

The Best of the Fair

Elementary: Grades 3–4

Background Information

World's Columbian Exposition

The World's Columbian Exposition of 1893 was meant to celebrate the 400th anniversary of Christopher Columbus's trip to North America (but it opened a year late!). Chicago was excited to host the fair and show the world how well the city had rebuilt in the 22 years since the Great Fire of 1871. More than 200 buildings at the fair had exhibits that displayed new and beautiful things many visitors had never seen before.

Visitors could learn and also have fun at a special area of the fair called the Midway. They could walk through an African village, see a show at a Chinese theater, visit an ostrich farm, and, of course, ride the world's first Ferris wheel! The Midway was similar to an amusement park that you might visit today.

Sources: *The Electronic Encyclopedia of Chicago*
www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org
My Chicago www.chicagohistory.org

Electricity at the World's Fair

Electric lights were a new technology in 1893. Many visitors who came to the fair from farms or small towns were amazed by what they saw in the fair's Electricity Building. Even people who lived in Chicago had never seen so many lights at once before; the fair had more lightbulbs than the entire city!

The Electricity Building gave people a chance to look at new inventions up close to see how they worked. They saw lightbulbs that would replace candles, and electric stoves that would replace those that burned wood or coal. Visitors could watch moving pictures for the first time on an invention called the kinetoscope, an experience that many of them would remember for the rest of their lives.

Sources: Miller, Donald L. *City of the Century: The Epic of Chicago and the Making of America*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996.

Hirsch, Susan E. and Robert I. Goler. *A City Comes of Age: Chicago in the 1890s*. Chicago: Chicago Historical Society, 1990.