GCSE

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ENGLISH LANGUAGE – Component 2

19th and 21st Century Non-Fiction Reading and Transactional/Persuasive Writing

WEDNESDAY, 7 NOVEMBER 2018 – MORNING

RESOURCE MATERIAL FOR USE WITH SECTION A

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Nik Wallenda Makes History at Niagara Falls

Jacob Burnett reports on Nik Wallenda's tightrope walk across Niagara Falls.

No one else in the world has had the view of Niagara Falls that Nik Wallenda had as he stared down into the churning waters 60 metres below and was enveloped in the mist from the thundering falls.

One careful step at a time Wallenda battled winds and near-blinding spray to make history, becoming the first person to walk across Niagara Falls on a tightrope for more than 100 years.



Wallenda was unbelievably calm as he slowly, painstakingly, proceeded step-by-step along the steel cable stretched across the falls. He even found time to give an interview as he was perched precariously over the raging waters below. "To be directly in the middle, directly above the falls...it takes your breath away. It's just unreal," he told the television company, which was broadcasting the spectacle live.

A crowd of over 125,000 people packed the roads by the falls – some waiting more than 12 hours to watch the historic performance – and they erupted with cheers as Wallenda ran the last few steps to the safety of the platform anchored in Canadian turf.

"The most amazing part was when he was on the wire and he was waving at the people," said eight-year-old William Clements, jumping up and down with excitement as Wallenda knelt down on the wire toward the finish, took a hand off his balance bar and waved.

Wallenda started his journey on the American side of the falls and finished less than half an hour and 500 metres later on the Canadian side. The distance and the heavy mist made it difficult for those watching in Canada to see exactly when Wallenda set foot onto the wire, but eventually his red jacket came into view.

Wallenda has been walking wires since he was a child and he comes from a long line of circus artists. He has performed many death-defying acts in his time, and normally Wallenda said he focuses on the movement of the wire to guide him, but when he looked down to see fast-moving water and looked up to see rising mist, it posed a "very unique, weird situation". As a result he ignored the first rule of tightrope-walking and instead of looking straight ahead he looked down as he walked. He concentrated on placing one steady foot in front of the other, trying not to get distracted by the raging waters below. He said that he could see the thousands of camera flashes as he approached and heard the roar of the crowd only once he was almost safely across.

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The crowds of people came with chairs, umbrellas, snacks and sunscreen to stake out the best viewing spots. Muriel Marsh, 81, claimed her spot on a hill at 7 a.m. Friday. “To see this fellow walk across on the wire, I think that’s fantastic and very brave and very clever,” she said.

Bert Dandy and his family arrived at 10 a.m., about 12 hours before Wallenda started his walk. He was sitting in a deckchair with an unobstructed view of the whole wire. He said to his children, “This is a once-in-a-lifetime event. It’s history in the making.”

For Wallenda, his daredevil act was all about fulfilling his personal dream. He had spent years preparing for the walk, both by practising on a wire and filling out endless paperwork to be allowed to attempt the crossing. He punched the air when he made it to the other side and he said he hoped people would take inspiration from his achievement.

“The impossible is not so impossible if you set your mind to it,” Wallenda said. “Reach for the skies and never give up.”

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