

THE LOUVRE PYRAMID BY IEOH MING PEI

Ieoh Ming Pei was born in China in 1917. He moved to the United States in 1935 to study architecture at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and the Harvard Graduate School of Design. In 1948, he accepted the newly created post of Director of Architecture at Webb & Knapp, Inc., a real estate development firm, and this association resulted in major architectural and planning projects in Chicago, Philadelphia, Washington, Pittsburgh and other cities. Pei has designed over fifty projects in the USA and abroad, many of which have been award winners. His more prominent commissions have included the East Building of the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C.; Le Grand Louvre in Paris; the Bank of China in Hong Kong; the John Fitzgerald Kennedy Library near Boston; the National Center for Atmospheric Research, in Boulder, Colorado; the Dallas City Hall in Texas and many others. He has designed arts facilities and university buildings on the campuses of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, the University of Rochester, Cornell University, the Choate School, Syracuse University, New York University and the University of Hawaii. In 1989 Pei completed the Louvre Pyramid, a large glass and metal pyramid, surrounded by three smaller ones, in the courtyard of the Louvre Museum in Paris. The large pyramid serves as the main entrance to the museum.

The structure, which was constructed entirely with glass segments, reaches a height of 20.6 metres; its square base has sides of 35 metres. The pyramid consists of 603 rhombus-shaped and 70 triangular glass segments.



GLOSSARY

- 1 hall
- 2 aroused
- 3 combination
- 4 union

The pyramid and the underground lobby¹ under it were created because of a series of problems with the Louvre's original main entrance, which could no longer handle an enormous number of visitors on an everyday basis. Visitors entering through the pyramid descend into the spacious lobby then re-ascend into the main Louvre buildings.

But why a pyramid? Why not a cylinder or a cone? According to Pei a pyramid is "the most compatible shape with the architecture of the Louvre... it is also one of the most structurally stable forms, which assures its transparency... as it is constructed of glass and steel, it signifies a break with the architectural traditions of the past. It is a work of our time." The construction of the pyramid triggered² considerable controversy because many people felt that the futuristic edifice looked quite out of place in front of the Louvre Museum with its classical architecture. Others came to appreciate the juxtaposing³ of contrasting architectural styles as a successful merger⁴ of the old and the new, the classical and the ultra-modern.



READING COMPREHENSION

● Answer the following questions.

- ① Where did I.M. Pei study?
- ② What is the Louvre Pyramid?
- ③ What is the pyramid like?
- ④ How do visitors enter the Louvre Museum?

- ⑤ Why did Pei choose a pyramid and not another shape for his building?
- ⑥ Why did the pyramid trigger controversy?

ACTIVITIES



VOCABULARY

● Explain in your own words the meaning of the following terms and expressions.

- | | | | |
|-------------|-------|---------------|-------|
| ① Award | | ④ Courtyard | |
| ② Prominent | | ⑤ Underground | |
| ③ Campus | | ⑥ Spacious | |