

HISTORIC PRESERVATION

AUDIENCE

Students grades 5–12

TOPICS & THEMES

- Historic preservation
- Adaptive reuse
- Responds to Biennial exhibit themes of Rights and Civic Life
- Stories and history

SKILLS

- Civil discourse: discussing and defending ideas
- Comparing and contrasting ideas from different viewpoints

MATERIALS

- Personal object
- Paper
- Pencil

STANDARDS

- SS.IS.6.6-8.MdC
- SS.IS.8.6-8.LC
- CC.K-12.W.R.1
- CC.K-12.W.R.3

VOCABULARY

Historic Preservation: keeping a building in its existing form by preventing more change or deterioration.

Adaptive Reuse: changing the function of a building while keeping some of the historic value.

Demolition: to tear down an existing building.



Overview

Every two years, the Chicago Architecture Biennial fills the galleries of the Chicago Cultural Center in downtown Chicago with projects created by people from around the world addressing the most important global topics related to architecture and design. The 2019 edition of the Biennial was called *...and other such stories* and looked at the stories that shape our city and our world, especially those from voices that have been historically underrepresented. You may be wondering: What do stories have to do with architecture? Architecture and the built and natural environments—including buildings, public spaces, parks, and more—tell us about the history, present, and future of a place.

This activity will introduce students to issues of historic preservation, decision-making in the built environment, and adaptive reuse.

Activity Steps

1. Ask students to bring their most beloved childhood toy, a treasured memento, or photo of a special place to class. Have them write a short paragraph or explain why it is special to them. Discuss their treasures as a class.
2. Have students imagine how they would feel if someone offered to replace their memento with a newer version and then destroyed their original.

BIENNIAL CONNECTION:

Re-Root + Redux
By Sweet Water
Foundation (Chicago, IL)

This project uses a structure inspired by a historic worker's cottage to ask questions about the history and current need for affordable housing in our city.

View the project online at:
chicagoarchitecturebiennial.org/current/contributors/sweet_water_foundation

Chicago Cultural Center, Chicago, IL

This building originally opened as the Chicago Public Library in October 1897. 10,000 Chicagoans toured the structure each day. Designed by the architecture firm of Shepley Rutan and Coolidge, this building came to be known as "The People's Palace."

Anarchitectural Library
By Adrian Blackwell
(Toronto, Canada)

This project looks at a series of "erasures" in Chicago (including school closures, loss of industry, mass incarceration) and the work local activists are doing in each of these areas.

View the project online at:
chicagoarchitecturebiennial.org/current/contributors/adrian_blackwell

Would your students agree to this idea? Discuss whether they feel their childhood item is replaceable. Is it 'just the same as' or 'better than' a new one? Why or why not? What other things from the past have they preserved?

3. Next, have students write a second short paragraph or explain why they think the original is worth saving. Or, if they wouldn't mind having a new version of their item, let them write about that alternative. Discuss how objects accrue value over time and are significant because of the role they have played in our lives.
4. Individually or in small groups, have students list five favorite buildings in their neighborhood or the city. List a few reasons why these buildings are unique. How would students feel if these buildings were to be demolished and replaced with newer versions? If the buildings on their lists were scheduled to be demolished, would they be willing to speak out against destruction? Why or why not?
5. Introduce the vocabulary term "historic preservation" and ask students to name old buildings in their neighborhood. Are any buildings threatened with demolition or destruction by neglect? How does it feel to see a building that is in disrepair?

Extensions

Go to the Chicago Architecture Biennial website and look at the projects by Sweet Water Foundation and Adrian Blackwell. Look up pictures of the Chicago Cultural Center.

- How do these projects relate to historic preservation, adaptive reuse and/or demolition?
- What other buildings are near the Chicago Cultural Center downtown? What if these buildings were torn down? What stories would be lost? What buildings have been saved?

Read the following quotation out loud and discuss with students. Do students agree or disagree with it?

"When historic buildings and neighborhoods are torn down or allowed to deteriorate, a part of our past disappears forever. When that happens, we lose history that helps us know who we are, and we lose opportunities to live and work in the kinds of interesting and attractive surroundings that older buildings can provide." —National Trust for Historic Preservation

Use the following points to discuss buildings in your neighborhood to wrap up the discussion:

- Do “old” buildings = “bad” buildings? Do “new” buildings = “good” buildings? Or is it vice versa, or neither?
- Which old buildings should be saved? All? Only some? Just the fancy or “important” ones?
- Who decides if a building is important enough to save?
- If a beloved old building is torn down, should there be some record, such as a gravestone, marker, or preserved fragments, to show that it once existed?
- If an old building is saved, can it have a new life with a new use? Should it be the same with every building? Can it be adaptively reused?

Rather than, or in addition to, bringing a personal memento, older students could be asked to research a building that was recently torn down, or is a protected historical landmark to defend as a part of the discussion or as an extended assignment.

This activity is adapted from the Chicago Architecture Foundation’s K-8 textbook Schoolyards to Skylines. Available at architecture.org/learn