

NEIGHBORHOOD EXPLORERS

Community Mapping Project

GOAL: Students will investigate how people are affected by different elements of their neighborhood, and the role they play in shaping their community.

MATERIALS: Post-it Notes, Translucent Vellum or thick tracing paper, Markers, Block Template, Clipboards

BRAINSTORM: What do you already know about your community? What do you notice when you walk down the street? What words come to mind? Use post-it notes to record these words (one word per note) and hang them together on a poster or whiteboard. Do you notice any patterns? Are there words, places, or perceptions that are shared by many people? Why do you think that is?

RESEARCH: New Yorkers are lucky—there are a lot of people who study our city. Some of them even do it professionally! Check out OASIS, the New York City Geospatial Database, which can give you more information about the different kinds of buildings in your neighborhood, as well as the people who live there. You can also visit the New York City Department of City Planning website to see if there are any projects or proposals in your neighborhood, or search the online Collections Portal at the Museum of the City of New York to find historic images of your community.

HYPOTHESIZE: Based on your brainstorm and research, create a hypothesis (or an educated guess) about who uses your neighborhood and how they use it. For example, if you learned that there are lots of residential apartment buildings in your neighborhood, who do you think lives in them? Families? Single people? Senior citizens? If you learned that there is a hospital nearby, you might expect to find doctors, nurses, or patients. You could also look for pet owners, or people doing specific activities (such as bicycling, shopping, or jogging).

Once you know who you're thinking for, think about how you will recognize them. For example, if you hypothesized that your neighborhood was used by families, you might look for adults and children together, or if you thought there might be lots of doctors in the area, you could look for people wearing white lab coats.

You could also look for other evidence, such as different kinds of traffic (pedestrians, cyclists, drivers, and public transit users), signage, and infrastructure (stop signs, trash cans, bike racks).

HIT THE STREETS: Using your map template, start your investigation. Use ticks, dots, or other simple marks to record your data as you walk around the neighborhood. Try to record the mark as close to the place on the map where you found it on the street. Take your time and walk slowly. You don't want to miss anything!

MAKE A SYMBOL: Once you've gathered all your data, it's time to turn it into information! Think of a simple, descriptive symbol to represent the data set you gathered—make sure it's one you can draw quickly! For example, an upside-down U could represent a bike rack, an octagon could represent a stop sign, and a group of two or three stick figures could represent a family. Each person working on the map should create a unique symbol.

RE-PRESENT YOUR DATA: Layer a piece of vellum or thick tracing paper over your map template, and add your symbols to show what you found and where you found it.

LAYER AND SHARE: Think about how your data might relate to other data sets collected by other members of your group. Layer your map over theirs to see if there is a relationship between what your group found. For example, were most of the bikes you found locked to bike racks or were they locked to other things? Were most of the people in lab coats near the hospital or the corner store?

Look at the relationships between different people, buildings, spaces, and infrastructure in your neighborhood represented in these maps. Does this information change your understanding of your community?