Do you know that the Empire State Building and many other skyscrapers, towers and bridges were built by ironworkers of Mohawk tribe, known as Indian Skywalkers?

Before you read:
ironworker - the person who builds frameworks of tall buildings or bridges
Mohawk - one of the Native American tribes
pier - a heavy structure supporting the spans of a bridge
hang out on the bridge - stay on the bridge
altitude - elevation, height
beam - long thick piece of wood, metal or stone, used in building
raging river - very fast running river
skyscraper - a very tall building
newfound trade - new profession
reserve - Land that belongs to the Native American tribe
skywalkers - construction workers who work at very high elevation
old timers - workers who worked at the same place for a long time

History of the Mohawk Ironworkers
In 1886 the Grand Trunk Railway wanted to build the Victoria Bridge across St. Lawrence River.

The railroad had to run through Mohawk Territory. The tribe agreed to that, the Grand Trunk arranged for the bridge company to hire some of the Mohawks as laborers to work on the bridge site. This decision changed the lifestyle of many Mohawks to this very day.

The first job for Mohawks was to supply the stone for the large piers supporting the bridge. When their shifts ended, they would hang out on the bridge watching the other workers to see what they were doing.

Even young Mohawk children became curious and soon they were climbing all over the bridge, right alongside the men. The workers noticed that Mohawks had a great sense of balance.

Fearless Wonders
When management became aware of this, they hired and trained a dozen tribal members as ironworkers. The first twelve, all teenagers, were working at high altitudes. They were known as the 'Fearless Wonders'. They would walk on narrow beams several hundred feet above the raging river and yet it appeared as though they were just on a casual walk along a forest trail. Constructing bridges and skyscrapers was extremely dangerous work. Many of the young Mohawks took it not only for
high wages, but also for a chance to prove their courage. They worked very hard at learning their newfound trade and soon began to train other men from their Reserve. Over the next fifty years many Native American people would follow in the footsteps of the Mohawks. They became known for their ability to walk high steel beams with balance and grace, seemingly without any fear, and ironwork became a matter of identity and great pride within the nation. These men helped to shape and build the 'New America'.

**Skywalkers** In the early 1900's iron bridges and tall buildings appeared. Chicago and New York City were reaching for the stars. From the beginning of that new age of construction, the Mohawks were there, 'skywalking' on the clouds, high above it all. The men made the long journey from their reserves to the big cities. They were leaving their families and then returning once or twice a month to visit. The Mohawk men, who worked in the Ironworkers Industry of America, soon became legendary and were known in later years as the 'Skywalkers'.

Many people tried to explain the skywalkers' courage. One of the tribal ironworkers of today explains it: "A lot of people think Mohawks aren't afraid of heights; that's not true. We have as much fear as other guys. The difference is that we deal with it better. We also have the experience of the old timers to follow and the responsibility to lead the younger guys. There's pride in walking iron."

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3 (Indian Skywalkers)

**Choose the correct answer:**

1886 the Grand Trunk Railway wanted to build

a) a tall building
b) a bridge across the river
c) a railway station

The company hired some of the Mohawks as laborers to work on the bridge site because

a) they didn't have enough workers
b) they agreed to do it as the railways went through the Indian land
c) they Indian laborers agreed to work for little money

It became known that the Mohawks were fearless of the height when

a) their workers and children climbed the beams all over the bridge
b) the Chief of the tribe told the company about that
c) the workers were supplying the stone for the large piers of the bridge
Mohawks had a great sense of:
a) danger
b) balance
c) fear
Who were "Fearless Wonder"?
a) the team of rescuers
b) the company representatives
c) the first team of tribal ironworkers
Constructing bridges and skyscrapers was:
a) an extremely dangerous work
b) a quite safe work
c) a low-paying work
Many young Mohawks took this job to prove their:
a) professional skills
b) courage
c) sense of balance

4 (Indian Skywalkers)

The 'New America' was of:
a) many fields
b) forests and mountains
c) very tall buildings
Mohawks were 'skywalking'. They were:
a) working at great heights
b) talking to the God
c) jumping down from the high objects
Which of these is true?
a) Mohawks aren't afraid of heights
b) Mohawks know how to deal with the fear of heights
c) Nobody has a fear of heights

Tell what you have learned about the Indian Skywalkers:
- How Mohawks started to be work in construction;
- Why they were hired to work at high elevations;
- What workers were called Fearless Wonders and why?
- Why the Indian ironworkers were called Skywalkers?
- Are they really not afraid of the heights?

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Sources:
1. www.katjaesson.com
2. us.macmillan.com
3. www.sites.si.edu