

Architecture and Art in the Age of Revolution: Neoclassicism vs. Romanticism (c. 1750â€“1850)

Materials Needed

- Access to the internet (for visual research and digital archives)
- Notebook or digital document for note-taking
- Comparison Worksheet/T-Chart (provided by instructor/self-made)
- Optional: Art supplies for sketching or digital presentation software (PowerPoint, Google Slides)
- Optional: Access to historical primary source documents (e.g., writings of Goethe, excerpts from Enlightenment philosophers)

Introduction (30 Minutes)

Hook: The Power of Design

Educator Prompt: Imagine you are tasked with designing a new monument to represent a fundamental modern valueâ€”say, Democracy, or perhaps Climate Change Awareness. What shapes would you use? Would the building be perfectly symmetrical and rational, or would it be rugged, dramatic, and emotionally evocative? The choices we make in design reflect the values of our time. Today, we look back at a revolutionary era where the values of reason clashed violently with the values of feeling.

Learning Objectives (What You Will Know and Do)

By the end of this lesson, you will be able to:

1. **Analyze:** Compare and contrast the foundational philosophies (reason vs. emotion) and key visual characteristics of Neoclassicism and Romanticism in both art and architecture.
2. **Identify:** Name and describe at least two major artworks and two major architectural examples representing each movement.
3. **Apply:** Analyze a modern building or artwork, determining which historical aesthetic (Neoclassical or Romantic) predominantly influenced its design.

Success Criteria

You will know you are successful when you can confidently fill out a comparison chart detailing the differences between the two movements and present a well-reasoned argument for the influence on your chosen modern example.

Body: Content and Practice

I Do: Modeling the Movements (45 Minutes)

Instructional Strategy: Direct Instruction and Visual Analysis. (Use side-by-side image comparison.)

1. Defining Neoclassicism (The Age of Reason and Revolution)

- **Core Philosophy:** Rooted in the Enlightenment. Emphasized reason, logic, order, duty, and civic virtue. A direct appeal to the perceived democratic ideals of Ancient Greece and Republican Rome.
- **Visual Characteristics:** Symmetry, clean lines, simple geometric forms, shallow relief (in painting), idealized human forms, cool colors (blues, greens, grays), and classical ornamentation (columns, pediments).
- **Architecture Examples:** The Pantheon in Paris (Soufflot); The U.S. Capitol Building (Washington, D.C.); The Brandenburg Gate (Berlin).
 - *Key Takeaway:* Architecture expresses stability, eternal truth, and state power.
- **Art Examples:** Jacques-Louis David's *Oath of the Horatii* (Duty over personal feelings); Ingres's portraits (idealized perfection).

2. Defining Romanticism (The Age of Feeling and Individualism)

- **Core Philosophy:** A reaction against the cold rationality of the Enlightenment. Emphasized intense emotion, individualism, the sublime (awe mixed with terror), nature, and the exotic. Interest in the Medieval period and the Gothic past.
- **Visual Characteristics:** Dynamic movement, dramatic lighting (chiaroscuro), rich color palettes, visible brushwork (impasto), focus on the irrational, the turbulent, and the terrifying in nature.
- **Architecture Examples:** The Houses of Parliament (London) (Gothic Revival); Strawberry Hill (Walpole); many large Victorian train stations (blending steel and historical styles).
 - *Key Takeaway:* Architecture expresses complexity, history, and often, dramatic sentiment.
- **Art Examples:** Goya's *The Third of May 1808* (emotional protest, dramatic realism); Turner's landscapes (the terrifying sublime); Delacroix's *Liberty Leading the People* (turbulent freedom).

We Do: Guided Comparison and Critical Discussion (45 Minutes)

Instructional Strategy: Think-Pair-Share/Collaborative Analysis.

Activity: The Great Clash

Compare two monumental works side-by-side using the provided guiding questions. (If in a classroom, pairs work together; if homeschooled, this is a deep self-reflection journal or discussion with the educator/mentor.)

1. **Visual Set A (Architecture):** The Madeleine (Paris, Neoclassical) vs. The Houses of Parliament (London, Romantic/Gothic Revival).
2. **Visual Set B (Painting):** J.L. David's *The Death of Socrates* (Neoclassical) vs. Théodore Géricault's *The Raft of the Medusa* (Romantic).

Guiding Comparison Questions:

1. How does the composition (arrangement of elements) convey a specific mood?
2. Which colors dominate the scene, and what do those colors typically symbolize?
3. If these structures/paintings were people, which one would be the strict professor and which would be the passionate revolutionary? Why?
4. What specific historical or political idea is the artist/architect trying to promote through this design?

Formative Assessment Check: Circulate (or review notes). Ask learners to define "The Sublime" and

provide one visual example from the Romantic period.

You Do: Independent Application and Analysis (60 Minutes)

Instructional Strategy: Project-Based Learning/Real-World Application.

Activity: Modern Influences Project

Task: Select a modern structure (built in the last 50 years) in your local community, online, or a major world city (e.g., a museum, a bank headquarters, a government building).

Analyze this structure based on the characteristics discussed. Your goal is to determine if the architect drew primarily from Neoclassical or Romantic aesthetics, or if it represents a deliberate fusion.

Presentation/Analysis Format (Choose one):

1. **Architectural Sketch & Notes:** Sketch the building, labeling features that align with Neoclassicism (symmetry, columns) and features that align with Romanticism (dramatic lighting, rough texture, asymmetrical elements).
2. **Digital Presentation:** Prepare 3-5 slides showing the structure, providing images of historical precedents (e.g., "This rounded dome references the Roman Pantheon"), and clearly arguing your classification.
3. **Written Essay (500 words):** Structure a persuasive essay arguing your classification, citing specific visual evidence from the modern building and connecting it directly to the philosophical underpinnings of the chosen historical movement.

Success Criteria for the Application Project:

- The analysis must clearly identify at least three specific visual elements.
- The argument connecting the modern building to the historical movement must be logical and well-supported.
- Terminology (e.g., symmetry, sublime, idealism) must be used accurately.

Conclusion (15 Minutes)

Recap and Synthesis

Educator Prompt: Let's revisit our core conflict. Neoclassicism taught us that humanity is best represented by order, logic, and ancient ideals. Romanticism taught us that humanity is best represented by internal feeling, passion, and the terrifying beauty of nature. We see these two philosophies constantly battling in the modern world.

Key Takeaways Review:

- Neoclassicism = Reason, Order, Rome, Duty, Logic.
- Romanticism = Emotion, Chaos, Medieval/Nature, Individualism, Imagination.

Summative Assessment and Reflection

Exit Ticket Question: If you had to commission a large public memorial today, which movement (Neo or Romantic) would you draw from and why? Use the philosophical goals of that movement to justify your choice.

Differentiation and Extension

Scaffolding (For learners needing extra support):

- Provide pre-selected, clear images for the "We Do" comparison activity, with simplified checklists of characteristics (e.g., "Check if lines are straight," "Check if light is dramatic").
- Focus the "You Do" project solely on finding one specific characteristic (e.g., Find a modern building that features classical columns, and explain what value that column implies).

Extension (For advanced learners):

- **Research Prompt:** Explore how a non-European culture was interpreted or misrepresented by the Romantic movement (e.g., Orientalism). How did the desire for the "exotic" conflict with Enlightenment ideals of universal humanity?
- **Creative Challenge:** Design a building or artwork that successfully incorporates both a strict Neoclassical facade and an intensely Romantic interior, providing a written rationale for the deliberate juxtaposition.