



Modern Marvels: Empire State Building

At a time when American dreams were in short supply, an iconic engineering marvel rose up through the New York City skyline and inspired a nation. This Modern Marvels episode tells the remarkable story behind the world-renowned Empire State Building. Planned during the 1920s, construction on what would become the world's tallest man-made structure was almost grounded by the Depression. In spite of the country's economic troubles, intrepid construction workers prevailed, carefully assembling the building's magnificent steel frame at an astonishing pace of four-and-a-half stories per week. In just over a year the miraculous structure was finished, and a monumental symbol of the indomitable American spirit was forever etched into the New York City landscape. From the first plans to the final rivet, explore this captivating and inspirational tale of the great Empire State Building.

Curriculum Links:

Modern Marvels: Empire State Building would be useful for courses or lectures on U.S. History, The Great Depression, Engineering, and Science and Technology.

Discussion Questions :

1. When was the Empire State building started, and when was it completed?
2. What inventions made the creation of skyscrapers possible? How were these inventions useful in other engineering projects or industries?
3. How did the geology of Manhattan contribute to the birth of skyscrapers? What might happen in cities with soft earth surfaces? What might happen in cities built on a fault line?
4. Why do you think Mr. Woolworth wanted to build a skyscraper for his headquarters? Do you think this was an important goal?
5. How did the Empire State Building get its name?
6. During the Great Depression, the construction of the Empire State Building represented a huge employment opportunity for New Yorkers. What were some of the jobs created by this project?
7. Why do you think leaders decided to move ahead with the construction of the Empire State building despite the Depression? What were the costs involved?
8. As you learn in this program, Native American construction workers have been willing to work at heights that would terrify other workers. What experiences do you think contributed to this skill?
9. The Empire State Building is an example of the "Art Deco" style. What does this mean? What was distinct about Art Deco buildings?
10. What do you think the Empire State building symbolizes in American society?

Extended Activities :

1. The Empire State Building is an example of the Art Deco architectural style. Working in groups or individually, have students create presentations about the Art Deco style. Students may want to find examples of Art Deco architecture in their cities or neighborhoods to include in their presentations.
2. Mohawk iron workers played a key role in the construction of the Empire State Building. Ask students to research the role of the Mohawk workers and then write a letter or diary entry from the perspective of one of these workers. Students may also want to write a 2-3 page paper about the Mohawk contribution to New York buildings.

Websites:

History.com video on the construction of the Empire State Building:

<http://www.history.com/videos/empire-state-building-defies-depression#empire-state-building-defies-depression>

Empire State Building official site:

http://www.esbnyc.com/tourism/tourism_history.cfm

More background about Mohawk iron workers:

http://www.sites.si.edu/exhibitions/exhibits/archived_exhibitions/booming/main.htm