

# Teachers' notes

## Spires that inspire

Spires rise heavenwards, tapering to a graceful point. Christians, making their way to worship in church, can be directed by the church spire, as spires are meant to rise above the common buildings around them. These spires, also called steeples, were built 'to the glory of God' and were meant to impress.

Until very recent times, church steeples were among the tallest buildings in the world. In 1311, the spire of Lincoln Cathedral towered 524 feet (160m), into the sky – that's taller than the tallest pyramid. It remained the tallest building in the world until its spire was blown down in a great storm 237 years later.

Spires can be the cause of arguments. If you want to extend the height of any building in order to be the tallest around, you can always add height by using a flagpole, a radio mast or a spire. Some people think that this is cheating and it definitely makes identifying the tallest building in the world very difficult. Do you count the 'add-ons' when you measure? Is the tallest building in the world Taipei 101? Sears Tower, Chicago? Jin Mao, Shanghai? Empire State Building? What do you think?

### The tallest spires

It is easier sorting out the tallest church spires. The honour goes to Ulm Cathedral, which at 530 feet (162m) is the tallest in the world and beats Britain's tallest, Salisbury Cathedral, by 126 feet (38m). There are about 16,000 parish churches in Britain and a good number of them have spires, although they do lag behind Salisbury a little in height. St Walburge's in Preston is next tallest at 309 feet (94m), then comes the St Michael's, Coventry (299 feet – 91m), the parish church in Louth, Lincolnshire (295 feet – 90m) and St Mary Redcliffe, Bristol (292 feet – 89m).

### Spires around the world

Perhaps the most astonishing spires in the whole world are to be seen in Spain on the great church designed by Antonio Gaudi. The Sagrada Familia in Barcelona has many spires of unique and intricate shape and you can climb up spiral staircases inside them to look out over the city. Although the church is nearly 100 years old, it is only half finished; it must be one of the most incredible building sites in the world.

