



What Happened Aboard the Edmund Fitzgerald?

On November 10, 1975, the Great Lakes ore carrier *Edmund Fitzgerald* sank in the area of the Great Lakes Triangle. Though its wreckage was found, no members of the ship's crew were ever recovered. The sinking thus became not only a new piece of the triangle's mystery; it became a human story as well.

Strong emotions are often expressed more effectively through an artistic creation than through spoken words. A violent painting or a joyful dance can communicate feelings that anyone can understand. The deep sorrow felt in the lakes country when the *Edmund Fitzgerald* sank was expressed in a haunting ballad by Canadian singer, Gordon Lightfoot.

THE WRECK OF THE EDMUND FITZGERALD

The legend lives on from the Chippewa on down
of the big lake they call "Gitche Gumee."
The lake, it is said, never gives up her dead
when the skies of November turn gloomy.
With a load of iron ore twenty-six thousand tons more
than the *Edmund Fitzgerald* weighed empty,
That good ship and true was a bone to be chewed
when the "Gales of November" cam early.

The ship was the pride of the American side
coming back from some mill in Wisconsin.
As the big freighters go it was bigger than most
with a crew and good captain well seasoned,
Concluding some terms with a couple of steel firms
when they left fully loaded for Cleveland.
And later that night when the ship's bell rang
could it be the north wind they'd been feelin'?

The wind in the wires made a tattle-tale sound
and a wave broke over the railing.
And ev'ry man knew as the captain did too
'twas the witch of November come stealin'.
The dawn came late and the breakfast had to wait
when the Gales of November came slashin'.
When afternoon came it was freezin' rain
in the face of a hurricane west wind.

When suppertime came the old cook came on deck
sayin', "Fellas, it's too rough t' feed ya."
At 7:00 p.m. a main hatchway caved in;
he said, "Fellas, it's been good t' know ya."
The captain wired in he had water comin' in
and the good ship and crew was in peril.
And later that night when 'is lights went outta sight
came the wreck of the *Edmund Fitzgerald*.

Source

OEAGLS EP-17C, *The Great Lakes Triangle*, by Rosanne W. Fortner and Daniel W. Jax.

Earth Systems Understanding

This activity focuses on the use of the arts, ESU 1.

Materials

- Recording of Gordon Lightfoot's "The Wreck of the *Edmund Fitzgerald*."
- Words to that song.
- Pencil or Pen.

Does anyone know where the love of God goes
when the words turn the minutes to hours?
The searchers all say they'd have made Whitefish Bay
if they'd put fifteen more miles behind 'er.
They might have split up or they might have capsized;
they may have broke deep and took water.
And all that remains is the faces and the names
of the wives and the sons and the daughters.

Lake Huron rolls, Superior sings
in the rooms of her ice water mansion.
Old Michigan steams like a young man's dreams;
the islands and bays are for sportsmen.
And farther below Lake Ontario
takes in what Lake Erie can send her,
And the iron boats go as the mariners all know
with the Gales of November remembered.

In a musty old hall in Detroit they prayed,
in the "Maritime Sailors' Cathedral."
The church bell chimed 'til it rang twenty-nine times
for each man on the *Edmund Fitzgerald*.
The legend lives on from the Chippewa on down
of the big lake they call "Gitche Gumee."
"Superior," they said, "never gives up her dead
when the Gales of November come early!"

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Answers

1. Student feelings will differ but will probably be expressed as worried feelings followed by sadness.
- A. The singer's voice is low and clear. "He sounds sad," many students say.
- B. The tempo is very slow and rhythmic. It seems to roll and lumber along.
- C. The instrument is a steel guitar. The rhythmic rise and fall is created with a "bottle slide."
- D. Background sounds are like storm waves rising and breaking against the ship. After the ship sinks, storm waves are no longer heard.
- E. Lyrics that create a mood include: *never gives up her dead, gloomy, a bone to be chewed, the witch of November, slashin', peril, the words turn the minutes to hours, etc.*

**There are more things in
heaven and earth...than
are dreamt of in our
philosophy.**

-Shakespeare

OBJECTIVES

In completing this activity you should be able to:

- Give examples of the amount of information that can be conveyed in memorable form in a song.
- Describe how music can convey emotions.
- Use the ideas from a song in your personal writing.

PROCEDURE

1. Listen to the recording. How does it make you feel? For each of the following things about the song, tell how it helps to produce this general feeling:
 - A. The singer's voice.
 - B. The tempo (how fast the song is).
 - C. The instrument being played.
 - D. Sounds in the background.
 - E. The words (list words or phrases that help create the feeling).
2. Imagine that you are aboard the *Fitzgerald* on the night of the storm. The darkness and the cold rain are uncomfortable, but until now no one had doubted that you will reach your destination. The song reports that "at 7:00 P.M. a main hatchway caved in." Write a one-page description of what you might have witnessed aboard the ship as it sank. This can be done as if you are recording events in a diary or writing a last letter to a friend. Since you have probably decided for yourself what must have happened that night, this is a way of providing the world with an "eyewitness" account of the events.

EXTENSION

The last messages from ships and planes that have disappeared are examined in Berlitz's book, *Without a Trace*, a follow-up to *The Bermuda Triangle*. The book also includes the testimony of witnesses and survivors, enlarging the mystery of the Triangle. As you read these accounts, search for ways to explain the happenings naturally. Both Berlitz's and Gourley's books imply that forces from outer space are responsible for triangle disappearances. Though this idea is an interesting one, most scientists would tell us that science fact is stranger than science fiction. It is very likely that some natural factors such as those you investigated in this activity have been responsible for disappearances in both the Great Lakes and the Bermuda Triangles.

A FINAL NOTE

As this activity was being prepared, another incident was added to the Great Lakes Triangle mystery. This incident did not result in the loss of the plane or any lives, but it is the type of accident that makes people believe that unnatural things are happening in the Triangle. Try to figure out what natural forces might have caused this near-disaster.

Columbus Dispatch FRI, APRIL 6, 1979

Survival Of Supersonic Dive Called Miracle

DETROIT (AP) — The 80 passengers aboard the TWA flight from New York to Minneapolis had just eaten a midair snack when they felt the craft begin to vibrate.

Suddenly, the plane swerved to the right, completed a 360-degree barrel roll and nose-dived from 39,000 to 12,000 feet — five miles — in a matter of seconds at a speed apparently exceeding that of sound.

“YOU COULD FEEL your face pressed back and the blood rush to your head,” said Chell Roberts, 22, a University of Utah student who was aboard. “Everyone was screaming. I thought it was over.”

“We were just through eating when it happened . . . people started to scream and a flight attendant started to cry,” he said. “It’s really a funny feeling to see what everybody does before they think they are going to die.”

But nobody died Wednesday night. Only three people aboard suffered minor injuries.

FEDERAL AVIATION Administration (FAA) inspectors said it was “miraculous” and “unprecedented” that the Boeing 727 jetliner survived such midair trauma before being brought under control in a desperation maneuver. Langhorne Bond, head of the FAA, commended the pilot, identified only as H. Gibson of Chicago.

“I can’t think of any other incident where a (commercial, passenger) plane has done a complete 360-degree rollover and survived,” Bond said Thursday. “The miracle is that it held together under such extraordinary speed and circumstances.”

Preliminary evidence, Bond said, indicated that the flight was “very routine in clear weather” when the plane “began to vibrate, went out of cruise control, rolled to the right, did a complete turnover and dived to the ground.”

“WE DON’T KNOW what caused it at this time,” Bond said.

At that point, the pilot tried to slow the descent by deploying devices on the plane designed to increase drag. But the wing flaps, spoilers and leading-edge slats proved ineffective at the speed the plane was traveling and were torn off.

The pilot then lowered the landing gear. “It is clear that that is the event that allowed the crew to regain control of the plane,” Bond said.

“THERE IS NOTHING in the manual to tell you what to do,” he said, commending the pilot.

Bond and other FAA officials flew in from Washington to survey the damaged craft at Detroit Metropolitan Airport. The plane, with a seven-member crew, made an emergency landing at 10:30 p.m. Wednesday.

Propped up by jacks, the plane sat on an airport side runway as mechanics, FAA officials and reporters examined the damage. Flaps on the right wing were ripped off during the descent. Pieces of metal hung from that wing and from the fuselage around the landing gear doors on both sides. Inside the airliner, newspapers and magazines were strewn on the floor. A large sack of used airsickness bags stood in the aisle.

TWO TAPES, ONE recording cockpit conversations and one recording radio conversations with the ground, were sent for study to the National Transportation Safety Board in Washington.

Chuck Foster, associate administrator of the FAA for aviation standards, said the plane was flying about 500 mph before the trouble hit, but in the dive apparently exceeded 650 mph — above the speed of sound at that altitude and temperature.

“I’ve been told that the airspeed indicator was pegged all the way over to the edge,” Foster said. “If that proves to be the case, it will be the first time in FAA history that an airplane (not designed for it) had exceeded those speeds and survived.”