15-B Chrysler Building, 1926–1930

William Van Alen (1883–1954)

15-B.1 William Van Alen (1883–1954), The Chrysler Building, Manhattan, 1926–1930 (photographed in 1930). Located at 42nd Street and Lexington Avenue, New York. Steel frame, brick, concrete, masonry, and metal cladding, height 1046 ft. (318.82 m.). Photographic print. Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, D.C.

The Art

The Chrysler Building was a special work of art when it was finished in 1930. At 77 stories high, it was the tallest building in the world. Very tall buildings are called skyscrapers. The building gets smaller at the top to allow sunlight to reach the streets. On the top of the Chrysler Building, there are seven overlapping arches that get smaller toward the top, making the building look taller than it is. The unusual decoration, a pattern of narrow triangles set in half circles, looks like a sunburst or the spokes of a wheel. At the top of the building is a shiny stainless steel spire, or point. American eagle heads stick out from some of the building's corners. Other corners are decorated with winged, round forms that look like a hood ornament or radiator cap on a car from that time period.

The Artist

William Van Alen was an architect, a person who designs buildings. Van Alen was known for his showy designs. He was one of the first people to use Art Deco designs in modern skyscrapers. Art Deco is a decorative style that highlighted sleek, smooth lines and often used unusual building materials. The Chrysler Building was Van Alen's most famous building.

The Historical Perspective

Chrysler, who got rich in the car business, wanted to build the tallest building in New York City. With its steel and design, the Chrysler Building reminded people of Mr. Chrysler's cars and the modern machine age. The building also had Egyptian designs on its elevator doors. Everything Egyptian was popular at the time because of the discovery of King Tut's tomb in 1922. The Chrysler Building was the first building in the world to tower more than 1,000 feet above the ground.

15-B.2 above left, detail. Steeple of the Chrysler Building. © Photo Company/zefa/CORBIS.

15-B.3 above right, detail. Workers waterproofing Art Deco stainless steel eagle ornament of sixty-first floor. © Nathan Benn/CORBIS.

15-B.4 above left, detail. Thirty-first floor decoration based on radiator cap and hubcap designs. Photograph by Scott Murphy, Ambient Images, Inc.

15-B.5 right, detail. Art Deco elevator doors at the Chrysler Building. © Nathan Benn/CORBIS.

Conversations and Teaching Activities

Head Start Children ages 3 to 5

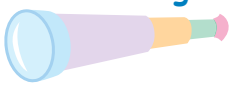
Encourage children to look closely at this photograph. Suggest that they focus on the Chrysler Building as a whole, compared to the other buildings around it. Ask them to look at some of the details, including those that are displayed in the photos at the side and some (like various lines and shapes, the background, the colors) that they may pick out by themselves. Introduce new vocabulary and find books that relate to the photograph.

Analyzing and Interpreting

Ask the following questions to stimulate thinking and discussion:

- The name of this photograph is *The Chrysler Building*. Why do you think it has that name?
- Are any other buildings as tall as the Chrysler Building?
- Why do you think the bottom of this building (point to it) is wider than the top of the building? Children might say for balance or to make it strong.
- Have you ever built a building like this with your blocks or cubes?
- What else might be in the air near the top of the building? Birds? Airplanes?
- Have you ever been in a very tall building? How did you feel?
- Are there other things you would like to tell me about this photograph?

Describing



✔ What is a photograph? How would you know something is a photograph?

✔ What is an architect? Do you know what an architect does?

✔ Have children point to the Chrysler Building and the other buildings around it. What can they say about the Chrysler Building compared to the other buildings in the photograph? What is in the center of the photograph? What is most of the background? (The sky is in the background.)

✔ Ask the children to keep looking closely and carefully. Then ask:

- ◆ What shapes do you see in the photograph?
- ◆ What kinds of lines do you see?
- ◆ What do you think the name of the photograph is?
- ◆ Why do you think this name was chosen?

✔ Invite children to find vertical lines. Talk about how horizontal lines follow the horizon—left to right—and vertical lines go up and down. The vertical lines are the lines of the building as they go straight up into the sky.

✔ Ask children if they know what a skyscraper is. Why would this building be called a skyscraper?

✔ Invite children to find the curved lines or point to them and follow with your finger. There are curved lines on the top of the Chrysler Building (see bottom pg. 94 15-B 2); on the elevator doors (see bottom pg. 94 15-B 5); under the eagle (see bottom pg. 94 15-B 3). Ask the children to find triangles. There are triangles near the top of the building; some are windows.

✔ Invite children to find squares and rectangles. There are squares and rectangles in the windows, in the bottom section of the building, and on the elevator door.

Connecting and Extending

Introducing Vocabulary

camera	ground
cement truck	ornate
circle	photography
crane	sidewalk
dump truck	skyscraper
front loader	spire

Related Family Literacy Experiences

Parents and children can:

✔ talk about a time they might have seen a construction site.

✔ go on a scavenger hunt and look for different types of tools in their home and talk about what they are used for. Even forks and spoons are "helping" tools.

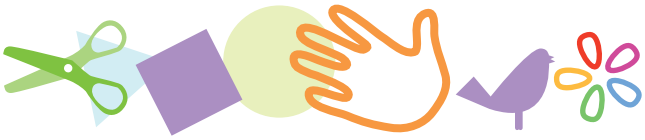
✔ sing the song "Tool Time" while waiting in long lines or during long drives.

Books

Skyscraper by Dana Meachen Rau (Marshall Cavendish Benchmark, 2007)
A book for beginners explains skyscrapers.

The Little Skyscraper by Scott Santoro (Price Stern Sloan, 2001)
Jack, a young boy, becomes an architect to lead the battle to have a skyscraper declared a landmark and restored to its former glory.

Up Goes the Skyscraper! by Gail Gibbons (Aladdin, 1990)
The building of a skyscraper, step by step, is presented in simple text and illustrations.



Related Educational Experiences

Explore tools. Collect several examples of two or three categories of tools (kitchen tools, school or office tools, repair tools, woodworking tools). Talk to the children about what tools are: objects that make something easier to do. Demonstrate a few simple tools.

In small groups, provide a box or a marked area of a table or floor for each tool. Have children sort the collection of tools by where or how they think each tool would be used. Ask children questions as they are sorting and guide their thinking about what they are doing.

What kind of people would you need to help construct a building? (Answers might include carpenters, bricklayers, plumbers, window makers.) Do they wear special clothing and use any special tools to do their jobs? What does someone need to build?

Add props and clothing to your dramatic play area that reflect the clothing of the construction trades.

*The ideas listed are just a few of the many activities that could be used to introduce or extend children's learning. Your knowledge of your children and families supports your ability to ensure positive learning experiences and outcomes for students. As an educator, you probably have ideas for books, songs, finger plays, and activities that you have thought of when introducing or extending children's learning related to the "**A Head Start on Picturing America**" artworks. We encourage you to confer with your colleagues, visit the local library or bookstore, and share your ideas with others.*