

The Chrysler Building William Van Alen

Grades: 6th-9th

Subjects: Visual Arts, History—Social Science

Time: 2 (50 minute) classes *Optional extra class period*

Featured Artworks: Picturing America: 15b The Chrysler Building

Lesson Overview: Students will explore the architectural form of the skyscraper, especially in relationship to national pride

Learning Objectives:

- Consider how the height and form of the Chrysler Building was a symbol of achievement and how the architectural form of the skyscraper relates to National pride
- consider the construction methods for skyscrapers *optional*: take the PBS online Skyscraper challenge
- Make charts in small groups, comparing historic plane collisions into the Empire State Building and the World Trade Centers; draw a graphic novel-style reaction entitled: AMERICAN SKYSCRAPERS RULE!

Materials:

- Picturing America: 15b The Chrysler Building, plus pictures of various other skyscrapers
- Appendix handouts/ resources
- paper and pencil
- an assortment of building blocks
- access to computers and internet

Ideas: The Chrysler Building was the tallest building in the world, a symbol of pride (1930-1). Tall buildings have inspired National pride, a fact that contributed to the damage done to the American psyche in the wake of the 9-11-01 plane collisions with the World Trade Center Towers.

Students will:

- write one page about the Chrysler Building
- *optional*: take the Skyscraper challenge on the PBS website
- write a graphic-novel style personal reflection about skyscrapers
- complete a comparison/contrast chart about plane crashes with two American symbolic skyscraper

Key Questions:

- How and why do skyscrapers promote feelings of national pride?
- What effect did the building of the Chrysler Building, and its contemporary rival, the Empire State Building, have on American imagination? Consider popular media, such as the hero Superman, both historically and in contemporary movies.
- How does a comparison of planes hitting the Empire State Building and the World Trade Center show skyscrapers as symbols of National pride? Why did the 9-11 disaster affect American pride? In what ways did the form of the skyscraper play a role in the drama?

Steps: Day 1

1. Anticipatory Set: Allow students to build tall structures with blocks, working individually or in groups. Give each group similar sizes and shapes with which to work. After 10 minutes, stop the class and look around at which structures are the tallest, soundest and most attractive.

2. Show the Chrysler Building art print as an introduction to the skyscraper form in an American context, using Visual Thinking Strategies (Lukehart, 2010).

A. Leader asks students to take a few minutes to look closely at an image and then ask these and only these questions:

1. What is going on in this picture?
2. What do you see that makes you say that?
3. What else can you find?

B. The leader continually paraphrases student responses, while increasing the accuracy of the language without making participants feel corrected, validating individual views, connecting observations, and pointing out differences of opinion.

Participants must provide visual evidence to support their interpretations.

C. After short discussion, give students basic information provided on poster about the piece.

3. Present information about the history of skyscrapers.

Show the portion of the PBS program, Building Big: Skyscrapers that has to deal with the building of the Chrysler building and the accompanying competition with the Empire State Building.

4. Handout Assignment Appendix A: Write at least one-page about the Chrysler Building, Handout includes questions to be addressed.

Optional Lesson (3rd class required)

Access to computers is necessary. 1. Access the online resource,

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/buildingbig/skyscraper/basics.htm>, read the skyscraper lesson, complete the Skyscraper online challenge

Day 2

1. Collect the writing assignment and briefly discuss the assignment. What were some things students liked about tall buildings. Post the Chrysler Building poster along side other skyscraper images and refer to them during the discussion.
2. In the PBS Building Big: Skyscrapers DVD, the B25 bomber collided with the Empire State Building. Invite students to speculate about why the building did not collapse, like the World Trade Centers did in the year 2001.
3. Use the Internet as a resource for a comparison and contrast study about the Empire State Building and the World Trade Center Twin Towers airplane collisions. Fill out Charts (Appendix B). Read information about the collapse of the World Trade Center (Appendix C).
4. Working in small groups, use the charts (Appendix A) as stimulus for discussion about the architectural form of the skyscraper as it relates to National pride. Why did the attack on the symbol of financial success in America ignite anger and calls for revenge?
5. Personal reflection: AMERICAN SKYSCRAPERS RULE! Use a graphic novel style, in which words and pictures are drawn together, to make a meaningful message about how skyscrapers have been important to Americans. (Use Appendix D as an example of graphic novel style.)

Author: Julie Christian Bender, Bridgman Public Schools, August, 2010

Appendix A

Handout Assignment: Write at least one-page about the Chrysler Building, considering these ideas:

- Chrysler Building and Empire State Building were built at the same time. In what ways were those buildings competitive? Why?
- How were the buildings symbols of American confidence and corporate pride?
- Discuss movie and comic book images, such as Superman or King Kong
- What do you like about tall buildings?

Appendix B

Chart: Comparison/ contrast of plane collisions with two American Skyscrapers

Directions: Work with 2 or 3 other people to find the information needed to complete this chart. Write on the back of the paper if you need more room.

Trait	Empire State Building	World Trade Center
Number of towers		
Symbolism of the buildings		

Height		
Date built		
Kind of plane(s) involved in the collision		
Result of collision (fatalities, damage to the buildings)		
Impact on the American pride		

Appendix C 9/11/2001 The Collapse of the World Trade Center Twin Towers

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Structural_failure

Main article: [Collapse of the World Trade Center](#) In the [September 11 attacks](#), two commercial airliners were deliberately crashed into the Twin Towers of the [World Trade Center](#) in New York City. The impact and resulting fires caused both towers to collapse within two hours. After the impacts had severed exterior columns and damaged core columns, the loads on these columns were redistributed. The hat trusses at the top of each building played a significant role in this redistribution of the loads in the structure.^[12] The impacts dislodged some of the fireproofing from the steel, increasing its exposure to the heat of the fires. Temperatures became high enough to weaken the core columns to the point of [creep](#) and [plastic deformation](#) under the weight of higher floors. Perimeter columns and floors were also weakened by the heat of the fires, causing the floors to sag and exerting an inward force on exterior walls of the building.^{[13][14]}

Appendix D Graphic Novel example Bullycomics Blogspot

“Say goodbye ("Bye bye!") to most of New York's most famous architectural wonders, as the Flatiron Building, the Empire State Building, Grand Central Terminal, and Chrysler Building get smashed into

QuickTime™ and a
decompressor
are needed to see this picture.

ruddle during the mighty brawl! “

Resources

Picturing America Home Page <http://picturingamerica.neh.gov/>

This site is the primary resource for the National Endowment for the Humanities project to bring masterpieces of American art into classrooms and libraries. Contains lesson plan suggestions

Picturing America Resource Guide Lesson for the Chrysler Building

http://picturingamerica.neh.gov/educators.php?subPage=edu_guide

Visual Thinking Strategies (Lukehart, 2010) M. Coombs & R. Fortier Introduction to Picturing America Rye Junior High School Rye NH <http://newberrypicturingamerica.pbworks.com/Useful-Links>

New York Architecture Images – Chrysler Building

<http://www.nyc-architecture.com/MID/MID021.htm> New York Architecture Images Web site with brief information and numerous images of the Chrysler Building; Chrysler Building Gallery link has period photographs of the Chrysler Building and its construction.

America in the 1930s

<http://xroads.virginia.edu/~1930s/DISPLAY/chrysler/Frame-1.html> University of Virginia American Studies Program Web site, America in the 1930s, Building the Chrysler Building: The Social Construction of the Skyscraper, with historical context and period photographs.

PBS: Building Big <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/buildingbig/>

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/buildingbig/skyscraper/challenge/index.html>

PBS Web site on the series, Building Big, with links to “Skyscrapers” and “Educator’s Guide” offers classroom activities. From main page, click on “Skyscrapers” then “Chrysler Building” for information and graphics that show the height of the Chrysler Building in comparison to other skyscrapers.

The Newberry Library Picturing American School Collaboration Conferences

<http://newberrypicturingamerica.pbworks.com/Useful-Links>

A collection of Useful Links for researching American Art and how it relates to American Life.

Scott McCloud image of the Chrysler Building in graphic novel style

Bullycomics Blogspot: http://bullycomics.blogspot.com/2008_07_06_archive.html

Wikipedia entries:

Link about structural failure in the World Trade Center Towers

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Structural_failure

Graphic Novel Wikipedia entry: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Graphic_novel

American comic creator and theorist Scott McCloud

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scott_McCloud