



## INTRODUCTION

Part of the success of a building is how it relates to its surrounding environment. Like people, buildings interact with their environment in various ways. There are buildings that are designed to blend in well with their environment by copying their neighbors' style. There are buildings that want to stand out by juxtaposing themselves with the surrounding environments. Each building is relating to its context. Whether that is in harmonizing with its neighbors or contradicting them.

In this lesson, students will be given an introduction to what the term “context” means in terms of architecture theory. Students will discover how the concept of context emerged, from the ideas of *genius loci* in Ancient Rome to postmodern ideas of context, including contextualism. This lesson also gives examples of buildings and how their designs react to their context.

## OBJECTIVES

- To learn why designing with context in mind is important
- To learn early examples of context in architecture
- To learn how architects use a site's context in the design process
- To learn how the ideas of the postmodern era (i.e. contextualism) influences architecture today

## PROCEDURE

- 1) **GETTING STARTED:** At the start of the lesson, project a picture of a city street like 5th Ave in New York City on the board. Have students look at the image and ask them to think about how the buildings interact with each other. Are there buildings that mirror each other's style? Are all the buildings built right up to the sidewalk? After a short discussion, introduce the concept of context to the class. Tell them how important context is in designing buildings.
- 2) **WATCH:** Next, have the students view ARCHITECTURE 101 episode “Context in Architecture”
- 3) **DISCUSS:** After watching the video, have a classroom discussion asking your students about the video. Here are some sample questions to ask to guide the conversation:
  - 1) How did ancient civilizations relate their buildings to their environment?
  - 2) Which ancient civilization first coined the term of “*genius loci*?”
  - 3) What did *genius loci* originally mean in ancient times?
  - 4) What is regionalism?

- 5) Why is designing buildings to fit within an urban context important?
- 4) **ACTIVITY:** To give students a better understanding of how architects design within context, have students look at other buildings doing an analysis of the buildings similar to how it was done in the video. Below are a series of photos of the Dancing House by Frank Gehry in Prague and the Centre Pompidou in Paris by Richard Rogers, Su Rogers and Renzo Piano that students can examine. Have the students look at the photos and have them answer the following questions:
- 1) What is the architecture style of the building? Is it a similar style to the other buildings around it?
  - 2) Is there an element of the building that is trying to juxtapose itself from the other buildings?

## RELATED RESOURCES

Below are books we used in producing our episode on modernism, so feel free to do some extra research to inform your lesson.

Taschen, Laszlo, and Katja Gazey. *Modern Architecture*. Taschen, 2010.

Weston, Richard. *100 Ideas That Changed Architecture*. Laurence King Publishing, 2020.

Norberg-Schulz, Christian. *Genius Loci: Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture*. Rizzoli, 1996.

## PICTURES FOR ACTIVITY

### Example #1: The Dancing House | Frank Gehry (1996)









**Example #2: Centre Pompidou | Richard Rogers, Su Rogers, Renzo Piano (1977)**

