



MCNY Investigations Series  
The Frederick A.O. Schwarz Children's Center  
at the Museum of the City of New York

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# neighborhood explorers

## pre and post walk activities



Stanley Kubrick. *Shoe Shine Boy* [Mickey and a friend walking down the street.] 1947.  
Collection of the Museum of the City of New York  
<http://collections.mcny.org>

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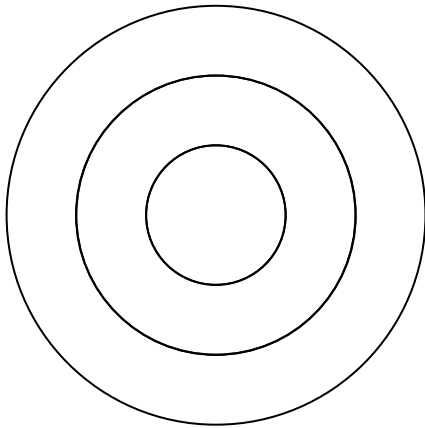
## Pre-walk Activities:

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### Activity #1: How do I relate to the neighborhood?

New York is a city of neighborhoods. A neighborhood is characterized by the unique people, buildings, and spaces that reside there, but neighborhoods are also containers of community histories, perceptions, and knowledge, that changes and is changed by the people who live there and the built environment over time.

Drawing exercise: Create a symbol that represents you. Drawing concentric circles around your symbol, add more symbols that represent where you are: the room, the building, the block, the neighborhood, the borough, the city, the state, the country, the world, the universe, etc.



\*New York was one of the first cities in the United States to use city-wide zoning, coded in a Zoning Resolution, as a tool to control the size and arrangement of buildings. The first Zoning Resolution was created in 1916, and has been amended regularly by The Department of City Planning. In 1961, the Zoning Resolution was completely re-written to reflect changes in the density and arrangement of the city, as well as current ideas about what a city should look like.

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## **Pre-walk Activities:**

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### **Activity #2 Where is your neighborhood located?**

Students can:

- Find their school on a subway map
- Look it up on OASIS, MyCiti, or Google Earth
- Look at the Zoning Map\*

What kind of information can we learn about the neighborhood from looking at maps?

- Names and arrangement of streets
- How is the neighborhood accessed by public transportation? (How do you get to school?)

***Activity: Use the MyCiti Resource Guide to investigate different kinds of zoning.***

Color in the zoning map to highlight different zoning districts in your neighborhood. Use the Manhattan Landbook to find the dimensions of the zoning lot where your school is located. Draw it to scale on the zoning map.

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## **Pre-walk Activities:**

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### **Activity #3: Who lives in your neighborhood?**

Students can:

- Use the CensusFactFinder or OASIS to gather demographic information

*Activity: Conduct a "Window Census"*

William H. Whyte, a City Planner and filmmaker once said, "The number one activity [in the city] is people looking at other people"

Students take turns looking out of a classroom window for specific intervals and gathering information about the people walking down the street:

- How old do you think they are?
- Are they male or female?
- Fun Facts (for example):
  - What color are their shoes?
  - Are they wearing glasses?
  - Are they listening to headphones?

Using this data, create a graph of demographic information about your neighborhood. Do you notice any trends? How does this information change depending according to the time of day? If this experiment was conducted over the course of one year, how do you think that the data might change?

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## **Pre-walk Activities:**

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### **Activity #4: *What are your perceptions about the neighborhood?***

What do you notice about the neighborhood as you come to school?

- Who lives here?
- What do people do here?
- What do the buildings look like? What do they have in common with buildings in other neighborhoods? What is unique?
- What does the neighborhood look like to a bird looking down on it?
- What kinds of businesses are there? Who do they serve?
- Do you see your neighborhood represented in books? Poetry? The news media? How is it portrayed?

Writing exercise: Using your perceptions and assumptions about the neighborhood, create a hypothesis: How do people use your neighborhood? What could you look for on the walking tour to test that hypothesis?

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## Post-discussion and Follow-up Activities:

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Following the neighborhood walk, students should share their maps and compare their investigations.

- What did you see?
- Where did you notice:
  - Residential
  - Commercial
  - Industrial
  - Institutional
  - Parks and Open Spaces
- How did people interact with buildings, open spaces and each other?
- What was different about each block that we looked at?
- What was the same?
- Where did you see:
  - Public Art
  - Public Transportation
  - Plants and green spaces
  - What else?
- Did students use the same notation system to record data? Different? How does the notation system affect the way we understand what they learned on their walk?

**Drawing Exercise:** Imagine that you could slice off the front of the buildings on one of the blocks we studied. What might you see people doing?

**Mapping Exercise:** Use vellum, tracing paper, or other translucent paper to create a map template for two or three blocks in the neighborhood. Invite students to record one of the types of data they gathered. Layer several sheets of vellum together. Is there a relationship between the different sets of data? (For example, do streets with more car traffic also have as much pedestrian traffic? Are there more people walking on residential streets or commercial avenues?)

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Mapping Exercise: Use vellum, tracing paper, or other translucent paper to create a map template for two or three blocks in the neighborhood.

## **Bibliography**

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Mitchell, William J., *Placing Words: Symbols, Space and the City*, MIT Press, 2005

Smith, Gregory A. and Sobel, David, *Place and Community-based Education in Schools*, Routledge, 2010

### ***Visual Literacy and Object-based Inquiry***

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Weiss, Cynthia; Lichtenstein, Amanda Leigh; and Booth, Eric (Editors), *AIMPrint: New Relationships in Art and Learning*, Columbia College Chicago, 2008

## **Online Resources**

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### **Open Accessible Space Information System (OASIS)**

<http://www.oasisnyc.com/>

### **Community Information Technology Initiative (CITI)**

<http://www.myciti.org/>

### **New York City Department of City Planning**

<http://www.nyc.gov/html/dcp/home.html>

### **Census FactFinder**

<http://gis.nyc.gov/dcp/pa/address.jsp>

### **Envisioning Development**

<http://envisioningdevelopment.net/>