



## New York City Streetscapes

New York is unquestionably one of the most vibrant cities in the world. Its streets are teeming with colors, sounds, aromas and ideas from different cultures. It is a collection of different ideas and experiences. This activity introduces students to some of these experiences. It requires students to attend to everything in the Empire State Building's neighborhood. Students will practice using their visual literacy skills to read the built environment.

### Activity #1

Assign each of the following New York City streets to a team of students. All are neighbors of the Empire State Building. Have each team photograph/sketch/write about the current street scenes (streetscapes) they find on these streets:

7<sup>th</sup> Avenue between West 32<sup>nd</sup> and West 35<sup>th</sup> Streets

West 34<sup>th</sup> Street between 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue and 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue

West 33<sup>rd</sup> Street between 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue and 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue

5<sup>th</sup> Avenue between West 32<sup>nd</sup> and West 35<sup>th</sup> Streets

Encourage students to include **everything** in their streetscapes. Have them explore their assigned blocks recording what they see.

Remind students they will be recording/describing/documenting a moment in history --- the history of Manhattan in New York City, in New York State in the United States of American in the year ----  
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After students have completed the assigned task, discuss what they captured with their drawing, their photograph or their words. What was the story they wanted to tell about the city? Discuss what they chose to leave out. Discuss what they missed. What part of the city's story is missing?

When you return to the classroom display your students' work.

Have your class watch selected scenes from *West Side Story* to note the streetscapes chosen for this movie. Have students look for anything they missed when they explored the city.



### Activity #2 – Alternative Activity

Divide students into small teams. Each team should choose **just one thing** found on a Manhattan street on which to focus/ document/describe --- **just this one thing** as they see it. A team might focus on:

- the pattern of the streets
- the traffic flow
- all the shops found there
- the decoration seen on buildings
- the pattern of shadows and sunshine
- the signs in the windows
- the people

(It's best if you generate your own list of things on which to focus, based on student interest and previous lessons).

Remind students they will be recording/describing/documenting a moment in history --- the history of Manhattan in New York City, in New York State in the United States of American in the year -----  
????

Assign students a city block (as in Activity #1) and have them explore this assigned block recording (via writing, drawing or photographing) what they see and hear in their chosen category.

After students have completed the assigned task, discuss what they captured with their drawing, their photographs or their words. What was the story they wanted to tell about the city? Discuss what they chose to leave out. Discuss what they missed. What part of the city's story is missing? If they told the story of the patterns of the built environment, did that mean they missed the story of the people who used these patterns? If they told the story of the shops found in the neighborhood, did that mean they missed the story of the patterns of use inside these shops?

### When you return to your classroom lead your students in a discussion about the streetscapes they saw and captured:

- Did they like the architecture on their assigned street?
- How did they capture the city aromas they discovered?
- Did they find lots of colors or few colors?
- What did the signs on the street look like? What did these signs direct people to do or not to do?

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Did the size and shape of the buildings they found make them feel small or big?  
What were the people in the neighborhood doing?  
How did they capture the city sounds they heard?  
Did they like the patterns of the city?  
How did life in the neighborhood compare to life in their community?  
What did they not see on their assigned city street?  
What they would change about the street they explored?

**Materials Needed:**

Sketching supplies  
Cameras  
New York City Maps  
Compasses (not required)  
Method of displaying student work  
*West Side Story* Video

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