

About this Guide

This study guide was made possible by a grant from the Katherine Mabis McKenna Foundation. Using sites in the Laurel Highlands, the guide is intended to introduce students to structure, function, and appearance in the built environment as a way of understanding how architecture and design tells the story of how people live, past and present. The American Institute of Architects defines Built Environment Education as the study of architecture, preservation, design, city planning, and the issues and challenges which are part of these activities. It is any area where people have intervened in the design of the natural environment either by accident or intent. It means recognizing that there is but one environment, which includes the natural and the human-made, whole and interdependent. The National Trust for Historic Preservation calls this same topic, *heritage education*. In England, it's called conservation; in France, *patrimoine*, and teachers often use the terms *cultural awareness*. Whatever we choose to call it, there is a common understanding that we are working towards a built environment designed to be aesthetically pleasing, functional, safe, and responsive to and reflective of cultural differences and values.¹ We suggest that teachers use these general resources to prepare students to explore built environments in the Laurel Highlands, including Fallingwater, the State Theater, Ohioypyle State Park, the National Road, Fort Necessity, Brownsville, and the Coal and Coke Heritage Center.

The sites serve many purposes: entertainment, inspiration, and education. People from all over the world go to them for enjoyment and fun; they go to find inspiration and to feel awe and wonder; and they go for casual and formal educational experiences. With this guide, we focus on how field trips can become much more than vaguely educational holidays from school; they can become part of a set of experiences teachers use to meet curriculum goals.

Teachers need not become specialists to teach creatively and effectively at these sites. They do need to become familiar with the unique characteristics of these sites as teaching-learning environments, and develop skills in inquiry- and object-based learning strategies. These skills have extensive application in the classroom as well as outside of it.

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¹ Graves, Ginny. **Walk Around the Block**. Prairie Village Kansas, 1992: i.

Classrooms may have the 3 “R”s, but these sites also have benefits of the 3 “A”s—the authentic, the aesthetic, and the accessible². The authenticity of a place—be it Brownsville, Ohionyle, or Fallingwater—sends a message about values. Eminent museologist Duncan Cameron calls this a message of a “different order....beyond doubt, that the communication of ideas through real things can be so intense and intimate an experience for the child that the picture image, the world symbol, the model or replica, and the screen image of film and television becomes pales shadows.”³

The sites are also compelling and engaging aesthetic environments. They encourage us to explore them, mentally and physically, to develop our own understanding and serve as a release from the confines of a classroom.

Although all the places are located in the Laurel Highlands, they make the whole world, the past, the present and the imagined, accessible. What has only been read about in books or studied in the classroom can now be personally discovered through multiple senses and individually understood and interpreted. The experience of personal discovery, through observation and interaction, allows children to remember what they have learned and develops intellectual tools they can use throughout their lives.

We suggest that you use this guide to incorporate the built environment with your instructional goals. The first part of the guide can be used as a general introduction to architecture; the second part of the guide will ground architecture in the Laurel Highlands.

This guide presents activities that encourage you and your students to awaken your own senses to the architecture around you in order to heighten your own experiences.

² Voris, Helen H., Maija Sedzielarz, and Carolyn P. Blackman. **Teach the Mind, Touch the Spirit: A Guide to Focused Field Trips**. Department of Education/Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago: 1986.

³ Cameron, Duncan F. “A Viewpoint: The Museum as a Communication System and Implications for Museum Education.” **Curator**, 11 (1): 33-40, 1968.