



Background Information: Setting the Stage

*We realize the manner in which a teacher interprets information to his/her students may vary from school to school. Different textbooks may emphasize certain facts and information to varying degrees and in different ways. Teacher experiences and interests may be quite different. School resources may differ and school systems may simply have different goals in mind for their students. We respect these differences. For this reason we have not presented a specific set of **facts** that **must** be learned through this curriculum. Rather we offer some basic information that should serve as a common point of reference for those using the curriculum. The activities that follow and make up this curriculum are offered to embellish this basic information, under your tutelage. The activities offer suggested ways for you to add to you students' experiences in your classroom, in your community and when you visit New York City and the NY SKYRIDE.*

Here is the very basic information that is to be embellished via the activities of this curriculum:

The year was 1929 and there was a problem! Our country had produced more products than its average citizens could consume. Businesses closed because they could not sell their goods. Factories shut down because there was no reason to produce more goods than could be sold. This meant that many people were out of work and were not able to feed and clothe themselves and their families. It was the same all over, on farms, in small towns and in big cities like New York City. People were hungry and did whatever it took to survive! Banks everywhere closed because too many people rushed to take their money out. Many people who had entrusted their money to these banks lost their life's savings.

New York City was hit especially hard during this time, called the Great Depression. It had limited space, a growing population of immigrants and an influx of people moving here from the countryside in hopes of getting jobs. The poorest areas of the city were extremely overcrowded, filthy and not at all fun places to live. All over the city there were breadlines serving hot meals to people who could not afford to buy food. Extended families and friends moved in together, living in very small apartments, in order to have a place to live at all. The federal government and the city put into place all kinds of programs to help people. Some worked, but many didn't. On the other hand there were people across the country and in New York as well who had extreme wealth and they suffered very little.

In the early part of the 20th century the wealthier New Yorkers had begin moving northward where there was more room. Land that had previously been farmland had given way to office buildings and great mansions of the very wealthy. As this migration continued, shortage of ground space became an ever-increasing problem. The only answer was to build up. Skyscrapers began to appear in Manhattan. Soon there was a race to build taller and bigger buildings. The value of the land went

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higher and higher as well. Developers began competing to see who could build the tallest building and reap the most rewards. Al Smith and John Raskob were two men who wanted to build the tallest skyscraper. They especially wanted to build a skyscraper in New York City that was taller than the Chrysler Building.

In 1929 Smith and Raskob began construction on the Empire State Building in New York City. A skyscraper is a building that must be over 20 stories tall. It must be taller than it is wide (the measurement of the building's height is greater than the measurement of its base). It also must have usable floors where people work, live and/or recreate. A skyscraper can be home to offices, hotels, apartments, shops, restaurants, theaters, etc. In 1929 the building of the Empire State building put many New Yorkers to work. That was a good thing! It also helped the economy of other areas in the United State and around the world because it used building materials from all over the world.

The Empire State Building took one year and 45 days to build and was built under budget. It stands 86 floors high with a tower on top that brings the total height to 102 floors --- 1,250 feet. It took 7 million man hours to build. It was a building feat that has not been matched to date. The design is Art Deco. Perhaps the most amazing feat was the incredible teamwork, planning and coordination that went into the construction efforts. Without this teamwork the Empire State Building could not have been built.

There were three physical factors that made the Empire State Building possible --- the discovery of steel (it could support much more weight than any of the other building materials), the concept of using this steel to create an interior structure that would supports the weight of a building (this would allow for a multi-story building that could rise hundreds of feet in the air) and the invention of the elevator --- one that wouldn't fall (This would make it possible and safe for people to live and work in a tall building)!

Today, as through out its history, New York City is a bustling, energetic city with a vibrant culture created by the mixture of people from all over the world. The city's immigrants have brought different languages, music, food, art, religions and different ways of looking at the world, all valuable contributions.