

LESSON PLAN

“LEARNING TO SEE”

An Architectural Walking Tour

A Sense of Place: Architecture, Culture, and History in the Arkansas Delta
Monticello, Arkansas

July 13 and July 20, 2024

The lesson consists of a 2-hour walking tour and discussion through downtown Monticello, Arkansas led by architect and educator, Russell Rudzinski, AIA.

OBJECTIVES:

- Develop participants’ ability to “see” the built environment in a focused and purposeful way.
- To raise participants’ awareness of how a building’s form and materials communicate ideas and attitudes about society, culture, and economics to the public across time.
- Engage in a fun activity that entices the participants to embrace the art of “seeing” and is easily transferrable to the home classroom.

PROCESS:

PART ONE: South Main Street (approx. 30 minutes)

- The tour will begin in the 500 block of South Main Street. Although there are a few large residential buildings of some architectural character, South Main Street has not been designated as a historic district.
- We will pause in front of three impressive examples of late Victorian and turn of the 20th Century mansions: 443 South Main Street, the Garvin Cavaness House, and the Robert Lee Hardy House. Each of these, built roughly in the same time period, demonstrates the economic prosperity that agriculture and timber industries brought to Monticello.
- The tour will specifically reference two civic building—the Drew County Courthouse and St. Mary’s Episcopal Church—and discuss the ideas or values being communicated by them.
- Along the way, other notable examples of American house architectural styles will be identified.

PART TWO: Monticello Commercial District (approx. 30 minutes)

- This tour will focus on the range and notable examples of commercial and civic architecture that give historic downtown Monticello its character.
- Information about use (government vs. commercial), location (at a street intersection or facing the square), and articulation will be studied to glean clues about the social, economic, or civic attitude individual buildings communicate, and how they contribute to Monticello’s public environment.
- We will discuss three governmental buildings: the U.S. Post Office, the Municipal Building, and the fire station, to illustrate how new architectural styles that emerged nationally in the 1920s and 1930s were imported into smaller rural areas through depression-era federal programs.

- We will contrast the character of the governmental buildings with the more modest expression of the various mercantile and commercial buildings that comprise the bulk of the commercial center.

PART THREE: North Main Historic District (approx.. 30 minutes)

- This tour will conclude in the impressive collection of large residences built during Monticello's expansion in population and prosperity from 1880-1910.
- This portion of the lesson will encourage participants to exercise their observational skills and encourage speculations on what messages the buildings communicate to them about society, culture, and economics.

PART FOUR: Closing Discussion (approx. 30 minutes)

- The tour concludes at the Joe Lee Allen House where the faculty guide will lead a discussion about architecture as a cultural phenomenon with the capacity to embody ideas particular to time and place.
- The faculty guide will answer questions about how this on-site method of "Learning to See" can be employed in the participants' home classroom to encourage students to develop their own "sense of place" through focused observation and intelligent speculation.

HANDS-ON-LEARNING COMPONENT: Architectural Scavenger Hunt (ongoing throughout lesson)

- Throughout the walking tour, students will be engaged in an "architectural scavenger hunt" as a fun means of drawing their focus and attention to the content of the tour.
- They will receive a paper in the beginning with images of fragments of the buildings they will see on the walking tour coupled with a question.
- The sheets will be collected at the end of this lesson and the participant with the most correct answers will win a prize. If there is a tie, the winner will be drawn at random.

Russell Rudzinski, AIA
Retired Professor of Architecture
University of Arkansas, Fayetteville

BIBLIOGRAPHY

GENERAL SOURCES ON "SEEING" THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

Horowitz, Alexandra. *On Looking: Eleven Walks with Expert Eyes*. New York: Scribner, 2013

An accessible exploration of the same Manhattan neighborhood walk taken with 11 different experts on a diverse range of subjects, illuminating how much our familiar built environment has to teach us.

Rasmussen, Steen Eiler. *Experiencing Architecture*. Boston: The MIT Press, 1964.

A classic, easy-to-read examination of design through time. Rasmussen's guide raises appreciation of architecture as an art that shapes us in our everyday lives.

Taylor, Joshua C. *Learning to Look: A Handbook for the Visual Arts*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981

Since 1957 this essential, easy-to-read book has opened the eyes of visual artists to the comprehensive nature of composition, form, color, and space. While focused on the visual arts, *Learning to Look* introduces broad principles of design that underpin any serious consideration of art and architecture.

GENERAL RESOURCES ON AMERICAN ARCHITECTURE

Harris, Cyril M. *American Architecture: An Illustrated Encyclopedia*. W.W. Norton, 1998.

A succinct, and comprehensive reference source featuring nearly 1,000 illustrations.

McAlester, Virginia. *A Field Guide to American Houses*. New York: Knopf, 2015.

For 40 years, this has been the essential guidebook for those interested in the range and complexity of domestic architectural styles in the United States.

SPECIFIC PLACE-BASED RESOURCES

National Register of Historic Places. <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/nationalregister/database-research.htm>

The National Register is an excellent resource for learning about significant places in your area that may be useful to you in planning your place-based lessons. They are in the process of digitizing their records and have established a searchable database you can access from the website above.

Keep in mind that the NR does not exclusively list properties based on their architectural quality/character. For example, something historically important may have taken place in a relatively unremarkable site or building. Nevertheless it is a good place to start if you are searching for locations for in-place learning.

Local historical societies or museums.

These locally focused small museums sometimes offer the best primary resources on the specifics in your area.

Local historical publications/guides

Big sweeping architecture guidebooks are not exclusively reserved for Chicago, LA, and New York. Many counties and cities may have had an adventurous historian who took it upon themselves to compile an architectural guide for your city or town.

Local or regional architect

Architects love to share their passion for their place and profession. If you are looking for some guidance reach out to local architects who may have an interest in helping you with an in-class or field trip to explore and understand the built environment in your area.