

Teachers Guide

# GRADES NINTH - TWELFTH



Frank Lloyd Wright Samara: A Mid-Century Dream Home | February 9th -April 21st, 2015

# INTRODUCTION

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“A BUILDING IS NOT  
JUST A PLACE TO BE.  
IT IS A WAY TO BE.”

-FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT





# Frank Lloyd Wright: the First Green Architect?

### Materials:

Internet and computer access  
A Brief Biography handout (attached)  
Sustainable Architecture and Samara worksheet  
(attached, for field trip)

### Objectives:

Students will gain an understanding of basic architectural terms as they apply to Frank Lloyd Wright. Students will gain an understanding four elements of sustainable architecture. Students will utilize technology and information-sharing systems to express views and accumulate sources.

### Student Instruction:

1. Inform your students that your class will be visiting an exhibit at your local museum called *Frank Lloyd Wright's Samara: A Mid-Century Dream Home*. Ask your students if they can predict the subject matter of the exhibit based on its title.
2. Divide students into 4 or 5 groups. Pass out a copy of the attached "Frank Lloyd Wright: A Brief Biography" for students to read. After students have read the piece, draw their attention to terms in boldface. Each individual student will conduct an internet search for the boldfaced terms. They will individually create a document that lists the meanings or gives and explanation of all boldfaced terms, running vertically down the paper with 5-6 spaces in between each term. They may wish to cut and paste images as well.
3. Students will then gather in their small groups and engage in consensus building, with the final product being a group-generated definition or explanation of each concept.

## PRE-VISIT LESSON PLAN

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4. Bring the entire class back together to review the terms. Request that student group leaders/spokespersons volunteer the information they garnered from their collective web searches. Ensure that they have covered the following critical learning points:

**Form and Function:** Organic architecture meant respecting the function of a building (a bank, for instance) through its form (design). For instance, Wright denounced making a bank look like a Greek Temple or twisting steel look like a flower. There should be a harmonious link between the purpose of a structure and how it is designed.

**Organic Architecture:** Although the word “organic” in common usage refers to something which has the characteristics of animals or plants, Frank Lloyd Wright’s organic architecture takes on a new meaning. It is not a style of imitation, because he did not claim to be building forms which were representative of nature. Instead, organic architecture is that which “grows from nature” and in doing so a building is created that *“makes the landscape more beautiful than it was before the building was built.”*

**Site:** the physical place where a building is constructed. Working in harmony with the site was critical to Frank Lloyd Wright, illustrated when he said, *“Architecture that belonged where you see it standing — and is a grace to the landscape instead of a disgrace”*

**Native Materials:** Building materials that are “native” (found abundant and growing) within close proximity to the construction site.

5. Finally, hold a class discussion (or go back to small groups) that begins with the question: *“What do these terms have to do with green architecture?”* Dig deeper with the question: *“Do you think that Frank Lloyd Wright was America’s first ‘green’ architect? Why or why not?”*

6. This question will be explored further during their visit to the exhibit and as they fill out the accompanying field trip worksheet.

# Frank Lloyd Wright

## A Brief Biography

Frank Lloyd Wright was born in Richland Center, Wisconsin, on June 8, 1867, and died in Phoenix, Arizona, on April 9, 1959, at the age of 91. Those early years in the Wisconsin countryside had a profound effect on Wright: “As a boy,” he wrote in his autobiography, “I learned to know the ground plan of the region in every line and feature. For me now its elevation is the modeling of the hills, the weaving and fabric that clings to them, the look of it all in tender green or covered with snow or in full glow of summer that bursts into the glorious blaze of autumn. I still feel myself as much a part of it as the trees and birds and bees are, and the red barns.”

In 1887 Wright left Madison for Chicago. In 1888 he took a drafting job with the firm of Adler and Sullivan where he worked directly under Louis Sullivan for six years. Sullivan was one of the few influences Wright ever acknowledged. Sullivan, known for his integrated ornamentation based on natural themes, developed the maxim “Form Follows Function” which Wright later revised to “Form and Function Are One.”

Wright believed that architecture should create a natural link between mankind and his environment. “Organic architecture” as Wright came to call his work, should reflect the individual needs of the client, the nature of the site, and the native materials available. Some of Wright’s most notable designs during this period were for “Prairie Houses.” These houses reflected the long, low horizontal prairie on which they sat. They had low pitched roofs, deep overhangs, no attics or basements, and generally long rows of casement windows that further emphasized the horizontal theme. He used native materials and the woodwork was stained, never painted, to bring out its natural beauty. This was his first effort at creating a new, indigenous American architecture. Other Chicago architects were also working in this same manner and the movement became known as “The Prairie School.”

In the last decades of his career Wright received many awards, titles, medals, and citations. He continued to write, producing *The Natural House* in 1954. This book discussed the Usonian home and a new concept called the “Usonian Automatic,” a house that could be owner built. In 1955, the University of Wisconsin conferred an honorary Doctorate of Fine Arts degree on Wright.

Of the more than 1100 projects Wright had designed during his lifetime, nearly one-third were created during the last decade of his life. Wright had an astounding capacity for self-renewal and was tireless in his efforts to create an architecture that was truly American. Through his work, his writings, and the hundreds of apprentice architects that trained at his side his ideas have been spread throughout the world.

Taken in part from: <http://www.franklloydwright.org/web/Biography.html>

# Sustainable Architecture and Samara Field Trip Worksheet

Describe the building site for Samara.

Was the house constructed in a way that complemented the natural landscape?

Explain the relationship between form and function as it applies to Samara:

List some of the building materials used in Samara. Were they native to the region?

Rate Samara as a “green” structure:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Not green at all				Somewhat green				Very green	



# Are you the Wright Architect?

## Materials:

Computer access  
Student's choice of recycled materials

## Objectives:

Students will gain an understanding of sustainable architecture and how it was applied by Frank Lloyd Wright. Students will engage in the creative process to engineer a model green building. Students will engage in effective written communication to present research findings and knowledge.

## Student Instruction:

1. Remind your students of their recent visit to the local museum to see the exhibit *Frank Lloyd Wright's Samara: A Mid-Century Dream Home*.
2. Begin discussing how students rated Samara as a "green" structure. Take an informal poll on the board and have students calculate the average rating. Inquire as to whether this number would change if we were living in the mid 1950s, when Samara was built. Are we applying contemporary standards to green architecture? Was there such thing as sustainable architecture in the 1950s?
3. Inform students that they will be designing a green/sustainable Usonian building fit for living in the 21st century in their community. Students should apply the same principles to their design as Frank Lloyd Wright did: organic architecture, form and function, native materials, designing in harmony with the natural features of the site. They may also choose to incorporate contemporary facets of sustainable architecture into their design.

## POST-VISIT LESSON PLAN

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4. They will create their 21st century Usonian home by reusing, restructuring, repurposing or recycling everyday objects (examples: bottle caps, straws, aluminum cans, batteries, corks, etc.). A cardboard platform can serve as the base, but students should account for undulations in landscape as well natural features in their design.

5. An accompanying paper should address each of the following points:

Description of the building site and how the home will be incorporated into the site.

Description of how the house will interpret the nature surrounding it.

The relationship between form and function

A description of building materials and why they are sustainable

A cost estimate. Could the average American afford this house in the 21st century?