

# Ghana's History through Architecture

*Lesson plan written by Erica Luetzow-Coward*

**Keywords:** architecture, Ghana, history, colonialism

**Overview** In this lesson, students will be able to explain how places are locations with distinctive, meaningful characteristics through looking at architectural styles in Accra and other parts of Ghana. Through this lesson, students will walk through stages of Ghana's history while looking at types of architecture (traditional, colonial, modernist, contemporary).

## Essential Questions

- What can you learn about a place from its architecture and how does that tell a story?
- What makes places unique and different?
- How do the look and construction of buildings change over time?

**Intended Grade Level** 2nd-5th

**Intended Content Areas** Social Studies

## Standard Alignment with NC Standards

### Social Studies-

*3.G.1.1 Explain how the absolute and relative location of places impacts the development of communities.*

*3.G.1.2 Explain how climate and physical characteristics affect the ways in which people live in a place or region.*

*1.1.9 Make inferences from information in sources.*

*1.1.10 Construct responses to compelling questions with specific claims and information from teacher-provided sources.*

### Visual Arts-

*2.CX.1.2 Recognize that works of art represent specific time periods.*

*3.CX.1.2 Understand how art documents the history of the local community.*

*3.CX.2.2 Understand how to use information learned in other disciplines, such as math, science, language arts, social studies, and other arts in visual arts.*

*4.CX.2.2 Apply skills and concepts learned in other disciplines, such as math, science, language arts, social studies, and other arts, in the visual arts.*

4.CX.2.4 Explain the effect of technology on the way products look and how they are created.

5.V.2.2 Use ideas and imagery from the global environment as sources for creating art.

5.CX.2.4 Interpret visual images from media sources and the immediate environment.

## Materials

- [Resource Slides for Classroom Use](#)
- Background reading/resources for teachers:
  - [“The Slave Fortresses of Ghana”](#)
  - [“Architecture as Nationalism in Accra, Ghana”](#)
  - [“Whose Style? Taste, Class, and Power in Accra’s Architecture”](#)
  - [Photo collection of European colonial architecture in Ghana](#)
  - [Architects on Ghanaian Architecture](#)
  - [“Despite” Architecture](#)
  - [Writing about Accra](#)
  - [National Cathedral of Ghana](#)
  - [“Cathedral of Scandals”](#)
- Paper, crayons,

**Suggested Length of Time** 45 minutes

## Prior Work to be Completed

None

## Procedures

- Reinforce Zoom Out/Zoom In from the previous lesson: Ask students what is the name of their school → city/town → state → country → continent. Remind students that they are learning about a continent called Africa → a country called Ghana → which has a capital city called Accra → which has buildings in it like your town.
- Today we will learn about architecture, the science and art of designing buildings. You can sometimes learn a lot about a place’s physical environment and history by looking at its buildings.
  - For instance: warehouses/mills of Durham, NC show what its economic past used to be. Houses with big porches remind us of the importance of windows and porches before air conditioning was common.
- Show students the slide “What is this building saying to you?”
  - Have students quickly fill in the speech bubbles for the buildings with a sentence that tells **why the building is important or significant.**

- Consider printing out the slide for students to write on or have them just list A-D on their paper and tell **why the building is important or significant.**
- Share out the students ideas and tell them that they will learn more about these structures and other buildings as the lesson progresses.
- **Rural Ghana Slide:** Like any country or state, Ghana has rural and urban areas, and you see different buildings in these different places. (Information on architecture largely from lecture on Architecture in Ghana by Professor Irene Addo and Kwabena Addo on 26 May 2023.)
  - Rural areas: you mainly see compound/family houses. New building materials and migration are changing how these structures are built.
    - Sun dried bricks, monolithic earth, metal sheet roofing. Cement based buildings being used more.
    - In the northern region, there are often communal construction projects with local knowledge of construction techniques passed on to the youth who do the low skill tasks at first.
    - Women's role in traditional architecture: plastering/finishing then decorating of walls.
    - In the northern regions, there are some Muslim compounds with round female spaces and rectangular male spaces.
  - **Traditional/Precolonial Architecture**
    - Ashanti houses/ shrines
    - Verandas and corridors to help with shade
    - Besease shrine in Ashanti region
- **Colonial Architecture Influence:** When Europeans arrived on the coast of Ghana originally looking for gold, they began to build "castles" which were really forts.
  - Over 30 forts were built on the coast (some of them only a mile or so apart) and became the center of European colonial rule and domination.
  - Some of these forts were made of stone and materials imported from Europe.
  - European governors, merchants, soldiers, priests and doctors lived at these forts which promoted and protected European trade in goods and later the forced migration of enslaved people to the Americas. At Elmina Castle, for instance, the governor lived in luxury upstairs while people were held in dungeons below him destined for enslavement and forced migration to the Americas.
- **Tropical Modernism:** Some buildings in Ghana were built in the colonial style and often used European materials or styles that were incorporated into more traditional West African building techniques.

- Some examples are many buildings at the University of Ghana and the [Osu Salem Presbyterian Middle Boys Boarding School](#), both in Ghana.
- The British built public works buildings like the Sekondi post office.
- Private buildings built in the colonial style are also seen throughout the coast.
- Tropical architecture experimented within the African building framework focusing on courtyards, ventilation, light, greenery, balconies. (Fry and Drew manual). (Prof. Owusu Addo home)
- **Modernist or the “Architecture of Independence”**
  - Post independence, Kwame Nkrumah had the goal of modernizing Ghana in many ways and architecture was a symbol or a means of accomplishing this. Ghana had come of age and needed to make a statement. To that end, government buildings and social housing were built.
  - Notable spaces:
    - Independence Arch and Black Star Square
      - [Google arts interactive site on Independence Square](#)
      - Built in 1961 to welcome Queen Elizabeth 2.
      - Represents struggle for freedom and honors fallen soldiers
    - Ambassador Hotel in 1957 (now Moevenpick Hotel)
    - Old Parliament Hotel (debate whether to pull it down for a Chinese constructed space)
    - Trade Fair site (by Polish socialist architects)
    - Akosombo Hydroelectric project in 1960 (a state dam building project)
  - KNUST (Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology), established in 1952 and is largest university in Kumasi/Ashanti region
    - Asante king of the time had a dream for university to be built in his kingdom to modernize the area (his son realized the dream)
    - Great hall; many buildings still have brick design in them
- **Contemporary Architecture**
  - Notable Spaces:
    - Signature Apartments in Accra—step design
    - Villagio Primavera Apartments in Accra—real estate company designed
    - Kwame Nkrumah Memorial Park—1995. Museum and mausoleum
    - National Theatre in 1992 by Chinese architects
    - Jubilee House—seat of government. Elicits stool of Ashanti
    - Ecobank Headquarters—lots of glass. Issue becomes how to address the ingress of heat (double paned windows).

- One Airport Square at airport –slanted columns and slabs.  
Designed to evince a particular mosque in the north
  - Nubuke Extended–art exhibition hall
  - Proposed Ghana National Cathedral
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- Pretend that you are an architect that has been hired to build a new library or apartment building or restaurant in your town. What will it look like? What building materials will you use? Will it be tall? Draw a picture of your building and make sure to label any interesting features!

**Optional Modification or Extension Activities:**

- Adapt the number of slides used for grade levels.
- Students can build a structure out of blocks, cups etc instead of drawing a building.
- Students can draw a “purpose” out of a hat for the drawing activity. “Your building must be for animals,” “Your building is for entertainment,” “Your building is for art” etc.