

Mao's Push and Nature's Shove: The Four Pests Campaign Breaks Ecological Barriers

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Junior Division
Group Website

1200 student composed words on the website
494 student composed words on the process paper
Media Count: 3:09

It was hard to choose this topic because we had many different ideas ranging from seclusion acts to a war on emus. However, the topic stood out as no one had heard of it beyond the name and it was shocking that one person and masses of dead birds and rats could cause a three year famine across the whole country, the death estimates are as high as 45 million people. We found it surprising that this famine caused a domino effect in China. The famine led to the leader losing power and then trying to regain power through violence. We decided on this topic and wanted to show how people in power do not always know what's best for others and can make mistakes, which is why it is so important to pay attention to decisions being made. It also teaches future leaders what not to do in the sense that Mao was warned multiple times that killing sparrows was a bad idea, but did not listen because of his fear of opposition. This teaches leaders to listen to advisors, do their research, and believe science.

We conducted research in a variety of ways. Due to COVID-19 most of our research was done online looking for specific details and events. Early on, we went to a History Day event at the University of Minnesota Wilson Library and photocopied many graphs and charts from the book "Tombstone; The Great Chinese Famine." The book proved very useful in providing a multitude of points made on our website. We also went to the Central Library in downtown Minneapolis and looked through the book "Quotations from Mao-Tse-Tung" as well as other texts, finding many good quotes about Mao's philosophies. After the state competition, we conducted 3 interviews with bird experts and an expert on early Chinese Patriotic Health campaigns. This helped us prove our thesis as well as create a broader view of positive effects of the health campaigns.

We chose to do a website because in sixth grade we had done a website history project and were familiar with web formatting, so it felt the most familiar. We did consider a documentary, but decided that for this topic a website would present the information in a more coherent way. When we were formatting the website, we wanted to create it in a way that made it clear and easy to understand. For that reason, we chose quotes, pictures, and propaganda used during the campaigns to prove what we were saying.

During the Great Leap Forward Mao broke ecological barriers by starting a campaign to kill off sparrows and it worked exceedingly well. Millions were killed and Mao offset the natural balance. Due to the lack of sparrows, locust populations boomed and caused a famine; the largest recorded famine by number of deaths. The broken barrier was a barrier that Mao never should have broken. He challenged nature's rule and Chinese citizens paid the price for his mistakes.