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Seven Wonders of the Modern World

Reading Comprehension History Unit

There are seven reading comprehension lessons in this unit, all based on the Seven Wonders of the Modern World. You will learn about:

- Panama Canal
- Empire State Building
- Golden Gate Bridge
- CN Tower
- Delta Works
- Itaipú Dam
- Channel Tunnel

Each lesson will have short, informative text followed by comprehension questions based on what was read. It is suggested that a parent/teacher read the selection and ask the questions orally; answers can be given orally or written on notebook paper.

You can also use this unit as a guide for a notebooking journal. The student can read the lesson text (or a parent/teacher can read it aloud) and use a notebooking page for written narration, using the questions as writing prompts. This often works better for students who struggle with reading comprehension questions.

Suggested vocabulary words are bolded. You can have your student look up the definitions to add to their history notebook.

The *Seven Wonders of the Modern World History Unit* is intended to be a supplement to your study of history and is geared for grades 4-8.

You will find answer keys in the index for each lesson.

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Introduction:

In this unit, we're going to discover seven wonders of the modern world. These seven have all been completed since 1900, though some were started many years before. Some of them have had tremendous **impacts** on business and everyday life. We'll travel throughout the Americas and to Europe and go from the tops of skyscrapers to underground tunnels. Are you ready? Grab a passport, and let's get started.

Lesson One: Panama Canal

Panama is a small country, only a little larger than West Virginia, but its location has made it extremely important to many nations. Not only does it connect North and Central America to South America, it also borders the Atlantic Ocean on its east side and the Pacific Ocean on its west side. Prior to the building of the Panama Canal, ships that wanted to travel from the east to the west had to travel the entire way around the southern end of South America. That meant a trip from New York City to San Francisco, for example, was around 13,000 miles (20,900 kilometers).

It's easy to see why cutting across Central America by water was an **appealing** idea. The French first began the task in 1881. In 1904, the United States acquired the canal and took over the work on it. By 1913, the two great oceans finally met, and in 1914, the SS *Ancon* became the first ship to make the journey through the canal.

Building the canal was a huge engineering achievement, but it did not come without tremendous cost. Financially, it cost the United States about $380 million. Sadly, it also cost the lives of 25,600 workers, many of whom died because of tropical diseases like malaria and yellow fever. These workers battled extreme conditions, working in hot, wet tropical areas that sometimes got more than 10 feet (3 meters) of rain every year.

The canal works by using a series of **locks** that raise and lower ships gradually so they can make the 85-foot (26-meter) change in water level between this part of the two oceans. An average of more than 12,000 ships make the 50-mile (80-kilometer) journey each year. Because of the canal, the trip from New York City to San Francisco by water is now just 5,200 miles (8,370 kilometers).

Lesson One: Comprehension Questions

1. Panama and the Panama Canal connect what land masses and bodies of water?

2. Who began construction on the canal, and when did they start it?

3. Who completed the canal, and when did it open?

4. What diseases were serious threats to the workers?

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Lesson Two: Empire State Building

Our next stop takes us to New York City, one of the most-visited cities in the world. The Empire State Building is recognized around the world as being an important part of this busy city. It opened in 1931 and held the record of being the world's tallest building for 40 years. It has 102 stories reaching 1,250 feet (381 meters) into the sky. Visitors can enjoy **observatories** on the 86th and 102nd floor plus an additional viewing platform near the top. You can find it in midtown Manhattan on Fifth Avenue, between 33rd Street and 34th Street. You can also spot it in more than 250 movies.

It has always held a special place in the hearts of the people of New York. Because of the incredibly hard work of many people, the building took only a little over 13 months to build, with workers adding 4.5 stories every week at one point. In 1963, panels were installed in the Empire State Building's lobby that showed the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World with the Empire State Building beside them as an eighth wonder. In 1994, the American Society of Civil Engineers officially named it one of the Seven Wonders of the Modern World.

It was designed in the **art deco** style by the firm of Shreve, Lamb & Harmon. It has a **riveted** steel framework covered by panels. As you work your way up the building, you see a series of setbacks, which are sections of the building *set back* from the rest. It makes the building almost like a gigantic set of stairs. Using geometric lines in art and architecture was popular in the 1920s and 1930s. You can find more art deco buildings in New York City, including the Chrysler Building, several blocks away where 42nd Street meets Lexington Avenue.

Lesson Two: Comprehension Questions

1. In what year did the Empire State Building open?

2. How many stories tall is it?

3. How many movies has it been in?

4. What style of architecture was it built in?

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Lesson Three: Golden Gate Bridge

The next destination on our list takes us across the country from the east to the west, but it only moves us forward 6 years in history to 1937. The Golden Gate Bridge connects the northern part of California with San Francisco. It stretches 8,981 feet (2,737 meters) long, and it was the longest bridge in the world until 1964 when a longer bridge was built in New York City. The bridge required around 88,000 tons (75,000 metric tons) of steel, 390,000 cubic yards (300,000 cubic meters) of concrete, and 160,000 miles (260,000 kilometers) of wire. It is a **marvel** of architecture, and its surrounding scenery make it one of the most photographed bridges in the world.

Joseph B. Strauss, the bridge's chief engineer, faced tremendous challenges in building the bridge. He had to build it strong enough to withstand powerful **currents**, winds, and earthquakes. His men often had to work in dangerous fog that caused at least one terrible accident when a cargo vessel smashed into the bridge. They also had to blast rock beneath the water so they could build foundations strong enough to withstand the earthquakes California is known for.

He improved the design of a safety net that was able to be moved from place to place. This net saved many men's lives, though sadly, 11 men died during the bridge's four years of construction.

Lesson Three: Comprehension Questions

1. In what year did the Golden Gate Bridge open?

2. What does the Golden Gate Bridge connect?

3. Who was the bridge's chief engineer?

4. What were three things the bridge had to be built to withstand?

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Lesson Four: CN Tower

From the Golden Gate Bridge, we need to head north and east to the city of Toronto in Ontario, Canada. Our next stop is a tall, needle-shaped skyscraper called the CN Tower. Reaching 1,815 feet 5 inches (553.33 meters) tall, it is the tallest **freestanding** building in the Western Hemisphere. It was the tallest building in the world when it opened in 1976 and held that record until the Burj Khalifa in Dubai, the capital of the United Arab Emirates, opened in 2010.

It took several years to build, starting in 1973. In 1974, the tower was finished. In 1975, the antenna was attached, and in 1976, the building opened thanks to the work of more than 1,500 workers.

If you visit this popular tourist attraction, you probably won't be alone! More than 2 million people visit the tower each year, enjoying spectacular views, a **revolving** restaurant, a movie theater, and a gift shop.

Originally built by the Canadian National Railway Company, it is now owned and operated by the Canadian government. It is a center for communication, used by more than 15 radio and television stations as well as wireless service providers. It is also a popular place for business meetings and other gatherings.

Lesson Four: Comprehension Questions

1. In what city can you find the CN Tower?

2. How tall is the tower?

3. What record does the tower hold?

4. What year did it open?

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Lesson Five: Delta Works

It's time to travel to Europe for the next wonder of the modern world. This wonder wasn't created because people wanted to build something new and different. It was built to save lives. In 1953, the terrible North Sea Flood hit the Netherlands and killed over 1,800 people. Not only were so many lives lost, 800 square miles (2,070 square kilometers) of land was **devastated** in the flood.

Not long after the flood, the Delta Works project began. Engineer Johan van Veen was put in charge of the project. It took just over 30 years, but by 1986, the massive project was complete. Delta Works combines a storm surge barrier, dikes, dams, **sluice gates**, and more into four barrier dams and six additional dams that close off the rivers, **inlets**, and **estuaries** that so easily flood. It even uses floating **pontoons** that can be filled with water and sunk to form a solid wall.

Not only does this amazing flood control system save lives, it helps connect islands that were once isolated. It provides tourist spots, such as a water theme park and an exhibit called the Delta Experience that teaches visitors about the historic flood of 1953. There are also beaches to explore, nature to discover, and even fun places to eat.

Lesson Five: Comprehension Questions

1. What flood struck the Netherlands in 1953?

2. Who was the engineer in charge of the project?

3. When was the project completed?

4. Name at least three of the parts of the Delta Works (not the tourist attractions).

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Lesson Six: Itaipú Dam

To reach our next destination, we need to cross the ocean and travel to the Western Hemisphere once again. This time, we're going to visit South America. On the Upper Paraná River, along the border of Brazil and Paraguay, we find the Itaipú Dam. The two nations worked together to build the dam, and it is now one of the largest **hydroelectric** power plants on Earth. Its twenty powerful **turbine generators** supply part of Brazil's electricity and most of Paraguay's.

The dam is actually a group of four smaller dams that work together. It includes a main dam, a **wing dam**, an **earthfill dam**, and a **rockfill dam**. It is 643 feet (196 meters) high and stretches along almost 5 miles (8 kilometers) of the river. Its **reservoir**, the artificial lake created by the dam, reaches north about 100 miles (160 kilometers).

The dam was begun in 1975. It was completed in phases, officially being completed in 1991 thanks to the work of more than 40,000 people. In order to keep the concrete that was used cool enough to set and harden properly, massive refrigeration plants also had to be built. Their combined capacity was equal to 50,000 domestic deep freezers! So many miles of electric power cables were used that they could have circled the globe 1.5 times. The iron and steel used in its construction is about the same as it would take to build 380 Eiffel Towers. The amount of earth and rock that had to be moved to build the dam is 8.5 times more than what was moved to build the Channel Tunnel, which we'll explore next.

Lesson Six: Comprehension Questions

1. What river was the Itaipú Dam built along?

2. What two nations worked to build the dam?

3. When was work on the dam begun? When did it officially end?

4. How many workers helped build the dam?

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Lesson Seven: Channel Tunnel

We need to take one more trip across the Atlantic Ocean in order to visit the final wonder on our list. People considered the idea of building a tunnel to connect England and France since at least the mid-1700s. Digging began in the 1880s, but the project was never completed. In 1986, a plan was formed to finally link the two nations. A **suspension bridge**, a bridge-and-tunnel combination, and a railroad track-and-road combination were all considered, but in the end, the railroad tunnel was chosen.

Digging began in 1987 and was finished in 1991. The tunnel officially opened in 1994. The Channel Tunnel is actually three tubes that run parallel to each other in some places and meet in other places. The center tunnel is a service tunnel that provides for maintenance, fresh air, and emergencies. The other two tunnels are for trains.

Several kinds of trains use the Channel Tunnel to cross the Strait of Dover. Freight trains carry goods. High-speed passenger trains carry people. A third type, called a shuttle train, carries cars, trucks, and buses along with their passengers. You can drive your vehicle on at one station and drive it off at the other about 30 minutes later.

The tunnel is 31.4 miles (50.5 kilometers) long, with 23.5 miles (37.8 kilometers) of it beneath the water. It connects to Folkestone, England, on one end and Sangatte (near Calais), France, on the other end.

Lesson Seven: Comprehension Questions

1. When did digging begin on the Channel Tunnel?

2. How many tubes make up the tunnel?

3. What are the three kinds of trains that use the tunnel?

4. What two specific locations does the tunnel connect?

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Answer Key

Lesson One: Panama Canal

1. North and Central America with South America; Atlantic and Pacific Oceans

2. French; 1881

3. United States; 1914

4. malaria and yellow fever

Lesson Two: Empire State Building

1. 1931

2. 102

3. more than 250

4. art deco

Lesson Three: Golden Gate Bridge

1. 1937

2. northern part of California with San Francisco

3. Joseph B. Strauss

4. powerful currents, winds, and earthquakes

Lesson Four: CN Tower

1. Toronto, Ontario

2. 1,815 feet 5 inches (553.33 meters)

3. the tallest freestanding building in the Western Hemisphere

4. 1976

Lesson Five: Delta Works

1. North Sea Flood

2. Johan van Veen

3. 1986

4. any three of the following: storm surge barrier, dikes, dams, sluice gates, floating pontoons

Lesson Six: Itaipú Dam

1. Upper Paraná River

2. Brazil and Paraguay

3. 1975; 1991

4. more than 40,000 people

Lesson Seven: Channel Tunnel

1. 1987

2. three

3. freight trains, high-speed passenger trains, and shuttle trains

4. Folkestone, England, and Sangatte (near Calais), France

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