Looks Count!

Community Planning, Natural Resource Protection, and the Visual Landscape

An Interdisciplinary Middle School Unit for Social Studies, Language Arts, Math, Science and Art

Western Upper Peninsula Center for Science, Mathematics and Environmental Education


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Lessons are posted at: http://wupcenter.mtu.edu/education/land_use/index.htm
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Additional Science Lessons (not included in booklet)
Color Me A Watershed - students observe land use changes over time and how this affects the quantity of runoff. (Project WET Curriculum & Activity Guide, p. 223)

Dragonfly Pond (from Project WILD Aquatic Activity Guide, p. 154)

Stream Monitoring - compare water quality above and below an urban area
Preface

Wise stewardship of a community’s built and natural environment requires public education. Few educational programs have been directed at middle and high school students to help them understand the choices and future consequences of community land use decisions, and equip them with the knowledge and skills to effectively participate in community decision-making.

Middle and high school students need to understand how choices regarding community land use can have long-term impacts on the visual appearance, economic vitality, and environmental quality of their community. In addition, students need to build citizenship skills and a sense of civic responsibility towards their community through active involvement in decision-making, community improvement projects, and helping to enhance the quality of life for community residents. This curriculum unit will provide a vehicle for youth involvement, as well as enhance public understanding of the land use choices to be made. The question is not whether to grow, but how.

As part of the Looks Count unit, students will be able to:

- Describe the cultural and natural character of their community and identify what makes it visually appealing;
- Design, conduct and tabulate community surveys to determine community needs.
- Give examples of design and planning tools that may be used to enhance their community.
- Interact with planners, architects, realtors, and citizens invited into the classroom to share their expertise and perspectives on community growth and planning.
- Photograph buildings, streetscapes, land uses, and viewsheds in the community, and develop a protection or enhancement plan.
- Read childrens’ books to identify the author’s message and perspective on community.
- Measure how land ownership has changed over time in the community using plat books to determine changes in land ownership and parcel sizes.
- Measure the human/environment impact of development by evaluating changes in biodiversity, effects of land use changes on wildlife habitat, and designing an investigation to assess the effect of roads on bird nest predation.
- Design a brochure that highlights the cultural and natural features of their community and suggest improvements.
- Design a community enhancement project.

The unit correlates with Michigan and national content standards for social studies, language arts, mathematics, and science.

Design Guidelines to Enhance Community Appearance and Protect Natural Resources: a guidebook for middle and high school students is an excellent companion to this interdisciplinary curriculum unit. To order a copy, call 906-487-3341. Both Looks Count and Design Guidelines may be downloaded (pdf) from: http://wupcenter.mtu.edu/education/land_use/index.htm.