

Reading Comprehension

THE GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM BILBAO, A MASTERPIECE OF TWENTIETH-CENTURY ARCHITECTURE designed by Frank O. Gehry, 1998

From the beginning, the architecture of the building that would eventually house the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao was recognized as a decisive factor in making the project the international landmark of artistic excellence it was designed to be. This approach continued the tradition begun by the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation when it commissioned Frank Lloyd Wright to design the original museum on New York's Fifth Avenue. Frank O. Gehry was entrusted with the task of designing the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao, largely because his conception reflected the project's enormous potential by integrating the building into the fabric of the city of Bilbao and into its ongoing urban regeneration plan.

Gehry's huge sculpture-like building is fashioned from a surprising array of materials and endowed with an extraordinary, unmistakable silhouette. Under the apparent chaos caused by the juxtaposition of fragmented volumes with regular forms finished in stone, curved forms covered with titanium and huge glass walls, the building revolves around a central axis, the atrium, a monumentally empty space crowned by a metal dome. Daylight floods in through the glass walls and the skylight set high up in the dome.

Leading off from this central space, a system of curved walkways, glass lifts and stairways connect 19 galleries that combine classical, rectangular spaces with others of unusual proportions and forms. The wealth and variety of spaces makes the museum exceptionally versatile. The notion of the collection as encyclopaedic overview is reflected in the chronological distribution of the works in rectangular galleries housed in the regular, stone-covered volumes. This overview is complemented by the in-depth spaces devoted to specific artists, for whose work 9 galleries of special forms and spectacular dimensions are reserved in the titanium-finished volumes.

Temporary exhibitions and large-format works are housed in an exceptional, 30 metre wide gallery which stretches along nearly 130 metres of column free space located in the impressive volume that runs under the imposing La Salve bridge. This space culminates in a tower which integrates the bridge itself into the intersection of volumes that configure the building.

The Museum has an Educational Area designed to help visitors to interpret modern and contemporary works of art and the unique architecture of the building itself, through specially-developed programmes and materials. The Museum has a 300-seat auditorium equipped with cutting-edge multimedia technology for use in conferences, screenings and artistic performances, thus increasing the Museum's

cultural offer as an arts and leisure centre. The auditorium is also available to companies, institutions and associations for corporate events, congresses, presentations, talks and cultural meetings. Outside visiting hours, the Museum's atrium and hall function independently and, like the auditorium, can be hired for special events, such as company galas, congresses or presentations, that require an attractive, spacious and exclusive venue.

1) Focusing on the text:

- a) This text can be divided into two main parts: introduction and description: can you recognize where one ends and the other begins?
- b) The description presents the museum divided into several main spaces. Can you list them here?
- c) Now identify the structures with the material they are built of: stone, metal, glass, titanium.
- d) In this text there are many adjectives with a positive meaning. Some of them are even intensified. List them.

Answer these questions:

- 1) Is the museum an integrated part of a more general plan?
- 2) Which one?
- 3) What does the museum look like?
- 4) Which is the nucleus of the museum?
- 5) How does daylight enter?
- 6) How can you get to the galleries?
- 7) Why is the museum very versatile?
- 8) Where can you find temporary exhibitions?