



Chicago Historical Society



WHAT IS ART?

Planning a Public Art Program

Grade level: Middle school through high school

Estimated time: Five class periods

Topic: Art and architecture of the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893

Subtopic: Designing public-art projects

Teacher background information

World's fairs and expositions held in the United States in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries celebrated the past while introducing visions of the future. The World's Columbian Exposition, held in Chicago in 1893, was a "city of realized dreams," proclaimed Catholic World.

After the Great Chicago Fire of 1871, Chicago established itself as America's architectural capital by pouring energy into innovation and building, especially related to skyscrapers, for the next twenty years. This philosophy led some fair planners to believe that the overall design of the fair should represent innovation. Others believed that Chicago would gain respect as a cultural center by imitating more traditional styles. This battle of wills played itself out in the fairgrounds at the World's Columbian Exposition.

Key concepts

Civic pride, aesthetic taste, vision, and urban planning

Key questions

What is art? What are the similarities and differences between fine art and public art? Who decides what is tasteful and what is offensive? How do decisions made by fair organizers still dictate the city's attitudes toward public art?

Goal of this lesson

This lesson will familiarize students with one of the principle objectives of the fair and demonstrate that Chicago had become one of the world's great cultural centers in the 1890s. "For [Chicago] businessmen, 'culture' was to be both a sign of their wealth and a civilizer—an antidote to the preoccupation with material gains that created their wealth" (Hirsch, 106).

Objectives

1. Students will identify the "masterful illusion" of the fair. Rather than celebrating diversity, the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893, like others before it, presented a calculated division of the world into "civilized" and "primitive" realms (Lewis, xii).



2. Through photo-analysis activities, students will recognize the importance of photography to the fair's success.
3. Through a fairground-mapping activity, students will understand the organization of the fair and recognize how it continued to influence urban institutions and planning far into the future.
4. Students will examine and discuss the controversy between those who supported neoclassical design and those who supported modernist design theories. Students will identify the "victor" in this design controversy.

Materials

Master copies of all handouts and photographs are provided.

1. Movements and Movers worksheet
2. Map of the fairgrounds
3. Photo Analysis worksheet
4. Photographs of the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893

Procedures

1. Divide students into small groups and ask each group to research a few of the terms from the "Movements and Movers" worksheet, or distribute the worksheet as a homework assignment prior to the start of the lesson.
2. Review the worksheet information as a class. Make certain that students are familiar with each movement and mover before beginning the Photo Analysis worksheet.
3. Divide students into groups of four, and distribute a copy of the map of the grounds of the World's Columbian Exposition to each group. Give students time to examine the map and then ask them to answer the following questions: What types of exhibition buildings were included on the grounds? How was the fair organized? Can they detect a pattern or structure to the mapping of the physical spaces?
4. Distribute a World's Fair photograph to each group. Ask students to determine, based on

their previous research, if the photograph was taken in the White City or on Midway Plaisance. Challenge students to locate their photograph on the fair map.

5. Distribute a copy of the Photo Analysis worksheet to each group. Use an additional photograph to complete a sample copy of the worksheet as a class. Demonstrate how the physical evidence (or details) of the photograph can be used to draw inferences or conclusions about the image. Discuss and clarify the terms "evidence" and "inference." Give each group time to complete their Photo Analysis worksheet and then ask the groups to share their findings with the class.
6. Discuss various public-art projects in Chicago, such as Cows on Parade (1999) and Music Everywhere (2002). Explain that each year the City of Chicago sponsors public-art, and ask students to design the next project. In their plan, students should include preliminary sketches and explain the rationale behind their design: What will the project be? Who will the organizers have to persuade to support the project? How will the project benefit the aesthetic quality of the citizenry? Encourage students to send their finished plans to their city officials.

Suggestions for student assessment

Assess students primarily on the creativity, thoughtfulness, and thoroughness of their public-art plan. The "Movements and Movers" and "Photo Analysis" worksheets can also serve as a tool for assessment.

Additional resources

Badger, C. Reid. *The Great American Fair: the World's Columbian Exposition and American Culture*. Chicago: N. Hall, 1979.

Chicago Historical Society. *A Teacher's Handbook of Activities and Information on Chicago History*. Chicago Historical Society, 1986.

Harris, Neil, et al. *Grand Illusions: Chicago's World's Fair of 1893*. Chicago: Chicago Historical Society, 1993.

Hirsch, Susan E., and Robert I. Goler. *A City Comes of Age: Chicago in the 1890's*. Chicago: Chicago Historical Society, 1990.

Lewis, Russell. *Preface to Grand Illusions: Chicago's World's Fair of 1893*, by Neil Harris, et al. Chicago: Chicago Historical Society, 1993.

Miller, Donald L. *City of the Century: The Epic of Chicago and the Making of America*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996.

Websites

Chicago Historical Society
www.chicagohistory.org

Chicago Public Library, www.chipublib.org

Extension activities

Ask students to make dioramas or physical models of the buildings and artwork of the World's Columbian Exposition that represent either the classical/neoclassical or modernist movements.

This lesson fulfills the following Illinois Learning Standards:

English Language Arts

State Goal 3: Write to communicate for a variety of purposes.

State Goal 4: Listen and speak effectively in a variety of situations.

State Goal 5: Use the language arts to acquire, assess and communicate information.

Social Science

State Goal 16: Understand events, trends, individuals, and movements shaping the history of Illinois, the United States and other nations.

State Goal 18: Understand social systems, with an emphasis on the United States.

Fine Arts

State Goal 27: Understand the role of the arts in civilizations, past and present.

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Movements and Movers Answer Key

Movements

Classicism: aesthetic attitudes and principles based on the culture, art, and literature of ancient Greece and Rome, characterized by emphasis on form, simplicity, proportion, and restrained emotion

Neoclassicism: a regard for tradition and reverence for the classics, with an accompanying distrust for innovation; a concern for social reality and the communal commonplaces of thought that hold it together; a concern for nature—or the way things are, are the way they should remain

Modernism: commonly refers to forward-looking architects, designers, and artisans from the 1880s that forged a new and diverse vocabulary to escape the tyranny of previous historical movements

The Chicago School of Architecture: refers to a group of forward-thinking architects who felt that the architect's broader contribution was to city and regional planning. The group's most prominent members were Daniel Burnham, Louis Sullivan, and Dankmar Adler.

The "City Beautiful": a "movement" whose advocates sought to improve their city through beautification. The beautification would sweep away social ills and inspire civic loyalty and moral rectitude among the impoverished. Cities would be in cultural parity with their European counterparts through the use of the beaux-arts idiom, and inviting city centers would appear to draw the upper classes to work and spend money in urban areas.

Other Terms

Staff: probably from the German staffiren (to trim). A building material with a plaster of paris base used as the exterior wall covering of temporary buildings, such as those at the World's Columbian Exposition.

Midway Plaisance: site of the amusement portion of the World's Columbian Exposition. It was connected to, but separated from, the main fairgrounds. More generally, an avenue at a fair, carnival, or amusement park used for concessions and amusements.

White City: the nickname given to the main fairgrounds at the World's Columbian Exposition because all the buildings were painted white.

Movers

Daniel Burnham, 1846-1912, one of the chief architects in the Chicago school. He arrived in Chicago in 1873 and was named chief planner of the World's Columbian Exposition in 1891.

John W. Root, 1852-91, partner of Daniel Burnham, noted for the architectural genius of such buildings as the Rookery. Root caught pneumonia and died after taking visitors on a visit to the proposed grounds of the World's Columbian Exposition.

Louis H. Sullivan, 1856-1924, an important member of the Chicago School of Architecture and partner with *Dankmar Adler*. Sullivan coined the phrase "form follows function." Most experts consider the Auditorium Theatre to be his most important building. After he and Adler dissolved their partnership in 1895, he had few solo commissions and died penniless.

Daniel Chester French, 1850-1931, one of America's foremost sculptors. French designed the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C., in 1922.

Augustus Saint Gaudens, 1848-1907, famous American sculptor. He created sculptures in a simple, naturalistic style and reduced details to express the essential character of the subject. He created standing and seated statues of Lincoln for Chicago parks in 1887 and 1906.

Movements and Movers Answer Key (continued)

Frederick Law Olmsted, 1822-1903, American landscape architect, city planner, and writer on social issues. Through his landscape designs and writings, he tried to recast the form of America's cities and suburbs and promote the refinement and culture he thought the citizens of a republic could attain. He was responsible, in large part, for the layout of the World's Columbian Exposition and the design of New York City's Central Park. He also designed the suburban community of Riverside, Illinois.

Charles F. McKim, 1847-1909, partner in the architectural firm of McKim, Mead and White. American architect who helped to popularize the building styles of the Renaissance and of classic Greece and Rome.

William R. Mead, 1846-1928, partner in the architectural firm of McKim, Mead and White.

Stanford White, 1853-1906, leading American architect and partner in the architectural firm of McKim, Mead and White. He began his career as an assistant to Henry Hobson Richardson, and his work was noted for its rich texture and ornamentation. A "friend," Harry K. Thaw, the jealous husband of Evelyn Nesbit, shot him to death. White's murder and Thaw's trial created a sensation.

Sophia Hayden, 1868-1953, the first woman graduate of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology's program in architectural design. Her design for the fair's Woman's Building emulated designs of the Italian Renaissance and fit in with the beaux-arts design elements throughout the rest of the White City.

MOVEMENTS AND MOVERS WORKSHEET**Directions**

The “movers and shakers” of the 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition supported the five movements listed below. Write a brief definition for each “movement” and for the three “other terms.” Then write a brief biography about each “mover.” Remember to cite your source(s). You may find the information you need both in printed sources and on the Internet.

MOVEMENTS

- Classicism _____
- Neoclassicism _____
- Modernism _____
- The Chicago School of Architecture _____
- The “City Beautiful” _____

OTHER TERMS

- Staff _____
- Midway Plaisance _____
- White City _____

MOVERS

- Daniel H. Burnham _____
- John W. Root _____
- Louis H. Sullivan _____
- Daniel Chester French _____
- Augustus Saint Gaudens _____
- Frederick Law Olmsted _____
- Charles F. McKim _____
- William R. Mead _____
- Stanford White _____
- Sophia Hayden _____

WORLD'S FAIRS



*World's Columbian Exposition of 1893
Photograph #1*

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*World's Columbian Exposition of 1893
Photograph #2*

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*World's Columbian Exposition of 1893
Photograph #3*

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World's Columbian Exposition of 1893
Photograph #4

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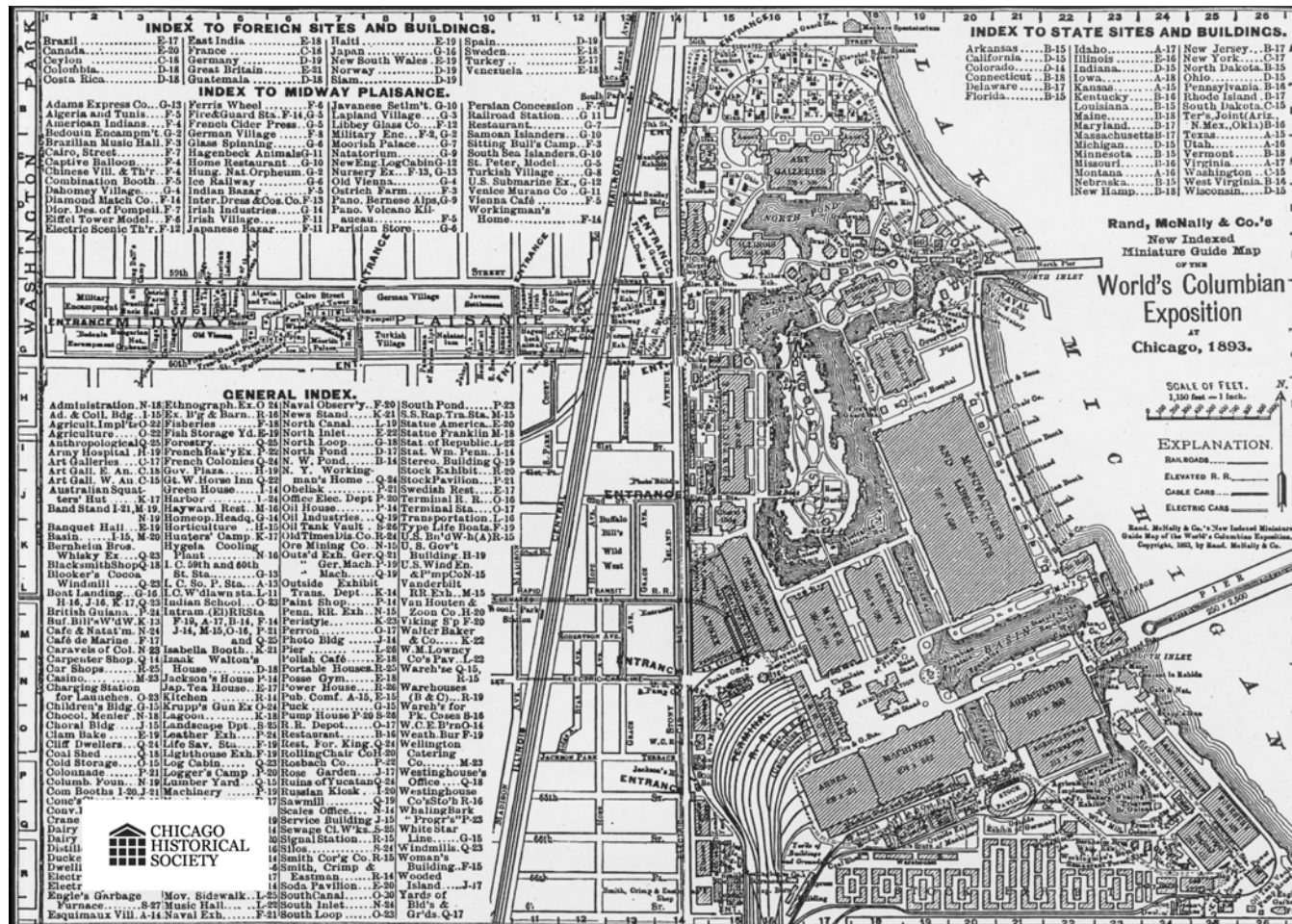
*World's Columbian Exposition of 1893
Photograph #5*

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*World's Columbian Exposition of 1893
Photograph #6*

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Map of Chicago's World's Columbian Exposition of 1893

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HISTORY LAB | FEEDBACK FORM

Please give us your feedback! After reviewing and using this *History Lab* lesson, please send us your feedback. Your ideas and honest assessment will ensure that these lessons keep improving and will provide us with useful insight for future teacher fellows. To fill out this form online or discover additional *History Lab* activities, visit the educators section of the Chicago Historical Society's website at www.chicagohistory.org.

Name: _____ E-mail: _____

School: _____ Grade you teach: _____

Are you a CHS member? (circle one): yes no

Name of unit you are evaluating (check one):

☐ America's Documents of Freedom

☐ African American Life in the Nineteenth Century

☐ The Civil War: Up Close and Personal

☐ Chicago's World's Fairs

☐ Face-to-Face with the Great Depression

☐ America and Protest

Name of lesson you are evaluating: _____

1. On a scale of one to five (with five being the best) rate this lesson in terms of the quality of the student learning experience it provides (circle one):

5

4

3

2

1

2. What were the strengths of this lesson? _____

3. What aspects of this lesson needed additional fine-tuning? _____

4. What advice, tips, or suggestions would you give to future users of this lesson? _____

5. Where does this lesson fit in your course of study (scope, sequence, unit)? _____

6. If applicable, how did the use of primary sources impact student learning? _____



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Thank you for your time. Please send the completed form to:

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Attn: History Programs **Fax: 312-266-2077**

