



sky-High Dreams

by Lee S. Justice
illustrated by Christy Hale

HOUGHTON MIFFLIN

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HOUGHTON MIFFLIN HARCOURT
School Publishers

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From my bed, I heard Mama and Papa talking low at the kitchen table. They sounded worried, but I couldn't make out their words at first. Then I heard Papa say, "That's what family is for. No nephew of mine is going to be out on the streets."





In the morning, Mama told my sisters and me, “Your cousin Hank will be coming to stay with us. His family doesn’t have a home anymore, so he needs a place to live.”

“What happened to their house?” I asked.

“Uncle Ezra lost his job,” Mama said. “Work is hard to find these days. No work means no money to pay the rent. When times get better, Hank will go back with his family. But for now, we’ll do our best to make him feel welcome.”



This sort of thing was happening a lot in 1930. Papa said the country was in a depression.

Our small apartment was already crowded, so I figured one more person didn’t matter, especially if it was a boy. Hank was older than I was, but I remembered that he was always laughing and joking. It would be fun, I thought, having him live with us.



When Hank arrived, he was not the kid I remembered. He looked skinnier, and his eyes were sad. Mama wanted to fatten him up right away, but Hank didn’t eat much and even left food on his plate.



“Be Hank’s friend, Gabe,” Papa told me. “Cheer him up.”

I tried to joke with Hank.

I tried getting him to talk about the Yankees, my favorite team.

I tried to talk him into playing stickball with me and my friends.

Hank wasn’t interested. Mostly he just climbed up to the roof of our building and looked down at the rest of us having fun on the street.





One evening my sister Doris came home from the movies and mentioned a newsreel she had seen at the local movie theater.

“There’s a new office building going up on Thirty-fourth Street. They say it will be the tallest skyscraper in the world.”



“Well, how about that!” said Papa. “Just when we got the world’s tallest skyscraper, they’re making an even taller one! I wish I had the time to see it for myself, but maybe you kids can go and tell me all about it.”



In early summer, the four of us headed uptown to see the new building. My sisters and I walked for blocks and blocks. Hank tagged along, too.

Slowly we began to hear the nonstop noise of rivets being hammered into steel. It got really loud when we came to Thirty-fourth Street and Fifth Avenue. The sidewalks were filled with watchers, and everyone was looking up.





Outer walls already covered the lower floors. Workers on scaffolds were setting the cream-colored stone and gleaming metal. From behind the walls rose the giant framework of steel columns and beams.

“I count at least 25 stories so far, maybe more,” someone said. I tried to count, too. When I reached the top of the framework, my neck was bent back as far as it could go. Then I realized that the finished building would be four times higher than that! I gasped.



I heard more gasps. “Look up there!” someone said. Way, way up—so high up I could almost not see it—a crane held a cable. Dangling from the cable was a steel beam. It swung back and forth in mid-air. And standing on the beam was a man, with nothing to **cling** to but the cable. The man guided the beam toward a column, while the rest of the **crew** moved it into position. When the beam rider stepped off safely, the watchers cheered.



“They’re like acrobats,” said Doris. Everywhere, men were **balancing** on steel as easily as if they were strolling down a sidewalk.

I looked at Hank. His head was back, his mouth open, his eyes wide.



On the walk back, Hank was quiet, as usual. At home, Mama asked us, “What did you think of the new building?”

Hank replied, “It was the most beautiful thing I ever saw in my life.”



Hank and I spent a lot of time on our roof that summer. If we stood at just the right spot, we could see the new skyscraper. It was growing fast.

“It’s because it’s so well planned,” Hank explained. “They’re building it like a model kit, with all the pieces ready to be put together. Every worker knows exactly what to do, and more than 3,000 of them are on the job right now!”



Almost overnight, Hank was coming alive. That skyscraper had captured Hank’s interest. He started keeping a scrapbook of articles and pictures. He titled the scrapbook “Sky-High Dreams.”

“They’re putting in high-speed elevators,” Hank said to me. “You’ll be able to zoom to the 80th floor in just over a minute. Imagine taking a ride in something like that!”



Everyone noticed that Hank seemed happier, more hopeful. He smiled more. He said yes to second helpings at supper. Mama thought that Hank had changed because of me.

“Gabe, you made Hank feel like he had a friend,” she told me. “You lifted his spirits!”

But I hadn’t done anything. It was the building that had changed Hank.



One day in late fall, Hank said with excitement, “The tower is up! The workers raised a flag at the very top.”

I looked for the flag but couldn’t see it. “It’s foggy today, so the tower disappears,” Hank said. “Imagine being up there, inside a cloud!”



New York is nicknamed the Empire State, and the name of the new skyscraper was the Empire State Building. It opened in May, right on schedule. Our whole family joined the crowds eager to take a tour.

“Just swallow, and your ears won’t hurt,” advised the elevator operator. The elevator soared to the 86th floor in a flash. Everyone stepped out to the observatory.



I peered over the wall and stumbled back, dizzy. Then I took a deep breath and looked again. The city spread out below me. I could see tiny cars crawl on the streets and toy bridges stretch across water.





We raced from one viewpoint to another.
“Look! I think that green patch is Central Park!” shouted Doris.

“I think I can see the ocean **tide** coming in on Long Island,” said Papa.



“The Statue of Liberty!” shouted Mama and Sylvia together.

“There’s our rooftop!” I yelled, even though I wasn’t sure I had the right one.



Hank was gazing at a distant spot. Then he turned to me and grinned.

“We’re sky-high,” he said. He looked like the happiest kid in the world.



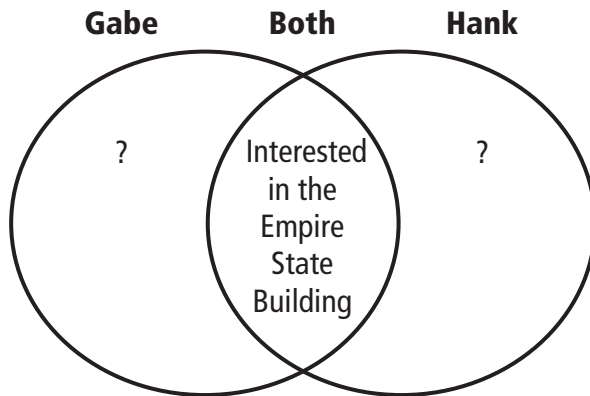


Responding



TARGET SKILL Compare and Contrast

How are Gabe and his cousin Hank alike?
How are they different? Copy and complete the Venn diagram below.



Write About It

Text to World Is there a building or place that is interesting or special to you? Write two paragraphs that compare how you feel about this building or place with how Hank feels about the Empire State Building.



TARGET VOCABULARY

balancing

cling

crew

disappears

excitement

foggy

stretch

tide

EXPAND YOUR VOCABULARY

beams

cable

columns

framework

observatory

rivets

scaffolds

skyscraper



TARGET SKILL **Compare and Contrast** Tell how details or ideas are alike and different.



TARGET STRATEGY **Infer/Predict** Use clues to figure out more about the selection.

GENRE **Historical fiction** is a story that takes place in a real period of history.

Level: Q

DRA: 40

Genre:

Historical Fiction

Strategy:

Infer/Predict

Skill:

Compare and Contrast

Word Count: 1,123

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