

Architecture in My Classroom?

You can use these tips to introduce your students to the subject of architecture. This (and the enclosed activities) will help your students understand Copshaholm and why it was built here in South Bend.



Architecture and the design of surroundings is something you and your students experience every day, both at home and in the classroom. Think about how you choose to arrange furniture, select a color to paint walls and ceilings, and decide whether your windows need shades or curtains.

When you arrange your classroom, you might put carpet in a corner to create a quiet and comfortable place for reading where students can sit or lounge. You might arrange bookshelves around the area to define the space and block sound. You might make sure the area is located near a window for good lighting. Elsewhere in the classroom you might gather desks together for group activities. Compare this to an arrangement where all the desks face in one direction and how different arrangements affect student interaction.

This simple example shows that you and your students need go no further than the classroom to discover architecture, although the school's neighborhood and students' homes are obvious places to explore as well. In discovering architecture, there are innumerable lessons for students of all grades.

Have students become detectives and dissect their surroundings. What materials make up the classroom walls, ceiling and floor -- carpet or linoleum, painted walls or wood paneling, and painted ceiling or acoustic tiles? Continue the investigation and be creative, and you can teach through architecture. Here are some ideas:

Does the classroom echo? Why? How can you change this?

Is it hot in the summer? Cold in the winter? How can you and your students control the climate so the classroom is as comfortable as

possible? For example, shades might block the sun's heat in the summer and a ceiling fan might create a pleasant breeze. In the winter, open the shades and rely on the fan to circulate downward the warmer air that rises.

Body heat affects temperature, so have students figure out how much they heat up their environment through several calculations. How does the color of the classroom make students feel? What would the difference be if it were scarlet red or midnight blue?

Students can compare the classroom to the library, gym, and principal's office by identifying colors, numbers of windows, the size and shape of the spaces, and other physical features and also the rooms' uses. What makes each room different?

Have students locate significant features specific to the school building through a treasure hunt. Have your students take what they learn from their investigations to design their ideal classroom or remodel a space in the school.

Your students can describe what they see out the windows of the classroom -- the buildings' ages, what they are made of, and who uses them. Then, they can map what they see to figure out the viewing distance.

Students can tour their building with maintenance staff to learn how the water, electrical, and heating and air conditioning systems flow into, out of and through the building. Then they might be assigned to draw a diagram of how the systems flow in their own houses.

Students could study and identify the exterior of the school -- for example, the geometric shapes, patterns, ornaments, materials, and handicapped access.

Architecture is all around you and you make decisions every day that influence your environment. This is what Architecture in Education teaches you and your students. You need no special expertise to open up a whole world and new way of seeing to your students.