

# FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT AND THE SPACE AGE

**GRADE:** 7-12

**TIME:** Three 50-minute sessions

Frank Lloyd Wright was 72 years old and at the peak of his career when he designed the George Sturges House in Los Angeles. He said about the project, "It is one of the simplest things we have done and one of the best." At the time, Wright was working with a young apprentice and architect named John Lautner, who went on to design many notable homes, such as Chemosphere (1960) in Los Angeles. In this lesson, participants will find the connections and commonalities between Frank Lloyd Wright and the Space Age, a period encompassing the activities related to the Space Race, space exploration, space technology, and the cultural developments influenced by these events. Then, participants will create their own Space Age home, known as Googie architecture.

**INTEGRATED SUBJECTS:** Visual Arts, Social Studies

## OBJECTIVES

### MATERIALS | RESOURCES

Internet access for independent student research

Background information about Frank Lloyd Wright, John Lautner, and Googie architecture

Pencils

Colored pencils

Sketchbooks and/or drawing paper

Rulers

1. Explore the influence of Frank Lloyd Wright on modern architecture. Research and examine images of the Sturges Residence, the Elrod House, Wingspread, and the S.C. Johnson Wax Building.
2. Find connections between Frank Lloyd Wright and John Lautner. Explore any other links between Wright and Googie architecture.
3. Design a home for the future.

## ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

1. How did the Space Age influence design as well as the political climate?
2. What world events were occurring from about 1930 -1964?
3. What will architecture look like in the future and why?

# LESSON PROCEDURE

## EXPLORE

### Session One

- Introduce the architecture of Frank Lloyd Wright and specifically focus on images of the Sturges Residence, Wingspread, and the S.C. Johnson Wax Building. See Appendix A for images of these buildings.
- Introduce students to one of Wright's apprentices, John Lautner. Mention that Lautner was involved in the design of the Sturges Residence, Wingspread, and the S.C. Johnson Wax building, and view samples of Lautner's later designs such as the Elrod House, Sheats-Goldstein House, Chemosphere, and the Garcia House. See Appendix B for images of these buildings.
- Challenge students to find connections to Frank Lloyd Wright's designs and John Lautner's homes.
  - Helpful resources for research include <https://www.newcity.com/2009/02/03/exploring-the-googleverse-in-search-of-chicagos-vanishing-architecture-of-the-future/>, <https://www.rostarchitects.com/articles/2019/1/20/eight-things-you-should-know-about-the-architect-john-lautner>, and <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/google-architecture-of-the-space-age-122837470/>
  - Differentiation: Have students independently research Wright and Lautner.
  - Optional Extension: Ask participants to research architect Nathan Johnson who worked in the Googie style. Encourage students to explore the work of Johnson and many other African American architects and challenge them to find commonalities to the work of Frank Lloyd Wright. <https://www.mercurynews.com/2021/02/24/here-are-10-trailblazing-black-architects-you-should-know/>

## ENGAGE

### Session Two

- Working in small groups, ask students to research space travel and Space Age design. Encourage participants to take notes and/or sketch ideas for their own Googie building design. Students can share their findings and sketches with each other to get feedback as they work.
  - Optional Extension: Have students find images of household objects that were designed from 1935–1962. Ask students to notice when and if a change in style occurs. Have students work in small groups to create a rough timeline, matching design trends with historical events of the day.

## DESIGN

### Session Three

- Recommend students draw several small sketches, known as thumbnails, of a Space Age-inspired home or building for the future before beginning a larger drawing. Students may draw in sketchbooks or on drawing paper. Colored pencils are optional.
  - Optional Extension: Have students design household appliances, furniture and/or clothing. As a resource, watch episodes from the 1962 cartoon, The Jetsons.

## CRITIQUE & INTERPRET

### Session Three

- Challenge students to draw or write a description of the future and how their home will function.
  - Optional Extension: Ask students to predict other aspects of life in the future, such as food, music, transportation, and school.



**Frank Lloyd Wright**, *George Sturges House*,  
Los Angeles, CA, 1939



**Frank Lloyd Wright**, *Wingspread*,  
Racine, WI, 1939



**Frank Lloyd Wright**, *Great Workroom*, S.C. Johnson  
Wax Administration Building, Racine, WI, 1936-1939



**Frank Lloyd Wright**, *S.C. Johnson Wax  
Headquarters*, Racine, WI, 1936-1950





**John Lautner, Chemosphere,**  
Los Angeles, CA, 1960



**John Lautner, Sheats-Goldstein House,**  
Los Angeles, CA, 1961-1963



**John Lautner, Garcia House,**  
Los Angeles, CA, 1962



**John Lautner, Elrod House,**  
Palm Springs, CA, 1968