

Fire & Phoenix: Chicago 1871

Presentation Answers

Question 1: Research Question

State it clearly and explain why it matters.

Our research question is: Can digital interactive tools make visible how journalists created and sustained the myth of Mrs. O'Leary's cow, and how they turned a historical disaster into a cultural legend?

Our website focuses on the "cow kicking over the lantern" story that journalists invented only 18 days after the Great Chicago Fire of 1871. The fact that this narrative became embedded in American collective memory, despite historians having proven that it has no factual basis, clearly shows the power of media representation over reality.

By examining journalists' role in producing this myth and how storytelling shapes public understanding, this project raises a crucial question for today: **How can understanding media-made myths help people develop critical media literacy skills?**

Question 2: Target Group / Users

Define who you are designing for and outline their needs.

We designed for three main groups:

1. Students (primary audience) - aged 14-25, in high school or university. They need engaging, interactive learning experiences that go beyond traditional textbooks. Our site provides visual and hands-on understanding of complex concepts like collective memory and media influence. They also need self-paced learning tools like our quiz and game.

2. Educators and researchers (secondary) - professors, museum curators. They need accurate historical content with verified sources, methodological examples of digital heritage implementation, and tools for classroom demonstrations. Our site includes references to primary sources like Harper's Weekly and official 1872 fire maps.

3. General public (tertiary) - history enthusiasts, museum visitors. They need entertaining and educational content with easy navigation, visual storytelling, and mobile-friendly access. Our multilingual support (Russian, English, Italian, Turkish) makes it accessible to international visitors.

All users benefit from our responsive design, which works on desktop, tablet, and mobile devices without requiring any plugins or external services.

Question 3: Objectives and Structure

Present the goals of your project and how your work is organized.

Our main goal is to demonstrate how digital interactive tools can preserve, interpret, and visualize the formation of collective memory through media representation of the Great Chicago Fire of 1871.

Specific objectives include:

- **Educational:** Create an engaging learning platform with interactive tools (game, quiz, slider)
- **Research:** Compare primary sources (Harper's Weekly illustrations vs. official fire maps) and examine how myths are constructed
- **Technical:** Build a fully responsive single-page application using pure JavaScript with no frameworks
- **Heritage preservation:** Digitize historical materials and make them accessible through multilingual support

Our work is organized as: A single-page web application with 10 main sections following a narrative journey from the fire's origin to its cultural legacy. The project has 7,353 lines of code, including HTML structure, CSS styling with animations, and JavaScript functionality for the game, quiz, canvas animations, and interactive slider. We developed it in phases: research and content collection, design and architecture, technical implementation, interactive features, and testing.

Team Structure and Responsibilities

Abdulaziz Abdumajidov: Technical development, JavaScript implementation, game mechanics, canvas animations

Gülcihan Saçlı: Historical research, content creation, multilingual translation, UI/UX design

Collaborative: Architecture decisions, testing, documentation, presentation preparation

Phase 1: Research and Content Collection

- Historical source analysis (Harper's Weekly, official maps, contemporary accounts) Image and video material collection
- Content structuring and narrative planning
- Multilingual content preparation

Phase 2: Design and Architecture

- User interface design and wireframing
- Color scheme and visual identity development
- Responsive layout planning
- Interactive element specifications

Phase 3: Technical Implementation

- HTML structure creation (7353 lines)
- CSS styling and animations
- JavaScript functionality development
- Canvas animations implementation
- Game mechanics development
- Quiz system creation

Phase 4: Interactive Features

- Drag-and-drop slider implementation
- Multilingual system integration
- Video player integration
- Game logic refinement
- Quiz question database

Phase 5: Testing and Refinement

- Cross-browser testing
- Responsive design verification
- Performance optimization
- Content accuracy verification
- User experience improvements

Question 5: Next Steps

Explain what you plan to work on after the mid-term presentation.

Our first priority after mid-term exams is completing the storyboard about Mrs. O'Leary and her cow, which we are currently developing. This will be the first thing we add to the website—specifically in the video placeholder section we left empty for this purpose. The storyboard will visually show how the fire started because of Mrs. O'Leary's cow and how it continued.

- Complete the Mrs. O'Leary storyboard for the video section
- Collect and analyze feedback from the presentation
- Improve content accuracy through additional source verification
- Enhance game features with new levels and difficulty settings