
THE EMPIRE STATE BUILDING

EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS

SOCIAL STUDIES:
GRADES 6-8



WHO BUILT THE EMPIRE STATE BUILDING? IMMIGRANT LABOR FORCE AND WORKER PROTECTIONS

Exhibit Connections: Construction, Elevators; 86th Floor Observation Deck

OVERVIEW OF LESSON PLAN

In this lesson, students will learn about the European immigrant and domestic rural migrant labor force (Newfoundlanders, Scandinavians, Italian, Irish immigrants, and Mohawk people) who built the Empire State Building. Students will explore the opportunities and obstacles laborers faced as they took on the colossal feat of building the world's tallest structure in record time.

OBJECTIVES

Students will:

- Identify, select, and evaluate different forms of evidence about the working conditions laborers encountered while building the empire state building
- Develop claims and counterclaims to understand the strengths and limitations of immigrant labor
- Identify the relationship of patterns and continuity in how immigrant labor shapes present-day workforce and the US economy
- Use their observations and analysis to write from multiple perspectives

SUGGESTED TIME ALLOWANCE:

One hour

RESOURCES/ MATERIALS:

- Student journals
- Provided worksheets
- Provided KWHLAW worksheet
- Pens/pencils, laptop
- Paper
- Resources on the Empire State Building, including history textbooks, encyclopedias, computers with Internet access, etc.

ACTIVITIES/ PROCEDURES:

Tell students that they will prepare for their trip to the Empire State Building by gathering information from multiple sources to better understand what life was like for the workers who built the Empire State Building at a time when New York City was going through a hard time. Teachers can help students organize their investigation by using a KWHLAQ chart: What do you Know? What do you Want to know? How will you find out? What have you Learned? What Action will you take? What further Questions do you have?

Model for students how to research the photographs of Lewis Hine on the digital archives of the NYPL, provide the video link, and links to digital archives where students can view period photographs, read concurrent newspaper articles, and watch a video documenting the construction of the Empire State Building and the laborers who built it. Students may document their initial observations on a shared Google doc, either working in teams or individually. After the class has had time to explore each type of evidence (photographs, video, print), the students will share their initial thoughts on what life was like for the teams of laborers who built the Empire State Building.

PRE-CLASS ACTIVITY

Students will explore the [photographs of Lewis Hine](#), and research newspaper articles from the early '30s to develop an understanding of the working conditions immigrant laborers faced while building the ESB. Investigation questions may include:

- What safety gear do you see in this photograph?
- What does the subject's expression tell you about their experiences?
- How did the Great Depression impact construction of the Empire State Building?
- Who might be missing from this photo?
- What is the task the workers are completing?

ON-SITE ACTIVITIES

Before beginning their field experience, the teacher should ask students to revisit their initial thoughts on what life was like for the laborers of the Empire State Building. Inform students that during their tour of the Empire State Building they will be using their senses to document their observations and experience. Students will take notes to inform a sensory writing project, building on the evidence they collected during the pre-trip activity.

EXHIBIT - CONSTRUCTION: ACTIVITY ONE

(10-15 minutes)

It took thousands of workers to build the Empire State Building in record time, during one of the toughest times in our history, the Great Depression. Working in teams of trades, the steel was erected at a pace of 4 ½ stories each week! A trade or tradesman is a worker who specializes in a particular skill that requires on-the-job training and experience. How many teams of trades worked together to build the Empire State Building? Take a moment to watch the workers in action. Imagine you are a riveter. Use your five senses to describe what you would hear, smell, touch, taste, and see as you worked high above the streets of Midtown.

EXHIBIT - ELEVATOR TO 80TH FLOOR OBSERVATORY (5 minutes)

Look up as you take the elevator up to the 80th Floor Observatory. How are workers dressed? What do you notice about how they move around the worksite? Add these thoughts to your notes.

EXHIBIT – 86TH FLOOR OBSERVATORY: (10-15 minutes)

As you take in the view, do you see any other buildings in construction? What do you notice about how they are being built? Imagine you are a worker at that construction site. What similarities and differences do you think you would experience as a worker at that site compared to the workers who built the Empire State Building?

HOMEWORK/FURTHER DISCUSSION

Students will create a Histogram, a depiction of a historical event as an Instagram post, of the construction of the Empire State Building through a chosen lens (laborer, the building itself, a pigeon, a rivet, the Chrysler Building, a steel beam, the Brooklyn Bridge, an elevator car, etc.) Students should be encouraged to choose a perspective different from the one they chose in class.



POST-VISIT ACTIVITY

Allow the students to reflect on their experiences at the Empire State Building and complete their KWHLAQ chart. How did you feel about experiencing the building in person? What surprised you? What are some challenges you think the laborers faced that you didn't think of before?

Students will revisit the observational/sensory notes they took while at the ESB. Students will produce a piece of text (print or nonprint) that explores a variety of cultures and perspectives related to the Empire State Building.

Invite students to choose a perspective: laborer, the Empire State Building itself, a pigeon, a rivet, the Chrysler Building, a steel beam, the Brooklyn Bridge, an elevator car, etc. What do students hear, see, smell, touch, taste from the perspective of their chosen person or thing? Ask the students to write a diary entry, day-in-the-life-of piece, Facebook profile, job advertisement for a newspaper, or create a nonprint response from their chosen perspective about the ESB. Students will share their work with the class.

Assessment and Extensions: The teacher may assess students' writing pieces through multiple rounds of peer editing or student-created rubrics for evaluating peer work. Students can organize a mock debate on laborers rights using their research and observational notes from the trip.

EVALUATION AND ASSESSMENT

Teacher may assess student work based on # of historical accurate facts included in their writing, level of detail, proper context, etc.

- **Grade 6:** Students will recognize and illustrate social, historical, and cultural features in the presentation of literary texts.
- **Grade 7:** Students will make deliberate, personal, cultural, textual, and thematic connections across genres.
- **Grade 8:** Students will make well-supported personal, cultural, textual, and thematic connections across genres.
- **Special Needs:** Provide students with a chart for notetaking, provide students with sentence frames and visual aids to organize their observations during the field trip, provide only concrete perspectives (ex: pigeon) to choose from as abstract perspectives may be difficult for some students to realize, shorten length of writing piece, create an infographic instead of writing.



CONNECTIONS TO THE STANDARDS

NEW YORK STATE SOCIAL STUDIES STANDARDS:

Grade 8:

8.2 A CHANGING SOCIETY: Industrialization and immigration contributed to the urbanization of America. Problems resulting from these changes sparked the Progressive movement and increased calls for reform. (Standards: 1, 2, 4; Themes: MOV, SOC, TECH, EXCH)

8.2a Technological developments changed the modes of production, and access to natural resources facilitated increased industrialization. The demand for labor in urban industrial areas resulted in increased migration from rural areas and a rapid increase in immigration to the United States. New York City became the nation's largest city, and other cities in New York State also experienced growth at this time.

8.2b Population density, diversity, technologies, and industry in urban areas shaped the social, cultural, and economic lives of people.

8.2c Increased urbanization and industrialization contributed to increasing conflicts over immigration, influenced changes in labor conditions, and led to political corruption.

8.2d In response to shifts in working conditions, laborers organized and employed a variety of strategies in an attempt to improve their conditions.

New York State ELA Standards for Grades 6, 7, and 8:

KEY IDEAS AND DETAILS:

1. Cite textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.
2. Determine a theme or central idea of a text and how it is conveyed through particular details; provide a summary of the text distinct from personal opinions or judgments.
3. Describe how a particular story's or drama's plot unfolds in a series of episodes as well as how the characters respond or change as the plot moves toward a resolution.

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas:

7. Integrate information presented in different media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively) as well as in words to develop a coherent understanding of a topic or issue.
8. Trace and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, distinguishing claims that are supported by reasons and evidence from claims that are not.
9. Compare and contrast one author's presentation of events with that of another (e.g., a memoir written by and a biography on the same person).
 - a. Use their experience and their knowledge of language and logic, as well as culture, to think analytically, address problems creatively, and advocate persuasively.

WRITING STANDARDS:

Texts Types and Purposes

3. Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, relevant descriptive details, and well-structured event sequences.
 - a. Engage and orient the reader by establishing a context and introducing a narrator and/or characters; organize an event sequence that unfolds naturally and logically.
 - b. Use narrative techniques, such as dialogue, pacing, and description, to develop experiences, events, and/or characters.
 - c. Use a variety of transition words, phrases, and clauses to convey sequence and signal shifts from one time frame or setting to another.
 - d. Use precise words and phrases, relevant descriptive details, and sensory language to convey experiences and events.
 - e. Provide a conclusion that follows from the narrated experiences or events.

TRIP WORKSHEET

NAME _____

DATE _____

INVESTIGATION: WHO BUILT THE EMPIRE STATE BUILDING?

KWHLAQ Chart

WHAT DO I KNOW?	
WHAT DO I WANT TO KNOW?	
HOW WILL I FIND OUT?	
WHAT HAVE I LEARNED?	
WHAT ACTIONS WILL I TAKE?	
WHAT FURTHER QUESTIONS DO I HAVE?	

TRIP WORKSHEET

NAME _____

DATE _____

INVESTIGATION: WHO BUILT THE EMPIRE STATE BUILDING?

What I know about the Empire State Building?

EXHIBIT: CONSTRUCTION

It took thousands of workers to build the Empire State Building in record time, during one of the toughest times in our history, the Great Depression. Working in teams of trades, the steel was erected at a pace of 4 ½ stories each week! A trade or tradesman is a worker who specializes in a particular skill that requires on-the-job training and experience. Take a look at the signs around you to find out how many teams of trades worked together to build the Empire State Building.

Answer: _____ teams

Take a moment to watch the workers in action. Imagine you are a riveter. Use your five senses to describe what you would hear, smell, touch, taste, and see as you worked high above the streets of Midtown.

I hear _____

I smell _____

I touch _____

I taste _____

I see _____

EXHIBIT: ELEVATOR TO 80TH FLOOR OBSERVATORY

Look up as you take the elevator up to the 80th Floor Observatory.

How are workers dressed? What do you notice about how they move around the worksite?

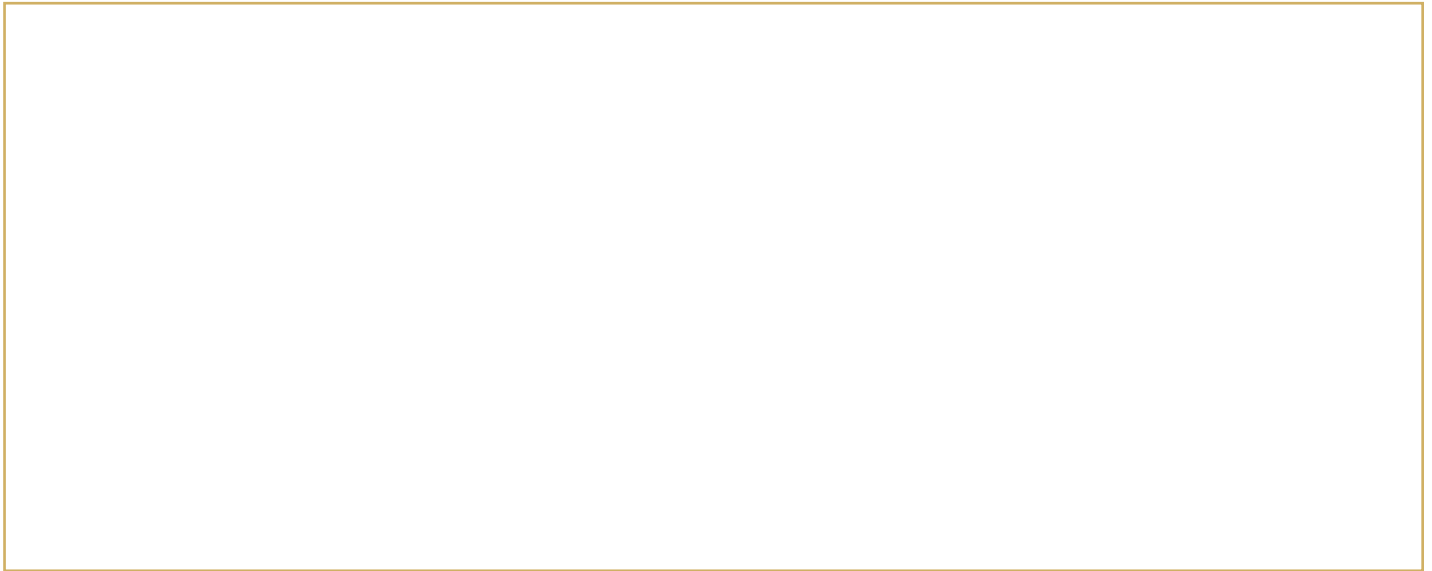


EXHIBIT: 86TH FLOOR OBSERVATORY

As you take in the view, do you see any other buildings in construction?

What do you notice about how they are being built?

Imagine you are a worker at that construction site.

What similarities and differences do you think you would experience as a worker at that site compared to the workers who built the Empire State Building?

Write or draw your response in the box below.

