Learning at Swenson House

Teacher and group leader guide

Use a historic home as evidence. These adaptable activities invite students to observe closely, ask questions, and connect everyday objects with life in Abilene. Use them during an arranged visit or with photographs from the website.

Plan your group visit

Contact the Society before making travel plans. Include your organization, student ages or grade levels, group size, preferred dates, and learning interests. Ask about availability, admission, visit length, supervision, parking, and access needs. Arrangements must be confirmed before arrival.

Visit: 1726 Swenson Street, Abilene, TX 79603
Inquiries: info@swensonhouse.com | 325-232-8454

Learning goals

- Describe an object or architectural detail using specific observations.
- Separate evidence from interpretation and explain a claim with evidence.
- Compare one aspect of daily life in the past with life today.
- Explain why communities preserve historic places.

Before your visit

Ask: What could a house tell us about a family and its community? Study one exterior photograph. Have students write three observations and one question. Introduce observation (what we can see), inference (an interpretation), and source (where information comes from).

During your visit

Use the companion student worksheet. Choose two or three inquiry stations on the next page, adapting to the rooms available and your group. Follow the guide's instructions; observe objects without touching, opening, or using them unless invited.

Rooms as evidence

Inquiry prompts and follow-up ideas

Foyer and staircase

Look closely at the wood grain and the staircase. What materials and skills would building this space require? How could materials reach Abilene?

Study

Compare the window seat, stained glass, and a study space today. How might this room support reading, listening, or reflection?

Dining room and pantry

Look for evidence of food preparation, storage, hospitality, and communication. Choose one object and ask what information you need before explaining its use.

Music room

Consider a piano or another music-related object. How could making music at home shape family time before today's digital entertainment?

Sunroom

The sunroom was added in 1928. Study the windows and light. How could the design help people enjoy a breeze before home air conditioning?

After your visit: make a supported claim

Have students finish: One thing this house helps us understand is ... My evidence is ... I still wonder ... Compare two observations, then discuss a detail that could support more than one interpretation. Extend the activity by researching a historic place in your own community.

A short historical anchor

The home was built around 1910 for William Gray and Shirley Swenson. Architect William P. Preston was involved in its design. A major remodeling in 1928 changed the exterior; the house is recognized in the National Register of Historic Places. Use the website's History page for the wider family and community story.

Sources and use

Room prompts draw on the Society's 2025 Kaffe Fest Mini-House Tour, adapted for general learning. Historical context: National Park Service, record 87002148; Swenson House website. Activities are flexible suggestions, rather than a statement of curriculum alignment or a guaranteed tour route.

Sources: swensonhouse.com/mini-tour
npgallery.nps.gov/AssetDetail/NRIS/87002148