



Chicago's World's Fairs

The World's Columbian Exposition of 1893 A Century of Progress International Exposition, 1933–34

INSTRUCTOR NOTE

Ask students to locate the last two stars on their Chicago flags. These stars represent the two world's fairs held in Chicago: the World's Columbian Exposition in 1893 and the Century of Progress International Exposition in 1933–34, which celebrated "a century of the growth of science and the dependence of industry on scientific research." This narrative is told in the voice of a child who attends the 1933 world's fair and records the experiences in a diary. The child also recounts conversations with an elder relative about his memories of attending the 1893 fair. Review the following vocabulary words with your students prior to reading the narrative.

Vocabulary

exposition—a large public exhibition

exhibit—a display of goods, products, and objects that can be part of an exposition

plaster—a material that is applied to a wall or surface wet but dries to be very hard

skyline—the outlines of buildings with the sky behind them

amusements—exhibits, rides, or games that people enjoy



Narrative

May 20, 1933

Dear Diary,

I can't imagine a more wonderful, exciting, thrilling day! Today is my ninth birthday and the whole family was over for a birthday dinner and cake. I got a toy truck from my brother and a mystery to read from my aunt and uncle. But the best present of all is that my parents are going to take me to the opening day of the Century of Progress World's Fair! I don't think I will be able to sleep. At all. Ever again.

Grandpa put me to bed and told me that when he was a teenager forty years ago, in 1893, he also went to a world's fair on the South Side of Chicago, in Jackson Park. He said it was called the World's Columbian Exposition. I wondered where the name "Columbian" came from because we are in Chicago. Grandpa told me that the Columbian Exposition was meant to celebrate the four-hundredth anniversary of Christopher Columbus's trip to North America (although it opened a year late!).

Because I have only been to a carnival, I asked Grandpa what makes a world's fair a world's fair. He told me that there are exhibits about all sorts of things and about all sorts of people from around the world. He said that it took two years to make all the buildings for the exhibits. The buildings were not made from bricks and iron, but out of a kind of plaster called staff. All the buildings were painted white, so the fair was given the nickname the White City. He said the



The fairgrounds before the buildings for the 1893 fair were built



A completed building for the World's Columbian Exposition



Narrative

buildings were so magnificent that he couldn't believe they were not meant to be used after the fair. At night the fairgrounds looked beautiful, because all the buildings lit up with electric lights.

I asked Grandpa to tell me more about the fair. He said it only cost him fifty cents to go, and twenty-seven million people went to it. He told me there were lots of things he remembered from the fair. In the Hall of Agriculture was an eleven-ton cheese! That cheese weighed as much as eleven elephants! Also in the same building was a chocolate statue that weighed fifteen hundred pounds. But Grandpa said his favorite memory was a ride on the Ferris Wheel. It was the first one ever made. It was 250 feet high. It had thirty-six cars and each car held sixty people. Grandpa said the ride took twenty minutes and when he was way on top he could see the whole fair and the skyline of Chicago.

I don't think I'll be able to sleep. I wonder if there will be a Ferris Wheel at the world's fair my parents are going to take me to.

1 What rides have you been on? What rides would you like to go on?



Poster advertising the Ferris Wheel



A close-up view of the Ferris Wheel cars



Narrative

May 27, 1933

Dear Diary,

What a day! All my friends were jealous because I got to go to the opening day of the Century of Progress fair.

We saw the Hall of Science and the Electrical Building and the Communications Building. At nighttime neon lights lit up all the buildings on the outside in so many different colors that people called the fair "Rainbow City." My mother told me that the name of the Midway where all the rides and amusements are is called the "City of a Million Lights." And it really felt like there were a million lights.

I had two favorite things at the fair. One was the Enchanted Island that was made just for kids. It had a place where you could watch bears drink milk, a pony track, a toyshop, a train you could ride on, and a place just to buy ice cream cones.

The other thing that I think really is my most favorite thing was the Sky Ride. It cost twenty-five cents and was two hundred feet above the ground. There were two towers that were 1,850 apart. The towers were connected by steel cables. You got in a car in one tower and flew across to the other tower. I loved it so much that my parents let me go on it again.

Well, my grandpa went on the Ferris Wheel and now I have gone on the Sky Ride. I think I am very lucky. Now maybe I can get some sleep.

The Sky Ride at the 1933 Fair



Enchanted Island at the 1933 Fair

2 If you could travel back in time, would you want to visit the fair with the Ferris Wheel or the fair with the Sky Ride?



Activity

Explain to students that they are going to imagine they have visited one of the world's fairs. They are going to write a postcard to a friend about a ride they have enjoyed.

- 1 Review with students some of the facts about the two world's fairs that took place in Chicago:
 - **When did the World's Columbian Exposition take place?**
 - **What were the buildings made of?**
 - **What was the name of the ride that Grandpa went on?**
 - **When did the Century of Progress take place?**
 - **What was the name of the ride the diarist went on at the Century of Progress fair?**
- 2 Have students turn to the *Greetings from the World's Fair!* page in their scrapbooks! Point out the features of the postcard that they will have to complete.
- 3 On the back of the postcard: the stamp, the person and address they are sending it to, and their message talking about their experiences on the ride.
- 4 On the front of the postcard, students can draw a picture of either one of the rides they have learned about, or they can make up their own.
- 5 Have students read their postcards aloud to the class when they have completed the activity.

MATERIALS

- *Greetings from the World's Fair!* student activity sheet (one for each student)
- pencils
- colored pencils
- crayons



Greetings from the World's Fair!

Imagine you have attended a world's fair.

Draw a ride you went on at the world's fair and tell a friend about it.

Illustration of _____

Wish you were here . . .

Bind your scrapbook here.