



PART ONE: BUILDINGS, NEIGHBORHOODS & TOWNS

LESSON FIVE: NEIGHBORHOODS, TOWNS & CITIES

By Charles M. Yarborough

Grade Levels

4 – 12 Teachers should adjust/select activities appropriate for the age and ability of their students.

Objectives

- Using historic buildings in their community, students will sharpen their powers of observation and develop research skills.
- Students will learn to become aware of their local environment.
- Students will be able to distinguish between neighborhoods, towns and cities and be able to identify various issues related to their organization.
- Students will be able to explain how places may have different meanings for various members of a community.
- Students will be able to explain the importance of city planning to the development of communities.
- Students will be able to differentiate between traditional development patterns and sprawl.

Mississippi Curriculum Connections

- Mississippi Studies (4th grade) Framework – Competencies 1,3, & 5
- Mississippi Studies (9th grade) Framework – Competencies 1, 2, 3, 4, & 5

Materials Provided Online www.mississippiheritage.com

- City Maps

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For the Teacher

In developing and maintaining our built environments, communities make decisions regarding the location, organization and preservation of buildings. These buildings make up neighborhoods, towns and cities.

In this lesson, students will sharpen their awareness of the distinctions between neighborhoods, towns and cities. Additionally, students will be challenged to understand city planning and the community processes of planning.

Opening the Lesson

On the board or overhead, write “What is a neighborhood?” Have students brainstorm various definitions in their own words, keeping a class list. Discuss the various definitions of “neighborhood” below, emphasizing to students that there are two aspects meaning of “neighborhood” – one refers to a physical area and the other suggests connections between people in a community.

Neighborhood – (n) an area within a city or town that has some distinctive features; people living in close proximity to or near one another; people having something in common; (adj) in the vicinity of

Have students list the characteristics of their neighborhood or the neighborhood around the school. Are there distinctive buildings, parks other places? What about people, traditions, activities, etc.?

Ask students how the buildings and spaces are connected to the people in their neighborhood or the school’s neighborhood. Emphasize that spaces often determine the ways that people interact and connect with one another.

Have students repeat the exercise defining a “city” and a “town.” What makes up a city? What makes a town? Emphasize the similarities in the answers to these questions and those questions regarding neighborhoods.

Developing the Lesson

Neighborhood Maps

Using Google Maps, www.maps.google.com, Flash Earth (satellite maps), www.flashearth.com, or any other map source for reference, have students draw a map of their neighborhood with streets and natural boundaries. The map should be on a paper large enough to add labels, symbols, explanations or any other information they need.

Have students walk through their neighborhoods and fill in buildings, parks and additional landmarks they feel are significant to the neighborhood.

Have students illustrate the placement of buildings on the blocks in their neighborhood. Ask them to consider the placement of those buildings. Why are some closer to the street than others? What kinds of open spaces are adjacent to some buildings? What is the purpose of the open space?

Then have students write a paragraph explaining the “meaning” or “significance” of some building, street or other place identified on their maps.

In class, discuss some of the paragraphs, emphasizing the differences between objective, factual information and subjective perceptions/meanings.

Other Possible Exercises

Students could also develop a brief skit, with each student representing a building or place on their map. Students should explain the “meaning” or “significance” of the building or place during the skit.

Another activity would be for students to map their route from home to school or to another common location in their town (library, theatre, courthouse, park, etc). Following the suggestions above, students could utilize the route map to explore the meaning of buildings and places.

Map Color Coding or Symbols

Give students a map of the school neighborhood and surrounding area with buildings noted. Have students color code the buildings on their maps, according to the building types. Teachers should determine (or allow students to determine, as long as the entire class is using the same color codes) a separate color for each of the building types emphasized in Lesson Four: Residential, Commercial, Mixed Use, Industrial, Institutional, Monumental and Recreational.

Have the class develop symbols for the various features of their neighborhoods, and then label the buildings and other features to explore and discuss what patterns they see. For instance, a cross might represent a church, a book might represent a library, etc. Students should also label historic buildings as “historic”.

Discuss with the class their observations about the finished maps. What trends do they notice? What types of buildings are grouped together? The color coding should reflect how various building types are commonly grouped. For instance, there are likely

to be churches among or near residential buildings. Institutional and commercial buildings are often grouped together.

This exercise offers an introduction to the concept of zoning within a community. Discuss with students what types of buildings are near their homes. Ask students what types of buildings or places are not located nearby that would improve the community (parks, theatres, etc.) What types of buildings would they not want near their home?

For homework, students can write a paragraph or draw a picture explaining/illustrating what type of buildings they would or would not want in their neighborhood.

Other Possible Exercises

Take a walk! Walk the class through a neighborhood to have a first-hand look at the many issues they have studied. Establish a focus prior to going, and ask questions that encourage students to consider their surroundings more completely. For example: Why are porches open (or enclosed)? Why are some buildings farther from the street than others? How close together are the buildings? Why are some windows larger than others? How wide are the streets? Where do people park their cars? etc. Have students discuss the differences between historic neighborhoods and modern developments.

During the neighborhood walk, invite someone from the neighborhood to explain the history of the neighborhood or a specific building or place in the neighborhood. Have students take notes and sketch/ photograph the buildings and identify building types and/or details.

What is a City?

Have students define “city” in their own words, keeping a class list. Then have students define “town” in their own words, keeping a class list. What are the differences? This discussion should eventually result in an understanding that “city” and “town” are words without any firm rule of size or population.

Then have students define rural, urban and suburban and discuss which types of buildings and what kinds of landscape details are likely to be found in each.

Rural – of, or relating to, the country – Likely building types: farmhouses, barns, single



homes, etc. Likely landscape features: pastures, fields, forests, etc.

Urban – of, or relating to, the city – Likely building types: hi-rises, skyscrapers, tall mixed-use buildings, parking garages, etc. Likely landscape features: open land and trees limited to parks.

Suburban – a mostly residential community outlying a city – Likely building types: shopping malls and strip malls, housing developments, “big box” retail stores (such as Walmart), large parking lots, etc. Likely landscape features: fewer trees and open land than in the country, but more than in the city.

Following this discussion, have students classify their hometown. Is it a city? Town? Rural, urban, or suburban? Discuss their reasoning.

For homework or in class, have students draw a map of their hometown which should include natural boundaries (such as rivers, hills, mountains, etc.), major roadways (highways and major streets), and neighborhood types (residential, industrial, commercial sections).

Discuss with students how their hometown is organized and how that organization meets the needs of the residents of their community. Students can also consider the ways the organization of their hometown fails to meet some of the needs of area residents.

City Planning

Explain to students that some cities and towns were planned while others were developed over time according to the random settlement of the residents.

Using an illustration of the original city plan for Jackson, Mississippi provided under *City Maps* on www.mississippiheritage.com, explain that the original city plan for the City of Jackson called for a government building, a college and a courthouse, each with an accompanying green space. Additionally, the town would be laid out with alternating blocks for residences/commercial buildings and park space in a “checkerboard pattern”. Ask why the planners would dedicate spaces for a capitol, college and courthouse. What other types of buildings would be needed? Where were they likely to locate? How might this plan be different if it were being developed today? Would

you require the same buildings? Why/Why not? Teachers can use illustrations of other cities or towns as long as they lend themselves to exploring the basic principles highlighted by the above questions. Compare/contrast the city plan of Jackson with other city maps provided on www.mississippiheritage.com.

As the students discuss the questions above, encourage them to understand that some cities are organized or planned in advance, while others are not. City planners try to organize cities so that homes, roads, government buildings and businesses are spread out in a way that will encourage a healthy life for a city’s inhabitants.

Sprawl

Explain to students that, following War World II, development patterns in the United States began to change. This change was due in large part to massive government spending on the interstate system, increased automobile ownership and disinvestment in public mass transit.

Show students the Sprawl Diagram provided under *City Maps* on www.mississippiheritage.com and read them the following explanatory paragraph:

Suburban sprawl, depicted in the lower sketch, creates a geography of separation. Stores, offices and housing are deliberately kept apart, forcing people to drive to every destination. Traditional neighborhood design, by contrast, ties a community’s elements into a network of streets that provides many choices of how to get from one point to another—on foot, on a bicycle, or in a motor vehicle (from *A Better Place to Live*, Philip Langdon, 1994).

Ask students to compare/contrast the sprawl diagram with the city maps of towns in Mississippi already discussed. How does this compare with their community? Can students walk to school? parks? shops? movie theatres?

Plan a City

Once students have engaged in these discussions, it is time for them to plan a city! Explain to students that their city should follow traditional development patterns, not sprawl. Working in groups (or as a single class group), have students brainstorm about the many different types of buildings they will need



in their model city. Ask questions as students work that force them to explore the comprehensive needs of the inhabitants of a city: Where will residents eat?; receive medical care?; park cars?; repair cars?; purchase clothes?; receive an education (elementary/secondary/professional)?; play? etc.

Students should also evaluate the various housing needs of residents. Remind students that in addition to single family homes of various sizes, they should consider including lofts over commercial businesses, townhouses and apartment buildings.

One important component to consider in planning the model city is transportation. Have students discuss options for different types of roads in their town, including boulevards, alleys, avenues and streets. Ask students to consider options for mass transit in their town, including a streetcar or bus system, as well as bike paths and walking trails. Encourage students to place goods and services within a five minute walk (five mile radius) of neighborhoods.

Once students have created a comprehensive list of the types of buildings and other places their model city will need, have the group(s) discuss/negotiate the locations of these buildings and develop a model map of their city to illustrate the selected locations. Students should be reminded that there are certain types of buildings that residents might not want located near others.

Give your model city roots. Be sure students select a name for their city. Students can also develop an imaginary scenario about the founding of the city and its development over time.

Once the model cities are drawn, each group will present and explain their model to the rest of the class.

Other Possible Exercises

If time permits, each student or group can also build a model of the city, or a neighborhood within the city. Students should use the same scale for each building.

Each student or group should record the following for each building model:

- The building's function and size
- The materials to be used
- A floor plan for the building
- A drawing of the front façade of the building

Models should be placed in relation to one another to illustrate the city or neighborhood plan. Students may use children's wooden blocks or Lego-type blocks for a more basic representation of the planned city.

Students could also research professions or volunteer positions related to community building. Students could then explain that person's role in developing a particular building, park or neighborhood in their model city as part of the classroom presentation.

Some possible choices include:

- Architect
- Engineer
- Land Surveyor
- Transportation Planner
- City/County Planner
- Planning or Zoning Commissioner
- Historic Preservation Commissioner
- Craftsman (bricklayer, plasterer, carpenter, etc.)
- Contractor/Builder
- Property Owner
- Real Estate Agent
- Developer
- Landscape Architect
- Elected Official (mayor, alderman, county commissioner)

Assessing Student Learning

Teachers may develop assessment opportunities in addition to the following:

- Student should complete map assignments.
- Student should prepare a written or oral explanation of neighborhoods, towns and cities.
- Student should complete planned city illustration or model.
- Student should participate in various classroom discussions.

Extending the Lesson

The possibilities for extending the lesson are limited only by the desire, time and creativity of the teacher and students. Some possible extensions include:

- Students could create photographic collages to "tell the story of" their neighborhood or a significant spot in the neighborhood.
- Invite a city planner, local zoning commissioner or local historic preservation commissioner to speak



with the class about local planning or zoning issues. Before the speaker arrives, have students develop a “what if” scenario for the planner or commissioner to address and discuss with the class. For example, “what if” a developer wanted to purchase a local landmark, demolish it, and build a new restaurant on the location?

- Invite someone from the Mississippi Heritage Trust to attend the classroom presentation of the model city. Contact Dawn Denton, Director of Programs, at 601-354-0200 to set up a classroom visit.
- Take students on a field trip to one of the many wonderful historic places in Mississippi. The Mississippi Tourism Division has lots of information on their website, www.visitmississippi.org/cultural_historical/, about historic resources across the state that you can visit.

Curriculum Developed by

Mississippi Heritage Trust

PHYSICAL: 600 East Amite Street, Suite 201
Jackson, MS 39201

MAILING: P.O. Box 577, Jackson, MS 39205

PHONE: 601-354-0200

FAX: 601-354-0220

EMAIL: info@mississippiheritage.com

ONLINE: www.mississippiheritage.com

Author: Charles M. Yarborough

As a native Mississippian, Charles M. Yarborough has long been an advocate for educating young people about the history and architecture of our state. A teacher at the Mississippi School for Mathematics and Science since 1995, Charles regularly involves his students in preservation activities, including the performance project *Tales from the Crypt*, which was awarded the 2005 Governor’s Award for Excellence in the Arts, and an architecture scavenger hunt of historic Columbus.

