

City by Design

This lesson was created as a supplement to the *City by Design* program at the National Building Museum. It is designed to be used in your classroom independently, or as an activity before or after a school program at the Museum. For more information about and to register for the National Building Museum's school programs, visit <http://www.nbm.org/schools-educators/school-visit/>.

The *City by Design* program introduces kindergarten through sixth grade students to city planning. It encourages young people to explore the complexity of cities and helps them understand the impact of people's everyday decisions on the places where they live, work, and play.

National Building Museum

Created by an act of Congress in 1980, the National Building Museum explores, celebrates, and illuminates achievements in architecture, design, engineering, construction, and planning. Since opening its doors in 1985, the Museum has become a vital forum for exchanging ideas and information about such topical issues as managing suburban growth, designing and building sustainable communities, and revitalizing urban centers. A private, nonprofit institution, the Museum creates and presents engaging exhibitions and education programs, including innovative curricula for school children.

Over the past two decades, the Museum has created and refined an extensive array of youth programming. Each year, approximately 50,000 young people and their families participate in hands-on learning experiences at the Museum: 2-hour-long school programs for grades K–9; major daylong festivals; drop-in family workshops; programs helping Cub and Girl Scouts earn activity badges; and three innovative outreach programs, lasting between 30 and 60 hours, for secondary school students. The Museum's youth programming has won the Washington, D.C., Mayor's Arts Award for Outstanding Contributions to Arts Education and garnered recognition from the National Endowment for the Arts.



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Investigating Where You Live



The built environment—buildings, roads, and parks—is diverse, exciting, and ready to be explored! As we seek to teach students how to examine the interaction of humans with their physical environment, a logical place to begin is with their own surroundings. The following activities help to sharpen students’ observation and identification skills and provide opportunities for problem-solving.

Investigating one’s built environment can go beyond observation by inspiring action and change. We all can play an important role in our community. The following activities provide opportunities for students to strengthen the “common good” through forms of citizen action.

Materials

Photocopies of worksheets (pages 37–38)

Paper

Clipboards

Pencils and crayons

Action

As a class, explore your school’s neighborhood or another community by going on a scavenger hunt. Find or obtain items from the following list:

- Five different leaves
- Crayon rubbings of three different building materials

- Printed napkin or menu from a bakery, restaurant, or coffee shop (you’ll need to ask if it’s ok to take a menu)
- List of four different animals or insects observed
- A ticket from a bus or a subway ride
- Crayon rubbing of a historic marker
- List of types of homes—how many apartment buildings, townhouses, and single family houses did you see?
- List of other nearby buildings—schools, restaurants, movie theaters, parks, etc.
- List of manhole covers; document how they are labeled—water, sewer, etc.
- List of types or evidence of transportation—car, parking lot, bus stop, Metro stop, bicycle rack, etc.

Also, look around to see if the community is well maintained, or if certain parts are in disrepair. If you find an area or building in poor condition, draw a picture of it to document the trash, broken windows, boarded-up doors, etc.

Discussion and Analysis

Discuss the different types of buildings and places that the students encountered while on their scavenger hunt. Talk about the purposes of the different buildings. How were they able to identify the buildings? What parts of the buildings gave them clues about each building’s purpose (e.g., a store window showing pastries, movie

posters at a movie theater)? What did their findings tell them about their community?

Then talk about the condition of the buildings and places that the students explored. If students drew pictures of these places, post them in the classroom and discuss what they discovered. If any buildings or areas were in poor condition, how did this make the students feel?

Read the following story, “Cory and the Vacant Lot,” then use the student worksheet, “Thinking About Cory and the Vacant Lot,” to prompt discussion about what Cory did and how he made a positive difference in his community. Select a community project such as picking up litter on a sidewalk, the playground, or park, and do it! Emphasize the positive role that each student is playing to make the community better.

Taking it Further

- Have each student create a print advertisement such as a billboard or magazine ad, promoting the community that s/he explored. The ad should highlight the positive aspects of the community and make people want to visit it.

Cory and the Vacant Lot



Cory lives on the sixth floor of an old apartment building. Each window in his home looks out onto a different part of the city. When Cory gets his breakfast in the kitchen, he likes to watch the cars and taxis drive down Swann Avenue. While playing in the living room, he can see antennas on the roofs of other buildings, but when Cory looks out his bedroom window, he sees a dirty, vacant lot. The empty lot makes him sad and a bit mad. Nobody seems to care about it. Sometimes Cory sees people throw used car parts, old rugs, and garbage in it. The garbage looks bad and smells even worse. Cory often wonders why the empty lot is such a mess.

One day he asked his mother, “Why can’t our dirty lot have flowers like the one next to grandmother’s house?”

His mother replied, “Cory, some things are too complicated for a little boy to understand.”

Not satisfied with his mother’s answer, Cory asked his father, “Why do people throw garbage in our lot?”

His father thought for a moment and replied, “It is a very small lot. People don’t think it is important and worth caring about.”

“Well, I think it would be better without garbage,” said Cory.

The next week Cory visited his grandmother who lives two miles away. He helped her care for the garden in the lot next to her house. He noticed that each day his grandmother watered the plants, weeded the garden, and collected trash. Helping her gave him an idea.

When Cory returned home, he got his friends from the apartment building together to clean up the vacant lot next to their building. They worked hard and got the City Park Council in their neighborhood to help. Cory picked up garbage and put it into trashcans. His friends cleared away stones and replaced them with soil. Together they pulled up weeds and planted flowers and trees.

The City Park Council painted the old wooden fence green. It took a lot of work and many hours, but when they finished, the lot looked great. Where there was once a lot filled with garbage, now stood a beautiful garden. Cory knew he would have to water and weed it, but everyone in the apartment building was willing to help. Now when Cory looks out of his bedroom window, he is very happy.

This story is based on a *New York Times* article “Where Once Only Garbage Grew, a Secret Garden.”

