

# DRAWING ON NATURE: ART GLASS BLIND CONTOURS

**GRADE:** 1-3

**TIME:** 40 minutes

Participants will consider the relationship between nature and design by sketching an art glass window at Robie House in a blind contour drawing exercise and adding to it in a way that reflects an aspect of the natural world. The activity will provide an introduction to design concepts used by Frank Lloyd Wright, help participants identify stylized natural forms in Wright's heavily geometric designs, and encourage them to look for inspiration in the natural environment for their own original creations.

**INTEGRATED SUBJECTS:** Visual Art & Environmental Science

## OBJECTIVES

### MATERIALS | RESOURCES

Images of Frederick C. Robie House  
& its windows  
Paper  
Pencils

1. Explore Frank Lloyd Wright's buildings as integrated designs and make connections between nature and his geometric designs.
2. Engage in the design process by creating both abstract and representational drawings.
3. Look closely at a work of art to identify design elements and understand an artist's intent.
4. Examine the relationship between the built environment and the natural world.

## ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

1. What is the relationship between nature and design?
2. What similarities can you find between Frank Lloyd Wright's Robie House and objects in nature?
3. Why might an architect use nature as inspiration for geometric designs?

# LESSON PROCEDURE

## EXPLORE

15 minutes

- Project or distribute an image of an art glass window from the Robie House, and prompt participants to spend time studying the window. Images are available at: <https://www.teachingbydesign.org/multimedia/>
- After a moment of close looking, ask them to draw the window without looking at their paper, following a line with their eyes while carefully moving the pencil in an attempt to recreate it.
- After several minutes of not picking up the pencil and not looking at the paper (the blind contour activity), ask participants to stop, allow them to look at their drawings, and ask them to compare it to the image of the Robie House window.

## ENGAGE

5 minutes

- Begin a brief discussion of nature and its influence on Wright's designs.  
Optional: Introduce organic architecture (<https://www.teachingbydesign.org/about/organic-design/>) and Frank Lloyd Wright's Prairie style (<https://www.teachingbydesign.org/about/prairie-style/>).
- Project additional images of Robie House and ask: How does the house blend in to nature? What colors, shapes, or textures remind you of something from nature? What elements from nature might have inspired Frank Lloyd Wright when he was designing this house?

## DESIGN

10 minutes

- Have participants return to their blind contour drawings and brainstorm objects from nature that it might represent or become with modification.
- Now looking at their papers, ask participants to add to the drawing to make it more strongly resemble the object from nature that they have chosen to portray.

## CRITIQUE & INTERPRET

10 minutes

- Have participants share their designs.
- Ask:  
What do you see? Did you encounter any challenges when designing? What were they? How did you address them? How did thinking about nature change the way you looked at Robie House? How did thinking about nature change the way you completed your design?
- Finally, ask participants to consider how nature and design are related. How does nature influence design? How can design complement nature? What are some ways that we think about the environment in the decisions we make day-to-day?