

Lesson Plan: Arc de Triomphe

Summary

In this episode, the artist sketched a toy model of the Arc de Triomphe while discussing its Roman origins, Renaissance revival, and the spread of triumphal arches in France. The talk included Napoleon's commission of the Arc, the wooden model built for his wedding, and how he died before it was completed but his remains later passed through it. Additional details covered the monument's immense size, its sculptures and reliefs, the panoramic view from the top, and its role as a major tourist attraction in Paris.

https://www.youtube.com/live/hjVNIIBc1Ak?si=7ZKwFBNukOmj_kFF

Objective

Students will explore the history, architecture, and cultural significance of the Arc de Triomphe, connecting its Roman inspiration to its role in French history and modern Paris.

Standards

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.2: Determine the central ideas of a primary or secondary source.
- NGSS.HS-ESS3-1: Construct an explanation based on evidence for how natural resources and cultural practices influence human society.
- C3.D2.His.14.6-8: Explain multiple causes and effects of historical events.

Materials

- Vetted 9 Fun Facts: Arc de Triomphe
- Worksheet
- Optional: paper, pencils, images of the Arc de Triomphe and other triumphal arches, projector or screen

Activity

1. Read through the 9 Fun Facts as a class.
2. Compare Roman triumphal arches to the Arc de Triomphe using provided images.
3. Discuss Napoleon's reasons for building the Arc and how its construction stretched across decades.
4. Analyze its physical size with comparisons (brachiosaurus, Sphinx, hedgehogs) to visualize its scale.
5. Complete the worksheet to reinforce learning and spark further discussion.

Introduction

Introduce the Arc de Triomphe as one of the most iconic landmarks in Paris. Explain that this monument connects modern France to ancient Rome through its style and purpose. Invite students to think about why societies build monumental structures and what messages they send.

Assessment

Students will be assessed on their participation in discussion, accuracy and detail in worksheet responses, and ability to connect the Arc de Triomphe's history to broader themes of culture, power, and memory.

Rubric

Criteria	Excellent (4)	Good (3)	Fair (2)	Poor (1)
Content Understanding	Demonstrates thorough understanding of all Fun Facts	Demonstrates understanding of most Fun Facts	Demonstrates partial understanding	Minimal or no understanding
Discussion Participation	Actively contributes with clear, relevant ideas	Contributes with generally relevant ideas	Limited contribution to discussion	No contribution
Worksheet Completion	All questions answered with detail and accuracy	Most questions answered with accuracy	Some questions incomplete or inaccurate	Few or no questions answered
Connections to History	Clearly connects Arc to broader historical themes	Some connection to broader themes	Limited or unclear connections	No connections made

9 Fun Facts

1. Triumphal arches began in ancient Rome Ancient Romans built triumphal arches to honor victorious generals and emperors. They were more than gateways—they were carved billboards of empire, filled with reliefs and inscriptions that told stories of conquest and power. The Arch of Titus in Rome, for example, shows soldiers parading treasures from Jerusalem nearly 2,000 years ago.

<https://www.walksinsiderome.com/blog/about-rome/triumphal-arches-of-rome/>

2. The Renaissance revived Roman architecture After centuries dominated by Gothic spires, Renaissance architects returned to the balance and symmetry of Rome. Arches, domes, and columns reappeared across Europe, echoing imperial grandeur. By studying Roman ruins and rediscovering Vitruvius' writings, builders like Alberti and Michelangelo laid the groundwork for monuments like the Arc de Triomphe centuries later.

<https://www.architecturaldigest.com/story/renaissance-architecture-everything-you-need-to-know>

3. France has several triumphal arches Paris boasts more than one triumphal arch. The Porte Saint-Denis (1672) and Porte Saint-Martin (1674) were built under Louis XIV to celebrate royal victories. Across France, arches can also be found in Montpellier, Marseille, and even Orange, showing how the tradition spread beyond the capital.

<https://www.francetraveltips.com/8-famous-arches-france/>

4. Napoleon ordered the Arc de Triomphe in 1806 After his decisive victory at Austerlitz, Napoleon promised his soldiers they would march home through arches worthy of their triumphs. The Arc de Triomphe was his attempt to rival the Caesars, casting his Grande Armée as heirs to Rome. Architect Jean-François Chalgrin designed it, but the emperor's ambition far outlasted his reign.

<https://www.napoleon.org/en/magazine/places/arc-de-triomphe-de-letoile-paris-2/>

5. A wooden arch was built for Napoleon's wedding The Arc wasn't ready when Napoleon married Marie-Louise of Austria in 1810. To keep the spectacle alive, carpenters erected a full-scale wooden version so the imperial couple could process through a triumphant arch. It was theater on a monumental scale, a reminder that power often relies on appearances.

<https://www.napoleon.org/en/magazine/places/arc-de-triomphe-de-letoile-paris-2/>

6. Napoleon never saw it finished Political turmoil stretched construction into decades, and Napoleon died in exile on Saint Helena in 1821. When his remains were returned to France in 1840, the funeral procession passed beneath the completed arch. The Arc became the stage for a final symbolic triumph long after the emperor was gone.

<https://science.howstuffworks.com/engineering/architecture/arc-de-triomphe.htm>

7. It is massive in size The Arc de Triomphe rises about 164 feet tall—roughly the height of a full-grown brachiosaurus reaching for treetops. At 148 feet long, it stretches as far as the Great Sphinx of Giza from paw to tail. Its 72-foot width could be spanned by more than 100 hedgehogs lined up nose to tail, making it the largest triumphal arch in the world.

<https://www.about-paris.com/arc-de-triomphe.html>

8. The view from the top is spectacular Climb its 284 steps and Paris unfurls below like a map. Twelve avenues radiate outward from the Arc like spokes on a wheel, with the Champs-Élysées stretching away in perfect symmetry. From the terrace, visitors can take in a sweeping 360-degree panorama of landmarks from the Eiffel Tower to Montmartre.

<https://www.paris-arc-de-triomphe.fr/en/discover/the-panorama>

9. It draws millions and fuels the economy The Arc de Triomphe ranks among France's most visited national monuments. In 2022, it welcomed over 1.6 million visitors, generating steady income from ticket sales while also driving spending in shops, cafés, and hotels along the Champs-Élysées. Its presence keeps the surrounding district one of the liveliest in Paris.

<https://www.sortiraparis.com/en/news/in-paris/articles/287612-paris-here-are-2022-s-most-visited-national-monuments>

Worksheet

Name: _____ **Date:** _____

Review

1. Who first built triumphal arches and why?
2. Which period revived Roman architectural styles like arches and domes?
3. Name two other French cities besides Paris that have triumphal arches.

Discussion

4. Why did Napoleon want the Arc de Triomphe built?
5. How did political changes affect its construction?

Data Analysis

6. How tall, long, and wide is the Arc de Triomphe, and what comparisons help visualize its size?
7. How many steps does it take to reach the top, and what can you see from the terrace?

Reflection

8. Why do you think monuments like the Arc de Triomphe continue to attract millions of visitors today?
9. If you could design a modern triumphal arch, what event or achievement would you commemorate?