

Skyscrapers

1 Read the text and label each paragraph with one of the titles below.

- | | | | |
|---|--------------------------|--|--------------------------|
| a. The tallest buildings in the past | <input type="checkbox"/> | c. Building techniques evolution | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| b. Connotation of the word "skyscraper" | <input type="checkbox"/> | d. High-rise housing in 17 th century | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | | e. Definition of the word "skyscraper" | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Par. 1 - The word "skyscraper" originally was a nautical term referring to a tall **mast** or its main sail on a sailing ship. In the late 19th century, the term was first applied to tall buildings being built in Chicago and New York City. The term "skyscraper" can be defined **empirically** – a building may be considered a skyscraper if it **raises** above its environment and changes the skyline² of the area. Some observers apply the word "skyscraper" to buildings of at least 20 stories. Others reserve the term for structures of at least 50 stories. But it is widely accepted that a "skyscraper" fits buildings with 100 or more storeys. A skyscraper taller than 300 metres may be referred to as *supertall*. The Council on Tall Buildings and Urban Habitat (CTBUH) has recently eliminated the "height to roof" category due to increased use of spires and other features.

Par. 2 - Engineering developments of the 1880s had **enabled** construction of tall multi-storey buildings. Architectural historians **refined** the definition of skyscraper according to these developments: the definition was based on the **steel skeleton** as opposed to constructions

of **load-bearing masonry**, which passed their practical limit in the 1890s. Modern skyscrapers are built with materials such as steel, glass, reinforced concrete² and utilize mechanical equipments such as water pumps and elevators. Until the 19th century, buildings of over six storeys were rare because they had a great number of stairs to climb and water pressure was usually insufficient to supply **running water** above 50 m.

Par. 3 - The tallest building in ancient times was the Great Pyramid of Giza in ancient Egypt, which was 146 metres tall and was built in the 26th century BC. Its height was not surpassed for thousands of years until the 14th century AD with the construction of Lincoln Cathedral in Great Britain. However, none of these buildings can be defined a "skyscraper" because they are not **suitable** for people to live.

empirically: *in modo pratico*
to enable: *rendere possibile*
load-bearing masonry: *struttura portante in muratura*
mast: *albero maestro della nave*
to raise: *elevarsi*
to refine: *perfezionare*
running water: *acqua corrente*
steel skeleton: *armatura in acciaio*
suitable: *adatto*
surrounding: *area circostante*

- skyline:* outline against the sky of a city or of the configuration of land.
- reinforced concrete:* concrete in which steel reinforcement bars have been incorporated to strengthen the material that would otherwise be brittle



John Hancock Center

Par. 4 - An early modern example of high-rise housing was in 17th-century Edinburgh, Scotland, where a defensive city wall defined the **boundaries** of the city. Because of the restricted land area available for development, the houses increased in height. Buildings of 11 floors were common, and there are buildings as high as 14 floors. Many of the **stone-built** structures can still be seen today in the old town of Edinburgh.

achievement: *successo, raggiungimento di una meta*

boundaries: *confini*

dramatically: *in modo sensazionale*

stone-built: *costruito in pietra*

Par. 5 – The first skyscrapers were built in the USA because of increasing land prices and growing urban population; so tall buildings were a social necessity even if the first skyscrapers had a commercial destination. Today the word ‘skyscraper’ often carries a connotation of pride and **achievement** in the countries where these buildings are erected. The decision to build a **dramatically** tall building is usually based on the desire to attract attention and gain prestige.

The skyscraper is a modern expression of power, mainly economic and social.

2 Add the correct question words (*What, When, Where, Why, How*) to the following questions. Then answer them.

- a. can a skyscraper be defined?
- b. was the term “skyscraper” originally referred to?
- c. was the definition based on, according to the architectural historians?
- d. materials are modern skyscrapers built with?
- e. were buildings of over six stories rare until the 19th century?
- f. was the Great Pyramid of Giza surpassed in height?
- g. can 17th century high-rise housing be found?
- h. building material were they constructed with?
- i. connotation does the word ‘skyscraper’ carry today?

