

**The Pig War:  
Confrontation, Escalation,  
Arbitration**

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We learned about the Pig War after watching a YouTube video titled “The Dumbest Wars Ever Fought.” The thumbnail depicted a row of bold red font reading “THE PIG WAR!?” above a man pretending to be a pig. After looking into it further, we realized that it was fitting for the upcoming National History Day contest: it was not only interesting, but also related to the theme of conflict and compromise. We decided to dig deeper.

We first found a few books, such as *The Pig War: Standoff at Griffin Bay* by Mike Vouri, the foremost expert on the Pig War in the United States. We also purchased a book titled *The Pig War: Images of America*, a compilation of 200 primary-source photographs relating to the Pig War. Later, we contacted the curators at Oregon Historical Society, who relayed their opinions on the topic. We visited their research library, which contained many primary sources such as original letters, manuscripts, etc. They also connected us with former PSU Professor Bill Lang, whom we interviewed. We also reached out to the staff at San Juan Island National Historical Park, where the Pig War occurred. The park’s Chief of Interpretation, Brandon Cadwell, helped us understand the event more thoroughly through an online interview. He pointed us to their website, which contained many primary source documents, journals, and photographs. We used this information to create our bibliography and script. Citing and reviewing sources taught us the researching process that historians use.

We chose to make a documentary because we had prior video-editing experience and felt like it was the most engaging out of the four categories. Because the Pig War took place between the eras of painting and photography, we could use both to portray the event. We ensured the script portrayed the story accurately and conveyed our thesis. After recording the voice-over script, we

began creating the documentary using Final Cut Pro X. We compiled photographs, interviews, voice-over and musical score, creating an eloquent and engaging documentary about the Pig War and its results.

Contrary to what the makers of the original YouTube video believed, the Pig War was not one of “the dumbest wars ever fought”. It showed how a small incident, like the shooting of a pig, can quickly escalate into a full-scale military confrontation. But most importantly, it proved that conflicts could be solved by arbitration. The Pig War ended because the US and Britain decided to compromise by allowing a neutral third-party, Kaiser Wilhelm of Germany, to resolve the issue. This method of compromising was revolutionary, and was used in many later conflicts such as the Alaska Boundary Dispute. It led to the creation of the Permanent Court of Arbitration in 1899, which currently works to resolve issues such as the South China Sea disputes and Croatia-Slovenia border conflicts. Arbitration is a compromising strategy that will be used for centuries to come, all because the British and Americans were able to compromise in order to resolve the Pig War.