

BREAKING THE BOX: PRAIRIE STYLE

GRADE: 3-5

TIME: OPEN

Frank Lloyd Wright worked to define a unique style of American architecture that was inspired by nature and the Midwest prairie, and which sought to break the small closed-in rooms of traditional European architecture. Through the design and construction of a large-scale cardboard model, participants will explore the characteristics that defined Wright's Organic Architecture and Prairie style. Participants will also have the opportunity to practice problem solving and communication skills as they work collaboratively.

INTEGRATED SUBJECTS: Visual Art, History, & Social Studies

OBJECTIVES

MATERIALS | RESOURCES

Large cardboard boxes
Tissue Paper
Construction Paper
Packing Tape
Masking Tape
String
Scissors
X-Acto Blades
Drawing Paper
Pencils
Sharpie Markers
A Large Open Space
Images of the Frederick C. Robie House

1. Understand and be able to identify the characteristics of Prairie style architecture.
2. Explore Frank Lloyd Wright design concepts and design elements.
3. Work collaboratively to create a large-scale design.
4. Think abstractly and problem solve to design and construct a 3-D model.
5. Develop visual and verbal design vocabulary.

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

1. What characteristics define the Prairie style?
2. What steps are needed to design and build a large-scale 3-dimensional model?
3. What strategies are needed when you design and build with others?

LESSON PROCEDURE

EXPLORE

- Introduce Frank Lloyd Wright as an American designer and architect (<https://www.teachingbydesign.org/about/frank-lloyd-wright/>).
- Share images of the Frederick C. Robie House and ask participants to share their observations. Images are available at: <https://www.teachingbydesign.org/multimedia/>
- **Ask:** What do you see? What colors did Wright use? What shapes did Wright use? Do you notice anything unusual about the design? Does the design resemble anything else?
- Introduce the Prairie style and its defining characteristics (<https://www.teachingbydesign.org/about/prairie-style/>). Explore the design of Robie house further and discuss Wright's design choices.

DESIGN

- In sketchbooks or with drawing paper, have participants make a few quick sketches of their own Prairie style designs.
- Introduce the project of the design and construction of a large-scale Prairie style model.
- Have participants brainstorm characteristics of the Prairie style that should be included as part of their design. Remind participants to refer back to their sketches.
- Discuss strategies for working together with a large group.
- Distribute string and have participants work together to begin laying out the footprint and walls for their model. Do not forget to mark doors and windows.

STRATEGY ONE: Begin with the exterior border of the building, or footprint. After all exterior walls have been placed, have participants begin laying out the interior spaces followed with the placement of doors and windows.

STRATEGY TWO: Have participants begin with the placement of all the interior spaces. This will determine the footprint of the building. Then place all the window and doors.

- Once the floorplan for the house is finished, have participants mark each of the walls and spaces with masking tape.
- Have participants walk through the design like a maze and consider any final revisions that should be made.
- After all revisions have been made, participants can begin laying out the cardboard walls by placing the pieces around the blueprint. TIP: It is easier to cut out windows and doorways before the walls are placed and affixed upright.
- As the walls are ready, have groups begin standing them upright.
- Continue to build each section of the building until all walls are completed.
- After all walls are finished, participants can add artglass designs, planters, furniture, and other decorative elements. To begin, have participants discuss characteristics of their building's design that should be further reflected inside the home.
- Allow each participant time to work on at least one decorative element.

CRITIQUE & INTERPRET

- Once the construction is completed, have participants present and lead tours of their Prairie style design to guests.