

LOST WORKS: MIDWAY GARDENS, 1914

GRADE: 6-12

TIME: One 50-minute session

In this lesson, students will investigate a primary source—Frank Lloyd Wright’s own autobiography—to better understand Midway Gardens, an entertainment center in Chicago designed by Wright in 1913 and opened in 1914. Though the design was imaginative, Midway Gardens was unable to weather the effects of World War I and Prohibition and was consequently demolished in 1929. After considering the historical context of Midway Gardens, students will design an imaginative entertainment center for today’s world, noting why they think the new design would succeed.

INTEGRATED SUBJECTS: Language Arts, Social Studies, Visual Arts, Media Literacy

OBJECTIVES

MATERIALS | RESOURCES

Midway Gardens excerpt from *An Autobiography* by Frank Lloyd Wright
(www.franklloydwright.org/revisiting-midway-gardens/)
Images of Midway Gardens and Sans Souci Amusement Park
Sketchbooks
Pencils
Colored pencils
Model making materials (optional)

1. Interpret a passage from Frank Lloyd Wright’s autobiography in order to better understand life in Chicago in the early twentieth century.
2. Learn about the work of Frank Lloyd Wright and the design of Midway Gardens.
3. Create an original work of art.
4. Analyze how and why projects succeed or fail.

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

1. Why do creative ideas sometimes fail?
2. How are creative ideas realized, specifically in the field of architecture?
3. What was life like in Chicago in the early twentieth century?

LESSON PROCEDURE

EXPLORE

- Introduce the work of Frank Lloyd Wright and Wright’s impact on the field of architecture. More information can be found at <https://www.teachingbydesign.org/about/frank-lloyd-wright/>.
- Introduce Midway Gardens, a public Chicago building, designed in 1913 by Wright and opened in 1914, that has since been demolished. (Tip: We like the Museum of Modern Art’s short video introduction to the building, which can be found at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4pjOMPnrEBQ>)
- Ask students to read the passage from Wright’s autobiography about Midway Gardens and review the images that accompany the text: www.franklloydwright.org/revisiting-midway-gardens/. (Tip: You may want to provide students with extra context, included below, for the passage!)
 - Edward Waller was a Chicago developer and patron of Frank Lloyd Wright. He was responsible for the development of what is widely considered to be the world’s first skyscraper (Home Insurance Building, 1885) as well as many of Frank Lloyd Wright projects such as the Rookery Building (remodeled by Wright between 1905-1907), the Waller Apartments (subsidized low-income housing designed by Wright in 1895), and Francisco Terrace (subsidized low-income housing designed by Wright in 1895).
 - Sans Souci was one of Chicago’s first amusement parks, built in 1899. It included roller coasters, a roller-skating rink, a ballroom, a casino, and a vaudeville theater. It was inspired by popular amusement parks from the 1893 Columbian Exposition in Chicago. (The architecture of the Columbian Exposition was primarily Beaux-Arts style, which differs greatly from the architecture of Frank Lloyd Wright.) The exterior of Sans Souci resembled a German beer hall. The park closed in 1913 due to lack of financial success.
 - Unable to weather the effects of World War I and Prohibition, Midway Gardens was demolished in October, 1929. This was the same month that the stock market crashed, signaling the start of the country’s Great Depression.
- Ask students to respond to Edward Waller’s comments that Chicago was a “...wilderness of smoky dens, car-tracks, and saloons.” Ask students why someone would hold that view of Chicago in 1913. Have students consider: What was happening in the city and in the country in the early twentieth century, or during the “Progressive Era”?
- Ask students to reflect upon Wright’s reference to Aladdin. Ask what they know about the story of Aladdin’s lamp and why Wright would invoke that idea. Have students consider: How might Edward Waller be like the genie in the classic children’s tale? What is the relationship between architect and developer? How did the final version of Midway Gardens compare with Waller’s view of Chicago at the time?
 - Differentiation: If you would like a visual aid, consider displaying the playroom mural in Wright’s Oak Park home, which depicts the genie and the lamp from the classic children’s tale. Have students consider how Wright’s imagination and creative desire is reflected in the mural.

ENGAGE

- Ask students to compare and contrast the design of Sans Souci with Frank Lloyd Wright’s design of Midway Gardens. Have students consider: Which design is more creative or imaginative and why? Which design is more garden-like? Encourage students to focus on the design elements of each building.
- Ask students to describe Chicago today. Have students consider: How does it compare and contrast to Chicago in 1913?
 - Differentiation: If students are not based in Chicago, have them describe their own community.

LESSON PROCEDURE (continued)

ENGAGE

- **Have students consider:** Could Midway Gardens succeed in today's world? Why or why not? What would a creative and imaginative amusement park or public place for entertainment look like today? Where in Chicago (or my community) would it be located?

DESIGN

- **Challenge students to design and draw proposals for a new public place for entertainment in their community.**
Have students consider: How does it respond to and reflect today's world? How is it creative or imaginative?
 - Optional Extension: Have students build prototypes of their designs.

CRITIQUE & INTERPRET

- **Have students share their proposals with their peers, noting why they think it could succeed in today's world.**
 - Optional Extension: Midway Gardens was once called a "spectacular failure." Ask students to write a paragraph about the ways it was spectacular and a second paragraph about the ways it was a failure.