

DOCUMENTING DECO

Activity Three Lesson Plan

Purpose

- Encourage participants to examine buildings more creatively and in more detail
- Demonstrate the breadth and diversity of Art Deco architecture across New York City
- Allow participants to gain new skills in photography
- Reinforce knowledge about Art Deco's architectural aesthetics and history through a practical application of that knowledge

Implementation Notes

"Documenting Deco" is a walking trip to see and photograph details of a local Art Deco building, and as such requires some prior organization and planning time. First and foremost, the instructor must identify an appropriate building for the trip. This building should ideally be within 10-15 minutes walking distance so that groups can visit and return within a reasonable timeframe. Instructors can use ADSNY's New York Art Deco Registry & Map to locate Art Deco buildings in their desired neighborhood, either by zooming in on relevant areas or by entering appropriate search terms. The map can be found here: <https://www.artdeco.org/old-new-york-art-deco-registry-map>

Instructors should also decide upon a list of "scavenger hunt" items for participants to look for and photograph in the building. These items can include specific design motifs (parapets, geometric patterns, etc.) as well as overall goals for the photograph (a full building shot, just an entrance, etc.). Examples of these items can be found in Appendix A. Plan on tailoring a class's specific list to whichever building they are photographing.

Background Knowledge and Materials

There are many resources online about photography techniques and insights that may be beneficial to both instructors and participants. For example, Richard Berenholtz (renowned architectural photographer and author of *New York Deco*) has a video called *Photography with Richard Berenholtz* that offers insights into the techniques and principles that inform his work. Instructors may choose to show this video as a warm-up or homework assignment prior to this project.

Instruction Notes

During the walk, ensure that participants are following basic safety guidelines by crossing streets together at safe times, staying together as a group, and remaining to one edge of the sidewalk. Find a safe place, preferably with a wide sidewalk, to stop and spread out for the actual photography portion of the trip.

Adaptation Notes

If an in-person trip is not possible, consider the following adaptations to complete this project as a homework assignment.

- Provide participants with a list of Art Deco buildings nearby that they can visit on their own time. Instructors can use the New York Art Deco Registry & Map to locate such places.
- For older participants with more freedom and ability to travel, open the possibility to photograph any building they can easily access in the city.
- Provide participants with a list of "scavenger hunt" items to photograph, much like instructors would for an in-person class.
- Participants will then take photos outside of school, and bring them in on the assignment's due date.
- If this project takes place as a homework assignment, instructors can choose to offer ADSNY's bonus lesson "Displaying Deco" as a third in-person lesson.
- In either version of the trip, in-person or as a follow-up assignment, participants can work individually or in small groups, depending on the needs and preferences of the group.

Presentation Steps

Warm-Up

Tell participants a little bit about the history and context of their destination today. This information can include background knowledge about the building's neighborhood, as well.

Instruction

Ensure that each participant or group has a copy of their scavenger hunt items, and explain that they will be photographing an Art Deco building today. Prepare participants for the walk by gathering supplies, then walk with the class to their designated location.

Activity

Once the group arrives at the building, participants will use their lists to photograph it. Participants should take at least one photo for every scavenger hunt item, paying attention to both the building's overall form as well as its details and decorations. Encourage participants to be creative in their photography, using angles and light to their advantage.

Participants should always be mindful of their own and others' safety during the exercise; refrain from standing in the street or blocking nearby entrances.

Wrap-Up

Instructors should give participants a 5-minute warning before returning.

Materials

Instructor materials available at ArtDeco.org/Learn:

- Smartphone or camera
- Scavenger hunt list (Appendix A)



APPENDIX A

Sample Scavenger Hunt Items, “Documenting Deco”

Art Deco Architectural Features

Take a photo that shows...

- Geometric patterns
- Sculptural relief
- Spandrels
- Parapets
- Terracotta decoration
- A flat roof
- A roof with stepped levels
- Decoration influenced by avant-garde art
- Decoration influenced by Ancient Egypt

Overall Design Features

Take a photo that shows...

- The building’s overall massing
- Vertical accentuation in a building
- An entrance
- A window

Note: these sample sets are examples only. Feel free to use, modify, or change them to best fit your class! If instructors know which building students will be photographing, feel free to add specific features or designs unique to that structure they wish students to find.