

PRAIRIE STYLE IN THE PARKS

GRADE: 6-12

TIME: Two 50-minute sessions

How did Frank Lloyd Wright influence other architects of his time? In this lesson, students will look at two notable Prairie style buildings in the Chicago parks system – Richard Schmidt’s Humboldt Park Boathouse and Dwight Perkins’s Café Brauer in Lincoln Park. After identifying and sketching Prairie style features in both buildings, students will consider how to design in harmony with nature as they design their own Prairie style park structure.

INTEGRATED SUBJECTS: Media Literacy, Language Arts, Social Studies, Visual Arts

OBJECTIVES

MATERIALS | RESOURCES

Library or Internet access for independent student research
Images of the Humboldt Park Boathouse and Café Brauer
Examples of Frank Lloyd Wright’s Prairie style architecture
Sketchbooks
Pencils
Colored pencils
Presentation boards or software such as PowerPoint, Google Slides, or Prezi

1. Analyze the role of parks and municipal architecture in communities.
2. Understand how artists and designers can influence their own generation as well as future generations.
3. Identify and sketch elements of Prairie style architecture in two existing buildings designed by architects inspired by Frank Lloyd Wright.
4. Apply observations and understanding of Prairie style architecture to an original work of art.

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

1. What factors define a style in art, architecture, and/or design?
2. How is architecture related to the environment?

LESSON PROCEDURE

EXPLORE

Session One

- **Ask students to think about why communities need parks and why parks need buildings. Discuss and have students consider:** What do park buildings look like and why?
- **Have students research and/or sketch a few examples of park buildings. Have students consider:** What do these buildings have in common? What is the relationship between the park and the park building?
- **Introduce the work of Frank Lloyd Wright, highlighting how the architect pioneered the Prairie style of architecture.** (Tip: The Frederick C. Robie House is a great example of residential Prairie style architecture!) Information can be found at <https://www.teachingbydesign.org/about/prairie-style/>.
- **Introduce features of the Prairie style, such as hipped roofs, central chimneys, broad eaves, horizontal rows of windows, and leaded glass windows. Information can be found at <https://www.teachingbydesign.org/design-elements/architectural-terms/> and in the book *A Field Guide to American Houses* by Virginia & Lee McAlester. Have students consider:** How is the Prairie style related to a prairie landscape? **Emphasize how the Prairie style stemmed from Wright's desire to design in harmony with nature.**

ENGAGE

Session One

- **Introduce two Prairie style Chicago park buildings designed by contemporaries of Frank Lloyd Wright: the Humboldt Park boathouse (Schmidt, Garden and Martin, 1907) and Café Brauer (Dwight Perkins, 1908) in Lincoln Park.**
 - Differentiation: Have students independently research the Humboldt Park boathouse and/or Café Brauer.
- **With students, compare and contrast the Prairie style park buildings with examples of Wright's Prairie style residential buildings.**
- **Ask students to pick one of the buildings to sketch, labeling any Prairie style features that they see in the building.**
- **Ask students to share their sketches and any Prairie style features they identified, which could include but are not limited to: an open floorplan, a hipped roof, use of natural light and/or natural materials, geometric patterns, rows of leaded glass, and planter urns.**
- **Based on what students can observe from the images, ask students to identify how the buildings are in harmony with natural park surroundings.**

EXPLORE

Session Two

- **Review the Prairie style and how it can be expressed in both residential and public buildings. Highlight how the Prairie style serves to better unite architecture and nature.**
- **Remind students that the Humboldt Park boathouse and Café Brauer were not designed by Frank Lloyd Wright, but were designed at the same time period in which Wright was working in Chicagoland and were influenced by the architect. Ask students:** Do you think Frank Lloyd Wright influenced the architecture and design of today in any way? If so, how?

LESSON PROCEDURE (continued)

DESIGN

Session Two

- **Challenge students to design and sketch a new Prairie style park structure. Encourage students to draw a few ideas and pick one to refine further. Have students consider:** How will my structure be used in the park and how does that impact the design?
 - Differentiation: Have students work collaboratively to design a harmonious collection of Prairie style buildings for one park.

CRITIQUE & INTERPRET

Session Two

- **Ask students to share their designs, pointing out ways that the design was influenced by Prairie style buildings from the early 1900s. Encourage students to point out any Prairie style features as well as any innovations in the design.**
 - Optional Extension: Ask students to reflect and write about how park buildings in their own community could better harmonize with park surroundings.