



Sensing Your Community

This activity is intended to be a companion activity to **Sensing New York City**, a similar activity suggested for completion while you were in New York City. By exploring New York City students learned that cities use all sorts of methods to attract attention, play to your emotions and make people feel in certain ways about it. The purpose of the following activity is to have students attend to the ways the built environment in their own community plays to the senses.

Activity

Have your students explore their community taking note of their senses that are awakened or used. Here are a few sensory experiences that students should note:

Where do they notice color first? What is their first reaction?

What sounds get their attention? Where and why?

When and where is movement the first thing they notice?

What aromas did they notice? Where? How do these aromas make them feel?

When and where did the *whole* of the community seem to change?

Describe the things that changed from one section of the community to another.

When you return to the classroom have your students report their initial reactions. Compare what each student observed and felt.

Then ask students to generate all the sensory words they can that describe their community ---- cold, hot, bright, dull, groovy, popping, hopping, sleepy, etc. Ask what they saw that made them use these words.

Ask students to, as they go home from school, evaluate **each intersection** they come to. They are to report the results of their evaluation back to the class in the form of **a descriptive word for each intersection**.

Take your students on a tour of their school and have them note the same sensory experiences as above.



After their tour of the school have your students brainstorm ways to add sensory experiences to the school experience. For example:

Paint all the doors bright yellow!
Play jazz in the hallways between classes!
Have the principal give one school broadcast a week in rhyme!

Have students locate artwork that awakens their senses or evokes an emotion from them.

Have students locate music that awakens their senses or evokes an emotion from them.

For one week have your students dress each day in a way that expresses an assigned sensory feeling or emotion. For example:

Monday is groovy day.
Tuesday is dull day.
Wednesday is bright day.
Etc.

Materials Needed

Permission for students to explore their community
Permission for students to explore their school
Access to the internet or to other research tools

Good Websites for Information About Our Senses

1. http://www.nanooze.org/english/articles/specialedition_5senses.html --- This is a cute sight basically for young children. But it has some good information about the way our sensory systems work.
2. <http://faculty.washington.edu/chudler/chsense.html> --- This site offers some experiences and experiments for students to try.
3. <http://www.hhmi.org/senses/> --- This is a link to part of the Howard Hughes Medical Institute. It has some really good information about the way our senses work.
4. <http://psychology.about.com/od/sensationandperception/a/colorpsych.htm> --- This site has a nice description about the psychology of color.
5. <http://www.moosepeterson.com/techtips/color.html> --- This is the site of a wildlife photographer who knows color and the psychology of color. He gives some nice stories about first-hand experiences.
6. <http://www.bobolinkbooks.com/Gestalt/HowFormFunctions.html> --- This is a link to a book/essay about Gestalt Theory published by Roy Behrens.
7. <http://gestalttheory.net/> --- This is the official site for the Society for Gestalt Theory and Its Applications. It has good information about events and people interested in Gestalt.

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On The Sidewalks of Your Community

[See Student Worksheet G](#)

These activities are intended to be completed in conjunction with similar activities that were suggested for completion during your visit to New York City (**On the Sidewalks of New York**). These activities focus on the many functions of your community's sidewalks --- providing pedestrian passage, being a home to streetlights, parking meters, trashcans, traffic signs and trees, providing access to building, etc. The activities in this section require students to use visual literacy to research how well your community's sidewalks carry out some of their many functions. Students are asked to observe, keep data about and give their opinions about the sidewalks in their community

Activity 1

Pedestrian comfort is of major concern when evaluating how well the sidewalks in a city function. The main measure of this is the number of people waiting to cross at an intersection or moving along the sidewalk at any point in time.

To have your students measure how well their community provides comfortable walking conditions for its pedestrians, have them observe and keep data at three different community locations of your choice:

- One in the main shopping area of the community.
- One in a residential area of the community.
- One in the governmental section of the community.

To measure the comfort level of pedestrians walking on their streets, city officials in New York City use a rating system based on the amount of space available for walking. To help your students evaluate the streets in their community, we have created Student Worksheet: *Evaluating How Easy It Is To Walk on New York City Sidewalks*. If you completed the activity in New York City you will recognize this worksheet as the same one you used there. We're presenting it once again for your use because we think it's applicable to collecting data in your home community as well.

With the student worksheet in hand, position your students at each of the three suggested locations (one at a time) and have them observe the pedestrians at each location for about 30 minutes each. At 10 minute intervals have students discuss and record how they would sum up the pedestrian traffic for that period based on the variables on the worksheet --- the variables the New York City officials use.

After observations are made, have students discuss what measures could be taken to relieve any crowded pedestrian traffic conditions they observe. Compare actual observations with any predictions students made when they did the related activity in New York City.



Activity 2

Before your students leave each of the three sites at which they are observing pedestrians, have them take a look at **other uses of the sidewalks**. Have them look for the following:

- Parking meters --- Are they located on all these streets?
- Street lights --- Are they the same at all three sites?
- Street signs --- Do all sections of the city have the same kinds of signs?
- Trees --- Do they exist at all three sites?
- Entryways --- How do they vary at the three sites?

Have your students decide if there is any relationship between pedestrian traffic and the number of parking meters, street lights, street signs, trees or entryways there are at a given site.

Activity 3

Have your students compare New York City sidewalks with those in their own community.

Materials Needed

Paper and pencils for noting research

A copy of Student Worksheet: *Evaluating How Easy It Is To Walk on New York City Sidewalks* for each student

Good Websites About Sidewalks

1. <http://www.nyc.gov/html/dot/html/sidewalks/sidewalks.shtml> --- This is a part of the New York City Department of Transportation's website that deals specifically with pedestrians and pedestrian traffic.
2. <http://www.walkinginfo.org/> -- This is a good site with information about policies affecting pedestrians and information about helping a community become more walkable.
3. http://www.walkinginfo.org/pedsafe/moreinfo_sidewalks.cfm --- This site is concerned about pedestrian safety.
4. Check all of the major cities in the US. Most have information about their policies and regulations for their own city sidewalks.



Compared to New York

[See Student Worksheet L](#)

The focus of this activity is on the importance, influence and power that New York City has held throughout its history. Students are asked to compare parks around the world with Central Park. Students are also asked to compare buildings around the world with the Empire State Building. By making such comparisons students get a look, not only at New York City history, but also at the history and geography of other areas of the world.

Activity

Here is a list of several parks in the United States. Have your students research each and compare them to Central Park:

- Grant Park in Chicago, Illinois
- Monroe Park in Richmond, Virginia
- Boston Common in Boston, Massachusetts
- Boston Public Garden in Boston, Massachusetts
- Fairmont Park in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
- Hyde Park in London, England
- The Tuileries in Paris, France
- The National Mall in Washington, DC
- Metro Parks in Cleveland, Ohio

Here is a list of skyscrapers around the world. Have your students research each and compare them to the Empire State Building:

- The Chrysler Building New York City
- Etionas Towers in Kuala Lumpur
- Jin Mao in Shanghai
- Taipei 101 in Taiwan
- Freedom Tower
- Burj Dubai in the United Arab Emirates

We have prepared Student Worksheet: *Compared to New York* to assist with the data gathering your students must do for this activity.



After your students have completed their research, have each student make a presentation on **one of the parks** and **one of the buildings**. Discuss each student's findings as a total group.

Have your students describe three ways that each of the parks is different from Central Park.

Have your students describe three ways that each of the skyscrapers is different from the Empire State Building.

Have your students locate parks in their community on a local map. Ask students to speculate about what **might occupy** each of these green spaces if it were not a park.

Invite an official with your local Park and Planning office into your classroom to provide information about parks in the area ---

- Their history
- Their current status
- Issues
- Their future

Materials Needed

- Access to the internet or to other research or library facilities
- A copy of Student Worksheet: *Compared to New York* for each student
- Photographs of parks in your community
- Access to local Park and Planning officials

Good Websites About Parks and Skyscrapers

1. <http://www.nps.gov/findapark/index.htm> --- This site provides links to all of the National Parks in the U.S.
2. <http://www.olmstedparks.org/history.htm> --- Information about parks designed by Frederick Law Olmstead.
3. <http://www.edf.org/article.cfm?contentid=2200> --- This is the official site of the Environmental Defense Fund. It presents information about several of its projects.
4. http://www.skyscraper.org/home_flash.htm --- This is the official site of the Skyscraper Museum in New York City.
5. <http://skyscraperpage.com/> --- This site has links to and information about skyscrapers all around the world.

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How Did You Draw These Buildings?

This activity is intended to be a companion to *Draw These Buildings*, located among our suggestions for activities to be completed before your visit to New York City and to *Seeing the Buildings You Drew*, located among our suggested activities to be completed while you are in the city. In this activity students get the opportunity to evaluate their visual literacy and their ability to turn words into visions.

Activity

Before you visited New York City you had students (or student teams) draw the following buildings.

Building #1

The base of the building rises five floors above the street.

The entrance is four floors high.

The lobby is three floors high.

From the 60 foot setback on the fifth floor, the building soars without a break to the 86th floor.

Building #2

The 77 story edifice, distinguished by its abundant automotive imagery (for example, silver hood ornaments embellish the setbacks and stylized racing cars appear at the thirty-first floor) and its striking crown --- The black Belgian granite entrance arches lead into a spectacular interior.

Building #3

This triangular steel skyscraper was designed on what was, at the turn of the century, among the most prominent sites in New York City ---

The slender 22-story building is clad in traditional Italian Renaissance ornament, most of it white terra cotta --- The small metal and glass extension (known as the cowcatcher) at the apex of the building was designed by the Burnham firm in 1902.

Focus again on these drawings. Have your students discuss them in comparison to the photograph/drawing the students created in New York City when they actually visited these buildings.

What words gave them problems?

Which words tended to allow for many different perceptions?

Have each student generate a verbal description for **one of the three buildings** as they saw them on their visit. Ask students to present their descriptions to the class and have other students guess which of the three buildings is being described.

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Ask each student to create a verbal description of a building located in their school community. Have each student present his/her description to the class and have the rest of the class guess which building is being described.

For a different perspective of New York City, provide videos about the city from the popular culture.

Materials Needed

- Student drawings from verbal descriptions that were previously created
- Photographs of the three buildings visited in New York City
- Popular movies or videos about New York City

Good Websites About New York City

1. <http://www.listsofbests.com/list/910> --- This site has a good list of movies set in New York City.
2. <http://www.nyc.gov/html/artcom/html/home/home.shtml> --- This is the official site for the Art Commission of the City of New York. It has lots of fascinating information about public art in the city.
3. http://www.art-collecting.com/galleries_ny.htm --- This site offers links to many of the city's art galleries.
4. <http://www.mta.info/mta/aft/muny/> --- This is part of the official site for the Metropolitan Transportation Authority of New York State. This section outlines the music that can be found in the subway stations under the city.
5. <http://www.ny.com/music/classical/> --- This site provides links to all of the classical music venues in New York City.



Pro or Con?

This activity focuses in on helping students refine their oral speaking skills. It requires students to conduct research, organize their thoughts and express clear, well thought-out ideas and opinions. The tool for this is debating.

Activity

Your goal is to prepare your students to engage in a debate about important issues relating to cities.

We suggest you begin by teaching basic debating skills to your students. Group students into teams of three. In each team one person takes the **pro position**; one person takes the **con position** and the third person **acts as the judge**. During practice sessions these positions are rotated until all three team members have had a chance to take each position.

Here are some phrases that are commonly used to frame debates. Help your students understand how and when to use these. They form the basics for proper debate etiquette:

I don't agree that...
I admit that...
That doesn't make sense.
That's beside the point.

Create 2 minute practice debates for your student teams. Practices should be carried out within the individual teams rather than across teams. Here are some suggested issues for practice debates:

Students in Senior High School should not have to do homework.

Cars are better than bicycles.

Our teacher should get a raise.

Help students do the initial research to gather supporting evidence for their position (pro or con).

Help students frame their arguments using the phrases above.

Help students participate in the 2-minute practice debates.

Help students evaluate their performance.

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Repeat the practice exercises as needed. Practice debates can be between student and teacher or between two students.

When your students are ready move them into lengthier debates. **Here are some suggested debating topics about city issues:**

It's time for cities to be adding more parks and not big buildings.

Skyscrapers are better for cities than small office buildings.

Art in public places is a waste of taxpayers' dollars.

Department stores are better than boutique stores.

Be sure to have students consider focusing on economic issues, social issues, political issues, health issues etc.

Materials Needed

Rules for Debate --- International Debate Education Association
Access to the Internet or to other research tools

Good Websites About Debating:

5. <http://www.urbandebate.org/> --- This is the official website for the Urban Debating League.
6. <http://www.nationaldebateproject.org/> --- This is the official site for the National Debate Institute.
7. <http://idebate.org/> --- This is the site for the International Debate Education Association. It is a good site for debate resources.
8. <http://www.deepape.com/> --- A site for online debating.

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Your Own Design for Manhattan

In this activity students must combine math skills and visual literacy with information about community planning, human psychology and history. They are asked to create a design for a site in the middle of Manhattan. Students are given the dimensions of the vacant space, a formula for space versus buildings and the direction that their design must be of value to the city. The rest is up to them. The activity also calls on students to work as co-operative members of a team.

Activity

Discuss with students everything that they learned about New York City from their visit there:

- The design of the city
- How residents use the city
- Street patterns
- Sidewalks
- Architectural details
- Building size, design, function
- Parks
- The affects of the using color
- Food
- Foot traffic
- Vehicular traffic
- Traffic safety
- Smells
- Sounds
- Shops and businesses
- Etc

Write/draw everything your students report for everyone to see and for later reference

Divide your students into small teams. Here's the scenario each team must address:

The Empire State Building has been torn down. The City is currently seeking proposals for what should be done with the site. Your team has been invited to submit a proposal. There are some requirements and parameters that you must consider. Here are these parameters:

The land you have to work with is 83,890 sq ft in area.

1/3 of total space must have interesting architectural details such as designs on buildings, fountains, sculpture 1/4 of available design space should consist of building structures. 3/4 of design

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space should consist of green space. Buildings may be of any size and shape as long as they fit esthetically with the neighborhood and meet current NYC zoning codes.

Buildings may be built of any materials as long as they meet current NYC zoning codes.

It must be possible to keep green spaces clean and safe.

The city must need and be able to use the space you design.

Have each team prepare a presentation to the class explaining their design for the space. This presentation should contain

The design itself

The architectural details they will include

Calculations to show how they fulfilled the spatial parameters requested

The function of the space they designed.

The needs the space is addressing.

Why they chose the design they did.

Material Needed

Chart paper

Pens

Pencils

Graph paper

Calculators

NYC Zoning Regulations www.nyc.gov/html/planets/html/zoning/



Good Websites About New York City Living and Cities of the Future

1. <http://www.mas.org/viewcategory.php?category=4> --- This website focuses on promoting a more livable New York City. It has information about NYC culture, neighborhoods, physical design, urban planning, contemporary architecture, historic preservation and public art.
2. <http://www.history.com/minisites/cityofthefuture> --- This site has information about the winners of a design and engineering competition for cities of the future.
3. <http://www.transfuture.net/> -- This is mainly a photo site but it has some very interesting designs for the future.
4. <http://www.victorycities.com/> --- This is one man's vision of the cities of the future.
5. <http://www.futurecity.org/> --- This site presents information about another engineering competition for the city of the future.
6. http://www.tenant.net/Other_Laws/zoning/zonch02.html --- This site links you to a handbook of information about New York zoning regulations.
7. <http://www.nyc.gov/html/dcp/html/subcats/zoning.shtml> --- This is the official website of the New York City Department of City Planning. You can find lots of information about the city's zoning here.
8. http://thenonist.com/index.php/thenonist/permalink/hugh_ferriss_delineator_of_gotham/ --- This website has a lot of information about Hugh Ferriss. It also has some of his drawings.
9. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1916_Zoning_Resolution --- This is Wikipedia's information about New York's 1916 zoning regulations.
10. <http://www.nyc.gov/html/dcp/html/zone/zonehis.shtml> --- This is another link to the New York City Department of City Planning. This section gives you the history of zoning in the city.



Freedom of Speech and Public Signage

This activity requires students to take a real life situation and related the issues surrounding it to the First Amendment of the United States Constitution. In order to do this, students must read the First Amendment and research expert opinions and related Supreme Court cases. They must be able to formulate a coherent opinion as a result of their research and analysis.

Activity 1

In this activity students will be called on to give their opinion about city signage and freedom of speech as guaranteed under the First Amendment of the United States Constitution.

Have your students read the **First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution:**

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

Engage your students in a discussion about the following:

Does a city such as New York or your own community have the right to restrict what signs can and can not say within its city limits. Or, does having a city make such restrictions on signage go against the First Amendment of the United States Constitution?

Invite a local government official into the classroom to discuss this issue as it relates to your students' community.

Invite a local expert on the Constitution into the classroom to discuss this issue as he/she interprets the Constitution addressing it.

Have your students research the rules and regulations regarding freedom of speech in other countries around the world.

Materials Needed

A copy of the First Amendment to the United States Constitution
Access to the internet or other research tools
Access to local government officials
Access to a Constitutional scholar

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Good Websites About Signage in Cities and Freedom of Speech

1. <http://www.dos.state.ny.us/lgss/books/munisigns.htm> --- This website appears to be a New York State Department of State of Local Services site that discusses municipal control of signage. It has a good section on regulations for commercial versus noncommercial signs.
2. <http://www.prweb.com/releases/nyc/billboards/prweb433594.htm> --- This is a copy of a news article written about New York City's action to control billboard advertising
3. <http://sandwalk.blogspot.com/2008/02/what-freedom-of-speech-really-means.html> --- This is a personal blog run by a professor of biochemistry at the University of Toronto. We have **not reviewed** the entire blog. What we have read provides an interesting argument/discussion about outdoor advertising and freedom of speech.
4. <http://www.aclu.org/freespeech/commercial/11064leg20020918.html> --- Here you can find The American Civil Liberties Union's testimony before Congress regarding some freedom of speech issues.
5. <http://faculty.ncwc.edu/mstevens/410/410lect08.htm> --- We are not sure of the origin or source of this website. It does present information about the debate over freedom of speech and it sites some good resources and additional weblinks.

Other Good Resources

1. For information about issues related to advertising signage and New York City, have students research NYC Local Laws 14 & 31.
2. **We the People, The Words We Live By, Your Annotated Guide to The Constitution** by Linda Monk.



Tell Me, Tell Me! What is New York City Really Like?

This activity requires students to organize auditory, written and visual material in order to describe New York City. First they must relate information about the city gathered from their own experiences to information found in Children's literature. Then they must arrange everything into a coherent presentation for younger students. This activity also requires students to use their interpersonal skills as well as test their public presentation skills.

Activity

Help your students prepare to describe New York City to younger children in their lives. They will use children's literature and their own experiences in the city for this description.

Present your students with a number of children's books that are set in New York City or describe the city. Have students choose one or two of these books that they think present a picture of the city as they experienced it. If students are not satisfied with your selection, allow them to research and come-up with their own selections.

Here is a list of a few children's books about New York City that they might find appropriate to use:

Snow White in New York, Adapted by Fiona French from the Brothers Grimm --- This is the traditional story of Snow White set in New York City during the Jazz Age

Lyle, Lyle, Crocodile, by Bernard Waber --- This is one in the series of stories about a crocodile who lives in New York City on East 88th Street and all the adventures that come his way.

And To Think I Saw It on Mulberry Street, by Dr. Seuss --- A typical, wild rhyming Dr. Seuss book.

Eloise, by Kay Thompson --- This book is all about the mischievous Eloise and her adventures at the Plaza Hotel.

From the Mixed-Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler by E.L. Konigsburg --- This is all about a brother and sister who run away from home and hide out in the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the adventures they have here!

The Cricket in Times Square by George Selden --- This book is all about a cricket that visits New York City but desperately misses his home in the country, despite some very interesting adventures.



Tenement by Raymond Bial --- This book presents a good picture of tenement life on the Lower East Side of Manhattan.

What Zeesie Saw on Delancey Street by Elsa Okon Rael --- This book recounts the story of the early Jewish immigrants in New York and their efforts to raise money to bring family and friends to the city from the Old Country.

Happy Birthday, Mr. Kang by Susan Roth --- This book is set in New York's Chinatown. It presents a picture of the difficulties immigrants faced around combining their traditions from the Old Country with their new lives in Manhattan.

Sector 7 by David Wiesner --- This book is set at the Empire State Building Observatory where something incredible happens to one of its very artistic young school visitors.

Men at Work, by Lewis W. Hine --- This book, created just for children, presents the most incredible photographs of the building of the Empire State Building.

Remember Me To Herald Square by Paula Danziger --- This book tells the story of a Midwestern teenager and his summer spent exploring New York City with some local residents who also learn a lot about the city.

Your school librarian/ media specialist can help you expand this list.

Have students prepare their own *picture* of New York City to present along with the children's literature they select. Their *picture* might be in the form of photographs, drawings, a poem, a song or a few simple comments.

Have students present their version of New York City via children's literature and personal experience to younger children in their community.

Materials Needed

- Children's literature about New York City
- Access to the internet or other research tools
- Props or costumes as required
- Access to younger children in your students' community



Good Websites About Children's Literature

3.

1. <http://www.loc.gov/rr/child/> --- This is part of the site run by the Library of Congress that presents information about children's literature.
2. <http://www.ala.org/gwstemplate.cfm?section=greatwebsites&template=/cfapps/gws/default.cfm> --- This site is a great source of information about children's book authors and illustrators.
3. http://latino.sscnet.ucla.edu/Latino_Bibliography.html -- A bibliography of children's literature focusing on Latino families.
4. <http://www.digital-librarian.com/childlit.html> --- This site provides links to many other sites related to children's literature.
5. <http://www.ucalgary.ca/~dkbrown/> --- This website lists all kinds of resources for and about children's literature.
6. <http://www.carolhurst.com/> --- This is a very complete site with a lot of information about all kinds of children's literature.