

**Take A Look
Around!**

**Architecture and
the Built
Environment**

Teacher Resource Book

San Jose Museum of Art

1892 (W. J. Edbrooke)

1991 (Skidmore, Owens,
and Merrill, and RMW)

Image 1

At first glance, the two buildings that make up the San Jose Museum of Art (SJMA) seem to have very little in common. The historic Richardsonian Romanesque structure was built of thick, rough sandstone in 1892. It has a very rounded, full feeling with many windows, a variety of shapes and heights, and a traditional atmosphere of columns, arches, and a clock tower. The new building, built nearly one hundred years later in 1991, has a light, smooth exterior with an array of geometric shapes, a unique pattern of small windows, and a notable absence of ornate decoration. They are two extraordinarily different structures built with different materials comprising very different shapes and details. However, these two buildings share a surprising number of similarities in form and function.

Let's start by looking at the Historic Wing. The building was designed by the architect W. J. Edbrooke

Richardsonian Romanesque

The historic building of the SJMA is a revival of the Romanesque buildings of the Middle Ages (500-1500 AD). These medieval structures, usually churches and cathedrals, were constructed with very heavy, dark stones cut into large blocks. Thick columns and low, sturdy, rounded arches supported these stone blocks. Because the stone was so heavy, and the columns so thick, the buildings were often very dark, dank places sorely lacking many windows or doors.

Fortunately, over the years, architects were able to improve the original Romanesque design giving this Romanesque revival a much more airy, light, and uplifting atmosphere. Look carefully at the exterior of the historic building of the SJMA. The entryway is flanked by the very traditional columns of the Romanesque era, but a pointed pediment, forcing your eye upward caps the door. Also notice the number of windows piercing the thick sandstone blocks--a good deal of sunlight is constantly flooding into this modern-day Roman structure. Let's look carefully at the details of this historic building to understand its important form and function and determine why it fits so well with the

Questions for Further Discussion

In modern architecture, columns are often used to support and decorate very grand, important buildings like museums, banks, and universities. Do these columns give you the impression of grandeur? Do you think this is the feeling the architect wanted to portray?

Why do you think federal buildings (i.e. museums, banks, post offices, etc.) often use columns instead of the more structural post? Can you identify columns on more typical buildings around your neighborhood?

Lesson Objectives

Grades 1-4

Identify columns and define their importance.

Differentiate between types of columns. Experience the feeling of a hard-working column.

Grades 5-7

Identify building materials of columns and discuss importance.

Define the difference between structural and decorative elements, and understand how some architectural pieces fulfill both roles.

Grades 8-12

Understand compression and the fact that gravity is pushing loads down vertically onto columns.

Activities

Art

Have students create capital designs for different buildings in your neighborhood. What could you add to column capitals at the entrance of your school? your home? the grocery store? What do these designs say about the building they support?

Language Arts

Discuss the reasons for various exterior elements of a building. Think about the exterior of your school in terms of element, functional aspect, and decorative aspect. Do any other structures serve both structural and decorative roles (for example: gutters, windows, stone, trim, etc).

Science

The columns of this image are made of sandstone. Have students identify the most common material used for columns. Why are columns usually made of bricks, stone, cement, or some kind of metal? What would happen to the column if it were made of a different material such as wood, plastic, or aluminum? Anchor samples of building materials outside a window at school to see how building materials weather over time.

