

**The Visionary Exploration of Jacques Cousteau:
Changing Perceptions of the Ocean through Undersea Encounters**

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Senior Group Website
1199 Student Composed Words
Process Paper Contains 499 Words
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Process Paper

When we began work on our History Day project, we struggled to find a topic that interested us and related to the theme *Exploration, Encounter, Exchange in History*. We were finally inspired when we visited the New England Aquarium, and saw a quote from Jacques Cousteau on the wall (which features on our Legacy page). We had been interested in Cousteau since middle school, and we were intrigued by how much one man could do to change the course of ocean exploration and development. We immediately saw a connection to the theme through his inventions. As our research progressed, we developed our view past Cousteau as solely an inventor. We originally imagined that Cousteau's aqualung would be the heart of our project, but the influence Cousteau created through films and television was pivotal, affecting the mindset of an entire generation. So we shifted the focus of our project to include Cousteau's films and their influence.

We began researching by examining online databases. The Google Books archive was useful because it contained many widely published early articles about Cousteau's work. Although Cousteau was a Frenchman, his childhood years in America mean that much of what he wrote is available in English, which is great because neither of us read French! Finding primary sources was straightforward as Cousteau created many documentaries and books about his experiences. In order to develop our understanding of Cousteau's work, we read many secondary sources that discussed his impact, and studied books that focused on ocean exploration. These sources helped us understand Cousteau's effect on the field of undersea exploration and the public. We also expanded our research by visiting the University of Minnesota's Wilson Library, finding many primary source documents otherwise unavailable to

us, such as articles from National Geographic. We successfully performed two interviews, one with English cave diver and explorer Tony Seddon, and the other with marine biologist, diver, and writer Alex Brylske. These interviews were wonderful resources for us as they helped us understand the influence Cousteau continues to have in the diving community.

One of the positive challenges of our project was how well Jacques Cousteau relates to the theme. We found ourselves constantly evolving our ideas about which connections we wanted to include. Cousteau exchanged the limited technology of the time for his inventions like the aqualung and scientific-research submersibles, enabling exploration of entirely new regions of the ocean. Through his television series *The Undersea World of Jacques Cousteau*, he introduced society to a previously unseen world by sharing his encounters, exchanging views of the ocean as a sinister place with one of the ocean as fantastical. Later in his career, Cousteau became one of the first ocean conservationists as well as the ocean's first explorer. Through this role, he exchanged the popular view of the ocean as an infinitely exploitable resource with the view of the ocean as a valuable, limited resource that needed protection. Cousteau's legacy of ocean exploration and marine conservation continues to influence and inspire today.