THE EMPIRE STATE BUILDING

EDUCATION MATERIALS

AMERICAN HISTORY & GEOGRAPHY GRADES 7-8

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:

- Contemplate 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.

ACTIVITIES/ PROCEDURES:

WARM-UP/DO NOW:
Have students reply to the following prompt written on the board prior to class: "'...the Empire State Building is a symbol of the American spirit,' of a steadfast determination to achieve the impossible. [from Thirteen Months to Go, page 19.] Why do you think someone wrote this about the Empire State Building? Given what you know or have seen of the building, how do you think it symbolizes the American spirit?" Allow students five minutes to write their responses.

Have the class discuss the following: How were the Great Depression and the enormous financial venture of the Empire State Building able to occur simultaneously? When did the Great Depression occur? Where? Was it isolated to one city, one country? Was everyone in the country affected? In the world? 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 seven groups and assign each group to one of the categories below. Instruct students that their goal is to report on what was occurring in their categories over this two-year span. With the exception of the "Global Events" groups, students will be researching New York in particular, and America in general. Their findings should be presented on poster board with pictures and accompanying text that addresses the questions below:

Architectural Developments
- What buildings and structures were being built during the 1920s and 1930s?
- Who were the biggest names in architecture and real estate?
- What were the trends in building designs at this time?

Economy
- What was occurring with the American economy during this period?
- What were the trends in the stock market in the beginning of 1929 and how did these change?
- Find statistics on costs of common items, average income and salaries, richest companies and individuals, and stock trends.

Global Events
- What major events were happening in the world at this time?
- Who are the most prominent figures, either on the rise or already in the spotlight?

Politics and Society
- Who were the key political figures in New York and in America?
- What were some of the major political and social issues of the day?
- What key legislation was being enacted or fought?

Popular Culture and Arts
- What were the most popular books, songs, plays, and other forms of entertainment?
- Who were the most popular figures?
- What were the trends in fashion?

Religion

- What were the most popular religions in America at this time?
- What new religions were being introduced?
- What religious groups were in the news around the world?

Technological Advancements and Science

- What important inventions are available (those that were then recently introduced)?
- What important, related inventions have yet to be introduced?
- What major achievements have occurred?

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 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. In what ways did the economic depression actually help advance an enormous undertaking like the Empire State Building?
2. Could a project like this succeed in New York today? Why or why not?
3. 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?
4. 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 data the class collected about the years 1929-1930, have them 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. These materials are displayed gallery-style on the walls and other spaces of the classroom.

To create this gallery walk, students must gather 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

Communism n. A system [of government] which distributes all wealth equally to everyone.

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.

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.

Steadfast a. Not wavering; constant; firm; resolute.

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-Continent Research for Education and Learning in Aurora, Colorado.

Technology: Level III [Grade 6-8]
Standard 3. Knows ways in which technology has influenced the course of history
Benchmark 3. Knows ways in which technology has influenced the course of history
Benchmark 4. Knows that technology and science have a reciprocal relationship

Science:
Standard 10. Understands forces and motion
Benchmark 1. Understands general concepts related to gravitational force
Benchmark 3. Knows that an object's motion can be described and represented graphically according to its position, direction of motion, and speed
Benchmark 5. Knows that an object that is not being subjected to a force will continue to move at a constant speed and in a straight line
Standard 11. Understands the nature of scientific knowledge
Benchmark 1. Understands the nature of scientific explanations
Benchmark 2. Knows that all scientific ideas are tentative and subject to change and improvement in principle, but for most core ideas in science, there is much experimental and observational confirmation
Benchmark 3. Knows that different models can be used to represent the same thing and the same model can represent different things; the kind and complexity of the model should depend on its purpose
Benchmark 4. Knows that models are often used to think about things that cannot be observed or investigated directly
Standard 12. Understands the nature of scientific inquiry
Benchmark 1. Knows that there is no fixed procedure called "the scientific method," but that investigations involve systematic observations, carefully collected, relevant evidence, logical reasoning, and some imagination in developing hypotheses and explanations
Benchmark 2. Understands that questioning, response to criticism, and open communication are integral to the process of science)
Benchmark 3. Designs and conducts a scientific investigation
Benchmark 4. Identifies variables (e.g., independent, dependant, control) in a scientific investigation
Benchmark 5. Understands why only one variable (independent) can be manipulated at a time and that all other variables must be controlled during the investigation
Benchmark 6. Uses appropriate tools (including computer hardware and software) and techniques to gather, analyze, and interpret scientific data
Benchmark 7. Establishes relationships based on evidence and logical argument
Benchmark 8. Evaluates the results of scientific investigations, experiments, observations, theoretical and mathematical models, and explanations proposed by other scientists
Benchmark 9. Knows possible outcomes of scientific investigations