

# Buildings That Grow from Their Landscape:

## An Introduction to Organic Architecture

*Lesson Plan for High School, Visual Arts  
Prepared by WEM Staff*

### Overview & Purpose

Though never formally trained as an architect, Wharton Esherick, in creating his own surroundings, demonstrated advanced understanding of the principles of architecture. Thus, the present aims to introduce students to organic architecture.

***Note, language used in this plan has been modified for a virtual learning environment.***

### Education Standards

Standard - 9.1.12.A

Know and use the elements and principles of each art form to create works in the arts and humanities.

Standard - 9.1.12.B

Recognize, know, use and demonstrate a variety of appropriate arts elements and principles to produce, review and revise original works in the arts.

Standard - 9.1.12.C

Integrate and apply advanced vocabulary to the arts forms.

Standard - 9.1.12.E

Delineate a unifying theme through the production of a work of art that reflects skills in media processes and techniques.

Standard - 9.2.12.A

Explain the historical, cultural and social context of an individual work in the arts.

Standard - 9.2.12.F

Know and apply appropriate vocabulary used between social studies and the arts and humanities.

## Objectives

Students will be able to;

1. Recognize and identify elements of Organic Architecture,
2. Explain the development and historical context of same, and
3. Apply these elements to the creation of their own original organic design.

## Materials Needed

1. Pens/Pencils and Paper (or any art materials on hand),
2. [Companion Teacher's Guide](#),
3. Examples of Organic Architecture (See, Teacher's Guide for a suggested list), and
4. *Suggested: Technology that would allow you to video chat with the entire class, if possible.*

## Vocabulary

Form- One of the elements of art. In terms of architecture, this refers to how a building is configured.

Frank Lloyd Wright- The seminal American architect who first used the term “organic architecture.” His architectural philosophy reflected both his reverence for nature and his respect for modern technology. Among his many ideas about architecture, he said buildings should look as though they were growing out of the landscape, rather than dominating it. His buildings were a seamless marriage of form and function.

Function- For the purposes of architecture, this refers to the intended use of the space, which is often a factor in its design.

Organic Architecture- Described by Wright as “the free architecture of ideal democracy,” this describes a principle that draws on a long history of architectural ideas, emphasizing harmony with nature.

Proportion/Scale- Artistic principles that describe the size of artistic elements or objects within a work of art.

Unity/Harmony- The principle that describes the cohesion of a work of art, or the degree to which all elements used work together to create the finished piece.

Wharton Esherick- Known as the “Dean of the American Craftsmen,” he was an influential 20th Century artist who incorporated Organic Architecture into the environment he created for himself.

## Activity

### *Anticipatory Set*

Consider sharing a brief video or segment of a video such as [this one on Frank Lloyd Wright](#), available on YouTube, to introduce students to the concept of Organic Architecture and key figures.

### *Introduction*

If possible, host a class-wide discussion on Organic Architecture. Include theories and works by Frank Lloyd Wright and Wharton Esherick. Consult the [Companion Teacher’s Guide](#) for more helpful resources and information. Show students examples of Organic Architecture and ask them to identify common elements.

### *Developmental Activities*

Students are to use information provided in class discussion, supplement with independent research, and, ultimately, design their own organic building (using any materials available to them at home), intended for their own use. If technology allows, students may collaborate on this project.

### *Closure*

Regroup and ask students to share what they created. They should identify their inspiration and the purpose of their building. They should be able to support their design choices with research.

## Assessments

Students’ designs should evidence thorough understanding and research of key principles of Organic Architecture. Presentations should be thorough, informative, and creative.

## Differentiation Options for Diverse Learners

### *Advanced Learners*

This lesson is inherently designed to be challenging, asking students to employ higher order thinking and independent research. It can be further modified in a number of ways. Consider incorporating other subject areas, like history, in further developing connections between

organic architecture and industrialization and/or current events. Encourage students to read more advanced and challenging material, when researching. Perhaps students will wish to delve deeper into modernist organic architecture and, in turn, may seek to design a modernist organic building. Regardless, research and resultant projects should reflect a more sophisticated understanding of engineering and architectural principles as well as historical context. Students may work in homogenous groups to accomplish this.

### *Learners with Special Needs*

Consider adding more structure to developmental activities. Rather than explore all tenants of organic architecture in your introduction, perhaps you will focus only on one, like the fact that organic architecture is inspired by but not an imitation of nature. A virtual class-wide discussion may help students to identify this idea in various examples of organic architecture. Then, perhaps students will (with help) create a design which applies that idea alone. If a student's motor skills prohibit them from being able to sketch (or apply these principles in some physical form), they should use any technology that may assist and/or get a classmate or family member who may help capture their ideas on paper!

### *English Language Learners ("ELLs")*

Use of language, in developmental activity, is limited. Introductory discussion and research material may need to be further simplified and/or translated. Consider modeling the activity. You may wish to utilize group work and/or guided notes/graphic organizers to aid students through research. Vocabulary and the resultant design can be as simple or as complicated as deemed appropriate! For instance, maybe you will only present the concept of organic architecture, as described above, and ask students to make their own design, inspired by examples used.