

DESIGNING SOCIETY: RACE, SEGREGATION, AND WRIGHT

GRADE: 9-12

TIME: Two 50-minute sessions

During the early 20th century, Frank Lloyd Wright's work reflected his serious interest in community and city planning. Although never constructed, Wright's design for the Rosenwald School was one such example. The Rosenwald School project was a segregation-era initiative to build over 5,000 schools for African American children in the South. Additionally, Wright's proposed utopian suburb, Broadacre City, reveals several socio-political values ingrained in Wright's philosophy. By looking at these two examples of Wright's work and by reading the criticisms of modern professionals, we can begin to trace how our individual or cultural beliefs can be impacted or influenced by our built environment. In this lesson, students will read modern critiques of Wright's community planning and be asked to identify at least one of Wright's main philosophies of design that they can then adapt and apply to their own vision of a utopian community plan.

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

OBJECTIVES

MATERIALS | RESOURCES

Internet access for independent student research

Paper or sketchbooks

Pencils

Markers or colored pencils

Images, videos, and articles about Rosenwald
Schools and Broadacre City

The following links may be a helpful resource:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hhTzKXVTtQ>

<https://metropolismag.com/viewpoints/>

[frank-lloyd-wrights-rosen-
wald-school-bundle-contradictions/](#)

[https://commonedge.org/where-was-jim-crow-
living-in-frank-lloyd-wrights-america/](https://commonedge.org/where-was-jim-crow-
living-in-frank-lloyd-wrights-america/)

1. Identify Wright's key philosophies of organic design, open floor plans, architecture, physical fitness, and progressive education.
2. Understand the impact of Wright's philosophies of design on community and education.
3. Adapt and apply Wright's philosophies to our life today.
4. Create an original city, community, or school layout.

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

1. How does design shape our society?
2. How might you use Wright's philosophies to design a diverse city, suburb, school or community today?

LESSON PROCEDURE

EXPLORE

Session One

- **Introduce Frank Lloyd Wright and the Jim Crow Era. Ask students: How do you think our built environment reinforced or challenged segregation laws?**
- **Introduce Frank Lloyd Wright’s primary building principle and show examples of the following:**
 - ◇ Organic design
 - ◇ Open floor plans
 - ◇ Geometry
 - ◇ Use of local and natural materials
 - ◇ Efficient use of space
 - ◇ Simple ornamentation

ENGAGE

Session One

- **Discuss the characteristics of Wright’s design, the built environment, and segregation. Some sample questions include:**
 - ◇ How does our environment impact the way we live?
 - ◇ How did Wright think about space, buildings, and design?
 - ◇ What effect would Frank Lloyd Wright’s ideas and designs have on segregation?
 - ◇ What are some other systems of power (besides segregation) that engage with the public through architecture and design?
 - ◇ What are other ways that the built environment can have an effect on the lives of people who are marginalized? (For example: race, gender, immigration, migration and colonization)

DESIGN

Session Two

- **Have students visualize Frank Lloyd Wright’s principles of design by sketching a community plan using the elements previously discussed. Students can work in small groups, individually or as a class.**
- **Ask students to look at other planned communities for ideas.**
 - ◇ (Examples: The Pullman neighborhood in Chicago, Riverside, Illinois designed by Frederick Law Olmstead, and Park Guell in Barcelona, Spain designed by Antoni Gaudi.)

CRITIQUE & INTERPRET

Session Two

- **Have students review and reflect upon the lesson. Ask students to share their ideas for a planned community.**
- **Ask students to consider how man-made structures can influence a person’s experience. Can they think of any buildings from their everyday lives that utilize design to influence behavior? How?**