

THE WORLD TRADE CENTER: RISE AND FALL OF AN AMERICAN ICON

EDUCATOR'S GUIDE

HISTORY® produced this 1-hour documentary about the World Trade Center in the spring and summer of 2001. No one had any idea that the World Trade Center would no longer be standing at the time this program was originally scheduled to air. While changes in the narration have been made since the disaster, this documentary is not about the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, or about the rise of modern terrorism. It focuses on the design, engineering, and operational history of the Twin Towers. Tragically, many of the people interviewed were lost in the disaster. Watching this program will give students insights into the tragic events of September 11, 2001, and the significance of the World Trade Center.

CURRICULUM LINKS

This teacher's guide is designed to contribute to your students' understanding of the September 11 attacks, and to encourage them to openly discuss their reactions to and ideas about recent events. This documentary is suitable for middle and high school students in history, technology, and urban studies classes.



PRE-VIEWING DISCUSSION AND ACTIVITY

Ask your students if any of them had seen the World Trade Center buildings in the Manhattan skyline and ask them to discuss the significance of the buildings. Some students may have personal stories that they have heard from family members or friends who worked there or who remember the buildings. Encourage them to share their stories in a classroom discussion.

Many students today may not remember September 11, 2001 but they may know a lot about the attacks on the World Trade Center and other sites through what they have learned by watching television or from family members. Ask students to write a journal entry about what September 11, 2001 means to them before watching this documentary.

When introducing this program, make sure your students understand that this is a history of the World Trade Center, not a documentary about Osama bin Laden or terrorism.



VIEWING ACTIVITIES

Students should take brief notes while viewing the documentary. Encourage them to write down short pieces of data — or intriguing facts — they may want to remember for later discussion. This program is chock-full of detailed information.

POST-VIEWING DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

See the last page of this guide for the student handout with these questions.

- 1. John Tishman, the owner and proprietor of the World Trade Center, describes the Twin Towers as New York’s “icon.” What is an icon? Do you agree with Mr. Tishman’s statement? Name two other icons of New York City.** (Possible answers: Statue of Liberty, Empire State Building, Times Square, the New York Public Library, the U.N.)
- 2. What do you think the World Trade Center symbolized for the terrorists involved in the 9/11 attacks? Why?** (Possible answers: World Trade Center represented dominance of USA in world economy. Trade Center very visible symbol in skyline, an American icon.)
- 3. 40,000 people worked in the World Trade Center on a daily basis. Using an almanac or atlas, have your students identify several towns with a population around that size. What would a small town have in common with the World Trade Center? How would it differ?** (Possible answers: They both had their own police, fire, power, phone lines, plus many places to work and shop. Trade Center was self-contained, indoors, people from all over the world worked there. More diverse than most small towns.)
- 4. What other structures made up the World Trade Center besides the Twin Towers?** (Possible answers: There were 7 other office buildings and an outdoor plaza, plus a shopping mall and transportation center for subways and PATH trains underground.)
- 5. The Operations Control Center is compared to the war room of a battleship. What are the strengths and weaknesses of this analogy?** (Possible answer: The fact that ultimately the Twin Towers were vulnerable to attack.)
- 6. The narrator points out three developments that made the creation of the skyscraper a possibility.** (Elevators in the 1860s, steel skeletal structures in the 1880s, and the boom in office work by the 1890s are some possible answers.) **Which factors do your students remember? Review these factors in class. Have your students evaluate the importance of each. Where were people working before they were in offices? (In fields and factories would be two possible answers.) What caused this change of location for work?** (Mechanization of agricultural and factory production after the 1880s and the rise of financial and other service industries, for example.)



POST-VIEWING DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (CONT'D)

7. **Why did the New York Port Authority build the World Trade Center?** (To revitalize lower Manhattan and the international shipping trade for the New York/New Jersey area).
8. **What is landfill? What problems did the construction face because the site was on landfill?** (Landfill is man-made deposits of earth or debris. In the lower West Side of Manhattan, landfill had turned the edge of the Hudson River into land, but water lurked only three feet below the surface!)
9. **What new engineering and construction techniques were used during the creation of the World Trade Center?** (“Slurry trench,” “kangaroo cranes,” creating a steel “skin” external structure rather than internal box grids stacked on top of each other, subjecting models to wind-tunnel tests are some possible answers.)
10. **Who was the architect of the World Trade Center? What was ironic about this choice?** (Minoru Yamasaki – he was afraid of heights.)
11. **Describe the Trade Center bombing in 1993. What was learned from this event? Did those lessons help in 2001?** (Note: This is not addressed directly in the documentary, and calls for speculation or research.) **Why or why not?** (Possible answer: Many people were able to escape because of safety features installed after 1993, such as better lighting in the stairwells.)
12. **Have your students consider the following questions: Why do many people want to build tall buildings? Why do many cities, such as Washington, D.C., and Paris, France, limit the height of buildings within their perimeters?** (Some cities have been built on land that is too soft or soggy for many skyscrapers. People may feel that extremely tall buildings reduce the “livability” of a city, by blocking the light, air, and views. Other people simply prefer a “human scale” for a built environment. In Washington, no building is supposed to be taller than the U.S. Capitol, a zoning regulation that has symbolic meaning as well.)





EXTENDED ACTIVITIES

- 1. In class, have the students review the notes they took while watching this program.** Create a list of short facts or data from the documentary to share as a large group. Or, small groups of students may create posters displaying information about the World Trade Center. Display the lists or posters in your classroom and discuss.
- 2. Students may wish to discuss the emotions they experienced while viewing the interviews with the workers from the World Trade Center, some of whom died on September 11, 2001.** How did the people who worked there seem to feel about their responsibilities?
- 3. For many viewers, it is a very difficult moment in the documentary when Mr. Martini discusses the potential strength of the towers in face of a 707 airplane.** Discuss what made the September 11 terrorists' airplanes different than the situation described by Mr. Martini? (The jets were much bigger and filled with explosive fuel.) In retrospect, what made the World Trade Center a clear target for the terrorists' plot? Ask students to write a short essay responding to this question. (Possible answers: Not only was the Trade Center an icon, it stood on the base of Manhattan Island. This made it easy to hit directly with nothing else in the way. It was also very near a regular airline flight path, as those who have ever flown into New York City airports would know.)
- 4. Many different skyscrapers are mentioned in the documentary.** In small groups, have your students learn about these skyscrapers. Each group should choose one building and present their findings on a poster. Alternatively, small groups or individuals may design an original skyscraper, and explain to the class what makes it unique as well as functional.
- 5. Today, many students may or may not remember the events of September 11, 2001.** Ask students to write an op-ed piece or letter to the editor about how and why the tragic events of this day should be remembered.

BOOKS:

Jacobson, Sid and Ernie Colón. *The 9/11 Report: A Graphic Adaptation*. (Hill and Wang, 2006).

Meyerowitz, Joel. *Aftermath: World Trade Center Icon*. (Phaidon Press, 2006).

One Nation: America Remembers September 11, 2001. (Little, Brown and Company, 2001).

WEBSITES:

More about the World Trade Center:
www.history.com/topics/world-trade-center

National September 11 Memorial & Museum:
www.911memorial.org

Tribute WTC Visitor Center
www.tributewtc.org