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Learning About the Empire State Building

In chapter 1, Buphead and Byron show Kenny how to survive a blizzard by spinning him around and throwing him in the snow. Kenny has padding from the many layers of warm clothing that his mother makes him wear. Kenny quips, “These guys couldn’t hurt me if they’d thrown me off the Empire State Building.”

The Empire State Building is a famous landmark that has graced the New York City skyline for more than 70 years. When it was built in 1931, it was the tallest building in the world, and it enjoyed that status until 1973. Even today, the Empire State Building and its colorful history fascinate people. Your students will enjoy learning about this interesting structure.

Have students work in pairs or trios. (If necessary, the class can be broken into larger groups.)

There are two Web sites listed in the resources on page 44 that may be available; or you can ask your students to search the Web using these keywords:

- Empire State Building
- ESB NYC
- NYC tourist
- New York City landmarks



1. If your students do not have Internet access, they can use encyclopedias or the definitive reference, *The Empire State Building: The Making of a Landmark* by John Tauranac.
2. The students’ goal is to locate and write down five interesting facts about the Empire State Building that they don’t think anyone else in the class will choose. Here are a few examples:
 - Every year, people compete to see who can be the first to climb the building’s 1,860 steps.
 - The building has 3,194,547 light bulbs.
 - The building’s electrical bill tops \$4.5 million annually.
 - On July 28, 1945, an Air Force B-25 crashed into the building between the 79th and 80th floors. Fourteen people were killed.
 - The only way the building could pay its taxes during the Depression was by charging visitors to go up to the observation deck.
3. Bring the class together as a whole. Have each team state their facts. They earn one point for every fact they found that no one else mentioned. (You’ll be pleased at how closely they listen to each other’s facts.)
4. The winning team(s) can have a prize, such as a no-homework-night pass or something else that is appropriate.

Music Critiques

In this part of the book, the Watsons get the Ultra-Glide, and we readers start to find out about the kinds of music they enjoy listening to. The “oldies” with asterisks are mentioned by name in the book. The others are readily available songs by the artists that Kenny mentions his parents playing on the Ultra-Glide.

- ★ “Yakety Yak” by the Coasters (Kenny’s favorite)*
- ★ “Under the Boardwalk” by the Drifters (Momma’s favorite)*
- ★ “Straighten Up and Fly Right” by Nat King Cole (Dad likes to whistle this)*
- ★ “Unforgettable” by Nat King Cole
- ★ “I’ve Got You Under My Skin” by Dinah Washington
- ★ “What a Difference a Day Makes” by Dinah Washington
- ★ “Smoke Gets In Your Eyes” by Dinah Washington



1. Obtain a copy of these songs on cassette or CD. You may even be able to access them on the Web. Play each one for the class.
2. If possible, read the students one or two music critiques from a magazine such as *Teen People*, *Spin*, or *Teen*. Post these phrases (which were taken from various music critiques in *Rolling Stone*):
 - “hokey, save-the-world lyrics”
 - “intensely rhythmic”
 - “too dull; sleep-inducing”
 - “likable, danceable beat”
 - “singing sounds a little tired”
 - “bounces along on a perky melody”
 - “they harmonize well”
 - “sassiest rock-and-roll rhythms”
 - “plunges listeners into”
3. Put the students into teams of three. Assign each group a different song or artist from the list above. Each group may listen to their song several times. Then they discuss and formulate answers to these questions:
 - What do you like about the song?
 - What did the recording artist do especially well?
 - What do you dislike about the song?
 - What could the recording artist have done better?
 - How is this song different from the songs of today?
 - How is this song like the songs of today?
 - What age group do you think this song appeals to (children, teens, adults, senior citizens)?
 - Would you recommend that another person your age buy this song?
4. Have each team use their answers to prepare a music critique for a teen magazine. Encourage them to use one or more of the phrases that you posted.