

# THE ARCHITECTURE OF DECO

## K-2 Activity Two Presentation Script

### Slide 1

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. Let's get started!

### Slide 2

In this lesson, we will focus on the design of Art Deco architecture. Design is about the look of a building—its interior (inside) or exterior (outside). Here we have a photo of Radio City Music Hall in Manhattan. Doesn't it look like a rising sun?

### Slide 3

All buildings have both structure and design. In the first lesson, we looked at the structure of buildings. You can watch the first presentation again to review what structure is in Art Deco architecture. Every building is made of the same parts of structure, but they look different because of a building's design or decoration. Remember architects? They are the people whose job it is to make artistic choices about buildings. They come up with ideas for buildings, draw them, and build models, which kind of look like toy versions of buildings. All of these artistic choices are known as "design." So, architects design buildings. In this photo, we have the Waldorf Astoria, a famous Art Deco building in Manhattan.

### Slide 4

The design of all buildings includes colors! What colors do you see in the American Radiator Building? That's the building you see in the front of the first photo. Behind it is another famous Art Deco building you should remember: the Empire State Building! The design of all buildings also includes materials on the outside of the building. Materials are things that we take from nature or make and then use to make new things. Think of stone and metal. We will look at materials later in this lesson.

### Slide 5

Design also includes the objects on buildings. These decorations make buildings look prettier or more interesting. What magical creature do you see on the American Radiator Building? Hint: It's in the second photo!

### Slide 6

Design also includes what the entrance of the building looks like. This could be the door, the area around the door, gates, or walls. What do you see in the entrance of the Graybar Building? Describe what you see.

### Slide 7

Design also includes how the windows of a building look. How are they shaped? Are they framed or accented? That means, do the windows have any special decorations? In this first photo, we have the Daily News Building in Manhattan. In the second photo, we have a close-up photo of the building's windows. What do you notice about them?

## Slide 8

Design also includes the patterns on the walls. These can be the interior or exterior walls of the building. Design could include the patterns around the building's doors, too. A pattern is a repeated design, like the zig-zags and chevrons you saw in the last presentation. Can you describe the pattern on the McGraw Hill Building in Manhattan? There's a lot going on in this building!

## Slide 9

Now let's look at surface materials, which are a part of a building's design. The exterior, or outside, of a building can be made of all kinds of things, or materials, put on its surface. A building's surface is its outside layer, or top part, kind of like its skin. Just think of the wall of a building. Now let's look at some materials, or the things you might find on the surface of a building. Like stone in 29 Broadway, the Manhattan building in the photo here.

## Slide 10

Brick can be a surface material. You've all seen bricks before! Usually they are red-brown or red-orange like the brick you see in the second photo. But did you know bricks can be other colors? Just look at The Ardsley, the Manhattan building in the first photo. Can you tell that this is a brick building?

## Slide 11

Notice the different colors bricks can be. Look at the top photo. There are yellow bricks and even blue bricks, too. Did you know that bricks can be rotated, or turned in different directions? They can make many pretty and fancy patterns.

## Slide 12

Metal can be a surface material, too. You know metal from cars and trains; forks, spoons, and knives; jewelry, like rings and necklaces; and plenty of other things. But metal is for buildings, too! It can come in a range of colors, like gold, silver, bronze, and copper. Can you tell what part of the Brill Building, in the first photo, is metal?

## Slide 13

Another surface material is stone. That's another way of saying rocks, like you see outside. Maybe you play with them or collect them. Well, architects use rocks to decorate buildings. Look at the Eldorado, an Art Deco building in Manhattan. What color stone do you see?

## Slide 14

Sometimes we make other materials look like stone. This is called cast stone. Cast stone is not real stone. It is made of concrete, which is not the same as the rocks we get from the ground. Concrete can have rocks, like gravel, in it, but it has other materials, too—including a lot of sand! Do you see how the entrance of the 181st St. Subway Station is made from concrete? (Click to make outlines appear) That's the cast stone I was talking about.

## Slide 15

Another surface material is glass. You have seen glass in kitchenware, like drinking glasses and bowls, and also used as windows. But glass can be put on the surface of buildings. Did you know that glass comes in a whole rainbow of colors? Look at the glass in One Wall Street. On the ceiling, you can see glass the color of gold, so it looks extra fancy. Do you see some red glass, too? There's also clear glass above the doors.

## Slide 16

Sometimes glass is used to make lots of windows that look like walls of glass. Look at the windows in this photo of Steiner Studios in Brooklyn. Do you see how the windows curve around the corner of the building? What a view!

### Slide 17

Glass can be made into big, thick blocks called glass bricks and then put up as walls. Glass brick walls let in more light than other walls. There's a lot of glass brick on the front of the William Lescaze House in Manhattan.

### Slide 18

Now you know some of the basic surface materials that buildings can have. Let's look at some of the wonderful surface materials we often find in Art Deco buildings. Can you name some of the materials in this Art Deco building?

### Slide 19

The surface material you see here is limestone, a smooth stone often made into large blocks. You can see limestone on the surface of the Brooklyn Public Library. Have you been there before?

### Slide 20

Another Deco surface material is granite. This is a stone that can be smoothed and polished, like you see here in 275 Madison Avenue. You have probably seen granite rocks while playing outside. They often have a natural glitter on them called mica. Mica makes granite sparkle. So, if you look closely at the granite in Deco buildings, you can usually see what looks like glitter. Pretty!

### Slide 21

Surface materials like limestone and granite are often used for a large part of a building's exterior. You can see a lot of limestone at Rockefeller Center in Manhattan!

### Slide 22

Smaller parts of a building may have special sections of decoration made from other surface materials. Look at the sculpture of Wisdom above the doorway at 30 Rockefeller Plaza. What colors do you see in this figure and the sky that surrounds him? Do you think Wisdom is made of just one material or more than one material?

### Slide 23

Decorative surface materials are often used to add decoration to the outside of a building. In the 1920s and 1930s, there were many new materials added to Art Deco buildings to make them look different and more modern, or newer. Here we have a picture of the Chrysler Building. We're looking at it up close, by its entrance. What materials do you see in the Chrysler Building's doorway?

### Slide 24

Mosaics are popular in Art Deco buildings. A mosaic is a picture or design made from small pieces of colored glass or ceramic tiles. Ceramic is a special kind of clay. Tiles are little squares, rectangles, circles, or sometimes other shapes. You probably have tiles in your kitchen or bathroom at home, or other bathrooms you have seen before. You can find a very special mosaic on The Fish Building in the Bronx. Why do you think they call it the Fish Building? Be sure to notice all the colors and the shapes! (Click for pictures to appear)

### Slide 25-27

(Click for detail pictures to appear)

### Slide 28

Another Deco surface material is terracotta. Terracotta is a special kind of red clay. You may have seen it used in bowls or vases. It can also be put on buildings, like the Gramercy House in Manhattan. Terracotta can bring bright colors to a building. What colors do you see in the Gramercy House?

### Slide 29

Sculptural relief! This is a kind of sculpture, or 3-D art, like something you make out of Playdough. It is not flat. In a sculptural relief, the figure or design is raised from the background. It's similar to a coin: the president's head and the words stick out from the flatter part of the coin. Relief sculptures were made to enhance entrances in Art Deco buildings. They were also used to make borders around windows and decorate roof edges. The second photo shows the Daily News Building, which has a huge relief sculpture above its doorway.

### Slide 30

Spandrels! A spandrel panel is a decorative piece that fits between the windows of different floors that are right above one another. You can see the panels very clearly in this photo of 1500 Grand Concourse in the Bronx. The spandrels are the orangish panels. In Art Deco buildings, spandrels often have a decorative pattern. They could be made of metals, terracotta, or stone.

### Slide 31

Geometric shapes! In the 1920s and 1930s, many architects used geometric shapes and lines to make patterns like zigzags. (Click to make the zigzag appear) The red arrow traces a zigzag in 265 Cabrini Boulevard in Manhattan. Have you learned the names of shapes? We have squares, circles, triangles, rectangles, and other shapes.

### Slide 32

Geometric shapes became so popular that architects and designers began to simplify other natural shapes into geometric forms—like fountains and leaves! Here we have an Art Deco fountain decoration at 181 Madison in Manhattan. Do you see how this fountain does not look like a real fountain? It's been stylized, or made to look like the idea of a fountain. The architect has put a creative spin, or personal style, on it.

### Slide 33

Here we have more geometric patterns. These are at the Chanin Building in Manhattan. Can you see the leaves, birds, fish, and other stylized figures? They are very pretty and interesting, but they do not look like real-life versions of these things. They are stylized.

### Slide 34

Parapet! That's a fun word to say. A parapet is a low wall along the edge of a roof, bridge, or balcony. In Art Deco buildings, a parapet can sometimes go far above the roof to make it decorative (pretty, fancy, or interesting to the eye.) (Click to make the outline appear) This is why many Art Deco buildings look like they are wearing a crown. Do you see how 55 Central Park West looks like it's wearing a crown?

### Slide 35

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