

Thomas Jefferson and Architecture



*“Architecture is my delight and putting up and pulling down
one of my favorite amusements.”*

Thomas Jefferson 1824

“Architecture is among the most important arts...”

Thomas Jefferson

Preface

This lesson is designed for 7th grade world geography students. It will be used as a component during a study of Thomas Jefferson.

Purpose of the Lesson

The purpose of this lesson is for students to explore one of Jefferson's many talents, architecture. After learning some basics of classical architecture students will identify those features on buildings designed by Thomas Jefferson. Students will also learn about Andrea Palladio and his influence on Jefferson's architectural style.

Students will explore websites and photos of the State of Virginia Capitol building, the University of Virginia, Monticello, and Poplar Forest to become familiar with Jefferson's architectural style.

When the research has been completed students will go on a field trip to observe architectural features in their community. The students will hopefully be able to identify architectural features similar to those Jefferson used in Virginia.

Each student will be expected to produce some type of project using the information they learned.

Content Information

Who was Andrea Palladio?

Andrea Palladio was born in Padua, Italy in 1508. He admired ancient Roman architecture. Palladio set the standard for home design and loved balance. His influence is still seen today in the Palladian windows which are usually tall windows with a rounded top and flanked by 2 smaller rectangle windows. Palladio is still the best known neo-classical architect in the western world.

Thomas Jefferson's library included several copies of Palladio's *I Quattro Libri*. He also had copies of Palladio's *The Four Books of Architecture* which he referred to as his bible. Jefferson's architecture style and his theories were based on his appreciation of Palladio and their connection to ancient Rome.

Thomas Jefferson was a self-taught architect. He designed many of his civic buildings such as the University of Virginia, the Virginia

State Capitol building, and his home Monticello in the neo-Roman or classical style.

PALLADIO'S BASILICA



Detailed view of Basilica which was completed after Palladio's death.

MONTICELLO

Monticello, which is Italian for “little mountain”, was begun in 1769 and completed in 1782. Renovations started in 1793 and made Monticello look very much like it does today in 1809. Monticello was a laboratory designed in the Palladian style and was never finished in Jefferson’s time.

Isaac Jefferson, one of Jefferson’s slaves, refers to parts of Monticello as being pulled down and built up again 6 or 7 times. It was struck by lightning once.



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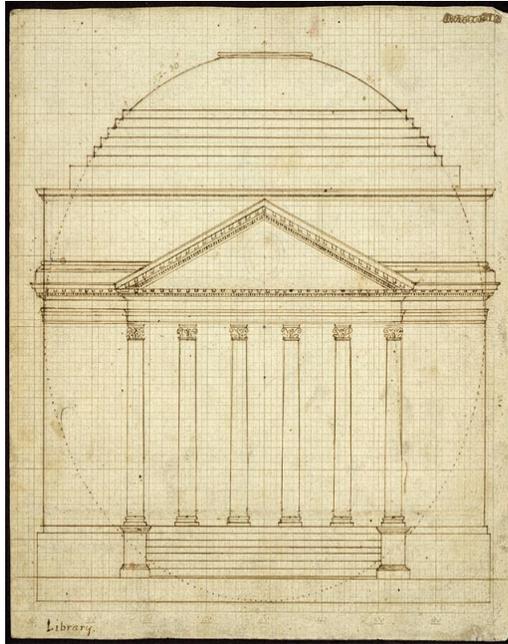
The University of Virginia became Thomas Jefferson's retirement project in 1817. Jefferson called the university his "academic village." The university has been able to maintain Jefferson's original intent which was to be a community where students and professors live in close quarters with the heart of the university. This is not true of most 200 year old structures.

At the bicentennial celebrations of 1976 the American Institute of Architects called the University of Virginia "the proudest achievement of American architecture in the past 200 years." The University of Virginia has also been recognized as a World Heritage site along with the Grand Canyon and the Statue of Liberty.

The Rotunda is modeled after the Pantheon in Rome which was built in ancient Rome by an unknown architect. Thomas Jefferson had only seen and read about the Pantheon in books by Palladio and others.



Pantheon



Thomas Jefferson's drawing of the Rotunda.



University of Virginia Rotunda

VIRGINIA STATE CAPITOL

Thomas Jefferson designed the neo-classical central building of the state capitol. He gave it a temple look designed after temples in Greece and Rome, which Jefferson had read about. The only temple he had actually seen was the Maison Carree in the south of France. Jefferson called this “cubic architecture.” Architects say Jefferson’s design of the capitol building has a “commanding and impressive site.”

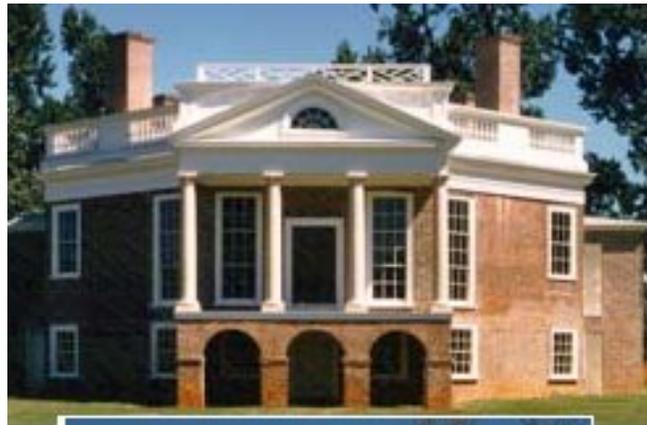


Virginia State Capitol
Thomas Jefferson designed the center structure.

POPLAR FOREST

Monticello was Thomas Jefferson's public house, Poplar Forest his retreat. This was Jefferson's last architectural masterpiece. It resembled an Italian-style villa. Jefferson said Poplar Forest was a place to "detach myself from public life."

"It is the most valuable of my possessions."



Poplar Forest
Bedford County, near Lynchburg, Virginia

Procedure

Day 1

Each student will be given the handout “Fun Facts About Classic Architecture.” The teacher and the students will discuss these basic designs.

<http://www.timelessarchitectural.com/pdf/Fun%20Facts.pdf>

Day 2

Lecture by local university art historian on architecture.

Day 3

Computer Lab

Students will explore the websites of Thomas Jefferson’s architecture drawings and photographs of Monticello, the University of Virginia, the Virginia State Capitol building, and Poplar Forest.

The students will be expected to take notes or make sketches identifying the classical architectural features.

Websites will be:

<http://www.thomasjeffersonpapers.org/>

This is the Massachusetts Historical Society website which has many of the architectural drawings of Thomas Jefferson.

<http://www.monticello.org>

This website has many resources about Thomas Jefferson and much information geared to students of all ages.

<http://www.poplarforest.org>

This website is great for learning about Jefferson architecture.

There is a special feature for students to click on architecture features of the house and information is highlighted about that feature such as *pediment*.

www.bluffton.edu/~sullivanm/virginia/jeffersonarchitecture.html

Great photos of Monticello and the University of Virginia.

www.3.iath.virginia.edu/wilson/home.html

More photos of buildings designed by Thomas Jefferson.

Day 4

Part of this class will include some time for students to reflect on what they've learned.

Teacher and students discuss what was learned from the websites.

Discuss project possibilities and expectations

Prepare for the architecture field trip.

Projects will be chosen by the students. They may be individual or small group projects. Ideas could be a PowerPoint presentation, an original architecture design using some of the classical features learned during the week's lessons, research dealing with more details of one of Jefferson's designs such as the floor plan of Monticello or other buildings on the campus of the University of Virginia, constructing a model of one of these structures, or a project using a digital camera.

Day 5

The field trip will include a walking tour and time for looking for, identifying and recording a list of specific architectural features on one of the local university campuses. Students will be required to take notes, make sketches, use a digital camera or all the above to be used in their project.

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*Thomas Jefferson:
Personality, Character and Public Life
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