Wearing Buildings
Is it possible to wear a building?

Theme
This lesson engages students in researching, designing, and then constructing a wearable model of a structure.

Student Objectives
use imagination and hand-eye coordination to create a costume that looks like a building

Activities
design and construct a “wearable” building

Type
indoor, classroom activities with room to spread out

Timeframe
three class sessions of 40 minutes each

Materials
• Handout A - photograph of an architect dressed as the Chrysler Building
• materials for creating buildings: a variety of large boxes or cardboard pieces, grocery store paper bags (for small children with narrow shoulders), or large paper yard bags (for larger children with wider shoulders)
• a collection of recycled materials: yarn, egg cartons, paper towel tubes, scraps of cloth, etc.
• crayons or markers
• colored construction paper
• scissors
• glue
• images of neighborhood buildings or Chicago structures for inspiration

Teacher Prep
display Handout A

Vocabulary
Beaux-Arts (pronounced bow - ZAR) (bow rhymes with dough) Beaux-Arts means “fine arts” in French; it is a style of architecture popular in France and the United States in the late 19th and early 20th Century; buildings in this style typically have formal symmetrical floor plans, lots of ornamentation, and classical features borrowed from ancient Greek and Roman architecture
façade (pronounced fah - SOD) the front of a building
texture the way a material looks and feels
rhythm parts of the building that visually move your eye along
pattern something that repeats; typically windows or bricks on a building
Background Information for Teacher

Architects and architecture schools have a long tradition of gathering together to celebrate their profession. One of these celebrations was extra special. In January 1931, famous architects from the New York City area gathered at a Beaux-Arts Ball at the elegant Astor Hotel. Many of the architects who attended the gala event that night came dressed as a building they had designed. Imagine how fun it must have been to see all those architects dressed up in headpieces and costumes made to look like skyscrapers. The costume of William Van Alen, architect of the Chrysler Building, remains one of the most memorable of the evening.

The Chrysler Building in New York City was the tallest building in the world when it was finished in 1930. Its graceful vertical shaft is crowned with a tapered spire of great metal disks that resemble the hubcaps of a fine automobile. The Chrysler Building helped to inspire the chevron top and spire of the Two Prudential Plaza Building (180 North Stetson Street, near North Michigan Avenue and East Lake Street) built in Chicago in 1990.

Your students can have great fun creating their own unique “wearable” Chicago buildings. Full costumes or just headpieces can be created from recycled materials you’ve collected.

Discussion Points

• Describe one of your favorite buildings in Chicago.
• Is it small or big?
• How is the building used?
• Describe three features that you like about this building.
• What materials is the real building made from?
• What materials will you use to construct the building you will wear?
• Will it be a full costume or a headpiece?
• How will you fit inside it?

Interdisciplinary Connections

Language Arts
Students can write a short dramatic play and wear their building creations to tell a story from neighborhood history or to call attention to a city problem they are concerned about.

Language Arts
When the students are wearing their building costumes, do they feel strong or weak? Do they stand out from the crowd or blend in with other buildings? Do they feel confident or nervous? Have students write about how it feels to be a building.

View of the Two Prudential Plaza Building in Chicago inspired by the Chrysler Building in New York City. (CAF 2002)
Activity Procedures

DAY ONE

1. Use the Discussion Points to help your class begin thinking about buildings. Have students research and choose a building they will create into a costume. Use photographs of local buildings, pictures from magazines or books, or website images for inspiration. Encourage your students to look beyond famous skyscrapers and research other local structures, or design their own tall buildings to wear. Draw pencil sketches to show the four sides of their building costume and how it will look with them inside.

DAY TWO

2. Begin making the costumes. It may be helpful for students to work in pairs for a time if they are using paper bags for the building. Once a circular head hole is cut in the bottom of the bag, one student should try it on while the student designer draws where they would like to include doors, windows, columns, patterns, or other building elements.

DAY THREE

3. Use glue to attach three-dimensional ornamentation to the costume. Add color and textures using markers, crayons, or scraps of cloth.

Extension

Present a fashion show to the rest of the school so the students can model their wearable buildings. Have the students write a narration to go along with the show.

Resources


old National Geographic magazines with pictures of buildings for inspiration

www.greatbuildings.com

www.skyscrapercenter.com

Illinois Learning Standards and Benchmarks

25A Understand the sensory elements, organizational principals and expressive qualities of the arts.

25.A.2d Visual Arts: Identify and describe the elements of 2- and 3-dimensional space, figure ground, value and form; the principles of rhythm, size and proportion and composition; and the expressive qualities of symbol and story.

26B Apply skills and knowledge necessary to create and perform in one or more of the arts.

26.B. 2d Visual Arts: Demonstrate knowledge and skills to create works of visual art using problem solving, observing, designing, sketching and constructing.

27B Understand how the arts shape and reflect history, society and everyday life.

27.B.2 Identify and describe how the arts communicate the similarities and differences among various people, places and times.
Architect William Van Alen in 1931 in his Chrysler Building costume, New York City. (© BETTMANN/CORBIS. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. USED WITH PERMISSION.)