

## Frank Lloyd Wright Teacher Resource Packet

### Frank Lloyd Wright, Architect

Frank Lloyd Wright was one of America's most important and influential architects. He was born in Richland Center, Wisconsin in 1867. His mother was a teacher and she surrounded his crib with drawings of cathedrals. She was determined her son would become a great architect. She encouraged him to learn about art, music, and nature. He soon became familiar with the flowers and plants on the rolling green hills around him. When Wright was nine, his mother gave him a set of Froebel blocks, a children's learning toy. With the blocks, Wright learned to use geometry to create flat designs on paper and to build structures. As he got older, he started to see geometric shapes in everything around him.

He studied engineering in Wisconsin, but left before he finished his degree. He moved to Chicago where he started working as an architect when he was 20 years old. He eventually got a job working for Adler and Sullivan, one of the most successful architectural firms in Chicago. His employer, Louis Sullivan, became an advisor and friend to Wright. Wright called him "Lieber Meister," which is German for "beloved teacher."

After Wright married his wife Catherine, Sullivan loaned Wright \$5,000 so he could build his first house in Oak Park, a Chicago suburb. Wright often turned to nature and geometry for inspiration for his designs.

Wright was 22 in 1889 when he designed and built his small house. It expanded and changed over the years as he and Catherine had six children. In 1898 Wright added an architectural studio to his home. There he worked with other architects and had many clients. He designed more than 125 buildings and invented a totally new form of architecture: the Prairie style. It was based on the idea that the design of a building should appear to grow out of the ground and be connected to nature. The floor plans were open and flowing, not boxy and dark. Some of the most important of these buildings are Unity Temple, his first great public building, and the Frederick C. Robie House in Chicago, his Prairie style masterpiece.

From February to April in 1905, Frank and Catherine took their first trip to Japan. Wright was inspired by what he saw there. He began to use aspects of Japanese architecture in his own designs. He also began to collect Japanese prints. After their return, Frank and Catherine gave talks on Japan to local organizations. They also gave a Japanese social at their home with lantern slides, prints, objects and tea served by young ladies in Japanese costume.

When Wright left Oak Park in 1909, he was 43 years old. He went to Germany and worked on a collection of his architectural drawings. These influenced European architects. A few years later he returned to the United States and designed many other revolutionary buildings. These include the Guggenheim Museum in New York City and Fallingwater, a house built over a waterfall in Pennsylvania. He even designed a mile-high skyscraper that was never built.

The architects who worked with Wright in his studios learned to connect buildings to their environment. They learned to think in new and different ways – just like Wright did. By the time he died in 1959 at the age of 91, he had designed more than 1,100 projects. Nearly half of these were built.

Frank Lloyd Wright never retired from his profession. Few artists in any field have matched his energy, productivity or imagination.

## The Frank Lloyd Wright Home and Studio

### The Home



In 1889, when Frank Lloyd Wright was 22, he bought a piece of land in Oak Park, Illinois. He borrowed \$5,000 from his employer, Louis Sullivan, paid for the lot and built a house for his 18-year-old bride, Catherine Tobin. A few houses were already standing on the street to the south. To the north there was only Illinois prairie.

The design of the house was based on the Shingle style of architecture, popular in the Eastern part of the United States. The roof and walls were covered with cedar shingles. Wright liked the natural look that common brick and cedar shingles gave to the house. He used leaded glass in a diamond pattern to give texture to the windows.

Even though he was young, Wright had strong ideas about architecture. He placed the fireplace in the center of the plan, at the "heart" of the home. He used wide doorways so that each room would not be a little box. Wright wanted to connect the spaces of the house by reducing the size and number of walls.

Wright used his own house as a laboratory to experiment with new ideas. He designed skylights and indirect lighting. He used building materials in new and different ways. For example, the interior walls of the children's playroom are brick, not plaster.

The playroom and a new dining room were added to the original house in 1895. The addition was needed because the family was growing quickly. Six Wright children grew up in this house.

### The Studio



Wright built a studio and connected it to his home in 1898. He wanted to bring his family life and work together under one roof. The architecture of the studio was very different from other buildings. It told possible clients that this was not the place to come if they wanted an ordinary house. The studio includes a reception hall, two-story drafting room, library, and office. The studio is joined to the home by a passageway, which was built to enclose a tree growing on the site.

**Credits:** Frank Lloyd Wright Home 1889/1898 Photographer, Tim Long  
Frank Lloyd Wright Studio 1898 Photographer, Don Kaleb