WRIGHT’S PRAIRIE SCHOOL HOUSES

CREATIVE ACTIVITY FOR THE CLASSROOM

(High School)

CONCEPT: Frank Lloyd Wright outlined nine principles for the design of Prairie School Houses. These concepts were used to some extent in all of his buildings of this period. The principles defined Prairie Houses as being composed of long extended horizontal shapes, open spaces in the interior divided by light screens, furniture either built-in or designed to fit the architecture, and windows organized in bands.

TO THE TEACHER: Review Wright's principles for the Prairie School house with your students. You may wish to read them and discuss each point, and then write each principle on the board in the students' own language. After discussion, the students will use several of the principles in creating a design for a Prairie house.

The principles as defined by Wright for the Prairie house were:
1. The number of the parts of the house was reduced to a minimum so that there would be a strong sense of unity in the home.
2. The house should be integrated with the site by extending the horizontal planes.
3. Box-shaped rooms should be eliminated and replaced by open spaces divided by screens and panels.
4. There should be no damp basement. Instead, the house is lifted up one level above the ground.
5. Windows should be banks of "Light Screens" instead of holes in walls.
6. There should be less materials used, and all materials should be produced by machine. Thus most of these houses have straight lines.
7. All heating, lighting, plumbing, and mechanical features should be made architectural features of the building and integrated into its design.
8. Furnishings should be made to reflect the building's design.
9. Fashionable interior decorators should be eliminated.

MATERIALS NEEDED:

- Drawing paper
- Newsprint
- Rulers
- Drawing pencils
- Art erasers
- Yellow tracing paper (if available)
- Drafting tape
- Images from slides or CD of “Frank Lloyd Wright” and “A Tour of the Dana House”
- Slide projector and carousel or computer with CD drive

PROCEDURE:

1. Show and discuss the images about Frank Lloyd Wright and the Dana-Thomas House. Encourage the students to take notes and to make sketches of the buildings they are viewing. (This is how architecture students study architectural history.)
2. Review Wright's principles for a Prairie School house. Have the students write these principles in their own words. Ask for suggestions and make a list of the principles on the chalkboard.

3. Ask the students to choose several of Wright's principles and prepare a line drawing of the facade of a Prairie School house of their own design. Sketches should be done on newsprint and the final transferred to white drawing paper. Tracing paper should be placed on the drawing whenever the student wishes to experiment or practice adding elements that are not final.

4. Final drawings should be inked with thin black marker.

5. Displayed drawings should be critiqued by the group to assess whether Frank Lloyd Wright's Prairie School principles were followed in the design.