



## DANA-THOMAS HOUSE IMAGE NARRATION

**FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT**  
(Elementary Script)

**CONCEPT:** Frank Lloyd Wright is considered by many to be America's finest architect. He was a founder of the Prairie School of Architecture. Prairie School houses are low to the ground and horizontal like the prairie. Frank Lloyd Wright drew on his interest in geometry and his love of nature when he designed his Prairie School houses.

**TO THE TEACHER:** This educational Image packet introduces students to the work of American architect, Frank Lloyd Wright. Most of Wright's work shown in the Images is taken from his Prairie School years in which he designed houses that are very horizontal in form. Prairie School buildings are low and flat much like the prairie on which they were originally located. The buildings are made of rhythmic, geometric shapes and are spacious inside. Wright also designed built-in and free standing furniture for his houses and used wood to a great extent in his interiors. Geometric designs are repeated throughout the house in art glass windows which create a soft lighting effect.

Image 1: Portrait, Frank Lloyd Wright. Frank Lloyd Wright (1867-1959) is America's most famous architect. He is known throughout the world for his creative designs for buildings. Frank Lloyd Wright designed houses in a style known as the Prairie School. These houses were low, flat and horizontal like the Prairie. Frank Lloyd Wright liked to design everything for his houses so that they would appear very unified. He designed the furniture, china, napkins and once even designed a dress for the owner of the house to wear.

Frank Lloyd Wright was born in Wisconsin and spent much of his childhood on his mother's family's farm, where he grew to love nature. His mother was very important in his life. She decided that young Frank would be an architect before he was born. She hung prints of great cathedrals in Frank's nursery and later bought him a set of Froebel kindergarten blocks to play with to help him learn to design and build buildings. Later, Frank Lloyd Wright said that the shapes of the blocks were always important to his building designs.

Frank Lloyd Wright went to school in Wisconsin and then moved to Illinois. He worked for other architects and then started his own practice. He became very famous for his designs. Later in his career, he experimented with new ways to use concrete in buildings and when he died, he had a design for a mile high skyscraper on his drawing board.

Image 2: Frank Lloyd Wright Home and Studio, Oak Park, Illinois, 1889-1911. Frank Lloyd Wright designed this home for his family in Oak Park. The home also served as his architectural office. The house is covered with wooden shingles.

Image 3: F.L. Wright Home and Studio. Wright designed an "Inglenook" off the

living room. (An inglenook is a corner by a fire.) This space was meant as a cozy get-away space. Notice the arch shape around the fireplace.

Image 4: F.L. Wright Home and Studio. This Image shows the dining room in Frank Lloyd Wright's home. Notice the furniture that Wright designed and the designs on the ceiling light screen. Look at the chairs Wright designed for the dining room. How do they look? Soft or hard? Comfortable or uncomfortable? Straight or curved? Warm or cold? What kind of lines did Frank Lloyd Wright use when he designed these chairs?

Image 5: F.L. Wright Home and Studio. In 1895, Frank Lloyd Wright added a nursery, playroom and music room onto his house for his six children. The room included a stage for giving performances and a moveable piano that was suspended from the ceiling. What shape do you see in the ceiling? (arch) How many times is the arch repeated? We say that the repetition of this shape creates a rhythm for your eyes.

Image 6: William H. Winslow House, Oak Park, Illinois, 1893-94. The Winslow house was Wright's first job in his new practice. The front of the house is very symmetrical. That means if you drew a line down the center of the building, it would have the same elements on each side. The roof looks like it is floating over the building.

Image 7: William H. Winslow House. This is the back of the Winslow house. It is very different from the front. Would you say it is symmetrical or asymmetrical, (not the same on each side)? Describe how the back of the house is different from the front. Frank Lloyd Wright went on to design houses that looked more like the back of the Winslow house in his new practice.

Image 8: William H. Winslow House, Interior. This is the inside of the Winslow house. Notice how Wright used wood to decorate the rooms. Also notice how simple and uncluttered the room seems.

Image 9: Dana-Thomas House, Springfield, Illinois, 1902-04. This house designed for Susan Dana in Springfield, Illinois. She was very rich and gave Frank Lloyd Wright all the money he needed to design her a house where she could entertain important people in society. The Dana house is one of the finest examples of Prairie School Architecture. Look at this view of the house. Can you see the influence of young Frank's building blocks in the design? Name the shapes you see in the building.

Image 10: Dana-Thomas House. The main entry of the house has a Roman arched door and a large planter called an urn which Wright designed to hold trailing vines. Narrow, long bricks are used to make the building look horizontal, and the mortar between each brick is carefully raked away so that it appears that the bricks are floating.

Image 11: Dana-Thomas House. Arches are also repeated in the barrel-vaulted

Gallery, where Susan Dana entertained politicians and members of Springfield high society. Live music was played from a balcony located above the ballroom.

Image 12: Dana-Thomas House. Frank Lloyd Wright designed beautiful leaded glass for the Dana house. He also designed lamps from decorated glass. The decorations on the glass are patterns that resemble butterflies and Sumac trees.

Images 13-14: Unity Temple, Oak Park, Illinois, 1904-06. The design for this church upset a lot of people when it was built. It was made of concrete formed in square and rectangular shapes. People didn't think it looked like a church at all. The inside of Unity Temple also uses designs based on squares and rectangles. Look at the lights. They were designed by Frank Lloyd Wright too.

Image 15: Thomas H. Gale House, Oak Park, Illinois, 1909. Frank Lloyd Wright used cantilevered balconies and roofs in many of his designs. A cantilevered balcony sticks out into space without any columns or posts to support its front or sides. Although the cantilevered shape looks like it is floating, it is really anchored inside the building. Wright carefully structured the building so that the overhang of the shape was counterbalanced by long beams of steel placed within the building. There are rumors that people visiting the Gale house were too afraid to stand on the balconies because they feared their weight would cause them to fall. They preferred balconies with columns below.

Images 16-17: Frederick Robie House, Chicago, Illinois, 1907-09. The Robie House is another of Wright's Prairie School houses. He used the cantilever to make his roof appear to float out in space. Wright also designed the house to have large spaces inside that were divided only by screens and panels. He didn't like small rooms that seemed like boxes. Wright also used a lot of art glass in his buildings so that light could come in, but people would still have privacy.

Images 18-19: Edgar J. Kaufman House (Fallingwater), Bear Run, Pennsylvania, 1935. The Kaufman family hired Frank Lloyd Wright to design a home on their property in the middle of a forest near a waterfall. When the Kaufmans hired Wright, they wanted to situate the house so that they would be able to see the waterfall. Wright convinced them instead to build their home over the waterfall and make it a part of the design for the house. Frank Lloyd Wright called the house Fallingwater. (You can see the waterfall from the living room and can walk down a short set of stairs to reach it).

Wright designed Fallingwater so that it was anchored to the rocks. Stone and slate from the forest were used in the design of the house so that the house would harmonize with nature.

Wright designed horizontal concrete balconies that were cantilevered out from the building. They seem to float over the waterfall and overhang the trees of the forest. You must cross a bridge of stone and concrete to enter Fallingwater. When you stand on the balcony, you feel like the building is a part of the natural landscape.

Image 20: Guggenheim Museum, New York, New York, 1956-59. This art museum is

one of Frank Lloyd Wright's designs that upset people. People of the time thought that this snail-like shape and concrete exterior did not look right next to the buildings in the neighborhood. The interior of the museum is created by a large spiral ramp on which visitors walk to view the works of art. Instead of visiting separate rooms to see the art work, Wright designed a large space in which all the art is hung. Visitors to the museum take an elevator to the top of the building and then walk down the ramp, viewing the art as they descend.