

The People's House

Teaching Guide



Link to the movie:

<https://vimeo.com/783070197>

Synopsis (18:30-minute video)

Created by high school student filmmakers, this eighteen-minute documentary analyzes the past and present of the state capitol. The capitol was designed to elevate Montana toward a set of ideals—democratic, patriotic, progressive—that were not always compatible with its past, which at times was marked by corruption and exploitation. Remarkably, the building does not erase that history, but rather incorporates elements of that past into its art and architecture, which was designed to inspire civic pride, represent the state's diverse populace, and unify a community in quest of a more virtuous society. The design of the building captures this unique story of transformation—of how a territory becomes a legitimate state and how diverse interests come together to form a community.

The People's House was made possible through the generous support of Helena College and a Humanities Initiatives Grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Before Watching

Let your class know that the student filmmakers who made this video learned that Montana's capitol, designed at the end of the nineteenth century, was intended to be "the people's house," uniting diverse interests as Montana transformed from a territory into the forty-first state. The film asks: "Does the capitol continue to live up to those principles today? Does it still speak to all Montanans?"

Ask your students to consider these questions as they watch the film.

Post-viewing Discussion Questions

How is the capitol's art and architecture intended to elevate democratic and patriotic ideals?

Why is the capitol called "the people's house," and how does its art and architecture reflect its purpose?

How has the capitol excluded the voices of some Montanans?

How has the capitol included the voices of many underrepresented Montanans?

If it was up to you, what art and/or architectural changes would you add to the capitol?

You may also wish to engage students' critical thinking skills and elicit their emotional responses with the following four questions, most easily remembered through the acronym DICE: What disturbed you? What interested you? What confused you? What enlightened you?

Quick Write

Set a timer for five minutes and have students revisit the pre-viewing questions:

- Does the capitol live up to the principles its design was intended to elevate?
- Does the capitol speak to all Montanans?