

Capitol

3rd

INTRODUCING ART

ARCHITECT: William Thornton

1. William Thornton was born in 1759 on an island in the West Indies. He moved to the United States in 1787 after studying medicine in Europe.
2. He was a physician, a painter, inventor and amateur architect.
3. Thornton entered a contest as a late entry to design the U.S. Capital Building. The deadline was only six days away when he request permission to enter the contest and send his design in late. Secretary of State, Thomas Jefferson, commented "It captivated the eyes and judgment of all. His prize was \$500 and a city lot. Washington praised the plan for its convenient but simplistic grandeur.
4. He was the architect in the construction of the capital until 1802. After that he was named head of the Patent Office. He is given credit for saving that building from the British cannons during the War of 1812.

ARCHITECT: Benjamin Henry Latrobe

1. Latrobe took over construction of the capital building in 1803.
2. He was an English architect, born in 1764 and came to the United States in 1776.
3. Because the exterior design of the capital was already set, he spent his talents on interior decorations. Sculptors were hired from abroad to chisel corn and tobacco motifs on columns and capitals. This uniquely American touch, influenced by Classical design adds to the grandeur of the building.
4. Latrobe was also charged with the repair of the building after the British burned in during the War of 1812. He replaced the wooden interior with marble, brick and stone.
5. Latrobe resigned his post in 1817.

ARCHITECT: Charles Bulfinch

1. Bulfinch was the first native-American architect to be charged with construction of the capital.
2. He was born in Boston in 1763 and attended Harvard. He also studied abroad for many years.
3. Bulfinch completed the tasks of the two architects that preceded him with slight modification to the West Front. This modification brought the plans more in line with how Thornton had envisioned it. He completed his work in 1830.

ARCHITECT: Thomas Ustick Walter

1. Walter was born in Philadelphia in 1804. His father and grandfather were masons and he became a master bricklayer while studying with an architect.
2. He entered a contest for the enlargement of the capital. Four designs were accepted and parts of each design were used in the final plan. Walter was named "Architect of the Capital Extension" in 1851. His job was to execute the completion of these plans. He served in this position until 1865.
3. The present capital dome was built under his direction and is considered an engineering feat.

ARCHITECT: George M. White

1. White was the first professional architect to work on the capital since 1865. He was appointed to this position in 1971.
2. Because the building was in need of some interior renovation and enlargement, he was hired to constructed the James Madison Memorial Building of the Library of Congress; design and constructed the Philip A. Hart Senate Office Building; restored the Old Supreme Court and Old Senate Chambers in the capital building.

ARCHITECTURE: "The United States Capital Building"

1. The U.S. Capital Building is said to be styled after "Classical" architecture. What do you think that means? Hint: Greek and Roman Architecture is considered "Classical". Please read information about Greek and Roman Architecture in the Western Art History Time Line and the "Introducing Architecture" sheet for more information.
2. Explain to the children about the capitals, columns, pediments and dome. Do you think the capital was designed more after the Roman style or the Greek style? Have the children identify the various parts of the building and point them out the rest of the class.
3. Greeks believed in education, a Democratic form of government, fair laws, and healthy sound bodies (the Olympic Games give evidence here). Do you think there is a connection between their beliefs and ours? What do we believe in? Thomas Jefferson and other founding fathers wanted our buildings to look classical in part because of our similar beliefs. Then when people look at these buildings they sub-conscientiously think about the Greek value system. Hint: This is a hard concept for this grade level to understand but some suggestion to this will begin the process of piecing the picture together.
4. Do you know of some buildings that look like our U.S. Capital? What kinds of activities take place in these buildings? Was the Classical design the best design to use for those buildings.
5. Are there buildings in your home town that look like Classical Greek or Roman Buildings? What are these buildings used for? Compare the use of these buildings with the value system of the Greeks to see if there are some similarities. Hint: In a library or museum we are educated about our world. One Greek value is to improve our minds through education. A court building is used to execute the law in a democratic way. One Greek value is believe in a democratic government.
5. What kind of stone was used for our capital? Hint: Sandstone from the state of Virginia. Washington chose it because it was a local stone. Why would it matter that it was a local stone? Hint: The cost of transporting it to the building site was more inexpensive.
6. Latrobe originally used wood for the interior decorations but after the War of 1812 he replaced much of the wood with marble. What happened to the building during that war? Why did he make this replacement?
7. The column's and capitals on the interior are designed to look like corn and tobacco plants. Why did Latrobe change to this design instead of copying the classical motif seen in Europe on Greek and Roman buildings?
8. Compare the Roman Coliseum to the U.S. Capital building. What similarities do you see? Do you see similarities to the colosseum design and sports arenas in this country? Hint: The Rose Bowl is very similar to the Roman coliseum. Many university sports arenas look much like the coliseum. The Roman coliseum was design after Greek coliseum. What part of the Greek value system was transferred to our culture through these designs? Hint: The Greeks believed in a strong, healthy and well developed body. The Olympics began with the Greeks.
9. On either side of the rotunda of the capital are housed the chambers for the House of Representatives and the Senate. Why would these branches of government be in different wings of the building? Why do you think they are held together by the rotunda? Think symbolically. What meaning does this have for us. Hint: These two branches of government operate separately from each other, yet they are separate parts of one democratic government. (Similar to the arms on our body.) The building visually speaks to us in this way. The rotunda unites, the wings are separate.
10. A statue crowns the top of the capital dome. It is the work of American sculptor, Thomas Crawford. He referred to her as "Freedom triumphant". She is a classical figure with one hand on a sword and the other holding a wreath and resting on a shield. She wears a headdress of an eagles head and Indian feathers. She is 19 1/2 foot bronze statue and was raised to the dome on December 2, 1863. Do you feel this statue speaks to us about our history? Why?