

TOTAL WORK OF ART: WRIGHT AND VIENNA

GRADE: 9-12

TIME: Two 60-minute sessions

Frank Lloyd Wright's guiding philosophy of "organic architecture" was a principle that guided him to create architectural designs as one cohesive piece unique to the site's natural landscape. Wright and his team of artisans envisioned every aspect of his designs from carpeting and furniture to lighting and windows, and even dishware on occasion. This philosophy of organic architecture closely mirrors *gesamtkunstwerk* or "total work of art," a design philosophy popular in Europe during the turn of the 20th Century. In this lesson, students will study Viennese designer Josef Hoffman, a co-founder of the Viennese Secession and *Wiener Werkstätte*, whose work Wright viewed during his trip to Vienna in 1910. Students will examine a criticism of a "total work of art" by analyzing architect Adolf Loos' short story "The Poor Little Rich Man." After comparing Wright's concept of "organic architecture" to the concept of a "total work of art," students will conclude the lesson by creating customized furniture to create their own "total work of art."

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

OBJECTIVES

MATERIALS | RESOURCES

Internet access for independent student research
Note-taking paper
Sketching paper
Printer paper
Pencil
"The Poor Little Rich Man" (Appendix A)
Images of Wright's organic architecture
Wright's Total Work of Art handout (Appendix B)
My Total Work of Art handout (Appendix C)
Post-it notes

1. Understand the term a "total work of art."
2. Compare and contrast Wright's concept of "organic architecture" to a "total work of art."
3. Analyze a historical criticism of the "total work of art" philosophy.
4. Sketch all parts of a room to create one cohesive design.

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

1. What were the goals of the Viennese Succession and the *Wiener Werkstätte*?
2. How are the philosophies of a "total work of art" and "organic design" similar?
3. What parts of interior design fall under an architect's role?
4. What techniques can an architect use to create one "total work of art?"

LESSON PROCEDURE (continued)

EXPLORE

Session One

- Introduce the term “decorative arts,” or objects designed to be both beautiful and useful. Explain that Art Nouveau increased the popularity of the decorative arts, a movement in resistance of the growing industrialization of the late 19th Century. Artists sought to bring “fine art” to common households through decorative arts and elevate the role of craftsmen. This philosophy was embraced by the Viennese Secessionist Movement, a group of Austrian artists who rejected traditional art and encouraged decorative arts and whose style closely mirrored the Art Nouveau movement. The Wiener Werkstätte, or Vienna Workshop, was a cooperative of artists whose goal was to create high-quality artistic designs of everyday utilitarian objects.
- Explain to students that Josef Hoffman was a leading architect in Vienna from the 1890s through the 1910s and it’s highly likely that Wright saw Hoffman’s designs during Wright’s 1910 trip to Vienna. Hoffman sought to create a uniquely Austrian style by designing individually for his client’s tastes and needs. While working with Secessionists and at Wiener Werkstätte, architects worked alongside painters, sculptors and carpenters to develop one united design that included interior objects and furniture.
- Show images of Josef Hoffman’s designs from the Viennese Secession and Wiener Werkstätte. Instruct students to read a biography about Hoffmann’s life and career and explore a sample of his art from the Neue Gallerie’s collection. Students can either conduct this research independently or refer to <https://www.neuegalerie.org/collection/artist-profiles/josef-hoffmann>
- After students have read Hoffman’s biography, discuss students’ findings as a group. Pose the following questions to students:
 - ◇ What was Hoffman’s goal in creating the Wiener Werkstätte? What was Hoffman’s view of an architect’s role? What was innovative about Hoffman’s works? What does the term gesamtkunstwerk or “total work of art” mean?
- Instruct students to select one of Hoffman’s designs from the Neue Gallerie’s website. Distribute sketching paper of any size. Direct students to sketch their chosen design of Hoffman’s on the sheet of paper. After sketching, tell students to answer the following questions on their paper. Is this design beautiful? Is this design useful? Would you use this object if it were in your home? If this object belonged to you, where would you store/display it?

ENGAGE

Session One

- Explain to students that Josef Hoffman and his fellow architects of the Viennese Secession and at Wiener Werkstätte were met with criticism by another popular Viennese modern architect, Adolf Loos. Adolf Loos criticized that focusing on small details of a design wasted an architect’s time, while Hoffman believed it to be innately part of the job of the architect.
- Direct students to read “The Poor Little Rich Man,” (Appendix A), a criticism of the philosophy of a “total work of art,” written in a popular daily Viennese newspaper in 1900.
- After reading, split the class into small groups of 2-4 to discuss the following questions.
 - ◇ Can a work of art also be a livable space? How would it feel to live in a “total work of art”? Would living in a “total work of art” change the way new objects are placed? Do you agree with Adolf Loos? Why or why not? Should architects limit themselves to designing only the building’s exterior? Where does the role of an architect end and the role of an interior designer begin?
- After students have considered the questions in small groups, discuss answers as a class.

LESSON PROCEDURE (continued)

ENGAGE

Session Two

- Introduce the life and work of Frank Lloyd Wright. Tell students that Wright intended to create a uniquely American style of architecture. Direct students to explore Wright's career through the timelines, multimedia resources, and information available on Teaching by Design's website. Instruct students to briefly jot down in their notes the reoccurring design elements, colors, materials, and patterns they notice in Wright's work. After students have had time to explore on their own, discuss what characteristics students noticed in Wright's designs.
- Next, read the page that explains "Organic Design" aloud together, resource from <https://www.teachingbydesign.org/about/organic-design/>. Use this opportunity to review the philosophy of a "total work of art" and ask students to share the similarities and differences between "organic architecture" and a "total work of art."
- Distribute "Wright's Total Work of Art" handout (Appendix B). Ask students what shared themes they see among Wright's designs for the Imperial Hotel.
 - ◇ How do Wright's interior designs relate to the building's exterior? How do the designs relate to the building's geography? What lines, colors, and shapes are shared among the group of furniture? Are Wright's interior designs beautiful? Are Wright's interior designs useful? Would you use these pieces of furniture if they were in your home? **Discuss the same questions for the Dana-Thomas House.**
- Instruct students to sketch another piece of furniture to match Wright's designs of the Imperial Hotel and the Dana-Thomas House on their handout.

DESIGN

Session Two

- Distribute "My Total Work of Art" handout (Appendix C) for students to brainstorm their own design. Instruct students to first select the location of their building and to consider how their building will relate to the landscape of their chosen area. Encourage students to choose locations as imaginatively or realistically as they would like (examples: a new version of their own home, a cabin in the woods, or a space station on the moon.) Then, instruct students to sketch their building's exterior. Next, have students select one room from their building for which they will create their "total work of art." After briefly sketching the room, instruct students to design every aspect of their room by sketching two pieces of furniture, flooring (such as carpeting, tile, or woodwork), a lighting fixture, dishware, and art glass (or a window). Challenge students to design interior furniture that is not only beautiful, but useful as well.
- After students have sketched the elements of their interior design, give students a large sheet of sketching paper for their final design. Instruct students to sketch their room as one cohesive work of art.

CRITIQUE & INTERPRET

Session Two

- Tell students to create an Artist Statement on a half sheet of printer paper that explains why their design is a total work of art. These 5-7 sentences will be displayed alongside each student's art. Encourage students to contemplate the following questions as they write their Artist Statement.

LESSON PROCEDURE *(continued)*

CRITIQUE & INTERPRET

Session Two

- ◇ What inspired your design? How did your building's geography influence your design? How does your chosen room relate to your building's exterior? What kind of room did you select for your design and why? How did you create cohesion among the many parts of your room? What common shapes and/or lines are present in your design? What colors and textures did you choose and why? What elements unite the many parts of your design? Are your interior designs beautiful, useful or both?
- **Display students' art alongside students' Artist Statements. After student art is displayed, distribute 3 Post-it notes to students. Tell students to walk around the room to observe their classmates' work, leaving Post-it notes of positive feedback next to students' art. Encourage students to leave Post-it notes on work that does not yet have any, so that every student can receive feedback.**

"The Poor Little Rich Man"

"Neues Wiener Tagblatt", 26th April 1900

I want to tell you about a poor rich man. He had money and possessions, a faithful wife to kiss away the cares of his daily business, and a gaggle of children to make even the poorest of his workers envious. Everything he laid his hands on thrived, and for this he was loved by his friends. But today, everything is very, very different; and this is how it came about.

One day this man talked to himself: "You have money and possessions, a faithful wife, a gaggle of children to make even the poorest of your workers envious, but are you really happy? You see there are people who have none of the things you are envied for. But their worries are utterly wiped away by a great magician; Art! But what is art to you? You don't even know the name of a single artist. Every snob could drop his business card at the door, and your servant would throw it open for him. Nevertheless, you have not once really received art! I know for sure it won't come. But now I will call on it. It shall be received in my home like a Queen who has come to reside with me."

He was a powerful man, and he carried through with great energy whatever he took on. It was his accustomed way of doing business. And so yet on the same day he went to a renowned interior architect and said: "Bring me art, art under my own roof! Money doesn't matter!"

The architect needn't be told twice. He went to the man's house and immediately threw out all of his furniture. Then he let floorers, lackers, painters, masons, tressilbuilders, carpenters, installers, potters, wallpaper-hangers, and sculpters move in.

You have never seen the likes of the art that was captured and well cared for inside of the four corners of that rich man's home.

The rich man was overjoyed. Overjoyed he went through the new rooms. Art everywhere he looked. Art in everything and anything. When he turned a door handle he grabbed hold of art, when he sank into a chair he sank into art, when he burried his tired bones under the pillows he burrowed into art, his feet sank in art when he walked across the carpet. He indulged himself with outrageous fervour in art. Since his plates were artistically decorated, he cut his boeuf à l'oignon with still more energy.

People praised, and were envious of him. The Art periodicals glorified his name as one of the foremost patrons of the arts. His rooms were used as public examples, studied, described, explained.

But they were worth it. Every room was a complete individual symphony of colour. Walls, furniture, and fabrics were all composed sophisticatedly into perfect harmony which each other. Each appliance had its proper place, and was connected to the others in the most wonderful combinations.

The architect had forgotten nothing, absolutely nothing. Everything from the ashtray and flatware to the candle extinguisher had been combined and matched. It wasn't a common architectural art. In every ornament, in every

form, in every nail was the individuality of the owner to be found. (A psychological work of such complication that it would be clear to anyone.)

The architect modestly refused all honours. He only said: "These rooms are not from me. Over there in the corner stands a statue from Charpentier. Just like anyone else would earn my disgust, if he claimed a room as his design, as soon as he uses one of my door handles, as little as I can claim these rooms as my design." It was nobly, and consequently said. Many carpenters who perhaps used a wallpaper from Walter Crane and nevertheless would want to credit the furniture in the room to themselves because they had created and completed it they were ashamed to the depths of their black souls as they learned about these words.

After flying off at a tangent let us now return to our rich man. I have already told you how overjoyed he was. From now on, he devoted a great deal of his time to studying his dwelling. For everything had to be learned; he saw this soon enough. There was much to be noted. Each appliance had its own definite place. The architect had done his best for him. He had thought of everything in advance. There was a definite place for even the very smallest case, made just especially for it.

The domicile was comfortable, but it was hard mental work. In the first weeks the architect guarded the daily life, so that no mistake could creep in. The rich man put tremendous effort into it. But it still happened, that when he laid down a book without thinking that he shoved it into the pigeonhole for the newspaper. Or he knocked the ashes from his cigar into the groove made for the candleholder. You picked something up and the endless guessing and searching for the right place to return it to began, and sometimes the architect had to look at the blueprints to rediscover the correct place for a box of matches.

Where applied art experiences such a victory, the correlating music can't lag behind. That idea kept the rich man very busy. He made a recommendation to the tramway company to replace the senselessly ringing bells on the trams with the characteristic motif of Parsifal bells. He didn't find any concession there, obviously they weren't ready for such a modern concept. Therefore he was allowed at his own cost, to change the cobblestone in front of his house, so that the carts rolled by in the rhythm of the Radetzky March. Even the electrical bells in his house got new Wagner and Beethoven motifs, and all the competent art critics were full of praise for the man who had opened up the new area of "art as a basic commodity."

One can imagine that all of these improvements would make the man happier.

We can't hide the fact however, that he tried to be home as little as possible. Now and then one needs a break from so much art. Could you live

in an art gallery? Or sitting in "Tristan and Isolt" for months at a time? See! Who could blame him for collecting strength in restaurants, cafés, and from friends and acquaintances to face his own home. He had expected something different. But art requires sacrifice. He sacrificed a lot. It brought tears to his eyes. He thought of all the old things that he held so dear, and that he missed. The big armchair! Everyday his father had taken his afternoon nap in it. The old clock, and the old paintings! Art requires it! Don't cave in!

One time it came to pass that he celebrated his birthday, and his wife and children gave him many gifts. He was very pleased with all his birthday presents, and they brought him much happiness and joy. Soon afterwards the architect returned because of his right to check on the placement of objects, and to answer complicated questions. He entered the room. The prosperous man who had many concerns on his mind came to greet him warmly.

The architect didn't recognize the happiness of the prosperous man, but he had discovered something else, and the colour had run out of his cheeks. "Why would you be wearing those slippers?" He blurted out.

The master of the house looked at his embroidered shoes, and sighed in relief. The shoes were made from the original design of the architect himself. This time he felt guiltless. He answered thoughtfully.

"But Mr Architect! Have you forgotten? You designed these slippers yourself!"

"Certainly!" The architect thundered. "But for the bedroom! With these impossible pieces of colour you are destroying the entire atmosphere. Don't you even realize it?"

The prosperous man took the slippers off immediately, and was pleased as punch that the architect didn't find his socks offensive. They went into the bedroom, where the rich man was allowed to put his shoes back on.

"Yesterday", he timidly began "I celebrated my birthday, and my family gave me tons of gifts. I sent for you so that you could give us advice as to where we should put up all of the things I was given."

The architect's face became visibly longer. Then he let loose:

"How dare you presume to receive presents? Didn't I draw everything up for you? Haven't I taken care of everything? You need nothing more. You are complete!" "But" the rich man replied "I should be allowed to buy things."

"No, you are not allowed, never ever! That's just what I was missing, things, that have not been drawn by me. Haven't I done enough, that I put the Charpentier here for you? The statue that steals all the fame out of my work! No, you are not allowed to buy anything else!"

"But what about when my grandchild brings me something from kindergarten as a gift?"

"You are not allowed to take it!"

The prosperous man was decimated, but he still had not lost. An idea! Yes! An idea!

"And when I want to go to Secession to buy a painting?" He asked triumphantly.









"Then try to hang it somewhere. Don't you see that there isn't any room for anything else? For every painting I have hung here there is a frame on the wall. You can not move anything. Try and fit in a new painting!"

Thereupon a transformation took place within the rich man. The happy man felt suddenly deeply, deeply unhappy, and he saw his future life. No one would be allowed to grant him joy.

He had to pass by the shopping stores of the city, perfect, and complete. Nothing would be created for him ever again, none of his loved ones would be allowed to give him a painting. For him there could be no more painters, no artists, no craftsmen again. He was shut out of future life and its strivings, its developments, and its desires. He felt: Now is the time to learn to walk about with one's own corpse. Indeed! He is finished! He is complete!

WRIGHT'S TOTAL WORK OF ART

Observe how Wright's designs of interior decorative objects relate to the design of the building's exterior and the building's geography. Next, notice the common lines, colors, and shapes shared among the designs. Use the common themes you notice to design another piece of furniture that matches with the other designs to create one "total work of art."

Site	Wright's Interior Designs			Your Interior Design
<p>Imperial Hotel, Tokyo, Japan 1923</p> 	 <p>Chair</p>	 <p>Dishware</p>	 <p>Rug</p>	<p>_____</p>
<p>Dana-Thomas House, Springfield, Illinois, 1904</p> 	 <p>Lamp</p>	 <p>Music Stand</p>	 <p>Art Glass</p>	<p>_____</p>

MY TOTAL WORK OF ART

It's your turn to create your own "total work of art." Choose a location for your building and sketch the building's exterior. Next, pick one room of your design and sketch it below. Then, sketch the interior furniture that belongs in that room to create one cohesive design.

Building Location: <hr/>		My Interior Designs		
Building Exterior				
Room of Choice: <hr/>		Piece of Furniture #1		
Room Interior		Piece of Furniture #2		
		Floor (ex. Carpet, Tiling)		
		Lighting Fixture		
		Dishware		
		Art Glass/Window		