



Through the Arts

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*Lower Manhattan, 1934*  
Thomas James Delbridge

# THE CITY

## Writing about Skyscrapers

### Arts Integration:

Visual Arts and English/Language Arts

### Target Audience:

Grades 4-12

### Description:

Students respond to a work of art, writing poetry or a graphic novel to demonstrate an understanding of skyscrapers

### Curricular Objectives:

Visual Arts:

The student assesses, evaluates and responds to characteristics of art.

English/Language Arts:

The student will use prewriting strategies to generate ideas.  
The student develops and demonstrates creative writing.

### Lesson Logistics:

Materials:

Image by Thomas James Delbridge: *Lower Manhattan, 1934*  
<http://americanart.si.edu/collections/search/artwork/?id=6622>

Paper and pen or pencil

Optional: markers, colored pencils, or crayons

Space:

Classroom (no particular arrangement)

### Vocabulary:

Visual Arts:

cityscape (a painting of a city), skyline, foreground, American Scene Painting (paintings circa 1920-45 that show the American people and land; sometimes called Regionalist painting), American Modernism (paintings circa 1910-35 in which artists largely reduced objects to shapes and colors rather than presenting them in a realistic manner)

English/Language Arts:

calligramme (text or poetry written in a particular shape)



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graphic novel (a novel in the form of comic strips)

Social Studies/History: primary source material

### **Lesson Strategy:**

#### Starting the Lesson:

- What are the names of some famous skyscrapers that you know?
- Why do you think these are so famous? (They usually were the tallest building in a city or were in places where notable events took place)
- What makes skyscrapers so appealing?

#### Building the Learning Experiences:

- Thomas Delbridge painted the skyline of New York, which has many skyscrapers. Begin exploring Delbridge's painting by making observations about the work. To begin, these observations should be statements of fact, not interpretation. Ask, "What do you see?" As students respond, follow up by asking, "What makes you say that?" Encourage the students to find evidence in the art that supports the main idea. Tell students that paintings like this are called cityscapes. Why do you think they have this name? Then ask, "What else do you see?" to help develop observation skills. Often observations lead to interpretation. Some additional questions to consider asking that prompt interpretation are:
  - How does the artist simplify the buildings? (leaves out detail, primarily uses geometric shapes, limits the colors)
  - Why do you think the artist made the buildings look so plain?
  - What is in the foreground of the painting? (a dock) Why does this look so large? (this is where the artist is standing to look across the water, so it looks large)
  - What devices does the artist use to frame the view of the city? (the triangular shape of the dock in the foreground, and the triangular shape of the clouds frame the view of the city)
  - How do you think the artist felt about New York City? (optimistic because the sky is blue and the sun is out) About skyscrapers? (because they are the subject, he probably likes them)
- Before you leave the discussion of the painting, point out the low arched buildings on the Manhattan side of the picture, which are ferry boat terminals. Why do you think ferries would be needed? (Manhattan is an island; people from New Jersey and Staten Island commuted by ferry to work in Manhattan.)

#### **Elementary Schools**

- What are your feelings about the painting, *Lower Manhattan*? Write a calligramme (text or poetry written in a particular shape; see Resources) about what you think about this view of the city. Write it in the shape of a skyscraper.

#### **Secondary Schools**

- Create a graphic novel that describes what New York City was like in 1934. Incorporate images of the Singer Building, the Woolworth Building and the Empire State Building in your novel. Review photographs from Lewis Hine's *Empire State Building*, which records its construction, and Berenice



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Abbott's *Changing New York* series to help give you a flavor of what the New York was like during the 1930s. (See Resources)

**Assessment:**

- Students can convey their feelings about the Delbridge painting by writing a calligramme.
- Students can write and illustrate a graphic novel about skyscrapers in New York City.

**Summary:**

- Sometimes artists simplify what they see, and we must fill in the details with what we know or feel about a place.

**Documentation:**

**William Delbridge painted *Lower Manhattan* in 1934. His painting is mostly shapes and colors; he gave very little detail about what New York City was like. Our class wrote calligrammes/graphic novels to fill in the blanks.**

Post the reproduction of the painting and the accompanying student work in the classroom or Media Center.

**Teacher Reflection:**

**Social Studies/History Extensions:**

**Elementary Schools**

**Critical Thinking**

- Have a discussion about why people build skyscrapers (maximize land use in crowded cities, become an icon for a corporation, become a point of pride for a city).

**Critical Thinking and Research**

- Skyscrapers became possible when the elevator and steel beams were invented. Why do you think these materials were important? What else do you think might be important? (electricity, plumbing technology to get water to upper floors, air conditioning) Research how the architecture of commercial buildings changed with these inventions and advances in technology.

**Compare and Contrast (using primary sources)**

- In the 1930s many skyscrapers were built in Manhattan. Use the Internet to find photographs of the Woolworth Building, the Singer Building, and the Empire State building, three buildings that are outlined in *Lower Manhattan*. (See suggestions in the Resources section.) What is similar about the



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style of these three buildings? ( Concrete construction, setbacks, spires, noticeable on the skyline)  
Compare and contrast these three buildings with later skyscrapers (which are mostly glass with no decoration and no setbacks; they have plazas which the other three do not)

Seagram Building, <http://www.nyc-architecture.com/UES/UES002.htm>

Lever House, <http://www.nyc-architecture.com/UES/UES012.htm>

Citicorp Center, <http://www.nyc-architecture.com/UES/UES001.htm>

### Map Skills

- Locate Staten Island and the island of Manhattan on a map. How many miles do you think the one-way ferry trip would be? (about five miles) What body of water separates the Manhattan and Staten Island? (New York Bay) What body of water is to the south of Staten Island? (the Atlantic Ocean) What river is on the west side of Manhattan? (the Hudson River) What river is on the east side of Manhattan? (the East River) What state is on the west side of Staten Island? (New Jersey)

### Secondary Schools

#### Research (using primary sources)

- Delbridge's painting gives very little detail about what Manhattan looks like. To fill in the blanks, create a special edition of newspaper that looks back over the decade of the 1930s. (See the Resources section for possible websites on suggested topics.) Assign varied topics to the class:
  - During the 1930s the city's environment changed dramatically as skyscrapers were built, one after the other. The Woolworth, Empire State and Chrysler buildings, along with Rockefeller Center, were all constructed in the 1930s. What did these buildings look like from the outside? What did the interiors look like? What did the owners do to make companies want to lease space in their buildings?
  - Lewis Hine documented the construction of the Empire State Building with his photography. Research how he was able to get photographs of workers working atop the building. (By being at the building site; sometimes he was suspended in a basket that could swing out over the street) What do his photographs highlight? (workers, the construction process) What were the working conditions like? (no safety equipment) Who did most of the construction work? (European immigrants and Mohawk Indians, who primarily did the iron work) [See Resources]
  - Berenice Abbot is famous for her series of photographs called *The Changing New York*, which she took from 1935-1938. How would you describe the streets of New York? The tempo of the city? The people?
  - *Lower Manhattan* shows the Whitehall Terminal, which is where the Staten Island Ferry docks. What did the ferries look like in the 1930s? How long did the ferry trip take? (about 26 minutes) Using population figures for Staten Island from the 1930 census compared to the 2010 census, and current Staten Island ridership numbers, extrapolate what the ridership of the ferry would have been. (Staten Island population in the 1930 census: 158,000; in the 2010 census: 443,000; Staten Island Ferry ridership today: 21 million people annually; estimated ridership in 1934: 7 million annually)

#### Research and Create (using primary sources)



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- Two New York City landmark skyscrapers were built during the Depression. The Chrysler Building opened on May 20, 1930. When it opened it was the tallest building in the world. On May 1, 1931 the Empire State Building opened, and claimed the title as the tallest building. The two buildings had lavish interiors to try and lure new tenants to their property. The atmosphere for leasing was very competitive. After looking at the interiors of each building (see Resources) choose your favorite skyscraper and devise a marketing plan to attract customers to your building.

### **Critical Thinking**

- The Singer Building (built in 1908) was for a time was the tallest building in New York, and was praised for its architecture. Many tried to have the building declared a landmark, but it was demolished in 1967 because it was no longer economically viable. Develop some criteria that can be used in deciding what buildings should be preserved and which ones are not valuable in the long term. If a building becomes a landmark, who should pay for its upkeep? If a historic office building needs to be modernized to handle 21<sup>st</sup> century technology and accessibility needs, what guidelines should be considered in staying “true” to the original design?

### **Critical Thinking and Research**

- The Empire State Building was conceived with a docking station for dirigibles (blimps). Why was this plan abandoned? (The winds caused by the height of the building were problematic. Dirigibles could anchor only with a single rope, which was considered impractical. That, combined with the explosion of the Hindenburg a few months after the building opened, made safety a concern.) What are the rules for aircraft flying over Manhattan today? (The FAA requires that planes fly in specified air corridors on either side of the island)

### **Research and Compare**

- Frank Woolworth made his money from dime stores, which were also called five and dime stores or five-and-ten-cent stores). What did these stores sell? (a wide variety of goods) Why were they given these names? (When the store opened the goods were sold at fixed prices, usually a nickel or a dime) What would the equivalent worth of ten cents in 1934 be worth today? (about \$1.60; <http://www.measuringworth.com/ppowerus/result.php>) What kind of stores do we have now that operate with the same concept as Woolworth’s dime stores? (Wal-Mart or other discount stores)

### **Research and Plan**

- Frank Woolworth chose the location for his building carefully. It was near City Hall, and there was ample pedestrian and commuter traffic. If you were going to build a skyscraper in your community, where would you want to locate it? Be specific. Why?

### **Explore Further**

- The Skyscraper Museum prepared a number of good lessons plans about building and designing skyscrapers for elementary, middle and high schools. Review and download plans at [http://www.skyscraper.org/EDUCATION/lesson\\_plans.htm](http://www.skyscraper.org/EDUCATION/lesson_plans.htm).
- Architects and engineers must consider wind, temperature and vibration in designing a skyscraper. Use an interactive laboratory to explore some of the challenges they must consider. <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/buildingbig/lab/loads.html>

### **Arts Experiences for Another Day:**



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## All Schools

### Describe and Evaluate

- The realistic painting of American Scene artists was being overtaken by the American Modernist style, which concentrated more on geometric shapes and gave less detail about everyday life. Which ones would you classify as American Scene painting? American Modernism? Why? Using the art criticism worksheet on pages eight, compare Delbridge's *Lower Manhattan* with these two paintings from the exhibition:

Charles Goeller, *Third Avenue*, 1934

<http://americanart.si.edu/collections/search/artwork/?id=9182>

Beulah R. Bettersworth, *Christopher Street Greenwich Village*, 1934

<http://americanart.si.edu/collections/search/artwork/?id=2002>,

And these two paintings, which are not in the exhibition:

Georgia O'Keeffe, *Manhattan*, 1925

<http://americanart.si.edu/collections/search/artwork/?id=34289>

Charles Sheeler, *Skyscrapers*, 1922

[http://www.phillipscollection.org/research/american\\_art/artwork/Sheeler-Skyscrapers+.htm](http://www.phillipscollection.org/research/american_art/artwork/Sheeler-Skyscrapers+.htm).

- The Chrysler Building featured gargoyles that represented hood ornaments and decorative brickwork that resembles hubcaps featured on cars the company manufactured. Here are some sites that show those details: <http://www.gargoylesofnewyork.com/2011/01/chrysler-building.html> and <http://www.thecityreview.com/chryslerb.html>. The building was criticized for serving as an advertisement for the Chrysler Corporation, but it started a trend. Now some buildings are actually shaped like ice-cream cones, ducks, shoes, pickle barrels, picnic baskets or other products. <http://www.ohiobarns.com/othersites/buildings/fl/09-57icecream.html> Design a skyscraper that features a commercial product as part of the architectural design, or a building that looks like the product you want to sell.

## Elementary Schools

### Visual Arts Research and Writing

- Research what the tallest skyscrapers in the world are currently. ([http://www.skyscraper.org/TALLEST\\_TOWERS/tallest.htm](http://www.skyscraper.org/TALLEST_TOWERS/tallest.htm) or <http://www.emporis.com/en/bu/sk/st/tp/wo>) Answer the following questions for each of the top five buildings on the list: Where is it? How tall is it? When was it built? Who was the architect? What construction materials were used? Then choose your favorite building and write a description of what this skyscraper looks like. Include all the information you discovered and make



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your description so vivid that even a blind person could envision what your favorite skyscraper looks like.

### Visual Arts Research and Scale Drawing

- Draw a New York skyscraper that you particularly like to scale. Label your drawing with the name of the building and five fun facts about it. (An index card or Post-it note makes a good label.)

### Visual Art

- Paint, draw, or use collage to create a mural of a city skyline.
- The Empire State building is lighted at night. The lighting schemes reflect holidays or causes outlined here: [http://www.esbnyc.com/current\\_events\\_tower\\_lights.asp](http://www.esbnyc.com/current_events_tower_lights.asp). Create your own lighting plan for the tower and send an e-postcard to a friend or family member. [http://www.esbnyc.com/tower\\_lights/?idStr=ecard](http://www.esbnyc.com/tower_lights/?idStr=ecard).

### Secondary Schools

#### Visual Art

- In the lobby of the Woolworth Building are small sculptures representing the architect, Cass Gilbert, and owner, Frank Woolworth. Cass Gilbert holds the building in his hands, and Frank Woolworth holds a bag of coins representing the profits of the building. (Woolworth paid the architect in cash, and some speculate that he is counting out the money for the architectural fee.) After looking at the sculpture of Frank Woolworth here: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/mirka23/223513671/> and the Cass Gilbert sculpture here: <http://www.totallyfreeimages.com/378159/Sculpture-of-architect-Cass-Gilbert-holding-the-Woolworth-Buildi>, create a design for a sculpture that symbolizes a person's job.

#### Draw

- Draw a design for a building that features elements of the product that you want to sell.

#### Drama

- Dramatize an interview between a newscaster and the owners and architects of a famous skyscraper on the day that the building opens to the public. If you are the newscaster, what questions will you want to ask? Where will you hold the interview? If you are the owner or the architect, what questions should you be prepared to answer? How will you use your face, body and voice to express excitement about the opening and pride in your accomplishment?



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## ART CRITICISM: Exploring Cityscapes

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Grade/Session \_\_\_\_\_

Describe what you see in these four American paintings:

These two paintings are in *1934: A New Deal for Artists* at the Mennello Museum of American Art.

Charles Goeller , *Third Avenue*, 1934

<http://americanart.si.edu/collections/search/artwork/?id=9182>

Beulah R. Bettersworth, *Christopher Street Greenwich Village* , 1934

<http://americanart.si.edu/collections/search/artwork/?id=2002>,

These two paintings are not in the exhibition:

Georgia O’Keeffe, *Manhattan*, 1925

<http://americanart.si.edu/collections/search/artwork/?id=34289>

Charles Sheeler, *Skyscrapers*, 1922

[http://www.phillipscollection.org/research/american\\_art/artwork/Sheeler-Skyscrapers+.htm](http://www.phillipscollection.org/research/american_art/artwork/Sheeler-Skyscrapers+.htm).

Record what you see about each painting here:

Goeller	Bettersworth	O’Keeffe	Sheeler





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Use your observations to answer the questions on the next page.

What is the main idea of all four paintings?

Which paintings show skyscrapers?

Which paintings are the most realistic?

Which artists used mostly geometric shapes?

There are two different styles of painting represented in these four paintings.

**American Scene** paintings were done between 1910 and 1945. These artists painted realistic artwork that shows the American people and land.

**American Modernism** lasted from approximately 1910-1935. Modernist artists mostly reduced their paintings to colors and shapes; while objects were recognizable, they were not realistic.

Which two paintings do you believe could be called American Scene paintings?

Which two paintings do you believe fit the description of American Modernism?

We have been studying *Lower Manhattan* by Thomas James Delbridge.

<http://americanart.si.edu/collections/search/artwork/?id=6622>

Is Delbridge an American Scene painter or an American Modernist? Circle one.

Why do you think so?

Which of these five paintings do you like the most?



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Why?



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## Resources:

### Calligramme:

A French poet, Guillaume Apollinaire, developed calligrammes as a way of writing words and letters to create a visual image. For example, the text might form the shape of the Eiffel Tower, or form the outline of a heart. You can see good examples of Apollinaire's calligrammes at this website:

<http://wordsandeggs.wordpress.com/2008/10/27/apollinares-calligrammes/>

### Cityscape Paintings:

Charles Groeller, *Third Avenue*, 1934

<http://americanart.si.edu/collections/search/artwork/?id=9182>

Beulah R. Bettersworth, *Christopher Street Greenwich Village*, 1934

<http://americanart.si.edu/collections/search/artwork/?id=2002>,

Georgia O'Keeffe, *Manhattan*, 1925

<http://americanart.si.edu/collections/search/artwork/?id=34289>

Charles Sheeler, *Skyscrapers*, 1922

[http://www.phillipscollection.org/research/american\\_art/artwork/Sheeler-Skyscrapers+.htm](http://www.phillipscollection.org/research/american_art/artwork/Sheeler-Skyscrapers+.htm)

### Photographers:

Lewis Hine

Empire State Building construction workers (New York Public Library)

<http://digitalgallery.nypl.org/nypldigital/dgkeysearchresult.cfm?keyword=Lewis+Hine>

Archive of photos of the Empire State Building (George Eastman House)

[http://www.geh.org/fm/lwhprints/htmlsrc/empire\\_sum00001.html](http://www.geh.org/fm/lwhprints/htmlsrc/empire_sum00001.html)

Berenice Abbot, *The Changing New York* (New York Public Library)

[http://digitalgallery.nypl.org/nypldigital/explore/dgexplore.cfm?col\\_id=160](http://digitalgallery.nypl.org/nypldigital/explore/dgexplore.cfm?col_id=160)

<http://legacy.www.nypl.org/research/chss/spe/art/photo/abbottex/abbott.html>

### Buildings:

Singer Building

Interior and exterior

<http://www.nyc-architecture.com/GON/GON003.htm>

Library of Congress photographs

<http://loc.gov/pictures/resource/cph.3c25895/>



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Woolworth Building

<http://www.nyc-architecture.com/SCC/SCC019.htm>

Empire State Building

<http://www.nyc-architecture.com/MID/MID073.htm>

[http://www.skyscraper.org/WEB\\_PROJECTS/VIVA2/viva2\\_intro.htm](http://www.skyscraper.org/WEB_PROJECTS/VIVA2/viva2_intro.htm)

Chrysler Building

<http://www.nyc-architecture.com/MID/MID021.htm>

Rockefeller Center

<http://www.nyc-architecture.com/MID/MID055.htm>

World's tallest buildings:

<http://architecture.about.com/od/skyscrapers/a/Worlds-Tallest-Buildings.htm>

### **Staten Island Ferry**

Photographs of ferries

[http://www.siferry.com/SIFerry\\_Current\\_Ferries.aspx](http://www.siferry.com/SIFerry_Current_Ferries.aspx)

History

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Staten\\_Island\\_Ferry](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Staten_Island_Ferry)

[http://www.lowermanhattan.info/about/history/did\\_you\\_know/did\\_you\\_know\\_that\\_73772.aspx](http://www.lowermanhattan.info/about/history/did_you_know/did_you_know_that_73772.aspx)

### **Book:**

*Skyscrapers: How America Grew Up* by John B. Severance.

This book details some of the advances in technology and engineering that made the skyscraper possible.

### **Photo credit for page 1:**

*Lower Manhattan, 1934*

Thomas James Delbridge

Born: Atlanta, Georgia 1894

Died: New York 1968

oil on canvas 26 1/8 x 30 1/4 in. (66.3 x 76.9 cm)

Smithsonian American Art Museum



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