



NEIGHBORHOOD IMPROVEMENTS — A CLASS PROJ- ECT TO BE PROUD OF

Subject: Social Studies

Skills: Action, Analysis, Application, Citizenship, Decision Making, Description, Discussion, Large Group, Modeling, Observation, Problem Solving, Public Speaking, Responsibility, Small Group

Duration: Highly variable depending on depth - about 2 weeks

Setting: Classroom and Neighborhood

Materials:

For small planning groups:

- “game pieces” (small construction paper pieces such as triangles, circles, and squares)
- colored markers
- an enlarged size map of their community or neighborhood or a blueprint to act as a “game board”

For the class model:

- cereal and shoe boxes of various shapes and sizes
- tempera paint
- construction paper
- markers, glue, and scissors
- butcher block paper
- floor or table space for the students to work on the model

For presentations:

- markers, glue and scissors
- poster boards
- pictures of improvement model

For actual neighborhood improvement:

- supplies will vary according to the planned improvement

Michigan Curriculum Framework Content Standards and Benchmarks:

- Social Studies II.2.LE 3:** Strand II. Geographic Perspective, Standard 1. Human/Environment Interaction, Benchmark LE 3. Describe the major physical patterns, ecosystems, resources, and land uses of the state, region, and country and explain the processes that created them.
- Social Studies V.1.LE 2:** Strand V. Inquiry, Standard 1. Information Processing, Benchmark LE 2. Organize social science information to make maps, graphs and tables.
- Social Studies V.1.LE 3:** Strand V. Inquiry, Standard 1. Information Processing, Benchmark LE 3. Interpret social science information about local, state, and national communities from maps, graphs, and charts.
- Social Studies VI.1.LE 3:** Strand VI. Public Discourse and Decision Making, Standard 1. Identifying and Analyzing Issues, Benchmark LE 3. Evaluate possible resolution of a public issue.
- Social Studies VI.2.LE 1:** Strand VI. Public Discourse and Decision Making, Standard 2. Group Discussion, Benchmark LE 1. Engage each other in conversations that attempt to clarify and resolve issues pertaining to local, state, and national policy.
- Social Studies VII.1.LE 2:** Strand VII. Citizen Involvement, Standard 1. Citizen Involvement, Benchmark LE 2. Engage in activities intended to contribute to solving a local, state or national problem they have studied.
- Social Studies II.2.MS 4:** Geographic Perspective, Standard 2. Describe, compare, and explain the locations and characteristics of ecosystems. Benchmark MS 4. Explain how humans modify the environment and describe some of the possible consequences of those modifications.
- Social Studies V.1.MS 2:** Inquiry, Standard 1. Acquire information from books, maps, newspapers, data sets and other sources. Benchmark MS 2. Use traditional and electronic means to organize social science information and to make maps, graphs, and tables.
- Social Studies VI.1.MS 2:** Public Discourse and Decision Making, Standard 1. State an issue clearly as a question of public policy. Benchmark MS 2. Trace the origins of a public issue.

Kent County Collaborative Core Curriculum (KC⁴):

- Social Studies:** 4:4, 4:6, 4:7, 4:8, 4:9
5:4, 5:5, 5:7, 5:9
6:1, 6:2, 6:3, 6:4, 6:5, 6:6, 6:10
7:1, 7:3, 7:4, 7:5, 7:8, 7:9
8:1, 8:2, 8:3, 8:9

OVERVIEW

For this class project, students begin by establishing neighborhood improvement goals. In small groups, they role-play city planners and design neighborhood improvements. As a class, students build a large-scale improvement model, and then present it to various groups. Finally, students help to accomplish a neighborhood improvement goal, gaining a sense of community pride.

OBJECTIVES

After participating in this activity, students will be able to:

- Use data from primary (direct observation) and secondary (maps) sources to plan and design improvements to their own neighborhood.
- Work together in a small group to design and plan neighborhood improvement goals.
- Work together in a large group to construct an improved model of their own neighborhood.
- Make presentations of the model to community and governmental groups.
- Take responsibility and help to accomplish one or more neighborhood improvements.

BACKGROUND

Personal involvement in neighborhood improvements can give students a tremendous amount of confidence in their ability to make a civic difference.

In Youth Planning Charrettes: A Manual for Planners, Teachers, and Youth Advocates, Bruce Race and Carolyn Torma accurately state that, “There are a variety of reasons to get youth involved in community planning. Educators want to introduce active civic learning into the classroom. Community planners and policymakers reach out for a more inclusive view of their communities by integrating youth concerns. Communities and parents seek an informed atmosphere for citizenship and leadership training. And young people want their aspirations acknowledged in preparing plans for the future.”

In Case Study #4 from Youth Planning Charrettes, students

from The George Washington Carver Elementary Garden Project not only planned and designed a community improvement project but also took the initiative to raise funding:

Students outlined the overall planning approach.

They helped establish the goals for the garden project, picked the experts that could help teach them to make the garden successful, networked with students at other schools, participated in the hands-on garden design, and advocated for the funding for construction.

Besides learning about an overall process, the students had the opportunity to participate in several workshop-style sessions. The major charrette session (youth participate in activities that define issues and find solutions to problems) was developing the Garden Planning Teams. In this charrette, students prepared a garden plan layout and planting plan. The Garden Planning Teams consisted

of five students who used their growing calendar, a selection of plants, the maps of the courtyards, and pieces of cut cardboard to plan the gardens. The students answered three questions while designing their gardens: 1. What plants will be planted and what time of year? 2. Where in the garden will they be planted? 3. How will the selected plants be maintained?

The students spent two hours building a scale model of their proposals, and then presented their models, drawings, and plant list to the rest of the teams. They discussed what was similar about the proposals and negotiated a consensus plan formed from all the teams' plans. (Race and Torma, 1998)

Community-based problem solving, neighborhood-oriented services, and public/private cooperation is needed in order to preserve and improve the physical, social and economic health of neighborhoods, support neighborhood self-reliance, and enhance the quality of life for residents. Students cannot fulfill all these needs, but they can begin to help and therefore improve their surroundings. In the process, their enthusiasm will spread, and more people will be encouraged to support and help improve their neighborhoods.

There are many things that can be done to improve a

neighborhood, and some are more fun and more pleasant than others. The type of improvements to be done depend on the needs of each individual neighborhood. For example, one neighborhood might need sidewalks, gardens, and parks, and another neighborhood might need vacant buildings repaired and junk, debris, and graffiti cleaned up. Although it may not be appropriate for students to make these changes themselves, they can identify ways to change their neighborhoods and present their ideas to the people who make change happen, such as the local planning commission or neighborhood association.

To begin the planning process, it is helpful to follow a series of distinct steps that are reflected in the elements of a plan. The planning steps that Bruce Race and Carolyn Torma list include:

- The vision and establishing goals.
 - Assessing the community and its resources (research).
 - Identifying the problems.
 - Examining the possible solutions to problems.
 - Creating tools for addressing the problems.
 - Establishing a course of action through a plan.
 - Implementing the plan.

This lesson can be very involved, especially if the students carry through and accomplish one of their improvement goals for their own neighborhood, but the hands-on learning experience will be very valuable, empowering, and never forgotten.

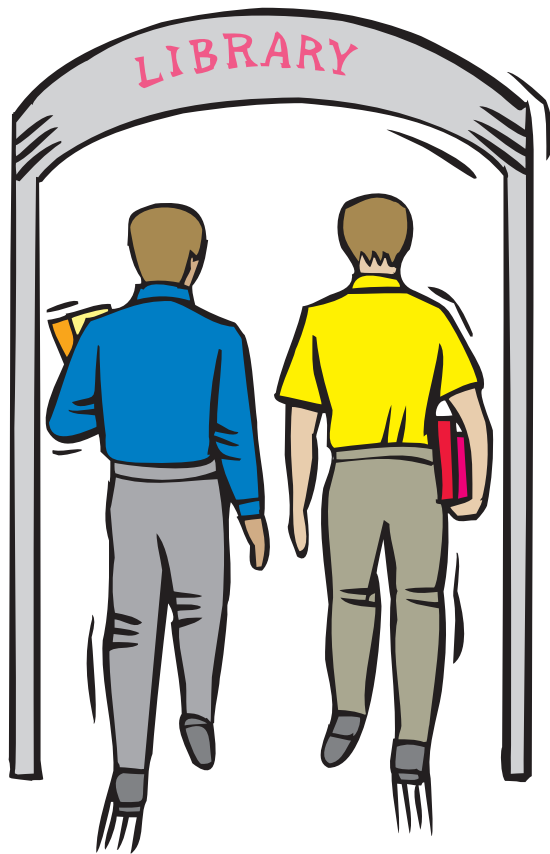


PROCEDURE

If not taken already in the lesson Walking Neighborhood Surveys, conduct a class field trip or walking tour to observe the actual make-up of the community. Ask the students to take notes to help them construct a model of the community.

PART ONE: ESTABLISH NEIGHBORHOOD IMPROVEMENT GOALS

1. Review and discuss with students the community in which they live. Ask them what types of things would make their community a better place now and in the future. Answers will vary, but some ideas might include



more homes, apartments, a local grocery store, bike paths, bus service, a library, more police patrol, an ice cream parlor, more street lamps, a pool, playgrounds, sidewalks, etc.

2. In addition to the above improvements, help the students list things or areas in the community that are a problem and need improvement, such as graffiti, parking, trash, fences in disrepair, open and vacant buildings, junk cars, and weedy vegetation (grass not maintained). The unfortunate reality is that crime, drugs, and gangs might also be on their list. Ask students to address the community problems and examine possible solutions.
3. After problems, improvements, and solutions have been listed, help students to decide on several goals they would like to see accomplished in their neighborhood. Allow time to discuss and debate different issues before final decisions on goals are made.

PART TWO: ROLE-PLAY CITY PLANNERS AND DESIGN NEIGHBORHOOD IMPROVEMENTS

1. Review the neighborhood goals that were established during the discussion in Part One.
2. Tell the class that they are going to role-play community planners. They will take the neighborhood goals that they

established and design the improvements on a neighborhood “game board.” 3. Split the class into groups of 5-7 students. Pass out the enlarged community maps/blueprints as the “game board” and paper game pieces. Tell students to label the game pieces with the neighborhood goals, for example, the triangle might be a park, the square is an ice-cream parlor, the circle is a trash clean-up site, the oval is where a tree will be planted, etc. Allow the students time to design and arrange the pieces on the map. Remind the students that they are role-playing community planners that are designing neighborhood improvements. Encourage them to apply knowledge and reasoning skills when planning because they will later have to explain why they put pieces where they did. When the plans are finished and the group is in agreement, have the students tape the pieces in place. Allow them to use the markers to add additional ideas or unique changes to their neighborhood.

4. Conduct a mock town meeting and have each planning group present their neighborhood improvements. Let each student describe a piece of the plan and the reasons for the design. At the end of the presentations, allow the planners (students) to discuss the various proposals and choose the best design. The best design may be a combination of ideas from each plan. Finalize design ideas to be included in the neighborhood improvement model.

PART THREE: BUILD A NEIGHBORHOOD IMPROVEMENT MODEL

1. Ask the students to help sketch on the chalkboard the streets and roads that comprise their community. Then transfer the sketch to butcher paper placed on the floor.
2. Direct the students to make the buildings that make up their community on the butcher paper. With art supplies and cereal boxes, they can work individually, in pairs, or in small groups to make stores, houses, schools, etc. (Remind them to include the goals that they set for neighborhood improvements!)
3. Have the students place the boxes in appropriate spots on the streets and roads drawn on the paper. To add realistic interest, allow the students to make traffic lights, street signs, trees, flowers, grass, etc. from the various art supplies.
4. Provide time and opportunity for the students to talk freely and draw conclusions about the neighborhood improvement model. Take pictures of it for displays and presentations.

PART FOUR: PRESENT THE MODEL AND ACCOMPLISH A NEIGHBORHOOD IMPROVEMENT

1. For homework or during class, have the students prepare materials for presenting the neighborhood improvement model to officials and citizens of the community. Examples might be group speeches, essays, skits, posters, displays, letters, notebooks, pamphlets, etc.
2. Allow students to present the neighborhood improvement model to Parent Teacher Associations, planning commissions, neighborhood associations, or government officials. They can also communicate with these groups through letters and photos.
3. Help and encourage student involvement in bringing about at least one of their neighborhood improvement ideas.

ASSESSMENT OPTIONS

1. Have students: select one potential neighborhood improvement that they feel is the best; justify why the improvement is needed; list two ways that it will help the neighborhood; and list two ways they can be personally involved in the improvement.
2. Assess small group involvement when designing neighborhood improvements.
3. Assess large group cooperation when constructing the neighborhood improvement model.
4. Evaluate final presentations of the class neighborhood improvement model.
5. Give the students a community map with buildings or items missing, and ask them to sketch and label buildings, streets and roads, neighborhood improvements, etc.

Adaptations/Extensions

1. Host a neighborhood improvement fair and invite school administrators, city planners, etc. to observe the neighborhood improvement model and presentation. Have them offer comments, feedback, and additional suggestions for improving the neighborhood.
2. Follow the same planning process for a different location such as a subdivision, a development project, another neighborhood, or a downtown.
3. Allow each planning group to build and present their own neighborhood improvement model. Or, have the groups build and present improvement models of different areas.
4. Assign each group to make a presentation of the neighborhood improvement model to different groups in the community.

Computer Extensions

1. Eduplace.com. [Helping Your Community](http://www.eduplace.com/rdg/hml/gold/gether/allproj.html). 1997. 30 May 2002. <<http://www.eduplace.com/rdg/hml/gold/gether/allproj.html>> Explains how to develop a plan of action for improving your community.
2. KidsDomain.com. [Folded Paper Houses](http://www.kidsdomain.com/craft/paperhouse.html). 2002. 30 May 2002. <<http://www.kidsdomain.com/craft/paperhouse.html>> You can make paper houses, stores, or even create a village of houses. Offers a blank, printable pattern, so you can create anything from your own home to an entire neighborhood.
3. ProTeacher.com. [Neighborhood/Community](http://www.proteacher.com/090004.shtml). 2002. 30 May 2002. <<http://www.proteacher.com/090004.shtml>> There are over 20 different lesson plans and units to teach about neighborhoods and communities. Student worksheets are provided. Excellent resource.
4. Sprawlwatch.org. [Best Practices - Strategies that can revitalize cities and arrest sprawl](http://www.sprawlwatch.org/frames.html). 2002. 30 May 2002. <<http://www.sprawlwatch.org/frames.html>> Information about sprawl and better planning of communities. Explains several different ways for land development avoiding sprawl.
5. Urbanity.50meg.com. [What is a Walkable Community?](http://www.urbanity.50meg.com/) 2002. 30 May 2002. A site kids can visit, read, and understand information regarding "walkable" communities. Includes photos to illustrate concepts.





SOURCE

Original credit given to City of Rancho Cucamonga Planning Division. Kids Neighborhood Workshop. "Part 4: Planning a Neighborhood." 20 September 2000. 7 March 2002. <www.Ci.rancho-cucamonga.ca.us/planning/kidsplan.htm> Additional information from "Where Do You Live?" by Patricia L. Martinez, Gardener School, Gardener, CO., and from "Box City" page 114 in Walk Around the Block by Ginny Graves HAIA, 5328 W 67th St., Prairie Village, KS 66208, Tel (913) 262-8222, Email: ginny@cubekc.org, Web:< cubekc.org>.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Contacts:

- Center for Understanding the Built Environment (CUBE)
- Grand Valley Metro Council
- Local Neighborhood Association
- Local Planning Commission
- Michigan Chapter of the American Planning Association (APA)
- United Growth for Kent County

References and Teacher Resources:

- Brown, Nancy Benziger. Planning Education Kids Style. APA Tennessee Chapter, 1994.
- Graves, Ginny. Walk Around the Block. Prairie Village, Kansas: Center for Understanding the Built Environment, 1997.
- Lewis, Barbara A. Kids Guide to Service Projects. Minneapolis, MN: Free Spirit Publishing, 1995.
- Lewis, Barbara A. Kids Guide to Social Action. Minneapolis, MN: Free Spirit Publishing, 1991.
- Mullahey, Ramona, Yve Susskind, and Barry Checkoway. Youth Participation in Community Planning. Chicago, IL: APA Planners Press, 1999.
- Race, Bruce and Carolyn Torma. Youth Planning Charrettes: A Manual for Planners, Teachers, and Youth Advocates. Chicago, IL: APA Planners Press, 1998.

Additional Lessons:

- Youth Planning Charrettes: A Manual for Planners, Teachers, and Youth Advocates, Chapter 7, "Designing Your Own Kids' Charrette" Pg. 89-92.
- Project WILD, "Planning for People and Wildlife" pg. 284-287.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK REFERENCE

IVC,IVE1,VA1,VC1,VC2,VE1,VG,VIA1,VIB1,VIC1,VID1,VID2