

IN YOUR OWN WORDS: ORGANIC DESIGN AND SUSTAINABILITY

GRADE: 6-12

TIME: Three 50-minute sessions

What does it mean to design organically? Frank Lloyd Wright dedicated his life's work to this question, designing organic buildings that united form, function, and place. In this lesson, students will define organic design in their own words with the help of word webs. Then, students will use their definition to research and identify historical and contemporary examples of organic architecture. Finally, students will unpack the relationship between sustainability and organic design, exploring ways that today's architects can look to organic design for inspiration as they design a more sustainable future.

INTEGRATED SUBJECTS: Visual Arts, Science, Media Literacy, Language Arts

OBJECTIVES

MATERIALS | RESOURCES

Library or Internet access for independent student research

Paper

Markers

Examples of Frank Lloyd Wright's architecture

Presentation boards or software such as PowerPoint, Google Slides, or Prezi

1. Understand and define the concepts of organic design and sustainability.
2. Research and identify historical and contemporary examples of organic design.
3. Identify ways that organic design can inspire sustainable design.
4. Present research findings and ideas to peers.

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

1. What does it mean to design organically?
2. What is sustainability?
3. What is the relationship between organic design and sustainability?
4. How was organic design expressed in the work of Frank Lloyd Wright?
5. How can Frank Lloyd Wright's philosophy of organic design influence architects today?

LESSON PROCEDURE

EXPLORE

Session One

- **Have students create word webs of the words “nature” and “harmony.”** The web could include synonyms, antonyms, categories, examples, descriptors, and other information related to the root word of the web. (Tip: Playing music during this exercise can encourage free exploration and release students from the pressure to immediately find the “right answer.” Remind students that the exercise is designed to open up their thinking and help them make connections and should therefore not be rushed!)

ENGAGE

Session One

- **After students build their understanding of nature and harmony, introduce the work of Frank Lloyd Wright.** Stress that Wright aimed to design in harmony with nature, which is a core component of organic design.

DESIGN

Session One

- **Ask students:** What does it mean to design organically? **Link some of the ideas and phrases from students’ word webs to collaboratively define organic design.** More information about organic design can be found at <https://www.teachingbydesign.org/about/organic-design/>.

EXPLORE

Session Two

- **Review the work of Frank Lloyd Wright and organic design.**
- **Revisit the classroom definition of organic design, giving students the opportunity to revise the definition after further reflection.**

ENGAGE

Session Two

- **Have students apply the consensus definition of organic design to a specific building designed by Frank Lloyd Wright. Students should independently select a Frank Lloyd Wright-designed house to review with a focus on how organic design is exhibited in the structure.**
 - Differentiation: Students can work in teams.
 - Differentiation: Educator can assign a Frank Lloyd Wright building to each student or team. Examples include but are not limited to the Frederick C. Robie House, the Dana-Thomas House, Fallingwater, the Ennis House, the David & Gladys Wright House, the Hollyhock House, the Meyer May House, the Pope-Leighey House, and the Darwin Martin House.
- **Ask students to identify at least three characteristics of organic design found in the building of their choice.**
- **Have students repeat the exercise by finding a contemporary example of organic design. Have students consider:** How is organic design expressed differently?

LESSON PROCEDURE (continued)

EXPLORE

Session Three

- **Have students create a word web with the word “sustainability.”**

DESIGN

Session Three

- **Ask students:** What does sustainability mean in architecture? **Link some of the ideas and phrases from students’ word webs to collaboratively define sustainability.** **Have students consider:** How does sustainability differ from organic design?

ENGAGE

Session Three

- **Have students revisit the buildings they explored in Session Two, using the consensus definition of sustainability to assess whether or not the projects can be considered sustainable. Encourage students to identify at least three ways each project is sustainable as well as three ways each project could be more sustainable.**
- **Have students consider:** How can Frank Lloyd Wright inspire architects today? What sustainable approaches did he use?

CRITIQUE & INTERPRET

Session Three

- **Have students present their findings and ideas to their peers.**
- **After the presentations, have students consider:** What would it mean for a building to be both organic and sustainable? What would it look like?
 - **Optional Extension:** Have students design an organic, sustainable building.