

Prairie Boy: Frank Lloyd Wright Turns the Heartland Into a Home

Author: Barb Rosenstock, Illustrator: Christopher Silas Neal

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About the Book

Frank Lloyd Wright, a young boy from the prairie, becomes America's first world-famous architect in this engaging nonfiction picture book introducing organic architecture--a style based on the relationship between buildings and nature. Wright's imaginative process transformed the American home.

Frank Lloyd Wright loved the Wisconsin prairie where he was born, with its wide-open sky and waves of tall grass. As his family moved across the United States, young Frank found his own home in shapes: rectangles, triangles, half-moons, and circles. When he returned, Frank pursued a career in architecture. But Wright didn't think the Victorian-era homes found there fit the prairie landscape. Using his knowledge of shapes, Frank created houses more organic to the land. He redesigned the American home inside and out, developing an architecture style that celebrated the country's landscape and lifestyle. Author Barb Rosenstock and artist Christopher Silas Neal explore the early life and creative genius of architect Frank Lloyd Wright, highlighting his passion, imagination, and ingenuity.

About the Author

Author Barb Rosenstock is the author of many picture book biographies, including *Otis and Will Discover the Deep*, *Secret Kingdom*, *Dorothea's Eyes*, *Ben Franklin's Big Splash*, and *The Streak: How Joe DiMaggio Became America's Hero*. Her picture book about Kandinsky, *The Noisy Paint Box*, won the 2015 Caldecott Medal.

About the Illustrator

Illustrator Christopher Silas Neal is the author and illustrator of multiple picture books, including *I Won't Eat That* and *Everyone*. He is also the illustrator of Kate Messner's *Over and Under the Pond*, *Over and Under the Snow*, and *Up in the Garden and Down in the Dirt*.

Note About this Guide & *Prairie Boy*

This guide consists of discussion opportunities and classroom extension activities that can be used when reading, teaching, or discussing *Prairie Boy* (together, in a small group, or individually).

Prairie Boy allows the readers to use reading comprehension strategies such as deciphering figurative language, comparing and contrasting elements, analyzing text structure, and looking at the importance of setting. It also gives opportunities for word study, research, math, and history extensions.

The discussion opportunities and classroom extension activities in this guide are designed to be used in 2nd through 5th grade as the text is read as a whole group, small group, or independently. Although this guide primarily focus on this text's use in elementary classrooms, that does not mean it should be limited to these grade levels.

Common Core Standards Correlation

The Common Core English Anchor Standards, Common Core Math Anchor Standards, National Core Art Anchor Standards & National Curriculum Standards for Social Studies Strands that can be met using this guide are:

- [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.3](#): Analyze how and why individuals, events, or ideas develop and interact over the course of a text.
- [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.4](#): Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.
- [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.5](#): Analyze the structure of texts, including how specific sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text (e.g., a section, chapter, scene, or stanza) relate to each other and the whole.
- [CCSS.MATH.PRACTICE.MP4](#): Model with Mathematics
- [CCSS.MATH.PRACTICE.MP7](#): Look for and make use of structure
- [Creating: Anchor Standard #1](#): Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work
- [Responding: Anchor Standard #7](#): Perceive and analyze artistic work
- [Responding: Anchor Standard #8](#): Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work
- [National Curriculum Standards for Social Studies Strand 1](#): Culture
- [National Curriculum Standards for Social Studies Strand 2](#): Time, Continuity, and Change
- [National Curriculum Standards for Social Studies Strand 3](#): People, Places, and Environment
- [National Curriculum Standards for Social Studies Strand 4](#): Individual Development and Identity

Activities

Use these activities to extend students' learning with *Prairie Boy*.

Prediction Then Check

Have students look at the page opposite the dedication page with a quote from Frank Lloyd Wright and illustrations of geometric shapes. Before reading the text, have students complete the PRE-READING portion of the graphic organizer below. When finished with the text, have students circle their correct predictions and also fill out the right side of the graphic organizer.

- This could be done with all the Wright quotations in the book.

What does the quote show the reader about Frank Lloyd Wright?	
PRE-READING	AFTER READING

Why did the illustrator decorate this page with geometric shapes?	
PRE-READING	AFTER READING

Wonderings



Figure 1 *Prairie Boy*, illustrations by Christopher Silas Neal

Part One: As a class, find the answers to the questions Frank had as a child.

- How do brown field ants hide in white Queen Anne's lace?
- When does the harvest moon change shape?
- What makes your home feel like home?

Part Two: Have each student create their own wondering and then research to find the answer. Students can create a one page information sheet sharing their question and what they learned.

Illustration Analysis

- As a class, compare and contrast the first spread which shows the Wisconsin plains to the next spread which shows Wright’s home in Massachusetts.
 - Extension: How did the change in colors affect the mood?
- As a class, analyze the illustration where Wright is sitting in the field of wheat on a suitcase.
 - What is the mood of the illustration?
 - Why would the illustrator put this image in the story?
 - What transition does this image represent?



Figure 2 Prairie Boy, illustrations by Christopher Silas Neal

Figurative Language Scavenger Hunt

Barb Rosenstock used figurative language, specifically similes, idioms, and personification, throughout the book to add imagery to her text. Have students look back through the text searching for figurative language.

- Examples of figurative language in the text:
 - ...rods like a mast
 - ...made his head spin
 - ...mind like a kaleidoscope
 - ...fingertips memorized
 - ...shapes felt like home
 - ...shapes kept Frank company
 - ...grew like wild oats
 - ...stuck out like whales in a wheat field
 - ...prairie’s shapes tumble from his fingertips
 - ...buildings grew naturally

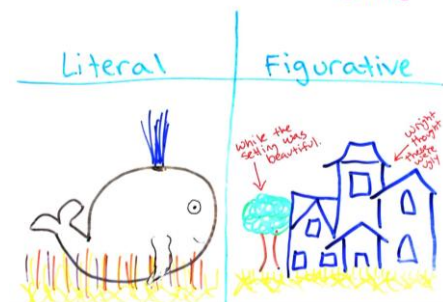
Once students have cultivated their figurative language list, divide your class by how many were found. (For example, if you have 20 students and 10 were found, make 10 groups of 2.) Then have them create a literal versus figurative image for their piece of figurative language:

“Figurative language found in the text”	
LITERAL meaning	FIGURATIVE meaning (in <i>Prairie Boy</i>)
Image depicting what the saying LITERALLY means.	Image depicting what the saying figuratively means (specifically in <i>Prairie Boy</i>).

EXAMPLE:

“He thought those fashionable houses stuck out like whales in a wheat field.”

Simile



Kaleidoscope

The author compared Wright's brain to a kaleidoscope. To help students analyze this word choice, have your students create kaleidoscopes.

- One option of how to make a kaleidoscope: <https://buggyandbuddy.com/science-for-kids-how-to-make-a-kaleidoscope/>

After students create their kaleidoscope, have them make a list of adjectives that they would use to describe what they see. As a class then brainstorm how these words could be used to describe a brain and how that fits Wright's personality.

Shapes



Figure 3 *Prairie Boy*, illustrations by Christopher Silas Neal

Frank Lloyd Wright saw shapes everywhere. Have your students spend a specified amount of time collecting shapes and forms (forms are 3D shapes). Have them make a shape journal where they'll put what shape/form they saw, where they saw it, and they can even draw images or take photos to include in their journal.

- Scaffold: Provide a list of shapes and forms that you would like them to look for.
- Reflection: At the end of the time period, have students write a reflection about their time looking for shapes. What did they notice? Which shape surprised them the most?
- Other option: Students could also complete this activity in groups just in the classroom!



Figure 4: *Unity Temple*, photo from Frank Lloyd Wright Trust

Once students have practiced finding shapes in their everyday life, share images of different Frank Lloyd Wright architecture and have students find the shapes in his work.

Architectural Styles

Many different styles of architecture were used to build houses during Frank's lifetime and some are shared in the book: Greek Revival, Victorian, Romanesque, Italianate. Break your students up in four groups to complete a research activity on each style including a definition, characteristics, examples, and a sketch.

- HGTV has great information about each style:
 - <https://www.hgtv.com/design/home-styles/greek-revival-architecture>
 - <https://www.hgtv.com/design/home-styles/victorian-architecture>
 - <https://www.hgtv.com/design/home-styles/neoclassical-architecture>
 - <https://www.hgtv.com/design/home-styles/italianate-architecture>



Figure 5: Pappas House, photo from Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation

European style homes and prairie style homes are very different. Complete a Venn Diagram comparing and contrasting the two types of homes.

- Extension: Have students compare and contrast their house to a Wright prairie home.

Blue Prints

In the text, blueprints are shared both in an illustration and in the back matter (Falling Water). Frank Lloyd Wright's blue print for the Robbie House can also be found at TeachingByDesign: <https://www.teachingbydesign.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Robbie-House-1.jpg>.

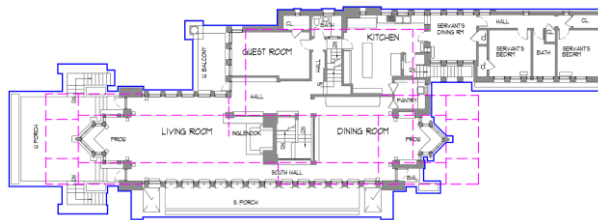


Figure 6 Robbie House Blueprints, image from TeachingByDesign

Share a basic blue print with students (Ex. <http://ptbatik.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/blueprint-homes-floor-plans-blueprint-homes-floor-plans-of-tagged-floor-blueprint-architect-jobs-in-dubai-2018.jpg>) and point out the different parts (scale, measurements, symbols). After viewing, have students create their own blueprint of their home or room.

- One YouTube video that shows how to design blue prints: <https://youtu.be/2IzbSUNwZjs>
- Extension: Have students create a blue print of their dream home.
- Extension: Have students create a blue print and architectural design for a house of one of the architectural styles researched.

Changes in American Households: Inventions

Frank Lloyd Wright differed from other architects during his era because he wanted to design houses for the new American family which included houses with “household inventions like washers, vacuums, and electric lights.” During the Industrial/Gilded Age (1876-1900) and the Progressive Era (1890-1920), which is when Wright lived, many things we use every day were invented and became part of the everyday household.

- First, as a class, have students create a list of appliances and other inventions that they use every day in their house.
 - Steer clear of newer technology and have them focus on things they think are indispensable like air conditioning and lights, etc. to keep the timeline focused on close to Wright’s life.
- Second, give each student a different invention from the list (pair or group if needed), and have students create an info sheet for the invention:

INVENTION NAME
Invention Timeline & Information:
DRAWING

EXAMPLE:

Washing
Machine

Invented by Jacob
(Scrub board) Christian 1767
Schäffer

Patented by James King 1851
(Drum washing
machine)

First Electric (The Thor) 1908
Invented by Alva J. Fisher
Patented 1910



- Finally, line up all of the inventions to make a class-created timeline.
 - Extension: Mark in the timeline when Frank Lloyd Wright was born, when he began his own firm, when he built his most famous pieces, and when he died so students can see his life in relation to the inventions.
- Reflection: Have students reflect on how these inventions would have changed the “American family” and their household.



TeachingByDesign.org is an resource site created by the Frank Lloyd Wright Trust and supported by the Terra Foundation for American Art. “Teaching by Design provides a 21st century platform for educator online resources that are aligned with STEAM goals and emphasize cross-curricular themes. The website has five sections (Lesson Plans, Interactive Timeline, Design Elements, Multimedia Resources, and Wright’s Life & Work). The following are some resources from each section to enrich your students’ experience with *Prairie Boy*.

Lesson Plans

- [Geometry & Architectural Design](#)
 - Grade: 3-5
 - Time: 60 minutes
 - “This activity will increase awareness of the geometric shapes that make up the built environment.”
 - Integrated subjects: Visual Art, Math, Science
- [Froebel Blocks & Frank Lloyd Wright](#)
 - Grade: K-12
 - Time: 45 minutes
 - “These activities will provide an introduction to design concepts used by Frank Lloyd Wright and help participants identify key connections between the Forms of Life, Forms of Beauty, and Wright’s designs.”
 - Integrated subjects: Visual Art, Math
- [Human Architecture](#)
 - Grade: K-5
 - Time: 45 minutes
 - “During this exploration of buildings and structures, participants will consider the physical space that these objects take up, their surrounding environments, and the decisions that were made by architects, designers, and engineers in order to make the structure possible.”
 - Integrated subjects: Visual Art, Social Studies, Language Arts
- [Designed for Purpose](#)
 - Grade: K-5
 - Time: 60 minutes
 - “In this activity, participants consider what it means to design for purpose by understanding how diverse families use houses differently and rethinking multiple layouts for the design of a house based on the needs of the people living there.”
 - Integrated subjects: Visual Art, Math, Engineering

- [Looking @ Design](#)
 - Grade: 1-12
 - Time: 30 minutes
 - In this looking activity, participants view examples of Frank Lloyd Wright’s designs and make quick sketches of the design elements they notice first.
 - Integrated subjects: Visual Art, Language Arts
- [Stories in Stone](#)
 - Grade: 3-5
 - Time: 60 minutes
 - “Through Frank Lloyd Wright’s Stork Columns at his Oak Park Home and Studio, participants will investigate symbolic imagery.”
 - Integrated subjects: Visual Art, Social Studies, Literacy
- [Wright Angles: Geometry in the Built Environment](#)
 - Grade: K-12
 - Time: 45 minutes
 - “In this lesson participants think critically about the built environment as they learn to identify two- and three- dimensional geometric shapes.”
 - Integrated subjects: Visual Art, Math, Language Arts

Interactive Timeline

- This section has an interactive timeline which includes Wright’s Life (Red), World Events (Blue), and Modern Art (Green). This interactive timeline would enrich the “Invention Timeline” activity and give even more insight into the world which Wright lived in.

Design Elements

- This section has “Elements of Design,” “Architectural Terms,” and “Frank Lloyd Wright Concepts.”

Multimedia Resources

- More images of Wright’s work can be viewed here.

Wright’s Life and Works

- This section has information on many different parts of Wright’s life and works. The sections that connect the best to *Prairie Boy* are “Organic Design,” “Prairie Style,” “Robie House,” and “Emil Bach House” though the other sections do give more insight into Wright’s life and work.

Discussion Questions

Use these questions as whole class discussions, reading check-ins, or as writing prompts with *Prairie Boy*.

- What kind of early childhood did Wright enjoy? How did this change over the first nine years of his life?
- What do the questions that Frank Lloyd Wright was considering when he was a child show you about how his mind worked?
- Why would the illustrator choose the specific house that is on the title page of the book?
- How did Wright's childhood toys, home, and interests impact his future work?
- How did the illustrator use Wright's preferences to direct the style of his illustrations? Find examples throughout the book to support your thoughts.
- Using the Author's Note and the text, how did Wright's mother influence his life?
- There was a boom of architecture in Chicago after the Great Fire of 1871—why were so many architects needed?
 - Extension: As a class, explore the history of this fire.
 - Resources for teaching about the Great Chicago Fire: <https://youtu.be/7dz5NBL-Flw> & <https://www.history.com/topics/19th-century/great-chicago-fire>
- By the Author's Note, a quote by Wright compares architecture to poetry to architecture. How is Wright's architecture similar to poetry?

Vocabulary

Use these vocabulary words in the book as a starting point for a vocabulary study with *Prairie Boy*. Research shows that reading and discussing words within context is one of the most effective ways to learn vocabulary.

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|---------------------|-----------|-----------|
| • heartland | • prairie | • tumble |
| • brush-footed | • aching | • mortar |
| • toddled | • mast | • hearths |
| • milkweed | • turrets | |
| • Queen Anne's lace | • finials | |
| • harvest moon | • dormers | |



About the Guide Creator

This guide was created by Kellee Moyer, a middle school literacy specialist in Orlando, FL. Kellee is the author of various teaching guides for all levels; the co-author of the blog [Unleashing Readers](#); 2016-2018 ALAN Board of Directors; a member of NCTE, ALAN, and ALA; member then chair of the Amelia Elizabeth Walden Book Award committee from 2012-2014; and a jury member of the 2020-2021 Schneider Family Award Committee. Kellee can be reached at Kellee.Moye@gmail.com.