



Curating the City: Wilshire Blvd.

Lesson 8: Form and Function: The Darkroom (5370 Wilshire)

What You Need to Know:

- Grade Level: All levels
- Curriculum Connections: English—Language Arts, Visual Art
- Kids' Guide Correlation: Use this lesson in conjunction with pages 15 of the Guide. As students explore the Darkroom, use this activity to help them understand the nature of a particular style of roadside architecture called “programmatic” and how form and function come together in some unusual buildings. You can modify this activity to explore other examples of roadside architecture in your own community.
- Website Correlation: Go to laconservancy.org/wilshire. Under “Explore Wilshire Blvd.,” find the page for The Darkroom for photos and background information.

Focus Questions:

- What is roadside architecture?
- What does “programmatic” mean as a description of roadside architecture?
- Why do some architects design a building to reveal its function?
- How are some examples of roadside architecture similar and different?

Expected Learning Outcomes:

- Students will be able to define programmatic and roadside architecture.
- Students will be able to identify how some buildings reveal their purposes and explain why architects might design a building to serve as an advertisement.
- Students will be able to express how the car and marketing had an impact on architecture, design, and urban development.

Assessment:

Draw a design for a building whose form reveals its function, and write a descriptive paragraph about it.

Essential Vocabulary:

- Roadside Architecture
- Programmatic Architecture

Materials:

- Lesson 8 worksheet
- poster paper



- paper
- colored pencils and markers
- pencils

Procedure

Motivation:

Display a photograph of the Darkroom. Ask students to discuss what they think the building looks like. What architectural details make it look like a camera? Have students guess what the function of the building is. Make sure they understand that the Darkroom was designed as a camera shop. Write the phrases roadside and programmatic architecture on the board. Tell students that they will be learning the meaning of these phrases and exploring how buildings can be designed to show their functions.

Making Connections:

Ask students if they have ever seen buildings that look like other objects. Invite them to share their experiences, and encourage them to be specific about the visual details that gave these buildings their unique appearance. Ask them to talk about their responses to these buildings – how did these “odd” buildings make them feel?

Guided Instruction:

1. Help students understand the definitions of roadside and programmatic architecture. Tell them that roadside architecture was aimed to be eye-catching, and that programmatic refers to buildings that are designed to look like their products. You can also point out that this architectural style is sometimes called mimetic architecture.
2. Distribute the Lesson 8 worksheet. Have the students read the passage silently. Review key facts to assess their comprehension.
3. Ask: Why would someone choose to design a building that looks like what it sells? What are the benefits? Students should be able to explain that the whimsical nature of the buildings might be appealing to customers and draw them in; buildings created in this style serve as great advertisements and also give prospective customers a lot of information about the product.
4. Remind students that most structures built in this style appeared along early highways. Ask: Why would business owners choose to put these buildings along new highways? Students should be able to explain that in the new era of the automobile, business owners were looking for innovative ways to get customers out of their cars and into their stores.
5. Have students explore the Internet for examples of roadside and programmatic architecture. Invite them to visit the websites listed on the worksheet. Have them guess what the purpose of each building is and identify the design details that provided the clues.
6. Challenge students to design their own roadside buildings. Direct them to



use the worksheet to plan their ideas. Have them draw their designs onto poster paper and write an accompanying paragraph to explain the purpose and characteristics of the building.

Assessment:

Have students design their own roadside buildings and write an accompanying paragraph to explain how the details on the exterior reveal the building's purpose.

Reflection/Critical Thinking:

1. What other examples of modern-day roadside architecture can you name?
2. Many businesses whose buildings reflect their purpose (who employ mimetic design) have closed their doors in recent years. What should be done with these buildings? Why is it important to preserve them? Write a proposal for how you might preserve or adapt a roadside structure.
3. As multi-lane freeways developed across America, roadside architecture became less popular. Why do you think this occurred?

Enrichment Opportunities:

1. Share the book *Buildings in Disguise: Architecture That Looks Like Food, Animals, and Other Things* by Joan Marie Arbogast (Boyd's Mill Press, 2004). This delightful book provides numerous other examples of roadside architecture and may serve as inspiration for your students.
2. Encourage students to do additional research on the rise of highways in the United States. Divide the class into small groups, and challenge each group to find out more about Route 66 and its impact on the growth of the Midwest and West Coast.
3. The popularity of roadside architecture corresponded to the increasing importance of the automobile in American life. Have students find out more about classic American automobiles of the 1940s and 1950s.

Worksheet Answers:

Design Your Own: Answers will vary.

California Standards:

English Language Arts (Reading):

- 3.2.3 Demonstrate comprehension by identifying answers in the text.
- 3.2.4 Recall major points in the text and make and modify predictions about forthcoming information.
- 3.2.6 Extract appropriate and significant information from the text, including problems and solutions.
- 4.2.3 Make and confirm predictions about text by using prior knowledge and ideas presented in the text itself, including illustrations, titles, topic sentences, important words, and foreshadowing clues.
- 5.2.3 Discern main ideas and concepts presented in texts, identifying and assessing evidence that supports those ideas.
- 5.2.4 Draw inferences, conclusions, or generalizations about text and support them with textual evidence and prior knowledge. 2.1.1 Measure



the length of objects by iterating (repeating) a nonstandard or standard unit.

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):

2.1.0 Students write clear and coherent sentences and paragraphs that develop a central idea. Their writing shows they consider the audience and purpose. Students progress through the stages of the writing process (e.g., prewriting, drafting, revising, editing successive versions).

2.1.1 Group related ideas and maintain a consistent focus.

3.2.2 Write descriptions that use concrete sensory details to present and support unified impressions of people, places, things, or experiences.

4.2.1 Write narratives:

- Relate ideas, observations, or recollections of an event or experience.
- Provide a context to enable the reader to imagine the world of the event or experience.
- Use concrete sensory details.
- Provide insight into why the selected event or experience is memorable.

5.2.4 Write persuasive letters or compositions:

- State a clear position in support of a proposal.
- Support a position with relevant evidence.
- Follow a simple organizational pattern.
- Address reader concerns.

6.2.2 Write expository compositions (e.g., description, explanation, comparison and contrast, problem and solution):

- State the thesis or purpose.
- Explain the situation.
- Follow an organizational pattern appropriate to the type of composition.
- Offer persuasive evidence to validate arguments and conclusions as



needed.

7.2.4 Write persuasive compositions:

- a. State a clear position or perspective in support of a proposition or proposal.
- b. Describe the points in support of the proposition, employing well-articulated evidence.
- c. Anticipate and address reader concerns and counterarguments.

8.2.1 Write biographies, autobiographies, short stories, or narratives:

- a. Relate a clear, coherent incident, event, or situation by using well-chosen details.
 - b. Reveal the significance of, or the writer's attitude about, the subject.
- Mathematics (Mathematical Reasoning):

9&10.1.2 Use precise language, action verbs, sensory details, appropriate modifiers, and the active rather than the passive voice.

9&10.2.6a. Report information and convey ideas logically and correctly.

11&12.1.3 Structure ideas and arguments in a sustained, persuasive, and sophisticated way and support them with precise and relevant examples.

Visual Art:

3.5.4 Describe how artists (e.g., architects, book illustrators, muralists, industrial designers) have affected people's lives.

4.2.6 Use perspective in an original work of art to create a real or imaginary scene.

4.2.7 Communicate values, opinions, or personal insights through an original work of art.

5.3.3 Identify and compare works of art from various regions of the United States.

5.3.4 View selected works of art from a major culture and observe changes in materials and styles over a period of time.

6.3.1 Research and discuss the role of the visual arts in selected variety of resources (both print and electronic).

6.3.2 View selected works of art from a culture and describe how they have changed or not changed in theme and content over a period of time.

6.2.5 Interpret reality and fantasy in original two-dimensional and three-dimensional works of art.

7.3.2 Compare and contrast works of art from various periods, styles, and



cultures and explain how those works reflect the society in which they were made.

- 7.4.1 Explain the intent of a personal work of art and draw the work of a recognized artist.
- 7.4.2 Analyze the form (how a work of art looks) and content (what a work of art communicates) of works of art.
- 8.2.7 Design a work of public art appropriate to and reflecting a location.
- 9-12.2.1 Solve a visual arts problem that involves the effective use of principles of design.
- 9-12.2.5 Use innovative visual metaphors in creating works of art.
- 9-12.3.1 Identify contemporary styles and discuss the diverse social, economic, developments reflected in the works of art examined.



The Darkroom
(Photo by Tim Street-Porter)



Student Worksheet

Name _____



The Darkroom in 2005 (Photo by Tim Street-Porter)

With a name like “The Darkroom,” it’s pretty clear what this store sold. Take a look at the front of the store, and it’s a dead giveaway! This building is from 1926, but in 1938 the owners redesigned the front of the store to look like a camera, down to all the knobs and buttons. A fun design like this was a sure way to get those car-driving shoppers to pull over for a second look.

The Darkroom is a great example of roadside architecture. This building is also an example of programmatic architecture, which describes buildings that are designed to look like what they sell or that use an easily understandable shape to display something about the purpose or the name of the business within. Imagine a hot dog stand shaped like a hot dog, for example, or a library shaped like a book. That’s programmatic architecture. The fact that these fanciful buildings became popular as car travel became popular explains why they are examples of roadside architecture.

From about the 1930s to 1950s, roadside architecture was very popular in the United States. All along the roadsides of America, you could find unusual buildings that drew motorists in with their wacky designs and humorous shapes. These buildings not only did a great job of showing drivers what they sold – they were also effective advertisements!

Los Angeles was among the first cities to be built up with the automobile in mind. As a result, L.A. was unique with its large number of buildings featuring roadside architecture. At one time in L.A., you could find a lemonade stand shaped like a lemon and a coffee shop shaped like a coffee pot.

Many of these unusual buildings are gone now, but some people are working hard to save the ones that are left. They are a keen reminder of how the car and advertising both have helped to shape our city.



Design Your Own

Now it's your turn to design a building in the roadside architectural style. Create a detailed color design on a piece of poster paper, and write a paragraph that explains the name and purpose of your building as well as the details that make it special. Use the questions below to help you plan your structure.

1. What kind of business is this building for? What product does it sell?

2. What special details will your building include?

3. What words will be visible on your building?

4. How do you want motorists to feel when they see your building?
