



Literacy and Intervention

SAMPLE LESSON

Einstein's Who, What, and Where

Nonfiction Passages for Comprehension

Grades 4–7



Book 1

The EMPIRE STATE BUILDING



Think about It

When you hear the name Empire State Building, what comes to mind?

AS YOU READ Put a ✓ next to parts of the story that you find interesting. Put a ? next to parts of the story you do not understand.

NOTES

Ask tourists who have visited New York City what one must see, and they will tell you the Empire State Building. People marvel at its beautiful design and its breathtaking views. Yet too few know the amazing story of how the Empire State Building was built.

John J. Raskob and Alfred E. Smith were close friends, and in 1929 both were out of work. Raskob had been a vice president of General Motors, the car company, and was very rich. Smith had been the governor of New York. When he ran for president of the United States in 1928, Raskob left his job to help his friend win the election. But Smith was defeated, so both men were looking for work.

New York needed more office space, but there was only so much land. Smith, a New Yorker, knew that more and more skyscrapers were being built in the city. These tall buildings, whose weight was supported by frames of steel, seemed to be a solution. The New York City skyline with its skyscrapers had replaced the Statue of Liberty as the **symbol** of the city. Smith suggested that Raskob use his money to build one of these giants. Smith, with his New York connections, would be president of the building. Raskob liked the idea and quickly agreed to Smith's plan.

The first drawings showed the Empire State Building with sixty-five stories. Raskob, however, was not satisfied because it was too low. He said that a taller building would make the news and receive lots of free advertising. Either Raskob or the building's architect, William Lamb, pulled out a big pencil, stuck it up in the air, and said that this is what the building should look like.

Raskob had a second reason for wanting the building to be taller. Walter Chrysler, a **rival** in the automobile business, was almost finished with building his own skyscraper in New York City, the Chrysler Building. Raskob wanted to be sure his building was taller than Chrysler's. So Smith announced that their skyscraper would be eighty stories tall and one thousand feet high. This would make it the tallest building in the world.

When Chrysler heard this news, he told his architect to increase the height of his building. In 1930, a stainless steel **spire** was added at the top. It rose like a giant needle into the air, making it 1,048 feet tall. But this was the highest it could go. Nothing more could be added. Raskob was pleased because his building was not yet finished. He could now make his skyscraper taller. The Empire State Building's final height was 1,250 feet, 202 feet taller than the tip of the spire on the Chrysler Building. It had 102 floors with an observation deck on the eighty-sixth floor from which people could see for forty miles.

Not only did the Empire State Building set a record for height, it was also built in record time. When the construction began in March 1930, the country was at the beginning of the Great Depression. Many people were out of work. Workers were eager for any job. About 2,500 people worked on the building each day. From the time the construction began, the frame of the building rose at an average of four-and-a-half floors per week. Once, the workers completed fourteen-and-a-half floors in ten working days.

Cranes lifted big bundles of steel **beams** high up to the top of the unfinished building. To move one of the beams into place, a man stood on it as the crane swung it in the air. With his feet spread apart, the man gripped a steel rope for support. While the beam was in the air, the worker turned it with his feet until the steel unit was at just the right angle. Then the crane lowered it into place. People on the street below stood three and four deep, watching the steelworkers construct the building. They said that the men reminded them of acrobats. A magazine writer compared the workers to little spiders spinning a fabric of steel against the sky.

As the building rose story by story, a tiny railroad was built on each level to carry needed supplies. At its busiest, there were about three thousand men working at one time. When the workers complained that they were late getting back from lunch because they could not find a place to eat, movable cafeterias were built on the

scaffolding. As the building increased in height, more were added. Finally, cafeterias were on the third, the ninth, the twenty-fourth, the forty-seventh, and the sixty-fourth floors. For forty cents, a worker could buy a hot meal or a couple of sandwiches, something to drink, and a piece of pie. Ten miles of water pipes carried drinking water to the workers.

In the early 1930s, there was little safety equipment. Since the work was so dangerous, a nurse worked full-time, and a doctor visited several times a day. An entrance to the building site was always kept free in case an ambulance was needed.

The building took one year and forty-five days to build. This is still a record for building a skyscraper of such a height. As soon as the Empire State Building went up, people loved it. From the time it opened, many tourists visited the observation decks and were thrilled by the marvelous views. The building became an instant symbol of New York City. Many people believe it is the city's and the world's greatest skyscraper.

symbol - something that stands for or represents something else

rival - a person who tries to be as good as or better than another

spire - a tall, narrow structure that tapers to a point at the top

beam - a long, strong piece of wood or metal, used in buildings for support

scaffolding - a group of platforms for workers to stand on as they work high above the ground on a building

LOOKING BACK AT WHAT YOU HAVE READ

🌀 Write your answers to the following questions on the lines below. When the question is in bold print, underline the answer in the story, and write the number of the question in the margin. The answer may be in more than one place. Then write it below.

1. **Why did Smith suggest to Raskob that he build a large skyscraper?**

2. Why did Raskob want to have the tallest building in New York City?

3. **How tall is the Empire State Building?**

4. Why do you think there was often a large crowd watching as the building went up?

5. **Why were people glad to be working on the Empire State Building?**

6. What are some other famous skyscrapers?

WORKING WITH WORDS

② What three new words did you learn from this story?

Try to use two of them in sentences.

A **proverb** is a short saying that expresses something that many people believe to be true. "Birds of a feather flock together" is a proverb. It means that people who have the same interests and beliefs are drawn to each other.



② Explain how the building of the Empire State Building is an example of the proverb "Many hands make light work."

② Explain how Governor Al Smith's actions after losing the election are an example of the proverb "Don't cry over spilled milk."

Sometimes words have more than one meaning.

Example: The waiter gave me the **bill**.

In the sentence, *bill* means the piece of paper that tells you how much you owe. *Bill* can also mean the beak of a bird.

☞ In the following sentences, the word in bold print has one meaning. Write what it is. Then see if you can write another meaning the word may have.

Raskob and Smith were **close** friends.

The spire **rose** like a giant needle.

It was 202 feet taller than the **tip** of the spire on the Chrysler Building.

Pretend you are John Raskob. You are writing in your diary, describing the opening of the Empire State Building. Write down what you did on that day and what you thought. When you have finished your writing, proofread it. Check it for correct spelling, grammar, capitalization, and punctuation.

