

Workshop 5

Domestic Architecture

Introduction

This workshop session introduces the analysis of domestic architecture artifacts as a tool in the literature classroom. Laura Arnold Leibman, literature professor at Reed College, uses examples of Native American architecture to help teachers enhance their reading of American literature texts. She discusses the ways to understand architectural references and settings in works of American literature.

By looking at two intellectual products from the same culture—a Navajo hogan* and Luci Tapahonso’s poem *Starlore* as well as an Acoma Pueblo home and Simon Ortiz’s *Poems From the Veterans Hospital 8:50 AM Fort Lyons VAH*—you will better understand how the beliefs and values of two distinct Native American cultures influence their poems.

During the course of the session, you will learn how to search for domestic architecture artifacts to help teach American literature. In the onscreen classroom, Laura discusses how she uses domestic architecture artifacts to illuminate the discipline of American literature in her own classroom. She provides high school teachers with ideas about how to read domestic architecture artifacts; she also suggests specific lesson plans.

We then follow the onscreen teachers into the computer lab where they work with Laura, Lois Leveen (Reed College English professor), and each other to find artifacts that supplement the themes and context of the literature they are currently teaching.

Next, we follow Sara Salvi—a teacher at St. Mary’s Academy in Portland, Oregon—into her own high school classroom. We watch as she models a similar lesson with her students. Finally, we hear Sara’s reflections on her own teaching practices.

* indicates a reference in the Glossary.

Before the Session

Before watching the “Domestic Architecture” video, be sure to:

- Guide: Read the Domestic Architecture Reading.
- Video: Watch the *American Passages* episode “Native Voices.” (The episode can be viewed on the *American Passages* Web site at www.learner.org. Click on “Video on Demand” or go to <http://www.learner.org/resources/series164.html> and click on the VoD icon next to the appropriate program title.)
- Web: Download the *Navajo Hogan* (serial #8963) from the *American Passages* archive site at http://www.learner.org/amerpass/slideshow/archive_search.php.
- Literature: Read Luci Tapahonso’s poem *Starlore* and Simon Ortiz’s poem *Poems From the Veterans Hospital 8:50 AM Ft. Lyons VAH*.

As you read, consider the following close reading questions specific to Tapahonso’s poem. See the Teacher Resources section in the Appendix for instructions on effective close reading.

- In the poem, Tapahonso speaks of two different homes: How does she describe each? What important details does she provide her reader? What details does she leave out?
- Anthropologist Pierre Bourdieu believes the house is “a microcosm organized according to the same oppositions which govern the universe.” In what ways does the hogan in Tapahonso’s poem relate to this statement?

Synopsis of Laura Arnold Leibman’s Presentation

- Laura begins by introducing how domestic architecture can be effectively used with literature. Using the example of signposts that appear in both domestic architecture and literature, she discusses how these disciplines connect through physical setting, social milieu, and the literary structure of a text.
- Laura leads the teachers in a close reading of the first artifact, the *Navajo Hogan*. She points out the hogan’s important architectural signposts and the ways they relate to Luci Tapahonso’s poem *Starlore*.
- Next, Laura looks at the second artifact, the *Acoma Pueblo Home*. Together, Laura and the teachers make observations about the artifact and then make connections to Simon Ortiz’s poem *Poems From the Veterans Hospital 8:50 AM Ft. Lyons VAH*.
- It is important to note that Laura pairs the Pueblo architecture with Pueblo literature and the Navajo architecture with Navajo literature. This way, the teachers gain a greater sense of the differences between these two Native American cultures; they can reflect on the ways that these differences are expressed in each poem.

Relating the Literary Movement to the Artifacts

Facilitators:

- Before this workshop session, you will need to download the image of the *Navajo Hogan* (serial #8963) from the *American Passages* archive and print out copies for all your participants. Be sure to print and copy the descriptive information that accompanies the image. (For further information on how to navigate the archive, see instructions in the front matter.)
- Begin the workshop by watching program 5: “Domestic Architecture” through the *American Passages* excerpted clip. Watch for approximately 11:30 minutes.
- Follow up with the discussion activity below. The discussion should take approximately 10 minutes.

Activity 1: Discussion of the Literary Movement

1. As a whole group, discuss what literature you have taught or are currently teaching from this literary movement. If you don’t currently teach anything from this movement, how might you add it to your curriculum?

Other authors and literature from *American Passages*’ “Native Voices” for potential discussion:

- **Leslie Marmon Silko** (1948–) Poet, novelist, and short story writer; Silko grew up on the Laguna Pueblo Reservation and is well known for her multi-genre novel *Ceremony*.
- **Louise Erdrich** (1954–) Of Native American and German descent, Erdrich is a poet, novelist, and short story writer. She wrote the composite novel *Love Medicine*.
- **Chippewa Songs** (1907–1909) These songs reflect the culture of the Chippewa (also called Ojibwa) peoples. They once lived along the shores of Lake Huron and Lake Superior, across Minnesota, and west to North Dakota. Some songs were sung in a ceremonial context, but others were not. At the most basic, the three levels of songs are old songs and singers; old ceremonial and medicine songs; and modern songs—these include love songs.
- **John Neihardt** (1881–1973) and Black Elk (1863–1950) Born into the Oglala Lakota, Black Elk was an important Sioux visionary who passed on his vision of the Six Grandfathers—the powers of the West, the North, the East, the South, the Sky, and the Earth—to poet John Neihardt. The record of this interaction became the book *Black Elk Speaks*, published in 1932.
- **Ghost Dance Songs** (1890) A religious movement began after a Paiute man, Wovoka had a vision in 1889. God told Wovoka the people should prepare for His coming and dance a ghost dance that would hasten the return of the old world. This prophecy spread amongst the Plains Indians and before long 20,000 Sioux were engaged in the dance. The fear evoked amongst U.S. officials eventually reached the breaking point at Wounded Knee, the tragic massacre of 200 Native American men, women, and children.
- **Roger Williams** (1603–1683) A Puritan who lived amongst the Algonquian Indians, thus alienating himself from both the Massachusetts Bay and Plymouth colonies. His most famous text is *A Key Into the Language of America*.
- **Thomas Harriot** (1560–1621) Author of *A Brief and True Report of the New Found Land of Virginia*. Harriot’s account, though optimistic, is some of the only information about the Roanoke people.

For more information on these authors, visit the *American Passages* Web site at www.learner.org.

2. How did the Domestic Architecture Reading change or enhance your view of Luci Tapahonso’s poem *Starlore* or other Native American literary works you have read?

Relating the Literary Movement to the Artifacts, cont'd.

Facilitators:

- Continue watching the video until the point where Laura Arnold Leibman finishes reading the first artifact (*Navajo Hogan*, serial #8963). Begin at the title First Artifact Reading and watch for approximately 9:30 minutes.
- Divide the session participants into groups of three and hand out the previously downloaded artifact. This activity should take approximately 20 minutes.

Activity 2: Reading the First Artifact

1. In your group, analyze the image that your facilitator provides for you. First, make some initial observations about the artifact:

- What details do you notice about the way this building is constructed?
- How does it differ from your own home?

2. Next, read the artifact more closely; use the Domestic Architecture Questions (created by Laura Arnold Leibman) below, along with the Domestic Architecture Reading and synopsis of Laura's lesson.

Domestic Architecture Questions:

- Is this house typical of the houses of this community? What makes it typical or atypical? What makes it different from the typical house in your community? Are the houses described in the literature you read typical? How can you tell?
- What (approximately) would be the economic or social status of the individuals living in this house? Is this status equivalent to that of the people in the literature you have read from this culture? What clues in the setting of the story, poem, or play clue us in to the social status of the characters? Are houses different for different classes in this culture? How so? Do you belong to a class equivalent to the people in the story you have read? How does your house reflect your social class?
- In American houses, rooms are usually divided for use by age (some rooms are for adults, some for children). This division does not exist in all American subcultures and has not always existed historically in American society. How is space divided in your house, in this artifact house, and in the house in the text you are reading? Is the space divided by age, class, gender, etc.? What does this spatial division say about the social structure of the culture that produced this literature?
- People often have stories to explain why houses should be built the way they are built. These are important resources for understanding the symbolic world the characters inhabit. Is there any symbolic or cultural significance behind the structure of the buildings you are observing? Does this community tell any stories to explain why they build houses the way they do?
- Houses are usually a communal enterprise. Who would live together in this house? What is their relationship to one another? What does this relationship tell me about the ideal family or social unit in this society? Do the characters in the story live in this ideal unit, or is their social unit fragmented?
- What objects belong in the house? What significance is ascribed to these objects? Do they belong to specific people in the house?
- Houses guide people to navigate them in a set manner. What are the rules governing the movement through your house? How does this artifact house differ from yours? Similarly, what signposts does the work of literature offer for how to move through the text? (If you were to break up the text into sections, how would you know which was the beginning, which was the middle, and which was the end?)

Relating the Literary Movement to the Artifacts, cont'd.

Facilitators:

- After discussing the *Navajo Hogan*, spend five to seven minutes discussing Luci Tapahonso's poem *Starlore*. Use the close reading questions from the Before the Session section as a starting point for discussion.
- Continue watching the video of the session participants reading and making connections to the second artifact, the *Acoma Pueblo Home*, along with Simon Ortiz's poem. Begin at the title Second Artifact Reading and watch for approximately 8:30 minutes. Stop the video after this second artifact reading, before the title Lesson Planning.
- Then do the activity below. This activity should take approximately 20 minutes.

Activity 3: Connecting Literature to the Artifact

1. Whole-Group Discussion Questions:

- What is the first step that Laura Arnold Leibman takes with the onscreen teachers to discuss the domestic architecture artifacts and their histories?
- How does she move the teachers' discussion from the artifact analysis to connecting the artifact with the literature they are reading?
- What techniques does Laura use on-screen that help you as a viewer? Could you use these techniques in your own classroom?

2. Return to small groups. Begin to draw connections between the *Navajo Hogan* and Luci Tapahonso's poem. Use the following guiding question:

- How does analyzing the image of the *Navajo Hogan* change or enhance the meaning of "home" in Luci Tapahonso's poem?

Facilitators:

- Watch the Lesson Planning and In the Classroom portions of the video. Begin at the title Lesson Planning and watch for approximately 34:30 minutes.
- Then do the next activity. This activity should take approximately 20 minutes.

Activity 4: Classroom Strategies Discussion/Create Lesson Plan

1. Whole-Group Discussion Questions: You just watched Sara Salvi apply what she had learned about connecting artifacts and literature to her own classroom. Take 10–15 minutes to discuss the following questions:

- Sara teaches at a private school with a smaller class size. How does class size make a difference in planning your lesson? What would you do differently considering the size of your own English literature classes?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of having the students search for and match images rather than providing them with pre-selected ones? When might you want to use which strategy for artifact selection?

2. In your same small groups, brainstorm different literary movements/pieces of literature that you could use with the *Navajo Hogan* and the *Acoma Pueblo Home*. What are some other domestic architecture artifacts that would supplement the literature you are currently teaching?

Relating the Literary Movement to the Artifacts, cont'd.

Facilitators:

- Watch Sara Salvi's reflective interview. Begin at the title Reflection and watch for approximately three minutes.
- Ask session participants to comment on what Sara felt worked in her classroom. Did this parallel what they thought worked as they were watching?

Building a Lesson Plan and Teaching With Artifacts

For the detailed six-step process for artifact selection, see the Teacher Resources section in the Appendix.

Homework

1. Create a lesson plan using a domestic architecture artifact with a piece of literature you are currently teaching.

For example: Using the text you are currently teaching, have your students select a character and draw their visions of that character's home design. Select three or four questions for your students to answer from the Domestic Architecture Questions located in Activity 2.

Share this lesson with fellow teachers at the next workshop session.

2. See next week's Before the Session section.

Artifacts and Literature Pairings: Domestic Architecture Artifacts

The following domestic architecture artifacts can be found in the *American Passages* archive at http://www.learner.org/amerpass/slideshow/archive_search.php. Enter the serial number to view a picture of the item and a detailed description.

Artifact and Serial

Parlor in New York
apartment
(1904) (#8263)

Home of Mrs. Jacob Stooksbury
(1933) (#4704)

Indian attack during King Phillip's
War; Hadley, Mass.
(1883) (#2121)

Literary Movement and Literature

Social Realism:
Edith Wharton's
The Age of Innocence

Southern Renaissance:
William Faulkner's
As I Lay Dying

Masculine Heroes:
Catharine Maria
Sedgwick's
Hope Leslie

Building a Lesson Plan and Teaching With Artifacts, cont'd.

Teaching Tips

- One teaching method that Sara illustrates is using a cultural artifact to help her students pay closer attention to the language in Dickinson's poems.
- Another method she uses is allowing her students to search for the artifacts rather than picking an artifact herself. She has made sure there are relevant artifacts in the archive before she asks the students to match images to their mental pictures. This process encourages her students to consider how time period and historical style make a significant impact on writing.
- One helpful technique that Laura uses is having the teachers in the workshop read the poem aloud before beginning the analysis. This is a good technique to use with students; it allows them to better understand the syntax of the poem, thereby retaining a clearer sense of the content (especially since many poems are not plot-centered). Additionally, having multiple students read helps quieter students "hear" their voices in the classroom.

Notes

Session Reading

Domestic Architecture Reading

What do we mean by domestic architecture artifacts?

Architecture refers most directly to the built environment, the structures humans create and occupy. While buildings are one type of architecture artifact, other objects also document the built environment. These objects include photographs, drawings, or paintings of buildings. They also may be blueprints, building codes, furnishings, or written descriptions of physical spaces (such as architectural guidebooks or decorating manuals).

Why are they useful to bring into a literature classroom?

The ways people design and occupy space reflect a great deal about cultural beliefs. For example, in the seventeenth century it was not uncommon for Anglo-Americans to eat, sleep, and entertain guests all in the same room. As ideas about privacy and public representation of the self evolved, later generations of Anglo-Americans began to differentiate the rooms of a house based on use. Today, many houses contain formal dining rooms and living rooms that are rarely used, because architectural ideals don't match inhabitants' daily practices. Studying building designs and materials, as well as furniture and other interior elements, can help us understand the cultural values that are inscribed in the built environment. At the same time, domestic space serves an important metaphorical role in American culture; where the values attributed to an ideal "Home Sweet Home" can reveal assumptions that might differ sharply from people's actual lived experience. Domestic architecture artifacts thereby provide ways to understand subtleties and even inconsistencies in the cultural contexts of literary works.

Contextualizing domestic architecture artifacts and literary texts: The case of Luci Tapahonso's *Starlore* and Simon Ortiz's *Poems From the Veterans Hospital 8:50 AM Ft. Lyons VAH*

Luci Tapahonso's *Starlore* and Simon Ortiz's *Poems From the Veterans Hospital* reflect ways the built environment can be a source of familiarity or of disjunction. The opening section of *Starlore* refers to alienating physical spaces that contrast with the welcoming image of the hogan as a restorative space. In *Poems From the Veterans Hospital*, a building meant for healing is depicted as sterile and institutional in comparison to the natural environment. Both poems detail the built environment in ways that portray emotional and cultural themes.

Using domestic architecture artifacts can help students understand how the descriptions of physical space function in the poem. For students who don't know what a hogan is, understanding the specifics of this type of structure is important, as we see in the video. In this sense, using domestic architecture artifacts can help students understand how spaces are designed and occupied by people from unfamiliar cultures.

But a careful reader of Tapahonso's poem will notice that not only is the hogan distinct from the alienating spaces described at the beginning of the piece, it is also different from the Navajo speaker's parents' home. Architecture here reflects not just a cultural difference between Anglo-American space and Navajo space; it also reveals that the Navajo themselves may choose different living spaces. Exploring this aspect of the poem can help complicate simplistic distinctions between whites and Native Americans. Similarly, considering how modern hospitals might differ from the 1937 building described in Ortiz's poem can help students see how architectural practices reflect changing technologies and ideologies, helping them articulate a more sophisticated reading of *Poems From the Veterans Hospital*.

Domestic Architecture Reading, cont'd.

As Native American authors writing in the second half of the twentieth century, both Tapahonso and Ortiz invoke architecture to depict places where characters feel at home or not at home. This trope also appears in the work of authors from other minority groups, such as *Brown Girl, Brownstones* by African American writer Paule Marshall or *The House on Mango Street* by Chicana writer Sandra Cisneros. Because ownership of the detached single-family home is so closely associated with the idea of attaining the American Dream, contemporary authors of all ethnicities often explore home spaces as sites where identity is expressed or contested.

Contextualizing domestic architecture artifacts and literary texts: The case of Emily Dickinson's poetry

Beginning in the 1830s, Americans began to place increased value on domesticity. Magazines, instructional manuals, and literary works advocated the domestic as a protecting and nurturing private sphere; this portrayal of the home was a direct response to the displacement caused by industrialization and urbanization. Sentimental literature such as Harriet Beecher Stowe's 1852 novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* offered contrasts between purportedly good and bad domestic spaces. In 1869, Catharine Beecher, Stowe's sister, authored one of the most popular nonfiction domestic guides published in the period: *The American Woman's Home*.

Other authors took more critical views of the domestic, creating gothic tales in which houses are disturbing spaces. Edgar Allan Poe's 1839 short story, *The Fall of the House of Usher* exemplifies this literature. Other authors depicted gothic domestic spaces to critique specific aspects of nineteenth-century American culture, such as Harriet Wilson's 1859 novel about Northern racism, *Our Nig*, or Charlotte Perkins Gilman's 1892 story, *The Yellow Wall-Paper*, which condemns the limitations of late Victorian era gender roles.

Emily Dickinson wrote nearly 2,000 poems during her lifetime, most of which she spent on the family homestead where she grew up. She wrote prolifically from the late 1850s through the 1870s, and images of houses in these poems range from the comforting home depicted in sentimental literature to the uncanny or even frightening domestic spaces common to the gothic. The lines of Dickinson's poem 1078, "The Bustle in a House / The Morning after Death / Is solemnest of industries / Enacted upon Earth—// The Sweeping up the Heart / And putting Love away / We shall not want to use again / Until Eternity," describe a familiar sentimental scene in which women's domestic labor functions as a means of emotional and perhaps even religious redemption. But this short poem stands in sharp contrast to the one Sara Salvi and her students analyze. In "One need not be a Chamber—to be Haunted," the image of a haunted house becomes a metaphor for an internal mental haunting experienced by the speaker. As with the later Native American poetry, focusing on the specific attributes of the spaces described in Dickinson's poems helps readers understand how architectural details, whether real or metaphoric, convey meaning in literature.

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Notes
