



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
2005 Volume III: History in the American Landscape: Place, Memory, Poetry

The Architectural and Social Space of the American Front Porch

Guide for Curriculum Unit 05.03.01
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The front porch is one of the most powerful symbols of American cultural values. Our reverence for community and country, for home and harmony, are idealized and realized in the architecture and art created for the front porch. From ostentatious plantations to humble cabins, this unit details the origins, stylistic evolution, technological influences, and cultural pressures that shaped the porch.

Industrialization in the 1840's gave Americans a leisure class, while simultaneously creating a fear that mechanization would overwhelm nature. The front porch was the link-the perfect liminal space-between civilization and raw nature, between public and private space. With the mass publication of architectural plans in pattern books, the front porch became one of the first "keeping up with the Joneses" necessities.

This unit is designed to make the history of the American porch a living history. The porch-then and now-reflects all the political, social, and economic needs of "We the people." The unit includes a neighborhood field trip to map porches, films, songs, theater productions, a novel, and poems that highlight American voices that sound like bells-sometimes lovely, sometimes lonely-gently swinging from the loose ropes that bind home to community.

(Recommended for English, Creative Writing, Dram, Sociology, History, Psychology, and Art, grades 10-12.)

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