

The Best of the Fair

Lesson 2: Reader's Theater

Focus Questions

Why was the World's Fair an important part of Chicago and world history? What were some of the groundbreaking innovations showcased for the first time in Chicago in 1893? What about Chicago appeals to or excites people?

Core Understandings

Students will understand that the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition helped secure Chicago's status as a major city and cultural center after the Great Fire of 1871. Chicago's geographic location and features attracted people from diverse places, making it a trade and transportation hub.

Knowledge

Students will know that the World's Columbian Exposition was a significant historical event—locally, nationally, and internationally. They will gain an understanding of how Chicago evolved in the geographic area represented in the narrative.

Skills

Students will use language arts skills to interpret the past and be able to discern fact from fiction. They will also gain an understanding how works of art are produced.

Common Core ELA Standards

CCSSR1. Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.
CCSSR3. Analyze how and why individuals, events, and ideas develop and interact over the course of a text.

ISBE Social Science Standards

Goal 15: Understand economic systems, with an emphasis on the US.
Goal 16: Understand events, trends, individuals and movements shaping the history of Illinois, the US, and other nations.
Goal 17: Understand world geography and the effects of geography on society, with an emphasis on the US.
Goal 18: Understand social systems, with an emphasis on the US.

ISBE Fine Arts Standard

Goal 26: Through creating and performing, understand how works of art are produced.

In This Lesson

Through a reader's theater performance of *The Best of the Fair*, students will make personal connections with history and better grasp the excitement generated by the innovative products, technologies, and exhibits showcased at the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition. Story elements of setting, character, obstacles/problems, and resolution are addressed. This lesson was researched and written by Beatrice Quatrokro.



NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE HUMANITIES

Activity

Cast student volunteers for a reader's theater performance of *The Best of the Fair*.

Roles include:

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|---------------------|-------------------------------|
| • Narrator | • Man at Moving Sidewalk |
| • Lily | • Man Pushing a Rolling Chair |
| • Joseph | • Boy Distributing Programs |
| • Grandpa | • Man at Ice Railway |
| • Sarah | • Ferris Wheel Conductor |
| • Frances | • Man at Ferris Wheel Gate |
| • Man at Pickle Map | • Mr. Weller |

After the performance, lead the class through the reading-comprehension and critical-thinking questions that accompany *The Best of the Fair*.

<http://www.chicagohistory.org/greatchicagostories/worldsfair/reading.php>

If you have computer access in the classroom, have students explore the map interactive of *The Best of the Fair*. Here they can view story locations then and now, including Joseph and Lily's neighborhood, the fairgrounds, and the Midway, where the first Ferris wheel was located.

<http://www.chicagohistory.org/greatchicagostories/site/storymap/index.html?story=3>

If you do not have computer access in the classroom, have students make a drawing of their favorite character or attraction from the story, incorporating any details mentioned in the narrative. Add these to your bulletin-board display created in Lesson 1. This activity may also be assigned as a Home Connection.

Materials & Resources

- **Printouts of *The Best of the Fair* narrative:**
http://www.chicagohistory.org/greatchicagostories/pdf/story/The_Best_of_the_Fair_by_Kris_Nesbitt.pdf
- ***The Best of the Fair* discussion questions:**
<http://www.chicagohistory.org/greatchicagostories/worldsfair/reading.php>
- **Computer access for students in the classroom** (optional)
- **Drawing supplies** (optional)

Instructional Notes

Decide in advance how elaborate you would like the performance to be. Enhance the activity by bringing in 1890s-inspired costumes and/or accessories for the performers to wear. (Second-hand stores are a great resource for this.) See the Classroom Activities section of the *Great Chicago Stories* website for more tips on facilitating reader's theater. <http://www.chicagohistory.org/greatchicagostories/classroom/reader.php>

Extension Activities

Break students into small groups to write and act out a new scene for *The Best of the Fair*. From the World's Fair map (see the artifact image set or Lesson 3), choose an additional attraction or building not mentioned in the story and have students imagine what the family might experience there.

Have students read *Joseph's Railroad Dreams* and/or *Trading Mystery*, two other *Great Chicago Stories* featuring the characters of Lily and Joseph.