



**THE HISTORY CHANNEL  
SPECIAL PRESENTATION**

**THE WORLD TRADE CENTER  
Teacher's Guide**

The History Channel produced this one-hour documentary on the World Trade Center in the spring and summer of 2001. No one at the network 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.

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.

*The World Trade Center* is suitable for middle and high school students in history, technology, and urban studies classes. This teacher's guide fulfills the following National Standards for History for grades 5-12 as developed by the National Center for History in the Schools: Historical Thinking Standards 2, 3, and 5 for United States History (Era 10).

**PRE-VIEWING DISCUSSION**

Ask your students if any of them have visited the World Trade Center, or have seen the buildings in the Manhattan skyline. If you teach in the New York City area, your students may have personal stories about friends or family members who worked there. Encourage them to share their stories in a classroom discussion. Students who saw the September 11 events on television but have no immediate connection also were profoundly affected, and should be encouraged to discuss their responses. Alternatively, assign a short journal entry in which students write about their feelings and experiences on September 11, 2001.

When introducing the video, make sure your students understand that this is a history of the World Trade Center, not about Osama bin Laden or terrorism. Explain that several of the World Trade Center employees whom they will see interviewed on camera lost their lives in the disaster.

**VIEWING ACTIVITY**

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. If you are using a VHS copy of this documentary, be prepared to stop and start the video to give students time to record pertinent data.





## 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 9/11/01 attacks? Why? (*Possible answers: World Trade Center represented dominance of USA in world economy. Terrorists wanted to "finish the job" they started in 1993. 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.*) 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.*)
4. The Operations Control Center is compared to the war room of a battleship. What are the strengths and weakness of this analogy? (*Possible answer: The fact that ultimately the Twin Towers could not protect themselves.*)
5. The narrator points out three developments that made the creation of the skyscraper a possibility. (*Elevators in the 1860s, steel skeletal structure in 1880's, and the boom in office work by the 1890s*) 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*) What caused this change of location for work? (*Mechanization of agricultural and factory production after the 1880s and rise of financial and other service industries*)
6. Why did the New York Port Authority build the World Trade Center? (*To revitalize lower Manhattan and international shipping trade for the New York/New Jersey area.*)
7. 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!*)
8. 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*)





9. Who was the architect of the World Trade Center? What was ironic about this choice? (*Minoru Yamasaki— he was afraid of heights.*)
10. 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.*)

### **EXTENDED ACTIVITIES**

1. In class, have the students review the notes they took while watching the video. 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 what 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? (*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. One of the amazing things about the World Trade Center destruction was the manner in which the Twin Towers imploded. How did the implosion reduce the impact of the disaster? (*The towers fell into themselves rather than collapsing or exploding across the lower end of Manhattan. While over 5000 people died in the collapse, it could have even more devastating if the towers had toppled over and crushed entire neighborhoods. Also, the fires were contained, and did not spread throughout lower Manhattan.*)
5. 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.
6. Have your students consider the following questions: Why do many people want to build tall buildings? Why do many cities, such as Washington, DC, 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 US Capitol, a zoning regulation that has symbolic meaning as well.*)





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5. The narrator points out three developments that made the creation of the skyscraper a possibility. What are these factors? Evaluate the importance of each. Where were people working before they were in offices? What caused this change of location for work?
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7. What is landfill? What problems did the construction face because the site was on landfill?
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