

Overview

In this lesson students explore the concept of “landmark” and discuss efforts to preserve them. Students examine the original Pennsylvania Station as an example of a lost landmark and Grand Central Station as a current, living landmark. Using visual aids, students will discuss the features of Grand Central Station and what makes it a unique structure and place. The poem “Grand Central” by Billy Collins will be used as a model for a writing exercise.

Objectives

- Explore the meaning of what makes a building or place a landmark and the importance of preservation.
- Examine ways that poetry may convey the importance of a place or building through artful language and detail.
- Observe the structure and arrangement of lines and space as they affect the meaning of a poem—the poem’s “architecture.”

Instructions

1. Open with exploration of the word *landmark*. Have the class make a list of words that they associate with landmarks. (Eg. “cherish” or “living history”) What words are important in describing a landmark?
2. Show photos of the original Penn Station before and after its destruction. Have the students list their favorite building or places in the city. How would they feel if it were destroyed? What buildings and places would they like to see preserved?
3. Ask a student to read Billy Collins’ poem “Grand Central” aloud.
4. Questions for discussion: how does standing in the middle of Grand Central make you feel? What do the words “grand” and “central” mean? Why are train stations important places? What feelings are you more aware of in a train station than in an ordinary building?
5. Lead a discussion on Grand Central Station and why it is an important landmark. Distribute various photographs that show features of the station (eg. its vaulted ceiling, golden central clock, the statue of Mercury) with historical facts about each one.
6. Imagine that you are the center of the universe. Write 10-20 lines about what it is like. What things revolve around you? How does it feel to be at the center of everything? How does it feel for thousands of people to pass through you?

MTA Arts for Transit and Urban Design

<http://www.mta.info/mta/aft/poetry/poetry.html?year=2013&poem=6>

GRAND CENTRAL

The city orbits around eight million
centers of the universe

and turns around the golden clock
at the still point of this place.

Lift up your eyes from the moving hive
and you will see time circling

under a vault of stars and know
just when and where you are.

-Billy Collins