

ABNER COOK LESSON PLAN

Big Question:

How did master builder Abner Cook incorporate local elements and resources when he designed and constructed the Neill-Cochran House Museum?

Formative Questions:

What is the architectural style of the Neill-Cochran House Museum, and why did Cook choose that style?

What materials did Cook select for the Neill-Cochran House Museum and why?

What were some of the construction styles and techniques Cook used at the Neill-Cochran House Museum?

Materials:

pen/pencil and paper, architectural examples from:

http://www.bc.edu/bc_org/avp/cas/fnart/fa267/greekrev.html,

printed handouts from:

<http://architecture.about.com/library/bl-preservationbrief-investigate06.htm>,

optional selection of potential building materials (e.g., limestone, brick, wood)

TEKS:

This lesson is adaptable to several grade levels and subject areas.

Objectives:

Students will be able to demonstrate an understanding of the architecture and building styles popular in 19th-century Texas.

Anticipatory Set (Attention Getter):

The teacher will start the lesson with a reminder of the upcoming visit to the Neill-Cochran House Museum through visuals or narrative.

Procedures:

The teacher will provide five examples of Greek Revival American architecture. A suggested website for examples is “A Digital Archive of American Architecture” available from: http://www.bc.edu/bc_org/avp/cas/fnart/fa267/greekrev.html.

The teacher will write on the board: “The popularity of the style was due to strong associations with classical tradition and democracy. The Greek Revival style was adaptable and used for many building purposes -- from ‘high’ to ‘low’.”

Students will reflect on the question: Why would Abner Cook choose the Greek Revival style?

Class will reflect before discussing possible answers.

Teacher will ask the questions: “What common elements do you see in the examples? What elements do you expect Cook would have included in the Neill-Cochran House Museum?”

Class will discuss possible answers.

Teacher will guide students through a hypothetical selection of building materials.

Reflection question: “What materials do you see used today?”

Teacher will write answers on the board.

Follow-up question: “Were those materials available 150 years ago?”

If possible, teacher should pass around building material examples and guide students toward selection of pine, cypress, and limestone as good choices.

Students will investigate the qualities of pine, cypress, and/or limestone, and predict why these materials were exceptionally good for the Austin area. Both pine and limestone were locally available and durable. Cypress was available along the coast and is durable and resistant to insect attack.

Cook and a partner owned a sawmill near Bastrop where the pine used in the House was growing; limestone was available along Shoal Creek in Austin – right in the vicinity of the House. Reflection question: “How would these facts influence his choice of materials?”

Teacher will show a picture of the Texas Governor’s Mansion (also designed by Abner Cook) after the 2008 fire as an example of durable building materials.

Note that the walls of the Governor’s Mansion are brick, not limestone, but the columns are cypress and held up very well in the fire.

Teacher will print and hand out “About.com: Architecture Preservation Brief #35” available at <http://architecture.about.com/library/bl-preservationbrief-investigate06.htm>. (May also Google “historic building techniques” or similar terms for additional Internet resources.)

Students will read two pages on construction techniques.

Students will develop site-specific questions regarding building techniques to ask during their visit to the Neill-Cochran House Museum.

Pre-visit Evaluation

Using their new knowledge of building techniques, materials, and architectural style, students will create their own vision of a Greek Revival house in 1850s Austin. Teacher will develop a rubric that emphasizes student use of information learned in each of the three formative questions.

Visit/post-visit evaluation

Students will prepare and deliver brief presentations addressing two main points: answering to their specific question about building techniques used at the Neill-Cochran House Museum and comparing and contrasting their pre-visit expectation and vision of the Neill-Cochran House Museum with their actual experience.