

SAMPLE: STUDENT PROCESS PAPER (2005)

Before I began my research, Jack the Ripper conjured for me an image of a silhouette clad in cap and cape, cloaked by the fog of Victorian London. It was this dramatic mystery and morbid romanticism that drew me to a documentary about the Whitechapel murders at the library. I was drawn to a small section of the video in which the narrator speaks briefly of how the Democratic-Socialists used the 1888 murders to promote liberalism in England. I was fascinated by the concept presented here: that of fear being used as a political tool to communicate reform. I wanted to learn more about how these killings managed to influence Victorian politics.

I began my research by reading secondary sources. From these I learned about the murders, and briefly about how they influenced politics and the social situation of Britain. This led me to want to know more about Victorian society, so I turned to descriptions of London written in the 19th century. I learned about how there was a large rift between the bourgeoisie and the working class, and many reformers wished to help the proletariat. This led me to a letter written by one reformer. Here, he speaks of how the murderer accomplished more to promote reform than even the Democratic-Socialist Party. I wanted to know how the Ripper achieved this reform, so I found a collection of primary newspaper articles about how some citizens were losing faith in the government because of its inability to catch the murderer, and many wanted top officials to resign because of this. I also learned that liberals in London used the killings as ammunition to use against the incumbent conservatives to persuade citizens to vote socialist in upcoming elections.

Now that I had an extensive amount of research, my task was to hone this knowledge into a story that could be told in ten minutes. Fitting into this narrow time limit proved to be the most daunting task of all. I chose to present my research with a documentary because I have experience with the media category, and I didn't want to be hindered by the word limit of an exhibit.

My documentary relates to both aspects of this year's theme: communication, and understanding. It concerns communication because the fear instigated by the murders communicated to the public an awareness of the horrid conditions in London's East End, the ineffectiveness of the conservative rule in Britain, and provided an opportunity for reformers to communicate urgings for liberal reform in England. Because of the ideas communicated as a result of the murders, people began to understand the plight of the proletariat, and started to understand that Britain needed social and political reformation. The liberal foundations laid by these killings expanded into reform that affected history. If it were not for the social understanding and political reform communicated by the Whitechapel murders, leftists would not have had such an opportunity to urge for progress, and politics today might be vastly less liberal.