



DANA-THOMAS HOUSE IMAGE NARRATION

FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT
(High School Script)

CONCEPT: Frank Lloyd Wright is considered by many to be America's most innovative architect. He is a founder of the Prairie School of Architecture which drew its philosophy from a romantic notion that buildings should evolve like living things. Wright spent much of his time searching for a new form for the American family home—one that fit the changing social patterns of modern families. The design of Prairie School houses concentrates upon the flow of space, the change of light, and the love of nature.

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. Wright was committed to the idea of open space in his houses. Large open areas are separated only by leaded glass panels and doors, and he did away with damp basements and unusable attics. Wright also designed built-in and free standing furniture for his houses and used wood to a great extent in his interiors. Windows in Prairie School houses are located in bands around the building rather than isolated as holes in the walls. Geometric designs are repeated on the glass of the windows and doors giving the interiors of these houses a warm, comfortable, ever changing glow.

Image 1: Portrait, Frank Lloyd Wright. Frank Lloyd Wright (1867-1959) is America's most famous architect. He is known internationally as an innovative designer and a founder of the Prairie School. Wright's personal style of design influenced the way Americans felt family homes should look and function. Wright is known for his careful attention to every detail of a building's design. He was a perfectionist and insisted that his clients allow him to detail both the exteriors and interiors of their homes.

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 the land. There he came to think of architecture as governed by the same rules that nature must follow, with each part related to the other. He also decided that buildings should be closely tied to the soil and natural site. Wright's mother was very influential in his life, deciding 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 at the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition in 1876 so that he could begin building. Young Frank was fascinated by the blocks and much of his architectural design was influenced by the geometric shapes he experimented with as a child. Wright said that he had an easy time in life because he always knew what he would do as an adult.

Frank Lloyd Wright was educated in Wisconsin and came to Oak Park, Illinois in 1888. He worked with Chicago architect Joseph Silsbee and later Louis Sullivan until he started his own independent career in 1895. Wright also started Taliesin East and West, which were educational facilities that combined the practice of architecture with

education and a design ethic that permeated the lives of his students. Wright went on to design new styles of architecture that changed building designs throughout the world. When he died, Frank Lloyd Wright had the 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 Wright home is covered in shingles and its style is based upon the work of the Shingle Style architects. Wright simplified the forms common to the style and designed the interior in a most innovative fashion—He began to experiment with forms that were common to Japanese architecture.

Image 3: F.L. Wright Home and Studio. Wright designed an "Inglenook" off the living room. (An inglenook is a corner by a fire.) It featured a Romanesque arched brick fireplace opening with built-in benches, and was meant as a cozy getaway space. Over the fireplace are stenciled the words, "Truth is Life". Notice the scale of this space. Frank Lloyd Wright was fairly short for a man and is said to have designed doorways and hallways shorter than normal so that he would look tall. What did he do to lower the scale of this room?

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 stenciled ceiling light screen. Take time to look at the design of the chairs. Describe the lines used to create the furniture. How does Wright's obsession with pure geometry effect the comfort of his furniture?

Image 5: F.L. Wright Home and Studio. Wright added to his home in 1895. Part of the addition is this nursery, playroom and music room for his children. Notice the visual rhythm created by the arches on the vaulted ceiling. The room included a stage for giving performances and a moveable piano that was suspended from the ceiling.

Image 6: William H. Winslow House, Oak Park, Illinois, 1893-94. The Winslow house was Wright's first commission after leaving the office of Adler and Sullivan. This view of the house shows the low, horizontal look and "floating" roof that would later typify Wright's Prairie School buildings. The front of the house is very formal and symmetrical. We say that this façade, or face, of the house is bilaterally symmetrical meaning that the elements are placed exactly opposite one another on each half of the house. This regularity is not typical of Wright's later work.

Image 7: William H. Winslow House. This is the rear view of the Winslow house which is much more informal than the front and is more typical of the homes Wright would later design. The rear of the house is very irregular and asymmetrical and has portions that project and that are recessed from the surface. In the Winslow house we see Wright experimenting with elements of building that would later characterize the Prairie Style House.

Image 8: William H. Winslow House, Interior. This is a view of the entrance hall of the Winslow house looking toward the fireplace alcove. The interior shows Wright's use of wood and built-in furnishings which allow his spaces to look simple and uncluttered. Wright also designed intricate leaded glass for this space.

Image 9: Dana-Thomas House, Springfield, Illinois, 1902-04. This house designed for mining heiress, Susan Dana, is considered the epitome of Prairie School Architecture. The residence reflects Wright's early ideas: cruciform plan, barrel-vaulted ceilings, connecting galleries, a low sloping roof, and banded windows. The exterior of the building clearly shows Wright's fascination with geometric shapes.

Image 10: Dana-Thomas House. The main entry of the house has a Roman arched door and a large planter which Wright designed to hold trailing vines. Narrow, long bricks are used to give the building horizontality, and the mortar between each brick is carefully raked so that the bricks appear to be 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 used beautifully designed leaded glass throughout the house in windows, skylights, lamps, and bookcases. The designs were very geometric, and were based upon inspirations from nature, including the butterfly and wild sumac.

Images 13-14: Unity Temple, Oak Park, Illinois, 1904-06. This Unitarian Church was considered quite controversial when it was built. Residents were appalled by this massive concrete temple which dominated the graceful, prosperous Victorian neighborhood. The church was Wright's second attempt at designing a public building and the first large-scale assembly building constructed in concrete. Inspired by Mayan Indian Architecture, Wright manipulated the square and cube to create this design. The supporting pilasters (square columns) of the Unity Temple show an abstracted design based on the hollyhock plant. Wright regularly utilized abstract forms to represent natural things in his designs. The interior of the Unity Temple is designed around themes and variations of the square and rectangle. Even the light fixtures follow this theme.

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 projects out into space without any columns or posts to support its front or side. 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. It is rumored 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. Frank Lloyd Wright defined certain principles that governed the way a Prairie School house would be designed. He used these principles when designing the Robie house. Some of the principles included the use of art glass to make windows become light screens, heating and plumbing fixtures becoming architectural features and the spaces of the house were separated by screens and panels rather than divided into little rooms. Wright designed a cantilevered roof for the Robie house and created a long, horizontal shape with low masonry walls, long, narrow bricks, and rows of banded windows so typical of the Prairie School. The interior of the house shows Wright's continued fascination with geometric shapes in the extensive woodwork and art glass windows.

Images 18-19: Edgar J. Kaufman House (Fallingwater), Bear Run, Pennsylvania, 1935. Frank Lloyd Wright designed Fallingwater to harmonize with the natural forest setting of rural Pennsylvania. 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 integrate it into the design of the house. The result was that Fallingwater has become one of the most famous contemporary houses in the world.

Wright designed Fallingwater so that cantilevered floor slabs are anchored to a masonry core and then to the native rock. Various levels of the house are designed in large open rooms, giving the house a spacious look. Native materials are used in the Kaufman house, including rough limestone. Horizontal concrete balconies are cantilevered to float over the waterfall and overhang the trees of the forest. You must cross a bridge of stone and concrete to enter Fallingwater, and once there, a sense of harmony and nature is perceived by all who enter. The waterfall can be seen from three sides of the living room and can be reached by a short set of stairs going down from the living room floor to the waterfall below.

Image 20: Guggenheim Museum, New York, New York, 1956-59. This art museum is one of Frank Lloyd Wright's most controversial works. At the time it was built, its organic shape and the materials were criticized as being out of place with the surrounding buildings. The interior of the museum is created by a large spiral ramp on which visitors walk to view the works of art. 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. Instead of visiting separate rooms to see the art work, Wright designed a large space in which all the art is hung.