



**THE  
EMPIRE STATE  
BUILDING**

**EDUCATIONAL  
MATERIALS**

**SOCIAL STUDIES:  
GRADES 9-12**



## “GREAT RACES” IN HISTORY RESEARCH AND WRITING PROJECT: CONTRASTING FAMOUS EXAMPLES OF HUMANITY’S RACE TO INNOVATE

### Exhibit Connections: The Site in the 1920s, Construction; Opening Day; Modern Marvel; Otis Elevators; Urban Campus

#### OVERVIEW OF LESSON PLAN

Students will research and write about “Great Races in History” using the Empire State Building as an example. The writing project will be centered around the history of the construction of the Empire State Building and the competition with the builders of the Chrysler Building to complete the tallest building in the world.

Students will review the materials in the exhibits at the Empire State Building and take notes on the construction of the building, with particular emphasis on the historical era in which the Empire State Building was built.

After considering the construction of the Empire State Building and the Chrysler Building, students will choose one additional “great race” to research and write about in an essay. Students can choose from examples provided—the race to invent a mass-production lightbulb, the Space Race to put an object in orbit around the Earth or travel to the Moon, the Human Genome project to map the entire code of human DNA; the race in 2020 to create a vaccine for the COVID-19 coronavirus; or (with their teacher’s approval) they can choose another “great race” in history.

There are many examples of races to make technological inventions, including the race to create a working airplane, medicine to cure polio or another disease, or others.

The goal of the students' research and writing is to leverage the learning in the Empire State Building exhibits, and then to compare and contrast other "great races" with the Empire State Building.

- What do these races tell us about the people who were involved and the time they were living in? Example: The Space Race can be linked to the Cold War; the Human Genome can be linked to the worldwide tech revolution.
- What impacts do these races have on our lives today?

## **OBJECTIVES**

Students will deepen their understanding of:

- Historical knowledge of several time periods, including the Roaring Twenties and Great Depression
- The link between technological advances and the time period in which they were made
- Connections between personalities and rivalries, and how they impact history
- Research skills
- Writing a comparative essay, citing evidence and details from several historical events to support their thesis

## **SUGGESTED TIME ALLOWANCE:**

(1.5-2 hours)



# RESOURCES/MATERIALS:

- Video: **Impossible Science On Location**
- Information provided in the Empire State Building exhibits
- Paper or notebook for taking notes at the ESB
- Additional research and writing will be done on a computer
- Bowery Boys Podcast: **“The Empire State Building: The Story of an Icon”**
- Relevant sections: Start minute 4:30 to minute 37. Then go to minute 38:23 to the end at minute 51:48
- Article from website, Buildings.com: **“The Empire State Building: An Innovative Skyscraper”**
- Provided worksheets

# ACTIVITIES/ PROCEDURES:

## PRE-TRIP ACTIVITY

Students will listen to the podcast “**Bowery Boys**

“The Empire State Building:  
The Story of an Icon”

and read the article from the website, Buildings.com:

“The Empire State Building:  
An Innovative Skyscraper”

Students will conduct additional research using digital archives, photographs, books, newspaper articles, and other primary sources. They will take notes on their research and consider the answers to questions such as these:

- How was the construction of the Empire State Building influenced by geography and the economy?
- How did the construction of the Empire State Building influence the landscape and culture of New York City?
- How was the construction of the Empire State Building influenced by the Great Depression? (Consider specifically when the Great Depression began and when the Empire State Building was built.)
- How did the competition between the Empire State Building and the Chrysler Building impact the construction of each building? Was this competition beneficial or detrimental to the building design and construction?

## ON-SITE ACTIVITIES One hour

Students will add to their research notes by examining exhibits to contextualize the competition and race between the builders of the Chrysler Building and the builders of the Empire State Building.

## EXHIBIT: THE SITE IN THE 1920S CONSTRUCTION

(15 minutes each)

Take notes on important information and consider questions such as these:

- Look carefully at the photos and visuals displayed in this exhibit. Describe the time period the Empire State Building was being built. What details in the exhibit give you clues about the time period?
- Who are key people who contributed to its design and construction?
- What changes were made in the construction and plans of the Empire State Building in order to win the race? Which building was finished first? Which was taller?

## **EXHIBIT: OPENING DAY, MODERN MARVEL, OTIS ELEVATORS, URBAN CAMPUS**

(10 minutes each)

In the nearby exhibits, consider what technological innovations were used to build the Empire State Building. What materials were used? How were the elevators built?

### **POST-TRIP ACTIVITY**

After the trip, students will choose one or two additional “historical races” for their research and essay. They will review a list of possible options from which they can choose, or teachers can permit them to find additional topics that interest them. After they choose their “races,” they will write a comparative essay contrasting the Empire State Building vs. the Chrysler Building race with the other example(s) they chose. Their essay must address these topics. For each historical race:

- Describe the importance of the innovation the parties were racing to complete
- Describe the historical era in which the race occurred. What important events were happening at that time in the United States or around the world?
- Explain whether the historical era is connected to the innovation. (For example, the Great Depression began in late 1929 and is one of the most important historical events of the 20th Century: Discuss how it impacted the construction of the Chrysler Building and Empire State Building)
- Explain why the innovation was so important that it became a race. Was it related to “discovery,” national pride or competition, fame, fortune, or the personalities of the people involved?
- Compare and contrast the innovations researched.

### **EVALUATION AND ASSESSMENT**

Teachers can review and assess the final essays written by each student according to the standards and grade levels appropriate for their class. Students should be able to write a comparative essay using the skills required in high school writing—for example, including a clear paragraph describing each race, a paragraph comparing and contrasting them, specific evidence cited to support their claims; and a list of sources for their evidence. Teachers can adjust the details of the assessment as they see fit. Moreover, depending on the grade level, accommodations for students with disabilities or students learning English could be provided by sharing specific links for research or a template for the essay.

Teachers could organize a class debate on a topic such as:

- Why do humans race to innovate and invent new technology? Is it for science and the good of humanity?
- Is it for fame and fortune?
- Is there a primary motivation or does it depend?

Students could also consider a link to the future. A further writing or discussion topic could consider:

- What will be the next big human race?
- What inventions will humans race to create in the 2020s or 2030s
- Can they cite evidence from their essays to support their predictions?



# CONNECTIONS TO THE STANDARDS

## ACADEMIC CONTENT STANDARDS:

### CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.3

Evaluate various explanations for actions or events and determine which explanation best accords with textual evidence, acknowledging where the text leaves matters uncertain.

### CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.7

Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, as well as in words) in order to address a question or solve a problem.

### CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.9

Compare and contrast treatments of the same topic in several primary and secondary sources.

# PRE-TRIP WORKSHEET

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

DATE \_\_\_\_\_

## EMPIRE STATE BUILDING PRELIMINARY RESEARCH

To prepare for your trip to the Empire State Building, we will do research to learn about the time period when the Empire State Building was built.

Listen to the Podcast: *(Start listening at minute 4:30 until minute 37; then skip ahead to minute 38.23 and listen to the end at minute 51:48)*

“The Empire State Building: The Story of an Icon”

Read the article from the website, Buildings.com,

“The Empire State Building: An Innovative Skyscraper”

QUESTION	RESPONSE	EVIDENCE FROM NOTES
How was the construction of the Empire State Building influenced by geography and the economy?		
How did the construction of the Empire State Building influence the landscape and culture of New York City?		
How was the construction of the Empire State Building influenced by the Great Depression? Consider specifically when The Great Depression began and when the Empire State Building was built.		
How did the competition between the Empire State Building and the Chrysler Building impact the construction of each building? Was this competition beneficial or detrimental to the building design and construction?		





# POST-TRIP WORKSHEET

## UPDATE TO EMPIRE STATE BUILDING ESSAY ASSIGNMENT

You have completed your trip to the Empire State Building and learned about the fascinating “race” between the owners of the Empire State Building and the Chrysler Building to construct the tallest skyscraper in the world (at that time).

Now you will conduct additional research to learn about other “Great Races in History.” There is a long tradition for humans to race to accomplish important things before others. People want to be the first to discover things—to find new places, invent new technologies, or cure diseases.

In addition to the great race you learned about on your trip (the Empire State Building vs. the Chrysler Building), choose one or two more that you will research. You could choose from these or ask your teacher if you have other ideas:

- The race to invent the lightbulb.
- The Space Race between the United States and the Soviet Union.
- The Human Genome project and the race to map the sequence of human DNA.
- The race to create a vaccine for COVID-19.

After you choose the “Great Race(s)” that you will research, write an essay comparing and contrasting the Empire State Building vs. Chrysler Building to the other technological races that you chose.

In your essay, you should include the following:

- Describe the importance of the innovation the parties were racing to complete.
- Describe the historical era in which the race occurred (what important events were happening at that time in the United States or around the world?)
- Explain how and why the historical era is connected to the innovation (why was it so important to make this discovery at that specific time?). In your discussion of the Empire State Building and the Chrysler Building, be sure to discuss the significance and impact of the Great Depression.
- Explain why this innovation was so important that it became a race (was it related to “discovery,” national pride or competition, fame, fortune, or the personalities of the people involved?)
- Compare and contrast the innovations researched. What patterns do you see in the Great Races that you researched?

Be sure to cite specific evidence to support your writing, and follow the writing process that you use in this class.

