an author's deepest thoughts on a topic.

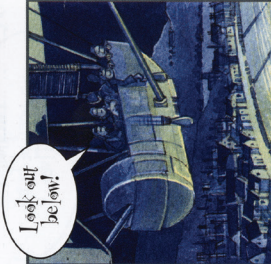
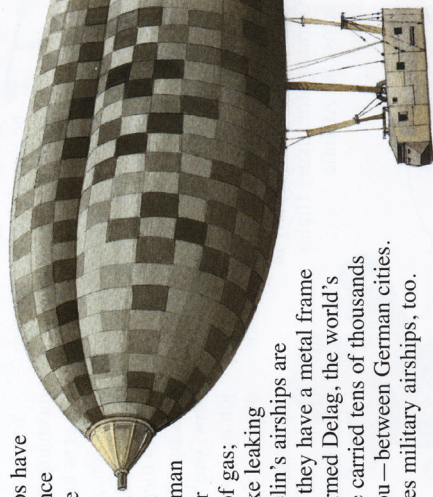
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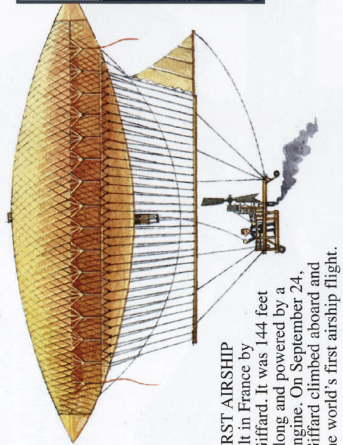
Flying Whales

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This armed French airship was used by the British in World War I to protect the English Channel.



DURING WORLD WAR I (1914–1918), the Germans used airships to drop bombs by hand onto enemy cities.

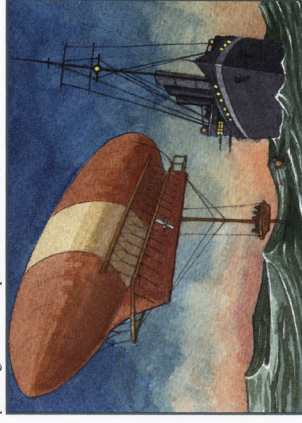


THE FIRST AIRSHIP was built in France by Henri Giffard. It was 144 feet (44 m) long and powered by a steam engine. On September 24, 1852, Giffard climbed aboard and made the world's first airship flight.

THERE WERE FEW anti-aircraft guns during World War I, but artillerymen could fire at airships by tilting the barrels of their field guns up high.

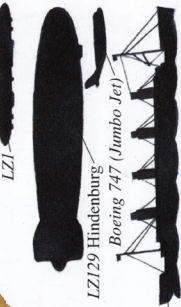


THE AIRSHIP AMERICA tried to fly across the Atlantic Ocean in 1910, but it failed because its engines broke down. The crew and their cat were rescued by a passing British ship, the *SS Trent*.

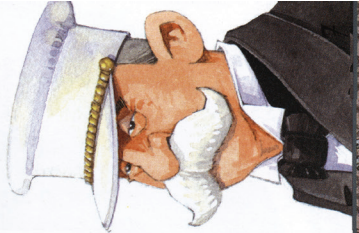


Handy Hint
If you want to work in an airship, make sure you're not afraid of heights!

ZEPPELINS were as big as ocean liners. If they were still flying today, they would dwarf modern airliners like the Boeing 747.



FERDINAND VON ZEPPELIN spent a fortune building his first airship, the LZ1. No one believed this retired army officer could do it. People were amazed when he succeeded.



Ferdinand von Zeppelin

Source: Graham, I. (2009). You wouldn't want to be on the Hindenburg! A transatlantic trip you'd rather skip. New York, NY: Franklin Watts.

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