

EASTERN STATE PENITENTIARY

Companion Guide

This guide is meant to help you follow along during Virtual Scout Day. You can find helpful definitions and core concepts for each session.

Word Bank:

Architecture- the art or science of designing and creating buildings; a method or style of building.

Preservation- the act of keeping something in its original state or in good condition

Incarceration-being in prison or jail

Penitentiary- a prison designed to inspire "penitence," or true regret.

Sentence- the length of time a person must stay in prison after being convicted of a crime.

Solitary Confinement- kept alone in a prison cell away from other prisoners

Radial Plan- a prison design where cell blocks connect at a central hub like the spokes of a wheel.

Cell- a room in a prison, jail, etc., where prisoners live

Cell Block- a group of prison cells that make up a section of a prison.

Gothic- a style of architecture that was popular in Europe between the 12th and 16th centuries and that uses arches, and large windows. Usually meant to be impressive or intimidating.

Death Penalty- death as a punishment given by a court of law for very serious crimes. Also known as Capital Punishment.

Core Concepts:

Session 1:

1. Eastern State is the birthplace of solitary confinement. Architect John Haviland designed the prison to house nearly 500 people in isolation.
2. Eastern State was famous but controversial. Some believed the prison's system of solitary confinement was bad for the health of the people imprisoned there.
3. The gothic exterior of Eastern State was designed to be intimidating and deter people in Philadelphia from breaking the law.
4. The radial plan made surveillance easier for guards in a time before security cameras. Over 300 prisons copied Eastern State's radial plan.
5. Prison architecture continues to change. There are many different designs.

Session 2:

1. There is a growing debate about the ethics of prison architecture. Some believe that architects should not design spaces meant for suffering or punishment like solitary confinement units or execution chambers.
2. Prisons are complicated buildings that must balance the need for security, surveillance, dining, work, medical care, and exercise.
3. "Humane prison design" is the idea that prisons can be designed to be more safe, beautiful, comfortable, and less stressful spaces. Humane prisons are thought to be better at rehabilitating people.

Session 3:

1. Building the massive penitentiary was an incredible feat in the 1820's. Choosing the perfect building materials for the 10 and a half acre prison was very important.
2. Today, Eastern State is a stabilized ruin. Preservationists work hard to keep the building safe for visitors and stop the decay of the building.
3. Architects can help save the planet! Architects can design buildings to be more sustainable or environmentally friendly.

Maps:

