

Lesson 5
Gilded Age in Newport Architecture Introduction
(1880 – 1920)

Subject Areas: “Introduction to Architecture of the Gilded Age”

Buildings are an ordinary part of human life; they are among the most common of human creations. They are taken for granted as is the sky or the ground. Yet, they do not come into being by accident. They are consciously planned, designed, constructed, even demolished for cause. To pause and reflect upon the buildings in one’s community is to consider and reflect upon events and upon the human values that determine the course of events. There are three sets of lessons here to allow a teacher to select the lessons that would best foster reflection for a particular group of learners.

Grade /Group: Grade 5/6

Time Frame: 6 – 10 or more lessons

Objectives:

The students will:

- recognize differences in architectural styles
- infer relations of buildings in Newport to ties between land and people
- make inferences regarding some values of Americans
- become aware of respect for Newport’s architectural heritage and preservation efforts and accomplishments.

NCSS Standards:

- 2 d. identify and use processes important to reconstructing and reinterpreting the past, such as using a variety of sources, providing, validating, and weighing evidence for claims, checking credibility of sources, and searching for causality
- 3 k. propose, compare, and evaluate alternative uses of land and resources in communities, regions, nations and the world
- 4 b. describe personal connections to place—as associated with community, nation, and world

Materials:

See Marble House Mythology and Architecture Program form <http://www.newportmansions.org>

The CD of the Marble House is included in the History Box.

Background Material:

*Facts about the **Marble House**, located in Newport, Rhode Island*

1888 – 1892

Designed by Architect Richard Morris Hunt

Style: **Neoclassical**

Workers: 300 hired from France and Italy

Owner: William K. Vanderbilt (the brother of Cornelius Vanderbilt II) had this summer home built for his wife, Alva, who wanted to be accepted into Newport society; the house was a present for Alva's 39th birthday. The building cost 2 million dollars and the furniture and decorations cost 9 million.

The family crest of the Vanderbilts: the oak leaf and acorn (symbolizing strength and longevity)

Architectural Style

The **Marble House** is **Neoclassical** in style. See packet from *A Field Guide to American Houses* by Virginia and Lee McAlester. This book is included in the History box. The Chapter on Neoclassical style starts on p. 343.

Neoclassical Style: The front of the building or façade is noticeable by a full-height porch (this means the porch is the full height of the building, with a roof (the external upper covering of a building, including the frame for supporting the roofing) supported by classical columns. A column is a rounded pole that holds up the roof of the porch. The columns are often white and at times are the full height of the building. Neoclassical buildings can be one story or one floor or more than one floor.

The façade (p. 24 of the *Visual Dictionary of Architecture*) is the **front** of a building or any of its sides facing a public way or space

A porch is an exterior appendage (or part of a building), forming a covered approach or vestibule (a small entrance hall between the outer door and the interior of a house or building)

Neoclassical style houses can be found in the south west in Texas and Arkansas; in the south in North Carolina, Kentucky, Alabama; in the midwest, such as, Missouri & Kansas, in the eastern United States in Connecticut, Rhode Island, and New York.

Facts about the Breakers, a home located in Newport, Rhode Island

1892 – 1895

The first breakers burned down in 1892. No wood was used in the structure of the 2nd building.

Owner: Cornelius Vanderbilt II

Architect: Richard Morris Hunt.

Mr. Hunt had recently completed the Marble House for Cornelius's brother William. Hunt chose the seaside palaces of Genoa, Italy as his inspiration for the Breakers.

Format: The house is constructed around a central courtyard, to imitate or copy houses from Italy. The ceiling is closed over the central courtyard rather than open to the sky, because of Newport's undependable weather. A court is an area open to the sky and mostly or entirely surrounded by walls or buildings; a courtyard is a court next to or within a building, using enclosed or surrounded by 4 walls.

The Breakers has loggias on both sides on the ground and first floors. A loggia is a porch with walls on 3 sides and no screens. This allows people to enjoy the outside weather.

Style: **Beaux Arts** houses are usually architect-designed landmarks and were built principally in the prosperous urban centers where turn-of-the-century wealth was concentrated: New York, Boston, Washington D.C., St. Louis, and Newport, RI. Most examples of Beaux Arts homes were built before 1915 but the style persisted until the economic depression of the 1930's. This information is borrowed from: *A Field Guide to American Houses* by Virginia and Lee McAlester.

The term Beaux Arts, which is French for Fine Arts, is used to describe the very decorative (fancy!) taste and style of America's industrial barons at the beginning of the 20th century (early 1900's). In those pre-income tax days, great fortunes were proudly displayed in increasingly ornate and (very decorative) and expensive houses. Many were of such a size that they were impossible to maintain in later eras because of taxes and economic recession. Some of these houses are now public museums.

See illustrations for identifying features of **Beaux Arts** homes: (1) very decorative and fancy; (2) wall surfaces with decorative garlands, flower (or floral) patterns, or shields; (2) façade or front of the building sometimes has columns built in (pilasters); (3) arched windows that are decorated with flowers, shields or window crowns; (4) entry porches with roofs supported by classical columns are common (see 3 types of classical columns: Doric, Ionic, and Corinthian). Many models have flat or low-pitched hipped roofs (a roof that has sloping ends and sides on 4 sides) or mansard roofs that slope up (see pictures, a roof having on each side a very steep lower part and a not so steep upper part, both parts are usually sloped); the roofs are usually covered with tiles; dormer windows appear on the on the steep lower slope of the roof (dormers are windows in the roofs)

Architecture Vocabulary

foundation

story—a complete horizontal division of a building, having a continuous floor

horizontal vs. vertical

dormer window

column, 3 general types: Doric, Ionic, or Corinthian

façade

gable roof

gambrel roof

mansard roof

low-pitched hip roof

pilaster—columns that are built right into a façade or wall (don't stand alone as a column)

Neoclassical style

Beaux Arts style

Vocabulary in preparation Marble House Lesson:

Architecture is the science and art of designing and constructing buildings.

Description is when one gives a written or verbal account (report) sharing the details of an event, experience or object.

Function is the specific purpose of something or someplace.

Mood (in terms of experiencing art and architecture) means the feeling the viewer observes in the workspace. For instance, a dimly lit and cold room can be seen as having a sad mood.

Lesson Development

Provide an overview of the features of Victorian Homes: see an organizer for this at this website.

<http://architecture.about.com/gi/dynamic/offsite.htm?site=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.mtsu.edu%2F%7Ethen%2FArchitecture%2Fpage35.html>

Show 3 – 7 examples of one type of home, like the Beaux Arts style. Have the students identify the different types of features that each of the houses seem to have in common—and yet also identify what is different about the homes. (See textual resources for examples. Give the students plenty of opportunity to use the architectural vocabulary.

Small Group Activities

Activity 1 Building Familiarity. Sort/classify the flashcard pictures of different buildings (houses) into three different types: Neoclassical vs. Beaux Arts or Other. Team with the Art Teacher. Have students complete pen and ink sketches of sample houses from the Neoclassical and Beaux Arts types. Label the drawings with key vocabulary. Create a bulletin board to illustrate the styles. Include information commonly used in a visual survey. See forms on website listed below. These common features are: Form, Roof, Features, Materials, Windows, Porches, Entrances/Doors, Columns, Details. What do examples of these houses tell us about the people that lived in them during the Gilded Age? Did these families live in these houses all year around in Newport? What brought them to Newport? Were there folks who lived in Newport all year around? Who might these folks have been? What families commonly did not live in these kinds of houses? Where did they live?

Activity 2: Student Assessment Criteria. Have the students develop the successful criteria for the creation of a bulletin board, powerpoint presentation and class quiz based on these two styles of architecture.

Activity 3: Student Production of Architecture Activities. Have one group find as many pictures and elements of the Beaux Arts style as possible and create an interactive bulletin board with drawings and pictures to illustrate this style. Be sure the bulletin board meets design criteria and then is posted. They can use this for elements to follow during their building lessons. Have this group become an expert on this style. Have students create at least a 5-slide powerpoint to illustrate this style. Have the students create a short quiz for the class based on this style of architecture.

Have a second group find as many pictures and elements of the Neoclassical style as possible and create a bulletin with drawings and pictures to illustrate this style. Be sure the bulletin board meets design criteria and then is posted. Have this group also create at least a 5-slide powerpoint to illustrate this style. Have the students create a short quiz for the class based on this style of architecture. They may use this for elements to follow during their building lessons.

Closure: Ask an architect to come and visit the class (get a recommend speaker from the Preservation Society or ask Jim Garman or Catherine Zipf from the Cultural and Historic Preservation program @ Salve Regina University or call the Newport Historical Society for suggestions). Who are some of the architects who have and are now living and/or working in Rhode Island? What can you find out about them and their work? What is an architect? What is the difference between a carpenter and an architect? Where did architects and /or carpenters get their ideas in the past? Where do they get them now? Ask the Architect to explain differences between the Beaux Arts style and the Neoclassical styles. Share the powerpoint presentations and bulletin boards with the Architects and another class or invite parents and share at the end of the unit. Or, have the Historical Society and/or Preservation Society come for a class visit. Find out what these people have done and are doing.

Follow-Up Activities:

Some buildings are quite plain, others have some decoration, and some are ornate. Have students develop criteria for determining simple, decorated and ornate. Make three groups: simple, decorated, ornate. Why would people make simple buildings, why would they decorate and why would they make them ornate?

Student Assessment: Scores from student designed quizzes; successful completion of bulletin board and powerpoints.

On-line Web Resources

The following website has the MOST incredible online pictorial architecture drawings: EXCELLENT.... See next line

<http://architecture.about.com/gi/dynamic/offsite.htm?site=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.mtsu.edu%2F%7Ethen%2FArchitecture%2Fpage35.html>

For visual survey worksheets:

The visual survey forms were designed by Maurie Van Buren, and are used with her permission. The survey forms may be downloaded and reproduced for classroom use, but may not be reproduced for commercial sale or publication. They are a part of *Heritage Education: The Story of American Homes*, an instructional unit of slides and information, designed for educators.

<http://architecture.about.com/gi/dynamic/offsite.htm?site=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.mtsu.edu%2F%7Ethen%2FArchitecture%2Fpage35.html>

Follow-up Activities

A lesson plan for Architecture and Nature: building bird houses for nesting birds

<http://artsedge.kennedy-center.org/content/2003/>

Other Architecture lesson plans:

<http://www.hsv.k12.al.us/schools/art/dixon/architecture.htm#My%20House>