

**Revised March 2012**

**FAMOUS ARTISTS SERIES: FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT (1867-1959)**  
Architecture

**Supplies needed:**

- \* Framed image of Coonley Window from art gallery and framed image of Robie House stored in the Art Closet
- \* Copies of “floor plan” for each student, master in supply box
- \* Copies of Coonley Window for each student, master in supply box
- \* ½ sheet transparency plastic for each student from supply box
- \* Laminated postcards and prints of examples of work from supply box (9 total)
- \* Students will need their ruler, a pencil and black and colored sharpies from supply box
- \* White paper from teacher’s workroom, cut to fit transparency
- \* Project sample
- \* **Wright**, by Pfeiffer in the supply box for reference

**Reference Books**

- \* Frank Lloyd Wright for Kids Thorne-Thomsen J720.92WRI
- \* Frank Lloyd Wright Force of Nature Nash J720.92WRI
- \* Frank Lloyd Wright – American Architect for the 20<sup>th</sup> Century Sommer 720.92 (oversized)
- \* Light Screens, The Leaded Glass of Frank Lloyd Wright, Julie Sloan 748.591
- \* Frank Lloyd Wright, Architect, Robert McCarter Q720.924

***AHEAD OF TIME NOTE: Third grade curriculum includes a unit in mid-Spring on Chicago – it might be appropriate to time this presentation with that unit. Cut transparency plastic sheets in half. Please make copies of the master “floor plan” and the “Coonley window” for each student on the copy machine in the teachers’ workroom. Please make copies of the master “Famous Artist Series” letter to hand out to students.***

Frank Lloyd Wright was born in rural Wisconsin in 1867. As an adult, he said that playing with “Froebles blocks” as a child had the most impact on his decision to become an architect. Frank Lloyd Wright came to Chicago in 1887 when he was 20 years old with \$7 in his pocket. He wanted to be an architect.

***Show students laminated picture of Wright as an older man.***

***Does any one know what an “architect” is? What would make an “architect” an “artist”? Discuss with students the ideas of buildings being built purely for “function” like a school versus someone being hired to do something “different” – Wright’s works were always remarkable because they were revolutionary at their time, some still are.***

Wright began his career as an employee at an architecture firm in Chicago. Typically, employees must design houses or buildings for clients in the same style their employer used. Wright worked for a famous architect at the turn of the century called Louis Sullivan. One of Sullivan’s buildings you may have seen is the Carson Pirie Scott store in downtown Chicago.

Wright liked the ideas put forth by the Aesthetic Movement that felt nature was the source of inspiration for architecture. In 1893 Wright went to the World’s Colombian Exposition in Chicago and was profoundly affected by the Japanese Pavilion exhibition. After that time, Wright traveled to Japan a number of times and had commissions in Japan later in his career. Wright said that the Japanese prints he loved influenced his architecture by teaching him to “eliminate the insignificant”.

In 1890 he built a home for his family in Oak Park, IL – a property that is now a museum you can visit. His home was very unusual for the time, and neighbors began to ask him to design houses for them. At that point Wright began his own architectural firm, based on the ideas of his home – the “Prairie House”.

***Show the students the laminated comparison of the Prairie Home versus the Victorian style. Discuss what is different about the two houses. Show pictures of Wright’s Studio and Robie House as well as laminated examples to pass around to students. Also show the “Prairie House” ad poster as you describe the following:***

The Prairie House is a Midwestern form of architecture, which reflects the earthen colors and flat horizon of the Illinois landscape. The floor plan is called “cruciform” (shaped like a cross) with a central imposing fireplace of stone or brick. The house had an emphasis on long, low horizontal lines and a “hipped” roof (4-sided sloping roof) often projecting (overhanging) far out from the main house. The inside of the home was also unusual as Wright liked the idea of rooms opening into each other in an “open” floor plan (versus lots of rooms with doors). Wright was designing open floor plans 100 years ago; many houses today use the idea of an open floor plan with kitchens opening into family rooms.

**Pass out copies of the “floor plan” of Robie House. Discuss with the students how the rooms flow together. Go over the architectural symbols.**

Wright built the Robie house for a wealthy Chicago businessman who liked the idea of an “open” house in the midst of the city of Chicago.

Wright’s clients often got a bit more than they bargained for as Wright would often design furniture, light fixtures, wall hangings, rugs and even dishes and clothing for the home! In one famous example an exasperated woman finally drew the line on what she would tolerate when Wright insisted she wear clothing he designed at a dinner party the family was hosting! While Wright was notoriously picky, his intention was to unite all the elements of his structure – including the homeowners!

Wright’s career coincided with innovations in the strength of structural steel which is necessary to build many buildings – used at that time for building the new steel skyscrapers. However, Wright adapted the steel to his house designs, which allowed him to open up the building by no longer relying on the walls to bear the weight of the structure. With steel beams in the ceilings, Wright was able to “cantilever” floors, terraces, roofs out over the main structure. It also enabled him to use large windows – “glass curtains” to open the home up to the natural environment outside. Windows were important to Wright – he liked to design small dark spaces with low ceilings, which would open suddenly by a large stained glass wall or window. Wright is famous for the many “stained glass” designs in his buildings.

**Present framed print of Coonley window.**

In 1907 a rich heir to an industrial fortune named Avery Coonley commissioned Wright to build a house in Riverside, IL. He had an unlimited budget. After the house was finished (now a historical landmark) he asked Wright to design a playhouse where his wife could teach kindergarten. The playhouse included many wonderful stained glass windows. In order to preserve the windows, they are now owned by several museums around the country including the Art Institute of Chicago, where you can see this window.

**Ask the class what they see in this window. Does it remind them of anything? Wright meant to portray the fun of a parade in this “art glass”, using iconic images like balloons, American Flags and confetti. The circles are striking and unique as most of his usual shapes include squares and rectangles.**

***Hand out the copies of the stained glass window papers as well as the laminated examples of his windows for the students to pass around. Discuss what a “stained glass” window is – how lead can be heated to bend around colored pieces of glass and hold together a glass “picture”.***

Wright most often used images of flowers in his stained glass designs but often rendered them in a very “stylized” manor with simple geometric shapes. ***Can the students see the “flowers” in his windows?***

In 1909 Wright left Oak Park, IL and moved to Spring Green, WI. For a number of years he received few commissions because there was an economic Depression. He did continue to design many homes, particularly his own in Wisconsin which is now an Architecture School and resort, and wrote numerous books on architecture. In the later 1930’s he began to design many revolutionary buildings, including the Johnson Wax office building in Racine Wisconsin (1936), a home in Pennsylvania built over a waterfall which is called “Falling Water” (1936), and the Guggenheim Museum in New York which took 16 years to build and was completed after his death in 1960.

Many of Wright’s 650 designs are still standing, and over one third are listed on the National Register of Historic Places. There are many in our area which you can visit – ask your parents if you can plan a visit to one.

**PROJECT:**

***Have the students take out their rulers and crayons. Pass around a transparency sheet mounted onto a white piece of paper (cut the same size) and a black permanent marker to each student. It might be best if they also get out a piece of scrap paper to practice a design onto – they could then “trace” it onto the transparency when they are happy with it. Have them spread the newspaper out on their desk first to protect it from stray marks. When the students have made a plan they like, they should color it in with the permanent colored sharpies. Make sure they put their names with permanent black pen on the transparency. Mount the project on black construction paper.***

**PLEASE LEAVE AT LEAST FIVE MINUTES AT THE END OF THE PRESENTATION FOR THE STUDENTS TO PRESENT THEIR WORKS TO THE CLASS.**

## FAMOUS ARTISTS SERIES

### FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT

Today in class a volunteer parent presented the works of American architect Frank Lloyd Wright to your child's class. They learned a little bit about Wright's life as well as made an art project in the style of his work. Ask your student about Wright's work – what is he most famous for? What is an architect? How did Wright impact architecture? If you should have access to the Web, the following sites offers very good ideas and tours of Wright's work:

[www.pbs.org/flw/](http://www.pbs.org/flw/)  
[www.franklloydwright.org](http://www.franklloydwright.org)

The class discussed the Coonley Window, which can be seen at the Art Institute of Chicago.

In addition, there are many Wright buildings open to the public nearby. The following list might inspire a visit with your child:

Dana-Thomas House, Springfield, IL 217-782-6776  
FLW Home & Studio, Oak Park, IL 708 848-1976  
Johnson Wax Building, Racine, WI 262 260-2154  
Robie House, Chicago, IL 708 848-1978  
Taliesin, Spring Green, WI 605 588-7900  
Unity Temple, Oak Park, IL 708 383-8873

Sincerely yours,

**Art Volunteer**