

# Stockyards to Skyscrapers

**Grade Level: 4-8**

## Lesson Overview

A look at the land use history of Chicago from the stockyards of the 1800's to the skyscrapers of today.

## Student Objectives

1. Describe the importance of the Chicago Stockyards to the area.
2. Sequence the development of skyscrapers in Chicago.
3. Connect immigration and technology changes to Chicago stockyards.

## Materials

- ✓ Stockyards to Skyscrapers information sheet
- ✓ Stockyards to Skyscrapers worksheet

## Vocabulary

- **assembly line** – a manufacturing process in which interchangeable parts are added to a product in a sequential manner to create a finished product.
- **disassembly line** – process used to take apart an animal for meat and by-products.
- **skyscraper** – a very tall, continuously habitable building, at least 300 feet tall.
- **stockyards** – a place for the sale and shipping of livestock. They are sometimes associated with slaughterhouses.
- **Union Stockyard** – large stockyard located in Chicago from 1865 - 1971.

## Background Information

Provided in the student information sheet.

## Procedure

1. Read together or in groups Stockyards to Skyscrapers Information Sheet.
2. Discuss a timeline, so that students will be able to complete the worksheet.
3. Students will complete Stockyards to Skyscrapers Worksheet.

## Extension Activities

1. Students could research the stockyards on the Internet to find further information. A Google search will give the most updated sources.
2. This lesson correlates to Skyscraper Science.

## Additional Resources

- “Hog Butcher of the World” by Carl Sandburg
- *The Jungle* by Upton Sinclair
- *The Killing Floor* by Howlin Wolf
- Chicago's Union Stockyards: 40 Years Since Closing ...  
<https://news.wttw.com/2011/12/20/chicagos-union-stockyards-40-years-closing>
- History of skyscrapers in Chicago:  
<https://www.bbc.com/culture/article/20150930-chicago-birthplace-of-the-skyscraper>
- Inventions that made building skyscrapers possible  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HJXhWSKqegE>

## Standards

### **Illinois Social Science Standards**

SS.EC.2.6-8.MdC. Describe the roles of institutions, such as corporations, non-profits, and labor unions in a market economy.

SS.H.1.6-8.MdC. Analyze connections among events and developments in broader historical contexts.

SS.G.3.6-8.MdC. Explain how changes in <sup>TECH</sup>transportation and communication influence the spatial connections among human settlements and affect the spread of ideas and culture.

### **Illinois English Language Arts Standard**

CCRA.R.1 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.

The **M**ultidisciplinary **A**gricultural **I**ntegrated **C**urriculum (mAGic) was created in 2004 under the leadership of the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) and the Facilitating Coordination in Agricultural Education Project (FCAE). Funding was made available through the FCAE grant budget from the agricultural education line item of the ISBE budget. This revision, as printed, was developed in January 2021.



These mAGic lessons are designed to bring agriculture to life in your classroom. They address the Illinois Learning Standards in math, science, English language arts and social studies.

Illinois mAGic project update writers/reviewers: Rhodora Collins – Dekalb County; Suzi Myers – Kane County; Connie Niemann – Montgomery County; Debbie Ruff – Livingston County; Jennifer Waters – Sangamon County; Dawn Weinberg – Hancock County; and Carrie Winkelmann – Menard County.

## Stockyards to Skyscrapers

During the early 1800's, the tavern owners of Chicago usually provided both pens and care for herds of cattle awaiting sale. Once railroads were built, stockyards were set up for the cattle to be housed. Many of these independent stockyards were scattered throughout the city of Chicago. It soon became obvious that a larger, more centralized, and more efficient stockyard was needed for the following reasons: the westward expansion of railroads that made Chicago a major transportation hub; the Mississippi River blockade during the Civil War closed the north-south river trade route; and the rapid growth of the meatpacker and livestock industry in Chicago. Therefore, construction for a consolidated stockyard began in June of 1865. On Christmas Day, 1865, Chicago Union Stockyards was officially opened. It eventually occupied a square mile of land from 39<sup>th</sup> to 47<sup>th</sup> Streets and from Halsted to Ashland Avenues. It was dependent upon the railroads, which would take the freshly slaughtered meat all over the country. The hogs, cows, and sheep were kept in pens on the property until they were slaughtered. "It was like the Wild West in the middle of an urban center, with cowboys and everything," said Olivia Mahoney, chief curator at the Chicago Historical Society.

The Chicago Stockyards were a place where products like hooves, hides, bones and brains—"everything but the squeal"—was put to commercial use. During the peak years, they employed 40,000 people, processed 9 million animals a year—82% of the meat consumed in the United States, and had 500,000 gallons of fresh water pumped in daily from the Chicago River.

Within this huge complex, the animals were slaughtered using a process known as a "disassembly line." They used a gravity process where the animals were killed on the top floor and the inedible parts were disposed of down chutes. It is said that Henry Ford observed this process and reversed it to put cars together in what are called industrial assembly lines.

The stockyards were important to Chicago in many ways, one of which was the influx of immigrants that came to the United States to find work there. The first group was mostly German, Bohemian, and Irish. Then beginning in the 1890's, a large group of Polish and Lithuanians came to work. Next came the African-Americans, up from the cotton fields of Mississippi, Texas, and Arkansas. Lastly, the Mexican immigrants came to replace the men at the yards who left to fight in World War I. Not only did certain ethnic groups tend to be found in certain types of jobs, but they also tended to live near each other in the surrounding neighborhoods. These ethnic neighborhoods allowed immigrants to assimilate easier to their new country, because the people spoke the same languages and had the same cultural backgrounds. Many times, once the people assimilated into the U.S. culture, they moved from these ethnic areas.

The stockyard's business peaked in 1924 and then gradually declined. The rapid growth of the federal highway system and the development of the refrigerated truck allowed packinghouses to move out of the expensive urban areas they had depended upon for railroad access. Also, meatpackers began conducting business directly with farmers, thus

bypassing the need for the stockyard. Lastly, the urban growth, with its increase in land value, property taxes, and anti-pollution laws, also contributed to the stockyard's decline. The Chicago Union Stockyard went out of business at midnight, Friday, July 30, 1971.

Today, there is only one slaughterhouse left in Chicago, Chiappetti Lamb and Veal, found in Bridgeport. They are the last remaining business of the stockyard era. "Chicago was the center for the railroads, and cattle used to be brought in and out from all over the country by train," said Rabbi Abraham Siegel, who still slaughters lamb for the Chiappetti Company. "Trucks can go into any little town any time and you don't need tracks. So, now most of the big slaughterhouses are in small towns where there is more space and cheaper land."

The gate of the Union Stockyard is one of the few remaining artifacts of the thriving stockyard industry of Chicago. It is a rugged limestone gate, found at the intersection of Exchange Avenue and Peoria Streets. The gate has a steer head over the central arch. The steer head is thought to represent "Sherman", a prize-winning bull named after John B. Sherman, one of the founders of the Union Stockyard and Transit Company.

While the stockyards changed the landscape of Chicago, in other parts of the city more changes were taking place. During the Great Chicago Fire of 1871, most of the buildings burned down, either because they were made of wood, or simply melted because they were constructed with iron. Shortly after the fire, the City's Common Council banned the building of wooden structures within the city limits. To stop the melting problem, architects coated the iron and steel supports with face bricks.

A rise in land prices forced lot owners to think vertically. William Le Baron Jenny built the first Chicago skyscraper; the term used for a building that is so tall it "scrapes the sky." His skyscraper was the Home Insurance Building, built in 1885 and demolished in 1931. It was 10 stories high and 138 feet tall. A steel skeleton of vertical columns and horizontal beams with the outer facing material of brick made up this first skyscraper. Due to the advancements in engineering and services such as electricity and the elevator, additional skyscrapers began to be built in Chicago.

The Willis Tower (formerly the Sears Tower) was built in 1973 and held the title for the tallest building in the world until 1998 when the Petronas Towers in Malaysia were built. The Willis Tower is an example of bundle-tube structural design. It is actually a bundle of nine tubes and is considered one of the most efficient structures designed to withstand wind. (The average wind speed is 16 miles per hour in Chicago.) As the building climbs upward, the tubes begin to drop off, reducing the wind forces on the building. The tower weighs more than 440 million pounds and is supported by 114 piles that are sunk deep into the earth so that they stand firmly on solid bedrock. Chicago now has 1,366 buildings over 12 stories high with more being built. The Vista Tower, which is under construction, will have 101 floors. It will become the tallest building in the world designed by a woman (Jeanne Gang). Chicago is ranked with Hong Kong and New York as the "Big Three" of the world's skylines. Chicago is considered the birthplace of skyscrapers.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

## Stockyards to Skyscrapers Worksheet

1. List the three reasons why a centralized stockyard was needed in Chicago.
2. Explain the role immigration played in the stockyards and the surrounding area.
3. What does the “disassembly line” mean?
4. What caused the decline of the Chicago stockyards?
5. Explain, in your own words, the reasons that skyscrapers became the way of building in Chicago.
6. Chicago shares the title of “Big Three” for world skylines with \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.
7. On a separate piece of paper, make a timeline of “Stockyards to Skyscrapers” using the following information.

_____	Date construction of Union Stockyards began
_____	Tavern owners keeping the animals for customers
_____	Opening and closing day of Union Stockyards
_____	Polish and Lithuanians began working at Stockyards
_____	Sears Tower built
_____	Great Chicago Fire
_____	First skyscraper built in Chicago (Home Insurance Building)
_____	Date of demolition for Home Insurance Building
_____	Year that the Stockyards peaked in business

## Stockyards to Skyscrapers ANSWER KEY

1. List the three reasons why a centralized stockyard was needed in Chicago.
  - **Chicago was the hub of railroads.**
  - **Mississippi River blockade during the Civil War closed the north – south trade route.**
  - **Growth of meatpacking and livestock industry in Chicago.**
2. Explain the role immigration played in the stockyards and the surrounding area.  
**Immigrants that came to the U.S. found work at the stockyards. This changed the neighborhoods in the area also, as they tended to live together while they assimilated.**
3. What does the “disassembly line” mean?  
**They used a gravity process where the animals were killed on the top floor and the inedible parts were disposed of down chutes.**
4. What caused the decline of the Chicago stockyards?  
**Rapid growth of the federal highway system and the development of the refrigerated truck allowed packinghouses to move out of the expensive urban areas they had depended upon for railroad access. Also, the meatpackers began conducting business directly with farmers, thus bypassing the need for the stockyard. Lastly, property taxes and anti-pollution laws contributed to the stockyard’s decline.**
5. Explain, in your own words, the reasons that skyscrapers became the way of building in Chicago.  
**Answers will vary, but should include the fact of land scarcity and pricing along with the advancements in engineering, electricity, and the elevator.**
6. Chicago shares the title of “Big Three” for world skylines with **Hong Kong** and **New York**.
7. On a separate piece of paper, make a timeline of “Stockyards to Skyscrapers” using the following information.

<b>1865</b>	Date construction of Union Stockyards began
<b>Early 1800s</b>	Tavern owners keeping the animals for customers
<b>Christmas, 1865; 1971</b>	Opening and closing day of Union Stockyards
<b>1890</b>	Polish and Lithuanians began working at Stockyards
<b>1973</b>	Sears Tower built
<b>1871</b>	Great Chicago Fire
<b>1885</b>	First skyscraper built in Chicago (Home Insurance Building)
<b>1931</b>	Date of demolition for Home Insurance Building
<b>1924</b>	Year that the Stockyards peaked in business