

Barns on the Farm



Life on a farm, especially a farm that has lots of animals, usually centers around the barn. For hundreds of years, farmers have built shelters to house their equipment, protect their harvest, and shelter their livestock. Barns were so important that they were often the first thing constructed on the land. Before a farmer built his home, he would typically build his barn. If he was lucky, his neighbors would help with a festive barn raising.

The word “barn” stems from the Middle English word “bern” which, in turn, was derived from the Old English word “berærn”. This word was created by combining the words “bere” for barley and “ærn” for house.

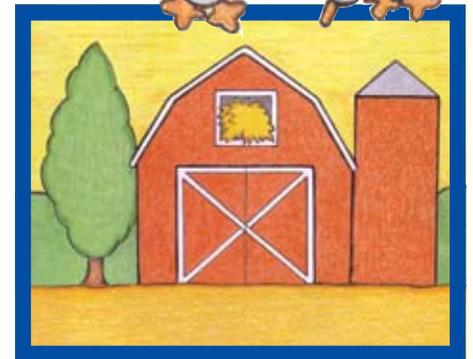
In the United States, barn styles varied from region to region. Much of the difference in style was dictated by the type of farming practiced. The land itself and the background of the farmer also played a huge role in what style of barn was constructed on a particular farm. Immigrants brought their construction knowledge and architectural styles with them to America. The design of barns also evolved over time. With a little research and a keen eye, it is possible to learn a great deal of American history while driving our country’s backroads in search of these stately structures.

The barn featured in this lesson is a classic Prairie, or Western style barn. These barns are usually quite large and are found throughout the West and Southwest where farmers have large herds and require big haylofts to store their hay and feed. Prairie barns have an opening for the hayloft at one or both ends topped by a peaked roof.

Early Dutch settlers built the first grand barns in the United States. Found in certain areas of New York State and New Jersey, these barns had broad gabled roofs with a large door for a wagon to enter on one or both ends. The interior of these barns is characterized by heavy beams that are joined together with pegs and columned aisles running on both sides of a large central area. This central area was commonly used for threshing grain.

Another style of barn commonly seen in hilly regions is the bank barn. This barn was built into the side of a hill so it could have two levels – both of which could be entered from the ground. The upper level was often used for storage of feed and supplies. The lower level usually housed animals. Farmers often cut openings in the upper floor so hay could be dropped directly to the hungry livestock stabled in the barn’s lower level.

Other notable barn styles include round barns – like the one George Washington owned, crib barns, Finnish log barns, and “three bay” English barns. At one time, most land-grant universities designed and offered barn plans to farmers. Plans were also sold by mail-order companies like the Sears, Roebuck Company.

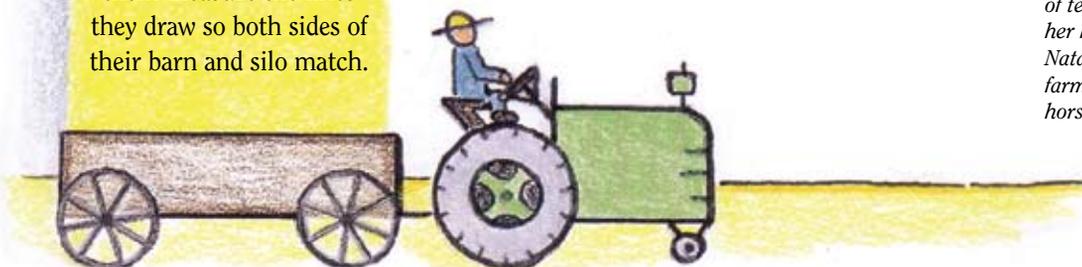


Learn More About Historic Barns

1. Visit the Smithsonian Institutions’ Museum on Main Street website at www.museumonmainstreet.org/exhibits_barn/barn.htm
2. Print “A Barn Guide to History Lesson Plan” from the Museum on Main Street’s website at www.museumonmainstreet.org/admin/barn_admin/barn_local/Barn_Guide_to_History.pdf
3. Learn about different styles of barns and their history by visiting the National Park Service’s website at www.cr.nps.gov/hps/tps/briefs/brief20.htm
4. The National Building Museum has an interesting summary of how barn construction evolved in the United States at www.nbm.org/blueprints/90s/spring94/page2/page2.htm
5. The Nebraska Humanities Council website explains how barn styles were influenced by the background of the people who built them. Visit their website at www.nebraskahumanities.org/programs/barnagainhistory.html

Teaching Tip

This lesson provides an opportunity to help your children use a ruler. Help them measure the lines they draw so both sides of their barn and silo match.



As the publisher of the award-winning Draw•Write•Now® series of books, Carolyn Hurst has spent the last decade researching how children learn to draw and the benefits of teaching directed-drawing. Carolyn, her husband Steve, and their two children, Natalie and Evan share their Poulsbo, WA farm with three dogs, two pygmy goats, five horses and a rooster named Napoleon.

Barn

