
THE EMPIRE STATE BUILDING

EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS

SOCIAL STUDIES:
GRADES 3-5



EMPIRE STATE BUILDING: REVOLUTIONARY PAST & INNOVATIVE PRESENT

Exhibit Connections: The Site in the 1920s, Construction, Modern Marvel and Otis Elevators, and Observation Deck

OVERVIEW OF THE LESSON PLAN

In the 1930s, the Empire State Building was a beacon of the ingenuity, innovation, and perseverance of New York City. Like the city, it grew from the vision, and hard work of many diverse groups of people. Students will learn about life in 1930s New York, the important role of Native American ironworkers in the construction of the building's steel skeleton, and the high stakes "Race to the Sky" that happened within a few city blocks. Students will also think about the building's role in current day New York City by learning more about recent renovations that make this modern marvel a leader in energy efficiency.

OBJECTIVES

Students will:

- Gain a deeper understand of life during the Great Depression
- Utilize the Empire State Building's exhibits to answer questions during their trip.
- Hear the lesser-known story of the Mohawk Sky Walkers
- Discover the Empire State Building's importance in modern New York City and examine its place amongst the current tallest structures on Earth
- Learn about the 2011 renovations that make the Empire State Building a world leader in sustainability and a leading example in energy efficiency

SUGGESTED TIME ALLOWANCE:

One hour



RESOURCES/MATERIALS:

- Pencil
- Provided worksheets
- Access to articles on the internet (links provided)

ACTIVITIES/PROCEDURES

PRE-TRIP ACTIVITY

In preparation for their field trip to the Empire State Building, students will explore the time period in which it was built. The juxtaposition of the mighty innovation of the Empire State Building and the deeply damaging effects of the Great Depression can give students important insight into just how miraculous the construction of this modern marvel really was.

The Empire State Building was built during one of the most important and challenging periods of American History: The Great Depression.

Read the two articles to learn more about the Great Depression and how the Empire State Building was built. Imagine you are a reporter interviewing a worker at the construction site of the Empire State Building. What questions would you ask them to learn more about the job they are doing and why? List your questions below.

Great Depression Article

[KIDSBRITANNICA.COM](https://kids.britannica.com)

The Empire State Building

[AN INNOVATIVE SKYSCRAPER](#)

ON-SITE ACTIVITIES (One hour)

EXHIBIT: THE SITE IN THE 1920S (15 minutes)

The Empire State Building was, at the time, the tallest structure ever built take out by humans. Look through the viewfinders to see images from the time. How do you think people reacted to this amazing feat of engineering?

Write a reflective paragraph (3-5 sentences) about how you yourself might have felt watching this amazing skyscraper being constructed. What does the city look like around the building as it's being constructed?

EXHIBIT: CONSTRUCTION (15 minutes)

The Empire State Building is being built all around you! Take a moment to observe the workers. What are they saying to each other? How are they communicating? How would you describe the conditions you see at the construction site?

If one of the workers on a team were sick or injured, none of the rest of the team would work that day. The teams were so in sync that it would have been a safety risk to operate without the whole team present. Can you think of a situation in your life where you have been an important part of a team? Write a few descriptive sentences on the worksheet.

EXHIBIT: MODERN MARVEL AND OTIS ELEVATORS (15 minutes)

The Empire State Building has made many modern improvements to the building's energy efficiency, design, and environmental impact. The building's 73 elevators use a technology called "regenerative braking," which allows them to store energy each time they slow to a stop and feed that power back into the building. What other energy saving measures have been implemented at the Empire State Building?

EXHIBIT: 86TH FLOOR OBSERVATION DECK (15 minutes)

On a clear day, you can see for up to 80 miles in all directions from the quarter mile-high Observation Deck of the Empire State Building. First, orient yourself by finding North, South, East, and West. What other skyscrapers do you see? When do you think they were built? What do you think goes on inside them (living, offices, hotels, etc.)? Use the chart below to list and sketch a recognizable landmark in each direction.

HOMEWORK/FURTHER DISCUSSION

To extend the activity, ask the students to interview family members or important members of their community who may have relatives who lived through the Great Depression.

POST-TRIP ACTIVITY

After unpacking the amazing sights from their trip to the Empire State Building, students will hear the untold story of a very important group of craftsmen: The Mohawk Sky Walkers.

Men of Steel: How Brooklyn's Native American Ironworkers Built New York

Teachers will:

- Lead a facilitated class discussion about the Empire State Building trip.
- Suggest that students turn and talk to their neighbors, asking them,
 - What did you like most about the trip?
 - What new thing(s) did you learn at the Empire State Building?
 - What surprised you while we were there?
 - What do you want to know more about?
- Allow time for the students to share what they discussed and take out by humans students' ideas on the board or chart paper.
- Next, introduce the general concept of "ironworkers" with questions and connections to the Construction exhibit:
 - How do you think such tall buildings get built?
 - What are some dangers of this job?
 - Why do you think someone would want to do this job?
- Allow students time to read the two articles and answer the short essay questions.
- In a large group, discuss their answers to the worksheet discussion questions.

EVALUATION AND ASSESSMENT

Students can be evaluated based on their participation in the large group discussions, as well as their answers to the worksheet discussion questions. Teachers may assess student work based on the number of historically accurate facts included in their writing, level of detail, proper context, etc. Older students will make well-supported personal, cultural, textual, and thematic connections across genres.

Modifications can include providing students with a chart for notetaking, sentence frames, and visual aids to organize their observations during the field trip, shortening the length of the writing piece, or students can be asked to create an infographic instead of writing.



CONNECTIONS TO THE STANDARDS

NYS K-8 SOCIAL STUDIES FRAMEWORK

- 3.3 Geographic factors often influence where people settle and form communities. People adapt to and modify their environment in different ways to meet their needs.
- 3.5 Communities share cultural similarities and differences across the world.
- 3.6 Communities from around the world interact with other people and communities and exchange cultural ideas and practices.
- 3.8 The concept of universal human rights suggests that all people should be treated fairly and should have the opportunity to meet their basic needs.
- 3.9 Communities meet their needs and wants in a variety of ways, forming the basis for their economy.
- 4.6 WESTWARD MOVEMENT AND INDUSTRIALIZATION: New York State played an important role in the growth of the United States. During the 1800s, people traveled west looking for opportunities. Economic activities in New York State are varied and have changed over time, with improvements in transportation and technology.
- 4.7 IMMIGRATION AND MIGRATION FROM THE EARLY 1800S TO THE PRESENT: Many people have immigrated and migrated to New York State contributing to its cultural growth and development.

PRE-TRIP WORKSHEET

NAME _____

DATE _____

INVESTIGATION: WHO BUILT THE EMPIRE STATE BUILDING?

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Read the two articles to learn more about the Great Depression and how the Empire State Building was built. Imagine you are a reporter interviewing a worker at the construction site of the Empire State Building. What questions would you ask them to learn more about the job they are doing and why? List your questions below.

Great Depression Article

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The Empire State Building

[AN INNOVATIVE SKYSCRAPER](https://www.fox.com/story/empire-state-building-1931-1932)

WORKER	QUESTION(S)
Elevator Installer	
Bricklayer	
Carpenter	
Plumber	
Water Boy	

TRIP WORKSHEET

NAME _____

DATE _____

WELCOME TO THE EMPIRE STATE BUILDING

THE SITE IN THE 1920S

(15 minutes)

The Empire State Building was, at the time, the tallest structure ever built. Look through the viewfinders to see images of the neighborhood in the 1920's. How do you think people reacted to the Empire State Building as it was being constructed?

Write a reflective paragraph (3-5 sentences) about how you yourself might have felt watching this amazing skyscraper being constructed.

Viewfinder Reflection:

CONSTRUCTION

The Empire State Building is being built all around you! Take a moment to observe the workers. What are they saying to each other? How are they communicating?

If one of the workers on a team were sick or injured, none of the rest of the team would work that day. The teams were so in sync that it would have been a safety risk to operate without the whole team present. Can you think of a situation in your life where you have been an important part of a team? Write a few descriptive sentences below.

EXHIBIT: MODERN MARVEL AND OTIS ELEVATOR

(15 minutes)

The Empire State Building has made many modern improvements to the building's energy efficiency, design, and environmental impact. The building's 73 elevators use a technology called "regenerative braking," which allows them to store energy each time they slow to a stop and feed that power back into the building.

How are the building's new elevator systems different from the original system?

List two other improvements the Empire State Building made and explain why these improvements are important.

1.	
2.	

TRIP WORKSHEET

NAME _____

DATE _____

WELCOME TO THE EMPIRE STATE BUILDING

On a clear day, you can see for up to 80 miles in all directions from the quarter mile-high Observation Deck of the Empire State Building. First, orient yourself by finding North, South, East, and West. Then, use the chart below to list and sketch a recognizable landmark in each direction.

NORTH:	EAST:
WEST:	SOUTH:

POST-TRIP WORKSHEET

NAME _____

DATE _____

EMPIRE STATE BUILDING POST-TRIP ACTIVITY

There's more to the story of the men who built the Empire State Building. Many of them were Mohawk, an indigenous people native to the area just south of Montreal. Their skill in walking across the beams at dizzying heights earned them the nickname "Sky Walkers" (later to be used by George Lucas in his Star Wars films.)

Read the attached article and answer the discussion questions below in short essay form.

Men of Steel: How Brooklyn's Native American Ironworkers Built New York

What introduced Mohawk ironworkers to iron work in the 1880s?

Why were they interested in this type of work?

What type of structures did they work on before starting to work on skyscrapers?

When did Mohawk ironworkers begin working in New York City?

Why were they permitted to enter the United States from Canada for work?

Describe the present-day lifestyle of a Mohawk ironworker:

Where do they tend to live in New York?

Why do you think many Mohawk ironworkers live in the same neighborhood?

How do many spend their free time and weekends?

What other structures have Mohawk ironworkers helped to build in New York City?

What has changed for Mohawk ironworkers between the 1880s and today?