



# Curating the City: Wilshire Blvd.

## Lesson 7: How Do Current Events Affect Culture?

### What You Need to Know:

- Grade Level: High School 9-12
- Curriculum Connections: English—Language Arts, History—Social Science
- Kids' Guide Correlation: Use this lesson in conjunction with pages 10, 14-15 of the Guide. As students learn about Art Deco and Streamline Moderne buildings in Wilshire Center and along Miracle Mile, use their activity to lead students to a deeper understanding of how historical events affect various aspects of popular culture. You can modify this activity to have students explore buildings from the 1920s and 1930s that are found in other neighborhoods.
- Website Correlation: Go to [laconservancy.org/wilshire](http://laconservancy.org/wilshire). Under “Explore Wilshire Blvd.,” use the “Architectural Style” filter to find images of Art Deco and Streamline Moderne buildings to compare. Specifically, compare the photos of Bullocks Wilshire/Southwestern Law School and May Co./LACMA West.

### Focus Questions:

- How did the financial boom of the Roaring Twenties affect ways that businesses and designers approached architectural style?
- How did the Great Depression of the 1930s affect architectural style?

### Expected Learning Outcomes:

- Students will be able to identify the connection between Art Deco and the prosperity of the 1920s.
- Students will be able to identify the connection between Streamline Moderne and the Depression of the 1930s.

### Assessment:

Write an essay explaining how the architecture of the 1920s and 1930s reflected major historical events.

### Essential Vocabulary:

- Roaring Twenties
- Stock Market
- Prosperity
- Great Depression
- Black Tuesday

### Materials:

- Lesson 7 worksheet



- Paper
- Pencils
- Internet resources

## Procedure

### Motivation:

Display pictures of the Bullocks Wilshire building (now part of the Southwestern Law School campus) and the May Co. building (now part of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art). Invite students to describe the characteristics that make each building unique. Tell students that Bullocks Wilshire/Southwestern Law School is an Art Deco building built in the late 1920s and that May Co./LACMA is a Streamline Moderne building built in the late 1930s. Tell the class that they will be exploring how each architectural style reflects what was going on in the United States during those two decades.

### Making Connections:

What do students already know about the Roaring Twenties and the Great Depression? Invite students to share their knowledge about major historical events, key people, and popular culture during this time period. As the discussion proceeds, write students' ideas on the board.

### Guided Instruction:

1. Distribute the Lesson 7 worksheet and direct students to read the passage silently. Review the key points and make sure that students understand the meanings of the terms Roaring Twenties, stock market, prosperity, Great Depression, and Black Tuesday.
2. Print out images from the internet resources on the worksheet, and display photos of Art Deco buildings from the 1920s. Ask students to think about how architecture in the 1920s reflected the nation's sense of optimism and prosperity. If corporations and individuals felt wealthy, how would that affect the decisions they made in designing buildings and choosing materials? Given the mood of the country, why would vertical lines and tall buildings be popular? Why vivid colors and expensive materials?
3. Now print out and display photos of Streamline Moderne buildings from the 1930s. How do these structures have a different look and "feel" from the Art Deco buildings? Challenge students to identify the architectural elements that reflect the sense that Americans were concerned about making ends meet and that resources were no longer as plentiful. Why would architects in the 1930s focus on low buildings with many horizontal lines?
4. Have students continue their study of architecture from the 1920s and 1930s by exploring additional websites. Have students visit the websites listed on the worksheet and answer the accompanying questions. Then direct students to pick two buildings – one Art Deco, the other Streamline Moderne – and write a detailed essay comparing and contrasting the two.



**Assessment:**

Have students write a comparative essay reflecting on how specific buildings from the 1920s and 1930s are similar and different.

**Reflection/Critical Thinking:**

1. Why do you think preservationists care about saving buildings in the Art Deco and Streamline Moderne styles? What makes these buildings unique? What do they tell us about our history? What would we lose if these buildings were gone?
2. How do you think today's architecture, fashion, and music reflect our sense of current events?
3. Can you find buildings from the 1920s and 1930s to compare in your own area? How do they compare to the buildings on Wilshire and on the websites?

**Enrichment Opportunities:**

1. Challenge students to extend their exploration of current events and popular culture to other decades. Have students work in small groups to look at current events, architecture, music, and fashion of the 1940s, 1950s, 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s.
2. Invite students to do individual biographical research of key Americans of the 1920s and 1930s, such as Cab Calloway, Clarence Darrow, Zora Neale Hurston, and Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Direct students to explore each individual's impact on historical events and popular culture.
3. Challenge students to find a popular song from the 1920s or 1930s and write a brief essay reflecting on how its lyrics relate to the current events of the period.
4. Have students work in groups to learn more about Prohibition. Encourage them to explore the issues surrounding Prohibition, its effect on American culture during the 1920s, and reasons behind its repeal in the 1930s.

**Worksheet Answers:**

Responses will vary.

**California Standards:**

English—Language Arts (Reading):

9&10.2.0 Reading Comprehension

9&10.2.3 Generate relevant questions about readings on issues that can be researched.

9&10.2.5 Extend ideas presented in primary or secondary sources through original analysis, evaluation, and elaboration.

11&12.2.3 Verify and clarify facts presented in other types of expository texts by using a variety of consumer, workplace, and public documents.

English—Language Arts (Writing):

9&10.1.0 Students write coherent and focused essays that convey a well-defined perspective and tightly reasoned argument. The writing demonstrates students' awareness of the audience and purpose.



Students progress through the stages of the writing process as needed.

- 9&10.1.1 Establish a controlling impression or coherent thesis that conveys a clear and distinctive perspective on the subject and maintain a consistent tone and focus throughout the piece of writing.
- 9&10.1.2 Use precise language, action verbs, sensory details, appropriate modifiers, and the active rather than the passive voice.
- 9&10.1.3 Use clear research questions and suitable research methods (e.g., library, electronic media, personal interview) to elicit and present evidence from primary and secondary sources.
- 9&10.1.4 Develop the main ideas within the body of the composition through supporting evidence (e.g., scenarios, commonly held beliefs, hypotheses, definitions).
- 9&10.1.5 Synthesize information from multiple sources and identify complexities and discrepancies in the information and the different perspectives found in each medium (e.g., almanacs, microfiche, news sources, in-depth field studies, speeches, journals, technical documents).
- 9&10.2.3 Write expository compositions, including analytical essays and research reports:
  - a. Marshal evidence in support of a thesis and related claims, including information on all relevant perspectives.
  - b. Convey information and ideas from primary and secondary sources accurately and coherently.
  - c. Make distinctions between the relative value and significance of specific data, facts, and ideas.
- 11&12.1.3 Structure ideas and arguments in a sustained, persuasive, and sophisticated way and support them with precise and relevant examples.
- 11&12.1.6 Develop presentations by using clear research questions and creative and critical research strategies (e.g., field studies, oral histories, interviews, experiments, electronic sources).
- 11&12.2.4 Write historical investigation reports:
  - a. Use exposition, narration, description, argumentation, or some combination of rhetorical strategies to support the main proposition.
  - b. Analyze several historical records of a single event, examining critical relationships between elements of the research topic.



- c. Explain the perceived reason or reasons for the similarities and differences in historical records with information derived from primary and secondary sources to support or enhance the presentation.
- d. Include information from all relevant perspectives and take into consideration the validity and reliability of sources.

History—Social Science:

- 11.5.0 Students analyze the major political, social, economic, technological, and cultural developments of the 1920s.
- 11.5.7 Discuss the rise of mass production techniques, the growth of cities, the impact of new technologies (e.g., the automobile, electricity), and the resulting prosperity and effect on the American landscape.
- 11.6.0 Students analyze the different explanations for the Great Depression and how the New Deal fundamentally changed the role of the federal government.
- 11.6.1 Describe the monetary issues of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that gave rise to the establishment of the Federal Reserve and the weaknesses in key sectors of the economy in the late 1920s.



## Student Worksheet

Name \_\_\_\_\_

The 1920s in America are known as the Roaring Twenties, with good reason. It was a decade of energy and optimism. World War I had just ended, and Americans saw an endless road of progress and wealth ahead.

Corporations built skyscrapers and opened new factories. More people could benefit from the economic growth by investing their money in the stock market. Investors saw unheard-of profits, and as a result, Americans had more money than ever before to spend on things they wanted instead of just needed. Some people could afford to buy cars, new radios, and new clothes. They had money to spend on new forms of entertainment, such as movies and records. The 1920s became all about enjoying the fruits of prosperity.

But it wasn't long before the good-time feeling of the 1920s was no longer. While some believed that the prosperity would certainly go on forever, others worried that it was bound to come to a crashing halt.

Those people were right. On October 29, 1929, the stock market crashed. This day became known as "Black Tuesday" as people across the nation watched the value of their stocks and bonds plummet. People who had invested their entire life savings in the stock market lost everything. Other people lost their jobs and their means of earning a living. The Great Depression had begun.

It was a bleak time. Factories, businesses, and banks closed their doors. Unemployment rose. At the height of the Depression, one in four people was out of work. The economic mess was compounded by a blistering drought that ruined crops across the Midwest. Farmers couldn't afford to pay their mortgages, and they lost their farms. Across the country, people were displaced, hungry, and despondent. Americans struggled to survive, and the good times of the Roaring Twenties were a thing of the past. People could no longer afford glamorous clothes or expensive luxury items; instead, for many families, each day was all about survival. And it wasn't until President Franklin D. Roosevelt ushered in the New Deal policies of the mid-1930s that things began to change for the better.

From our vantage point many decades later, it's easy to see the contrasts between the two decades in many aspects of American culture, such as music and fashion. This contrast can also be seen in the architecture of the 1920s, 1930s, and, in the aftermath of the Crash, of the 1940s. Many buildings from the Roaring Twenties reflect optimism and prosperity in the "machine age" of the car, the train, and the plane. Some were built in the Art Deco style and featured soaring vertical lines, expensive materials, and ornate decorations. In contrast, many buildings from the 1930s and early 1940s were more subdued and reflected the country's more cautious and reserved approach to spending money. Some buildings from the 1930s and 1940s were constructed in the Streamline Moderne style. These buildings used less expensive materials and had simpler decoration. With horizontal lines that set the structures low to the ground and designed as if to speed through time and space (like a bullet-shaped train or car), Streamline buildings of the 1930s suggested a feeling of stability, dependability, and ability to reach forward into a better era.



## Explore the Internet

Use the Curating the City: Wilshire Blvd. microsite to explore architecture of the 1920s and 1930s:

### Curating the City: Wilshire Blvd.

[laconservancy.org/wilshire](http://laconservancy.org/wilshire)

Go to “Explore Wilshire Blvd.” and filter by “Architectural Style” to find Art Deco and Streamline Moderne buildings along Wilshire.

What details did you observe about architecture in the 1920s? Consider elements such as size, shape, materials, and ornamentation.

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What details did you observe about architecture in the 1930s? Consider elements such as size, shape, materials, and ornamentation.

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How might the Great Depression have influenced architects and the people who hired them to construct buildings?

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## Write an Essay

Choose two buildings from your explorations – one from the late 1920s and one from the late 1930s. Use the questions in the “How to Look” tips (see the Kids’ Guide, page 5) to take some notes and make some comparisons. Write a thoughtful essay that shows their similarities and differences.