

Redesign Your Street

Middle School Teacher's Guide/Workbook

Lesson 1: The Streets Around Us



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Lesson One

The Streets Around Us

BIG IDEAS

To Share with Your Students



→ **STREETS ARE AN IMPORTANT PART OF LIFE IN A CITY**

We are going to study our streets because they matter to us. In cities, we use our streets to get from place to place, but also use them to work, play, and live. They are a big part of the public space that we all share.

→ **BY OBSERVING THE STREETS, YOU CAN LEARN A LOT**

We can go on a walk in the area around the school; simply by looking at people's daily activities to learn about streets.

→ **OUR TRANSPORTATION CHOICES MATTER**

We can think critically about our transportation choices and how they affect street design. Streets are built to support the way we get around, and we have generally built our streets to accommodate privately owned cars, not transit riders, pedestrians, or cyclists.

Know the Facts

- The average American spends over 100 hours per week commuting to work.
- Americans drive more than two and a half trillion miles annually —while the average American spends 440 hours driving every year — the equivalent of 11 work-weeks.
- Over 25% of ALL land in New York City is devoted to roads
- In Bogota, Colombia, on Sundays cars are prohibited from driving in more than 70 miles of the city's streets, attracting more than a million residents every week to bike and walk.

(Sources: Planetizen, "Removing Cars to Create Public Space;" Drum Major Institute, "Reclaiming our Public Space for People, Not Cars"; Men's Fitness Mar '07)

What We Will Learn

Students will gain a new perspective of the value of public space, in particular, that our streets are important and we can improve them. They will use observation to determine some of the effects that streets designed for cars have on our daily lives.

Questions of the Day



- Why do our streets matter?
- What are the different effects that cars have on our daily lives?
- How can we measure the impact of cars by doing experiments in the area around the school?

Main Activities

The students will walk around their neighborhood and observe their streets. They will then discuss why street design matters.

1) Catalyst - 2 mins

Students answer the following question in their "Livable Streets" journals: What factors make a neighborhood a nice place to live?

- Students can list their ideas or write several sentences
- If students are struggling, ask them what they like best about the area around the school, or their own neighborhood

2) Talk with a Partner - 3 mins

Students talk with a partner about what they think makes a nice neighborhood.

- Each student should share at least 2 ideas with their partner

3) Share with the class - 5 mins

Students share with the rest of the class.

- Create a list as a class of what makes a good living environment. Keep brainstorming until you have at least 10 or 15 items on your class' list.

Quick View

TIME 1hr	NATIONAL STANDARDS NSS-C.5-8.5, NSS-G.K-12.1, NSS-G.K-12.2
GRADE LEVELS 6th-8th Grade	SUBJECT AREAS Environmental Science, Social Studies, Art

Materials

- Livable Streets journal
- Pens or pencils
- "Neighborhood Walk" handout
- Hard notebook or clipboards
- Blank paper for sketching
- Colored pencils or markers

4) Core Activity: Neighborhood Walk- 30 mins

Explain to the class that you will be going on a walk outside to look at the streets in the neighborhood, to get a sense of what's nice about the area, and what could be improved. Before you head out, briefly discuss the following questions:

- How are streets a major part of our public space?
- What are the signs, signals, art, services, and structures in our public space that we normally take for granted?
- What number percentage of streets do you hypothesize will be devoted to cars? To pedestrians? To cyclists? To transit riders?

Take the students out on a walk in the area around the school, and fill out the "Neighborhood Walk" handout. The categories are: Plants, For Pedestrians,

Private Vehicles, Public Transportation, For Cyclists, and Other. Write down observations and questions for each category. For example, under, "For Pedestrians" write down "special striped crosswalk near school"). Encourage them to make detailed observations and suggestions (e.g. "Man with stroller can't get by our class because the sidewalk is too small," "The sidewalk needs to be at least 3 feet wider for pedestrians")

5) Class Discussion - 10 mins

Students discuss what they saw and ask whether they noticed anything about public space and streets after they went on the walk. Ask the class challenging questions to get a discussion going.

- What is the impact of cars on the urban environment? How are they helpful? How are they hurtful? Discuss the pros and cons of cars.
- Did they feel like the streets were designed to be sustainable? Could they be made better for pedestrians, cyclists, and transit riders?
- Explain that they will learn more about streets and street design, and the impact that cars have on our lives and the environment.

6) Wrap Up - 10 mins

Ask the students to sketch an image based what they've seen on their walk. Hand out paper and pencils. Explain that they can draw or write about anything that stood out to them on their walk – this is not a formal assignment, but to help them process what they've observed.

- Kids who are less into drawing can write (e.g. a poem, song lyrics, a simple cartoon with a lot of dialogue, a prose description, etc.)

Tips for Success

- Some ideas for your list of what makes a good neighborhood: good air quality, clean water, relatively stable climate and weather, affordable housing, healthcare and sanitation, excellent public transportation, outdoor areas to walk, bike, and exercise, low crime rate, parks and public plazas, trees and plant, safe places for children to play.
- When on your walk, try to walk around an area with various kinds of transportation. Don't forget, public transportation includes buses, so check out a bus stop.
- Ask the kids to focus on things they see every day, but usually don't pay much attention to, like crosswalks, signals, bike lanes, benches, etc. And have the students look at how other people and vehicles are using the streets.
- When creating your pros and cons of cars list, be sure that negative effects list include those that are less apparent, such as increased road congestion, decreased street safety, and reduced public space.

Further Resources



- Planetizen, "Removing Cars to Promote Public Space;" (www.planetizen.com)
- Drum Major Institute, "Reclaiming our Public Space for People, Not Cars" (www.drummajorinstitute.org/)

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Middle School

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Handouts

Category	Observations	Suggestions
1 Plants 		
2 For Pedestrians 		
3 Private Vehicles 		
4 Public Transportation 		
5 For Cyclists 		
6 Other 		