

THE ARCHITECTURE OF DECO

3-5 Activity One Presentation Script

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Hello! My name is Miss Christine and I'm the teacher for *Documenting Deco*, an educational program for students like you. *Documenting Deco* is brought to you by the Art Deco Society of New York, or ADSNY for short. ADSNY is a nonprofit organization that celebrates the art and culture of 1920s and 1930s New York City and beyond.

What makes a New York building Deco? Not all NYC buildings are Deco, but the Chrysler Building is! That's the shiny, jazzy building in the middle of the picture. It's in Manhattan. Let's look at what makes Art Deco buildings like the Chrysler Building Art Deco!

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In this lesson, we will focus on the structure of buildings—their shape, their size, and how they are built. In this drawing, or illustration, by the artist and architect Hugh Ferriss, we see the structure, or shape, of the building in this imaginative drawing from 1916. That was a little before Deco became popular, but the building has the shapes, lines, and drama of the Deco style.

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All buildings have structure and design. Here we have two pictures of the Empire State Building. The Empire State Building is the world's most famous Art Deco building! In the photo with the blue background, we see the Empire State Building from far away, with almost the whole building in view. In the photo with the yellow and orange sky, we see the top of the building.

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Internal structure includes the parts of a building that give it support, keep it standing, and make it function. Here we have two drawings of the Chrysler Building, the jazzy building we saw before. (Click to make outline appear) The red rectangle outlines its internal structure. Doesn't the internal structure look like a skeleton? Buildings have their own skeletons, just like humans have skeletons.

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Structure can also be the silhouette or outline of a building. In this picture, we see the outlines of several buildings. (Click to make outline appear) The red lines you see here outline the silhouette of the Empire State Building. You've probably seen outlines of people represented in art, books, cartoons, and video games before. (Click to make silhouettes appear) Just like these silhouettes give us a sense of a character's size and shape, silhouettes of buildings give us a sense of their size and shape.

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The structure of all buildings includes (click to make outlines appear) walls (click to make outlines go away), (click to make arrows appear) windows (click to make arrows go away), (click to make arrows appear) roofs (click to make arrows go away), and (click to make outlines appear) entrances (click to make outlines go away) like gates and doors. Here we see Noonan Plaza in the Bronx.

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What parts of the structure do you see in this Art Deco building? Look closely and tell me what you see.

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The person who designs a building is called an architect. How the architect puts these structure parts together determines the style of a building: walls, windows, roofs, entrances, outdoor spaces, and interior spaces. Here is a picture of 30 Rockefeller Center in Manhattan. You might recognize this as the area where they light up a huge Christmas tree and put out an ice-skating rink around the holidays. There are also many shops and restaurants there.

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Here we have a picture of famous architects dressed like their NYC buildings. These men dressed up for a fancy party called the 1931 Beaux Arts Ball. Look at the architect in the middle with the tall hat. That's William Van Alen, the architect of the Chrysler Building. (Click to make photo appear) Can you see how his costume looks like the Chrysler Building? Especially his hat?

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So, when was Art Deco popular? The Art Deco style of architecture became popular in the 1920s and 1930s, about 100 years ago. Terms associated with this era include the Jazz Age and the Interwar Period. Art Deco overlapped with the Roaring Twenties and the Great Depression. Here we have two pictures of another Art Deco building, 70 Pine Street in Manhattan.

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Deco buildings were designed during changing times in America, after World War I, which ended in 1918, and before World War II, which ended in 1945. These were two major wars that you will probably study before you start middle school. In this picture, we see construction workers eating lunch at Rockefeller Center. Do you see how they're sitting on a beam high up in the sky? Look at the buildings behind them. Do you also notice that the men are not wearing any of the safety clothes or gear construction workers wear today? Many things were changing in our country at this time and many things have changed since then.

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As more people moved to Manhattan, New York City grew outward toward what are now the other boroughs, as well as upwards. There are five boroughs in the City of New York and they are all terrific. Look at the map, we have the Bronx, Manhattan, Queens, Brooklyn, and Staten Island.

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During this time, buildings were made taller and taller, creating the modern skyscraper. The Empire State Building was built from March 1930 to April 1931. The pictures here show a chunk of that time, going from June 1930 to November 1930.

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During this time, there were many new materials being created, like plastic and special metals. Many of these materials came about because of military innovation (things invented by the military during the first World War.) The Chrysler Building, which we see here, has a lot of shiny metal, which was a new material for buildings at that time.

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Even though buildings have the same structural parts, each building is unique. Most Art Deco buildings share features that are similar but not exactly the same. Like people in a family! Here we have three Art Deco buildings in Manhattan: 120 Wall Street, The Century, and the Squibb Building. Do you see how they all belong to the same building style? What's similar from building to building?

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Look at these buildings: 1001 Jerome Avenue in the Bronx and the Sears, Roebuck & Company Building in Brooklyn. Do you notice any similar features? (Click to make buildings shake)

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Now let's talk about shape and size. Buildings are 3-D, or three-dimensional, not 2-D, or two-dimensional. Every building has a general shape and size that takes up space. The overall impression of its size and shape is called massing. Here we have two photos of the Daily News Building in Manhattan.

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Art Deco skyscrapers normally have different stepped levels, or steps. These steps are similar to the steps in Mayan and Aztec pyramids. These pyramids, or ziggurats, are in Mexico and Central America, places south of the United States. In the first picture, we have a ziggurat in the country of Guatemala. (Click to make outlines appear) Do you see how its silhouette looks like steps? In the second photo, we have the Paramount Building, an Art Deco building in Manhattan. (Click to make outlines appear) Its silhouette also looks like steps.

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Vertical lines! Vertical lines make your eye move all the way from the bottom of a building to the top. (Click to make arrow appear) In Art Deco buildings, windows are often "stacked" in vertical lines. Can you see the vertical lines formed by the windows in the Bronx County Building?

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Wrap around windows! Wrap around windows are windows that wrap around the corner of a building. (Click to make arrows appear) This type of window is very common in Art Deco apartment buildings, like 265 Cabrini Boulevard in Manhattan.

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Flat roofs are roofs that have no angle or slant. (Click to make outline appear, click again to make it go away) Some Art Deco buildings have flat roofs, or many layers of flat roofs, (Click to make arrows appear) that make the top of the building look narrower, like the New Yorker building in Manhattan.

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Pitched roofs are the opposite of flat roofs because they have slants. (Click to make arrows appear) Pitched roofs were popular before the Art Deco style, but they are not common in Art Deco buildings. This private house in Brooklyn has pitched roofs and it is not an Art Deco building.

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Some flat roofs have rooftop gardens, like the ones at Rockefeller Center in Manhattan.

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That's all folks! Thank you for joining me for the *Documenting Deco* lesson on structure. To learn more about *Documenting Deco* and the Art Deco Society of New York, visit www.artdeco.org. See you next time!