

An Example of a Written Lesson Plan for a Ten-Minute Room Demonstration
2019 Garden Docent Training
Hillwood Estate, Museum & Gardens

(Note: the four sections above the line are not spoken to visitors; they are only expressed in writing by the docent.)

Audience: Intelligent, curious adults with little to no knowledge of the lesson's subjects

The room & features highlighted: Rose garden, floribunda roses, wisteria, climbing roses, monument

Objectives: As a result of participating in this lesson, participants will be better able to: identify key aspects of this room's design, features, connection to Post, and importance to the museum's mission.

(Note: the sections below are spoken to visitors.)

Hook: **Who has renovated a home or a room in a home?** (if no one has, ask: has anyone redecorated a space?)

Advance Organizer: If you answered yes, you share an experience with our founder, Marjorie Merriweather Post. She purchased Hillwood in 1955 and spent two years renovating the gardens, as well as the mansion. At age 70, she knew what she liked and these gardens are a culmination of a lifetime of garden experience. In this rose garden we will explore her design choices: how she kept some of the landscape features, and adapted or changed others. We will also explore several features that make this room special, and how the museum maintains it today.

Who has been to Hillwood before?

Design: The gardens at Hillwood are like outdoor rooms. **What shape would you say this garden room is?** a circle....She kept the overall circular shape as she found it when she purchased Hillwood. And it's always been a rose garden—for enjoyment, not for cutting.

Can you identify what elements make up the walls? boxwood hedges and pergola, or shaded walkway

First, the pergola—when Post moved here the rose garden existed with this pergola (and the stairs). She kept it.

Now, take a moment to imagine the garden without the American boxwood hedges. What happens if you took it away? More open, less encircled/enclosed. We can see what Post did by having hedges—it "finishes" the room. The boxwood wall is low enough that it allows our eye to continue looking past them. Interestingly, Post reused the boxwoods—they originally were planted on the Lunar Lawn when she purchased the estate.

Post enlisted help in the rose garden's renovations, which were really a refinement of what she found here, adapting it to her tastes. In 1956 she hired Perry Wheeler, a local landscape designer who assisted in the design and planting of the White House Rose Garden. He picked up the brickwork in the pergola and incorporated that into the "floor" of this room. He made new paths and flower beds. Look at the unusual shape of these beds (point) ---in the shape of crowns---a fitting symbol to incorporate for a collector of decorative art often made for European royalty.

Transition: Let's take a closer look at the plant that is in these beds: the roses.

Feature 1: Floribunda Roses:

All these beds have roses in them, which is how they are similar. **Any guesses on how each bed is different from its neighbor?** each is planted with a single variety of floribunda rose

The museum has made sure that these varieties planted today are varieties that were available during Marjorie Post's lifetime, specifically the 1960s. The original floribundas from Post's time declined with age and were removed.

Like its name implies floribunda roses are abundant with flowers—a bouquet on every branch almost! They were originally created by crossing a polyantha rose with a hybrid tea rose. Polyantha have many (sometimes even 100) small blooms on a stem. Hybrid tea roses typically have a one showy large blossom on a stem. So you can see how the breeders combined the best of each type of rose to create the floribunda.

Our floribunda roses typically bloom late May/June. We've probably heard the saying, "make time to stop and smell the roses." You can try that with our roses, but their scent is subtle!

Transition: Speaking of fragrance, another flower with a striking fragrance is the spring-blooming white wisteria climbing up the pergola.

Feature 2: White Wisteria

This vine with its long pendulous flower clusters dates to Post's time, and is pruned frequently to promote flowering and keep it in check. It has long, pealike pods in the fall that stay into the winter.

Marjorie Post seems to have appreciated fragrance. As you walk through the gardens today, you will notice that many of the trees and shrubs have wonderful fragrances when they bloom.

Transition: Another plant on the pergola is the climbing roses.

Feature 3: Climbing Roses—'American Pillar'

Several of the climbers date to her time, specifically the pink spring-blooming 'American Pillar' roses on each end of the pergola. Notice how these roses take the color of this garden upward! Unlike the wisteria vine, these climbing roses are trained to climb, and do not do it naturally.

Transition: Not all the elements of this garden date to Post's time at Hillwood.

Feature 4: Monument:

Can anyone find an element of the garden that was installed after her passing in 1973? The pink granite monument in the center bed, originally there had been a fountain in its place

Marjorie Post:

Post chose this garden as her final resting place. Her ashes were placed in the base of the monument in 1974. It is topped with an urn made of porphyry---a very hard (durable) purple-colored stone. The base bears the Post family coat of arms and an inscription in Latin -- "All my hopes rest in me," a fitting motto for a generous and independent woman.

On the anniversary of her birth and death dates, horticulture staff place beautiful floral arrangements on the monument to remember and honor our founder.

Transition: There have always been gardeners at Hillwood. Today's horticulture staff numbers about 10 full time staff and over 100 volunteers. During Marjorie Post's time 12-15 dedicated and capable gardeners maintained the gardens.

Museum Today:

An example of that preservation work can be found here: in 2011 all the brick paths were completely restored. That shows how the museum continues to value Marjorie Post's gift of Hillwood and its gardens to the public.

Conclusion: We explored this garden, to find out how Marjorie Post adapted this space to fit her wishes, the features that make this garden room special, and how Hillwood's maintains it today.

Conclusion question assessing visitors' take aways: **What new information about this garden, Marjorie Post, or the museum do you leave with?**

Resources consulted: Rose garden lecture notes, rose garden section in: audio tour, Comprehensive Garden Notes, Stauffer's "The History of the Gardens at Hillwood, Washington, DC," Brown's 2006 garden lecture, Oxford Art Online (porphyry), Better Homes & Gardens online gardening plant dictionary (roses)