

# LANDMARKS & LETTER WRITING

**GRADE:** 3-8

**TIME:** 60 minutes

In many ways, preservation and design go hand-in-hand. By working to save an important building, communities and individuals help to ensure its status as a work of art and preserve its place in history. In this lesson, participants learn about and participate in the process of historic preservation by considering the definition of “landmark” and crafting persuasive letters. Participants explore the history of Frank Lloyd Wright’s Robie House as a landmark as well as the landmarks in their own communities. Then, they consider the value of a well-crafted letter and its power to shape cultural history by choosing a landmark to defend and preserve.

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**INTEGRATED SUBJECTS:** Visual Art, Social Studies & Literacy

## OBJECTIVES

### MATERIALS | RESOURCES

Images of the Frederick C. Robie House  
Lined paper  
Pencils

*Letter to the editor from Frederick Robie, Jr.,  
Chicago Tribune, March 1957*

<http://archives.chicagotribune.com/1957/03/29/page/14/article/voice-of-the-people>

*Letter (editorial) from Harvard University, The  
Crimson, April 1957*

<http://www.thecrimson.com/article/1957/4/17/plans-to-demolish-robie-house-draw/>

1. Introduce Frank Lloyd Wright as an American architect and designer.
2. Introduce Robie House as the quintessential example of the Prairie style and its significance as a historic landmark.
3. Communicate a persuasive argument through writing and fact based reasoning.
4. Explore the concept and process of historic preservation.

## ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

1. Why is it important to preserve something?
2. What makes something valuable or important?
3. How do facts and emotions factor into the power of persuasion?
4. How can you preserve history with letter-writing?

# LESSON PROCEDURE

## EXPLORE

5 minutes

- Introduce the concept of historic preservation and landmarks by having participants brainstorm a list of landmarks. Ask participants to consider what it was like to visit them and what makes them special.
- As participants share their experiences and what they know about landmarks, begin forming a definition together.
- Once participants have agreed on a definition, have them consider the process for designating a landmark and introduce historic preservation. For further information on landmarks please refer to the National Historic Landmarks Program of the National Park Service at: <https://www.nps.gov/nhl/apply/intro.htm>

## ENGAGE

20 minutes

- Introduce a specific historic landmark in Chicago, the Frederick C. Robie House, and have participants read Frederick Robie Jr.'s letter to the editor of the Chicago Tribune in 1957. (<https://www.teachingbydesign.org/about/robie-house/>)
- Discuss Frank Lloyd Wright as an American architect and designer and the significance of the Frederick C. Robie House (<https://www.teachingbydesign.org/about/frank-lloyd-wright/>). Show images of the house and discuss Organic architecture (<https://www.teachingbydesign.org/about/organic-design/>) and the Prairie style (<https://www.teachingbydesign.org/about/prairie-style/>), allowing participants to pick out defining features of the home (window screens, horizontal lines, built-in planters, etc.). Images are available at: <https://www.teachingbydesign.org/multimedia/>
- Share Robie's history and the jeopardy it faced in 1941 and 1957, despite its historical and artistic value.
- Focus discussion on how the letter might have helped to preserve Robie House.

## DESIGN

25 minutes

- Have participants choose a landmark in the community that they think should be preserved and write a persuasive argument for its case.
- To highlight the elements of a persuasive letter, re-read sample portions of Robie Jr.'s letter again. Ask: What do you think was the most persuasive point Robie Jr. made to save the Robie House? Did he support this idea with evidence? If so, what was it? How did Robie Jr. present his argument? What are the different parts of the letter?

## CRITIQUE & INTERPRET

10 minutes

- Have participants share their letters with partners and select a few to read their letters aloud to the class.
- Finally, have participants reflect on the process of writing a persuasive letter. Ask: What was the most difficult part about making a strong argument for your landmark? What was the easiest? How did you use both facts and emotional appeals? What other situations can you apply these strategies to?