

Process Paper

When we started our National History Day project, we did not know who Margaret Hamilton was. The theme breaking barriers made us think about women's empowerment. We noticed that there were very few women mentioned in the history of STEM fields, so we started down that research path. We wanted to cast light on someone who was less well-known. After looking into many women who broke barriers in STEM fields, we still had not settled on one person. Then, Marisa saw a YouTube video by Google called "Margaret By Moonlight," which celebrated Margaret Hamilton. Marisa's first thought was, "I have to tell Junie." We immediately began researching Margaret Hamilton and soon realized how many barriers she broke.

Although we found many primary sources, few of them were from the time of the Apollo missions. We speculate that during the 1960s, the American public obsessed over the astronauts, but was not as interested in the other people who contributed to the missions. This inspired us to tell Margaret Hamilton's story. Throughout our research, we found that Hamilton broke barriers not only as a woman, but as a student, a software engineer, a problem solver, and a pioneer in technology. We named the page dedicated to her early career "As a Programmer" because she had not yet created the term software engineering.

As we started our research, we carefully planned out everything. We numbered each source. Junie cited and annotated the even-numbered ones while Marisa cited and annotated the odd-numbered ones.

When we were searching for sources, we looked through interviews with Hamilton figuring she would know her story better than anyone else. We emailed her twice, but have not yet received a response.

Since we were studying a woman in technology, we decided to choose a technological category. We got stuck between documentary and website, but eventually landed on the website. Marisa had experience creating websites and we had access to NHDWebCentral. Junie took charge of layout and Marisa oversaw formatting. Working with NHDWebCentral proved more difficult than we expected. We decided to use a Google Document to make planning easier, and then we added everything into the website editor.

After we turned in our project and completed our interview, we waited many suspenseful days for the results. When we heard that we were advancing to the state competition, we were overjoyed. After looking at our rubrics, we decided to include more historical context and images. Junie was delighted to find the perfect source describing women entering the workplace, and we incorporated what we learned from it immediately. We also worked on telling a story with our website instead of having separate paragraphs that presented disjointed pieces of information. From here, we struggled to get our word count back to 1200, but we eventually got there.

Even though website creation is hard, it is also fun. We both learned so much about Margaret Hamilton, website building, and historical research.