

WORD ART: CONCRETE POETRY AND FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT

GRADE: 6-12

TIME: Two 50-minute sessions

Frank Lloyd Wright broke creative ground and transformed the history of architecture when he pioneered the Prairie style in the early 1900s. A uniquely American style of architecture, the Prairie style expresses democratic ideals and reflects the prairie landscape. In all creative fields, artists seek to innovate and push the limits of their discipline. In this lesson, students will explore innovations in creative writing through concrete poetry, a style of poetic verse in which the formal arrangement of words creates an artistic pattern or recognizable shape that adds meaning to the work. First, students will explore and sketch elements of Wright's Frederick C. Robie House. Then, they will reflect upon Wright's design by transforming their sketches into concrete poems.

INTEGRATED SUBJECTS: Visual Arts, Language Arts

OBJECTIVES

MATERIALS | RESOURCES

Images of the Frederick C. Robie House
Sketchbooks
Pencils
Paper
Colored pencils (optional)

1. Explore the concept of innovation in the arts.
2. Investigate and interpret concrete poetry and the work of Frank Lloyd Wright.
3. Sketch elements of the Frederick C. Robie House.
4. Transform sketches into a concrete poem about the Frederick C. Robie House.

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

1. What does innovation look like in the arts?
2. What is creative form in poetry and design?

LESSON PROCEDURE

EXPLORE

Session One

- **Introduce the concept of innovation by challenging students to define the term.** Ask: What role does innovation play in the arts? Can you think of any examples of innovation in visual art, music, dance, literature, or other creative disciplines?
- **Introduce Frank Lloyd Wright as an innovative architect and introduce the Prairie style, which is best expressed in the design of the Frederick C. Robie House (1908-1910).** Have students consider: What is innovative about the Frederick C. Robie House? (Tip: To better reinforce the innovative qualities of the Robie House, compare and contrast the design with other homes of the period.)

ENGAGE

Session One

- **Take an inquiry-based tour of the Frederick C. Robie House.** If a field trip experience is not possible, have students research the design and/or explore the building's elements through photographs.
- **During the tour, have students sketch and describe elements that they consider to be innovative.** Encourage students to create descriptive word lists and make multiple sketches. Highlight the form or shape of the building as well as the form or shape of Wright-designed furniture in the home. Have students consider: Is the form innovative or creative? How?

EXPLORE

Session Two

- **Review Frank Lloyd Wright and the Prairie style.** Ask students to share elements of the design that stood out to them.

- **Introduce the concept of concrete poetry by closely studying a few examples.** Have students consider:

What is the form or shape of this poem? How do you read or interpret this poem? What is it trying to express? How does the poem's form or shape impact my understanding of the poem? Would this poem make sense if I couldn't look at it? What is innovative about this poem? More information and examples can be found at:

<https://blogs.getty.edu/iris/what-is-concrete-poetry/> and <https://www.theartstory.org/movement/concrete-poetry/>.

DESIGN

Session Two

- **Challenge students to transform their sketches and notes into a concrete poem about the Robie House.** Have students consider: What do I want to express about the Robie House? Encourage students to make multiple drafts and experiment with the form or shape of the poem.

CRITIQUE AND INTERPRET

Session Two

- **With students, decide how the poems should be shared.** Have students consider: Should they hang on a wall like a work of art? Should they be read aloud?
- **Have students share their concrete poems, noting what they aimed to express and how they tried to express their ideas creatively or innovatively.**