SCOVILLE PARK FOUNTAIN: UTILITY VS. AESTHETICS

GRADE: 6-12
TIME: Two 45-minute sessions

In this lesson, students consider various architectural achievements of Frank Lloyd Wright and discuss whether they were designed to be useful or beautiful. Students then analyze items within their own lives to determine whether they were designed with utility (use) or aesthetics (attractiveness or beauty) in mind. Finally, students select an object and redesign it to improve its utility and/or aesthetics.

INTEGRATED SUBJECTS: Visual Arts, Social Studies, Social-Emotional Learning

MATERIALS | RESOURCES

Photographs of various Frank Lloyd Wright designs
Photograph of the Scoville Park fountain
Library or internet access for independent student research
Pencils
Paper or sketchbooks

OBJECTIVES

1. Define the words *utility* and *aesthetics*.
2. Identify ways that designers and architects apply both utility and aesthetics in the design of a building or other designed objects, such as furniture.
3. Identify ways to improve the design of an object they use in daily life.

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

1. What are utility and aesthetics, and how do they play a role in the work of designers and architects?
2. What everyday objects are designed well, with both utility and aesthetics in mind?
3. How did Frank Lloyd Wright apply both utility and aesthetics in his designs?
4. What are some objects that we use regularly, and how can we make changes to improve the usefulness and/or beauty of those objects?

LESSON PROCEDURE

EXPLORE

Session One

- Introduce students to Frank Lloyd Wright's work, focusing on his desire to create buildings that are both useful and beautiful. Display images of his work such as the Guggenheim Museum, Unity Temple, Robie House furniture, or the Coonley Playhouse art glass windows, and discuss both the utility and aesthetic appeal of these various works.

ENGAGE

Session One

- Display a photo of the Wright-designed Scoville Park Fountain in Oak Park, Illinois. Ask students to identify what this object is, how it is used, and what aspects of the object add an element of beauty to it.
- (Enrichment) If time and space allow, consider a field trip to Scoville Park to view the fountain in person.
    - Background information: This drinking fountain was designed with three levels which include a basin at the top for birds, a spigot in the middle for humans, and a trough at the bottom for horses and dogs. There are relief sculptures and geometric details to enhance the beauty of the fountain, and the water itself could be considered an attractive feature as well.
    - More background information: The fountain was installed by the Oak Park Horse Show Association and was a design collaboration between architect Frank Lloyd Wright and sculptor Richard Bock, who worked almost exclusively out of Wright's Oak Park Studio from 1903-1910. The fountain that currently resides in Scoville Park is a replica that was installed in 1969 and is about 100 feet from the original location.
- Have students identify everyday objects and discuss whether they are designed to be useful, beautiful, or both. Possible objects include furniture, clothing, purses/backpacks, light fixtures, and technology such as smartphones. Ask students: Which objects are successful in uniting utility with aesthetics? Encourage students to consider multiple examples of the same object and take note of aesthetic and functional differences in the designs (e.g., multiple examples of a backpack or a pair of scissors).

DESIGN

Session Two

- After discussing and collecting a list of various household objects that may or may not be successfully designed with utility and aesthetics in mind, ask each student to choose just one object. Ask students to identify something that the object is lacking. Challenge students to redesign it so that it is more useful, more beautiful, or both.

CRITIQUE & INTERPRET

Session Two

- Have students share their redesigns either in small groups or with the whole class, leaving room for constructive criticism and additional redesigns.