
THE EMPIRE STATE BUILDING

EDUCATION MATERIALS

AMERICAN HISTORY
& GEOGRAPHY
GRADES 3-5



IT WAS THE BEST OF TIMES, IT WAS THE WORST OF TIMES:

Understanding The Context In Which The Empire State Building Was Built

OVERVIEW OF LESSON PLAN

In this lesson, students will contemplate why the Empire State Building means so much to so many people. They will then research the era in which the building was built, the Great Depression, to gain an understanding of why this building is one of the world's greatest success stories.

SUGGESTED TIME ALLOWANCE

1 hour

OBJECTIVES

Students will:

- Think about why the Empire State Building has become such an important symbol.
- Discuss the Great Depression.
- Research the 1920s and 1930s.
- Write opening day speeches for the Empire State Building.

RESOURCES/ MATERIALS:



- Student journals
- Pens/pencils
- Paper
- Classroom board
- Resources on the Empire State Building and the 1920s and 1930s including history textbooks, encyclopedias, computers with Internet access, etc.
- If available, computer with speakers or a music player and CD of a selected song
- Copies of the lyrics to “Happy Days Are Here Again”

ACTIVITIES/ PROCEDURES:

Note to Teacher: The following link offers the artists and titles of songs released during those years, most of them can be played directly from the website. The song “Happy Days Are Here Again,” recorded by Leo Reisman and His Orchestra, is used in this lesson: [Click for site.](#) [Click to hear song.](#) If you cannot play the song, students can read the lyrics together in class. [Click here for “Happy Days Are Here Again” lyrics.](#)

WARM-UP/DO NOW:

Inform the class that you are going to play a sample of a song. Ask students to listen to it, then answer the following in their journals: “How would you describe the mood of the song? Does it sound serious or funny, happy or sad, etc.? When do you think it was written? Why?” Allow students a few minutes to write their responses. After students have finished writing, invite them to share these responses. Reveal that the song was released in November of 1929 by Leo Reisman and His Orchestra. Are they surprised by the date? Ask if anyone knows what was going on in America at that time?

Ask the class the following question: “Depression.” Record their responses on the board. Follow up by asking, “What do you think an ‘Economic Depression’ is?” Help the class understand the characteristics of the Great Depression.

Inform the class that they will be researching the era during which the Empire State Building was built, 1929-1930. Divide the class into four groups, assigning each group to one of the categories below. Each group is to answer the questions for its category and thereby report on what was occurring over this two-year span. Students will be researching New York in particular and America in general:

Architectural Developments

- What types of buildings or structures were being built during the 1920s and 1930s? Give examples to support your answer.
- What was the “Skyscraper Race” or “The Race To The Skies”?
- What men were involved in this race?

Economy, Group A

- What happened in the stock market in September of 1929?
- What happened in the stock market in October of 1929?
- What were the richest companies?

Economy, Group B

- How many people were unemployed after October of 1929?
- Where did people go to find work?
- What was the Dust Bowl?

Economy, Group B

- What important inventions are introduced during this time?
- What major achievements have occurred in aviation (flight)?
- What advances have been made in land travel (cars and trains)?

Once they complete their research, have the groups share their findings. As a class, discuss the following: “Knowing what you know now, do you think it was a good time to invest \$50 million to build the world’s tallest building? Why or why not?”

WRAP-UP/HOMEWORK:

Consider the context in which the Empire State Building was designed and constructed. What was intended to be a huge office building came to be considered by many as the eighth wonder of the world. For homework, imagine you are former Governor Al Smith at the ribbon-cutting ceremony for the Empire State Building. Write the speech you will deliver praising this amazing accomplishment and the people who worked on it, and talking about what the building means to New York and the nation.

FURTHER QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. Do you think a project like this could succeed in New York today? Why or why not?
2. In Dubai, United Arab Emirates, the Burj Dubai Skyscraper began construction in 2005 and is scheduled for completion in 2009. Its intended height will be more than twice that of the Empire State Building. Do you think it will be held in the same esteem as the Empire State Building? Why or why not?
3. Should people continue to make such huge skyscrapers? Why or why not?

EVALUATION/ASSESSMENT:

Students will be evaluated based on their participation in the initial exercise, thoughtful participation in group research and presentation, and their written speeches.

EXTENSION ACTIVITY:

Using the information gathered in the class about the years 1929-1930, transform your classroom into a “Thirteen Months” gallery walk. Such a walk invites people to look closely at a range of material that highlights the words, images, and sounds of a particular time and place. It is displayed gallery-style on the walls and on other spaces of the classroom.

To create this gallery walk, students must gather together a broad range of print and visual materials that cover the thirteen months of the Empire State Building’s construction. Resources to consider include: photographs, quotations, maps, charts, graphs, essays, editorials, articles, primary source documents, music, film or video clips, or artifacts of any kind. These can be displayed around the classroom in “stations,” preferably in chronological order to create an interactive timeline.

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VOCABULARY:

GLOSSARY

Aviation n. The art or science of flying.

Depression n. 1. A state of sadness and low spirits. 2. A period of drastic decline in a national or international economy, characterized by decreasing business activity, falling prices, and unemployment.

Economy n. The system of production and distribution and consumption, esp. of a community, country, etc..

Erect a. standing upright.

Prohibition n. Specifically, the forbidding by law of the sale of alcoholic liquors as beverages.

Prosperity n. Advance or gain in anything good or desirable; successful progress in any business or enterprise; success.

Skyscraper n. A very tall building.

Stock n. The certificate of ownership of shares of a particular company or corporation.

Unemployed a. Having no regular work.



ACADEMIC CONTENT STANDARDS:

This lesson plan may be used to address the academic standards listed below. These standards are drawn from “Content Knowledge: A Compendium of Standards and Benchmarks for K-12 Education: 3rd and 4th Editions” and have been provided courtesy of the Mid-Century Research for Education and Learning in Aurora, Colorado.

American History: Level II [Grade 5-6]

Standard 23. Understands the causes of the Great Depression and how it affected American society

Benchmark 1. Understands economic aspects of the Great Depression

Benchmark 2. Understands the environmental and social impact of the Great Depression

Standard 22. Understands how the United States changed between the post-World War I years and the eve of the Great Depression

Benchmark 2. Understands how urban life changed in the 1920s

Benchmark 3. Understands the rise of a mass culture in the 1920s

Benchmark 7. Understands aspects of Prohibition

Geography: Level II [Grade 3-5]

Standard 9. Understands the nature, distribution and migration of human populations on Earth’s surface

Benchmark 1. Understands the characteristics of populations at a variety of scales

Standard 12. Understands the patterns of human settlement and their causes

Benchmark 1. Knows areas of dense human settlement and why they are densely populated

Benchmark 4. Knows reasons for the growth and decline of settlements

Benchmark 6. Knows similarities and differences among the world’s culture hearths