

Habitats: Design Your Own Suburb

(http://www.ccg.org/resources/learning_centre/classroom_activities/habitat_suburb.asp)

Connections to the curriculum:

Geography and Social Studies

Connections to the Canadian National Standards for Geography:

The World in Spatial Terms

Human Systems

Uses of Geography

Time:

Four hours

Materials:

- Blackboard or whiteboard
- Large pieces of white construction paper
- Drawing materials (regular and colored pencils)

Suggested Grade Level: 4 - 8

Overview

This lesson asks students to think about their own perceptions of cities and suburbs and to consider the features that exist in a typical urban and suburban area. They will also learn about sprawl and some of the problems associated with rapid suburban growth. They will conclude by designing their own suburbs.

Objectives

Students will:

- view and discuss urban and suburban scenes;
- list the features of their ideal town and discuss whether these features can be found in cities and suburbs;
- draw mental maps of a city and a suburb;
- brainstorm and list the possible effects of sprawl on the environment, adults' daily lives, and kids' daily lives;
- design their own new suburbs, taking into account the things they have learned about sprawl.

Geographic Skills

- Acquiring Geographic Information
- Organizing Geographic Information
- Analyzing Geographic Information

Suggested Procedure

Opening:

Write the words "City" and "Suburb" on the board, and ask students to contribute words that come to their minds when they think of each one. List their ideas on the board.

Ask students to list some of the things they would want to have in their ideal town. To guide this activity, you may want to pose these questions:

- What conveniences would you want your town to have (e.g. accessible bus routes or plenty of parks and open space)?
- What types of homes and businesses would you want there to be?
- How would you prefer to get around your town? Would you like to be able to walk or take public transportation (or perhaps even skateboard), or would you prefer to be driven around?
- Discuss students' lists as a class. Can they find these conveniences in a city?
- What about in the suburbs? In their own town?

Development:

Read these two scenarios to the class, asking them to form pictures in their minds as you read (you may also want to print the scenarios and have students read them in class):

Scenario One

Marcie is running late for school. She runs out the front door, forgetting her lunch. Darn! She has missed the school bus, so she'll have to take the public bus. She walks two blocks and pays one dollar to get on the next bus.

She looks out the bus window and notices that Vinnie's Pizza is having a special on pepperoni. A block later, the bus stops to pick up some more kids who missed the school bus.

The traffic isn't bad, but they have to stop at all the red lights and bus stops. She gets to school just in time for the bell. Because she got an "A" on her book report, her teacher takes her and a few other kids to the pizza place next to the school—it's not Vinnie's, but it's almost as good!

Scenario Two

Josh is running late for school. He knows he's already missed the bus, so what's the use in running down the street for it now? Thank goodness his mom is still home — otherwise he'd have to call around and see if a neighbor could drive him to school.

His mom agrees to drop him off at school on her way to work. They're in a hurry, but they have to slow down for children and speed bumps.

Once they get to the main boulevard, they hit two red lights. Even worse, Josh realizes he has forgotten his lunch. He gets to school on time, but he has to share his best friend's soggy sandwich; the school cafeteria's closed today, and the nearest place to buy food is in the mall three miles away.

Ask students to describe the type of setting where each person lives. They may notice that Marcie lives in a city and Josh lives in a suburb. What evidence do students see in each scenario that is "typical" city or "typical" suburb? Do they think these scenarios are accurate?

Have students sketch two maps that illustrate their own perceptions of what cities and suburbs are like. Their maps (one of a city and one of a suburb) should show examples of transportation routes, housing, and businesses. Allow about fifteen minutes for this activity; these should be rough sketches rather than highly detailed drawings.

As students go through this mental mapping exercise, make sure they understand that they should draw the maps based on their own ideas and impressions of cities and suburbs. If they have little or no experience in one or both of these settings, that's okay.

Discuss students' mental maps as a class. Ask them to describe the types of transportation they drew and the other features they included to show their impressions of a "typical" city and suburb.

Write the word "sprawl" on the board, and ask students to define this word. They might say that a person can "sprawl" out on the couch, or they might be familiar with the word as it pertains to suburban development.

Explain that many people are very concerned about the way the suburbs have been growing over the past few decades. As more and more people move away from the cities seeking their own homes and some fresh air, developers build houses and malls on land that was once farmland or even desert. Since homes are kept in separate areas from businesses and there's not generally much public transportation, the people who move into these houses have to drive a lot.

Tell the class that this phenomenon is called "sprawl." Ask the class if they have seen any examples of sprawl in their own area.

Have students look at the pictures of sprawl at [Urban Sprawl @ NationalGeographic.com](http://UrbanSprawl@NationalGeographic.com) or [Suburban Sprawl | CSMonitor.com](http://SuburbanSprawl|CSMonitor.com).

Discuss what the pictures show.

Divide the class into small groups, and ask them to brainstorm the possible effects of sprawl on the environment, adults' daily lives, and kids' daily lives. Have them list their ideas.

Have groups go to National Geographic's [*New Suburb?: Sprawl vs. "Smart Growth"*](#)

Ask them to read the introduction, and make sure they understand that the term "New Urbanism" refers to a type of town design that tries to make new towns and suburbs more like old-fashioned city centers and small towns.

Ask them to locate and scroll over at least six items in this virtual town and list the features that are different from a typical sprawling suburb. Make sure they know that when they scroll over an object and see a plus sign, they can click on the object to see pictures of the New Urbanist versus the sprawl design.

Discuss students' findings as a class.

Closing:

Discuss as a class the possible effects of sprawl on the environment, adults' daily lives, and kids' daily lives. What things did they notice in the New Urbanist suburb that might be better for the environment and that might be more pleasing to adults and kids than sprawl? Alternatively, are there some ways in which sprawl might be better than the New Urbanist model?

Suggested Student Assessment

Ask students, either in groups or individually, to design a new suburb. They can imagine that it will be developed near their town or in another part of the country. First ask them to consider the features they would like their suburb to have. Some of the questions for them to consider will be:

- What types of transportation would you like to make available?
- What types of housing do you want?
- What types of businesses do you want?

- Do you want mixed-use neighbourhoods where businesses and homes can be together?

Have them draw their suburbs on large pieces of construction paper. They should include streets, neighborhoods, business districts, and major transportation routes such as rail lines, bus routes, highways, or large "feeder" roads.

Ask students to label their maps to show the important features they have included. They should label at least six features. Have students share their maps with the class.