

JANE JACOBS AND THE FUTURE OF NEW YORK

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Pre-Visit Activities

Although Jane Jacobs was unschooled as an urban planner, the ideas that she promulgated in her 1961 book, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, profoundly impacted the way planners, architects, policy-makers, and ordinary citizens view cities. Throughout *Death and Life*, Jacobs stressed the importance of simple observation. She argued that more could be learned and understood about a city's health and vitality by taking time to observe its street-life and physical make-up than years of formal training in the country's most prestigious academies.

The following activities will help sharpen your students' powers of observation, and show them that they don't need to be an "expert" to reach conclusions about what works in a city as well as what does not.

1. **Make a mental/memory map of the neighborhood.**

Materials: plain paper (any size, e.g., 8 ½" X 11" or 11" X 17"), pencils, crayons, or colored pencils.

Time: Approximately 45 minutes.

Begin this activity by asking students to name the components of a neighborhood with the students. Although they will likely be quite familiar with these concepts, it is helpful to articulate the ideas. Students' answers might include residences, including apartment buildings, single-family houses, apartment towers, etc.; commercial spaces, such as restaurants, drug stores, banks, movie theaters, etc.; places of worship, such as churches, synagogues, mosques, and temples; open spaces such as parks, playgrounds, plazas, and sidewalks; public spaces such as schools and libraries; civic sites such as post offices, police stations, hospitals, and fire departments; and transportation nodes such as bus stops, subway stops, taxi pick-ups, etc. Students may also discuss boundaries and what constitutes a neighborhood's boundaries, i.e., principal streets, highways, a natural boundary such as a body of water, a park, railroad tracks or elevated train tracks, etc.

Decide whether students will focus on their own neighborhoods where they live, or the neighborhood where the school is located. Ask students to think about the neighborhood (whichever you choose). What are the places they go? How do they get there? What are the places they

notice? Which are the streets with which they are familiar? Are there certain stores that they always go to? Are their friends' or relatives' houses nearby that they visit? Explain to the class that they are going to make a mental/memory map of the neighborhood. Stress that this is a map made from memory, and therefore, it is *highly* subjective. It is not meant to be an accurate representation of the neighborhood. It is only *their* impression of the neighborhood based upon the way they experienced. Encourage students to talk about their work when they finish. Save the students' work, especially if you intend to do activity number 2.

2. Map analysis.

Materials: Street map of students' neighborhood, or maps of the school's neighborhood. (Sources of maps include: Hagstrom road atlases; Oasis mapping—create map by zip code: <http://www.oasisnyc.net/oasismap.htm>

Citi (Community Information Technology Initiative):

http://www.myciti.org/make_a_map_citi2.html

(Create a map by address. Maps may show locations of schools, fire departments, etc., depending upon how the user designs it)

Or, use Google maps.

Time: Approximately 45 minutes

If you have done activity number 1, have students compare their memory maps with the prepared map. What is the difference between the type of information the students included on their memory maps and the type of information included on the prepared maps? Ask students to consider why. Have them compare the information on the memory and prepared maps. What is different? What is the same? Are there any areas that the students made larger than they exist in reality? Smaller? Omitted completely? Why do they think so? In a journal entry, ask students to consider what they learned about themselves and how they experience their neighborhood by comparing their memory or mental maps with the prepared maps. Ask them to consider whether looking at the prepared map has made them curious about other parts of their neighborhood with which they might be unfamiliar? What do their mental or memory maps tell them about themselves?

If you have not created the mental or memory map, students may use the prepared maps to illustrate how they use the neighborhood. Students may either draw directly on the prepared map or create an overlay map with tracing paper. They should show their route to school, favorite places, etc. Follow directions above.

3. Neighborhood walking tour.

Materials: Neighborhood tour sheet, pencils, clipboards
Time: Approximately 90 minutes, i.e., two periods

Tell students that one of the best ways to learn about a neighborhood is to spend time in it. This walking tour needn't be elaborate. Oftentimes, a simple walk around the block will suffice. It is advisable, though, to map out a route beforehand, so that there won't be unexpected obstacles, such as a street closing, etc. You may also want to map out a route that includes both mixed-use streets (e.g., a street with stores below and residential above, some cultural/public uses, etc.), and streets that are strictly one-use, e.g., residential.

Using the enclosed neighborhood tour sheet, take the students on the walking tour.

When you return (you can do this portion the following day if you don't have a double period), analyze the class' findings. The students may interpret the data in a variety of ways. They may make charts or graphs that show the number of types of buildings that they observe, the number of people that they observed, the types of activities in which they were engaged, etc.

4. What is street life?

Materials: cameras or drawing paper, drawing materials, e.g., charcoal, ink, pencil, pastel, etc.

Time: Approximately 45 minutes – 90 minutes, including possible homework assignment

Introduce the term 'street life.' Ask students to react to the term. What does it mean to them? What are examples of street life? Students' responses might include: people shopping, people playing basketball at the playground, people hanging out listening to music, a police officer giving directions, people running into friends and chatting, a school crossing guard helping children, etc. Ask the students their opinion of street life. Is it good for a neighborhood? Is it bad for a neighborhood?

Discuss how the physical components of a street may contribute to or take away from street life.

Ask students to think of a street in their own neighborhood that has very active street life. Tell them that they will write a poem that describes the street, and then for homework will illustrate it either with photography or any other type of illustration. Any type of poem would be suitable, although the structure of a cinquain would lend itself very well to this type of descriptive writing.

Cinquain:

one word or two syllables - subject name
two words or four syllables - description
three words or six syllables - action
four words or eight syllables - description
one word or two syllables - summation

5. In a neighborhood, what works, what doesn't, and why?

Materials: Place analysis forms (included), place questionnaires (included), students' memory maps (if you have made them). Cardstock for accordion books, crayons, colored pencils, pastels, pencils, glue stick. If you have access to advanced equipment, students can record the interviews for a podcast, or if you have video cameras, they can be filmed for a webcast, etc.

Time: Approximately two hours and 15 minutes, i.e., three periods including homework

Ask students to think about their own neighborhoods. What are their favorite outdoor places to go? Why? What places do they avoid? Why? Do they feel safer in certain parts of the neighborhood than others? Why? Are certain areas more crowded than others? Why? Tell students that they are going to work in pairs. They will conduct an oral interview to learn about a friend's favorite and least favorite place. Make sure students understand that they should be thinking about outdoors locations. In other words, their bedroom may very well be their favorite place to be, but in this activity, they are focusing on their favorite and least favorite places to go where they can be part of their neighborhood.

Split the class into pairs. Each student will interview the other about his/her favorite and least favorite place in the neighborhood. For homework, the pairs will visit each other's favorite and least favorite place to continue the discussion and make observations on-site. Students should take photographs or make drawings using any medium of the sites. They should also stay at each site for at least 20 minutes.

Back in the classroom, students continue to work in pairs to create an accordion book that tells visually and through words a profile of the student and his/her favorite and least favorite sites. *Procedure for accordion book:* Use card stock. Fold in half the long way and cut. (You will have two pieces, each 4 ¼" X 11".) Create accordion folds in each piece and then glue together. (See blank sample included in this package.) Students should design their books so that when it's read one way, it describes the favorite place. When it's flipped over and read the other way, it describes the least favorite place.