LESSON 3  NEIGHBORHOOD VIEW TEAMS

Overview
Working in small groups, students explore an assigned area of their community, such as several city blocks of the commercial area, or a neighborhood. Students make observations concerning: architectural details, presence of green space, signage, landscaping, utility lines, compatibility of building designs, and whether the area’s overall visual appearance is attractive.

Objectives
Students will be able to:
1. Categorize the land uses within their assigned area.
2. Conduct a visual critique of an area, identifying attractive and less attractive aspects; discuss how these contribute to or detract from a sense of community.
3. Define and give examples of visual pollution.
4. Make recommendations for visual improvements.

Procedure
Warm Up #1 (optional)
To familiarize students with the visual choices that communities can make about a wide range of visual characteristics, have them watch an introductory video:

(1) Community of Choices illustrates how planning is the key to protecting and enhancing the natural, cultural, and historic characteristics of a community. (Order from The Dunn Foundation. (The video may be ordered for $45 from the Dunn Foundation at: www.dunnfoundation.org)

(2) Back to the Future: Designs for Walkable Neighborhoods Illustrates how community sprawl impacts citizens’ quality of life and provides suggestions for how to design for diverse land uses while still maintaining a sense of community. (The Back to the Future video may be ordered for $5.00 from Citizens for a Better Environment, 152 W. Wisconsin Ave. Suite 510, Milwaukee, WI 53203 or Tel: 414-271-7280).

Prior to watching the video, have students make a record sheet with two columns. Label the first column “Common Approach” and the second column “Better Approach.” While they are watching the video, have students list five “problems or concerns related to community growth” in the first column, and then list how these concerns could be addressed in the second column.

Warm Up #2 (optional)
To get students out in the community looking at the natural and cultural landscape of where they live, conduct a scavenger hunt of your community. Students can either do this during class time, or can be assigned to do this on their own time. While each teacher would need to design a scavenger hunt appropriate to their own community, two types of scavenger hunts are possible. One type focuses on the history of the community and the other type focuses on the architectural features of buildings in the community.

Duration:
One or two 50-minute class periods.

Materials:
Digital or film cameras (one per group)
Map of community divided into areas.
Photo assessment table

Optional:
Design Guidelines for Enhancing Community Appearance by the Western UP Center for Science, Mathematics and Environmental Education.

Key Vocabulary:
development, visual corridor, historic character, land use, industrial, commercial, residential, rural, suburban, urban, sprawl, visual pollution, landscaping, perspective

Subjects:
Social Studies
Language Arts
Art
Sample questions on a history scavenger hunt might include:

- The first pre-fabricated house in town was purchased from Sears in 1902. It is located at 862 Maple. Does it blend in with the other homes on the street?

- What material was most often used to construct buildings in our town before 1900? After 1900?

- What is the name and address of a building that predates the fire of 1887? How do you know it predates the fire?

- When was the park in Lake Linden established? What was at this location before the park?

- Look at the hardware store on Main Street. Has it always looked like this? Explain your answer.

Sample questions for an architectural scavenger hunt (that includes photos of specific parts of the building), might include:

- An example of carved stonework is found on what east-facing office building?

- What building material was used to construct the buildings on the main street?

- What is sold inside the building redesigned from its original use as a department store?

- Do the moose antlers on this building enhance the appearance of this building?

**Procedure**

1. Divide class into teams of 3-4 students. The teams will continue to work together throughout the entire unit.

2. Using a map of your community that you may obtain from your chamber of commerce, divide the community into different areas or neighborhoods of one or more blocks. Assign an area to each team. If your community is small, or your class size large, an area may have more than one team assigned to it. It is important that the areas are large enough, so that students can look at how the buildings and/or land uses in an area fit together.

3. Have student teams take photos of their assigned areas in the community. There are several ways to get these photos. Photos may already be available from various city agencies and organizations, or the teacher can take the pictures, or the students can take the photographs. If student take the pictures, use the following guidelines:

   a. Provide each student group with an instamatic, disposable, or digital camera (digital photos are recommended). You may have a designated time during the school day for groups to walk around town and take photos with a supervising teacher, aide, or parent, or you may choose to make this a homework assignment. The students within each group arrange their own camera rotation schedule, so each student can have the camera overnight to take their pictures and then pass the camera onto the next student in the group. Perhaps some students will have their own digital cameras that they can use to take their pictures. Try to complete the picture taking in one week, as subsequent activities depend on having the students’ photographs available.
b. Instruct students how to use a camera and take good photographs: lighting, composition, focus, background/foreground, streetscape versus individual building, etc. Perhaps you may want to invite a local photographer to conduct a photography workshop with students.

c. Each group member will take six photos of their area. The photographs will be used again in Lesson 4 (What Do You Want Your Community to Look Like?), Lesson 11 (Here’s What’s Great About My Neighborhood), and Lesson 12 (Sharing With the Community). Students should be instructed to photograph cultural and natural features that illustrate the attractiveness or unattractiveness of the neighborhood or community, such as:
- Overall visual character of area (streetscape)
- Signage
- Parking lot design
- Street trees and landscaping (or lack of)
- Streetlights, utility poles, cell towers
- Street art or murals, street furniture, fountains, and other features
- Green or open space
- Architecture or design of buildings
- Environmental protection practices

4. Students should enter each of their photographs into the table on the next page (Photographic Record) and answer the questions.

5. Each group will develop a community improvement plan for their area that includes at least four improvements. The teacher should provide an outline stating what should be included in the plan. A good reference for possible community improvements is the guidebook titled, Design Guidelines for Enhancing Community Appearance by the Western UP Center for Science, Mathematics and Environmental Education (www.wupcenter.mtu.edu)

Assessment
Students are able to categorize land uses and describe their neighborhood photos using the proper vocabulary. Students are able to assess whether their “streetscape” is visually pleasing to them, or contains examples of “visual pollution.” Students are able to make recommendations for improvement.

Extension
Make a drawing of a plan view of the neighborhood, showing location of streets and buildings as part of their community improvement plan. If possible, show an example of a plan view available from the city planner or a consulting firm.

Michigan Content Standards Addressed
Strand V. Inquiry - Students will use methods of social science investigation to answer questions about society.
  Standard V.1 Information Processing
  ♦ All students will acquire, organize, interpret, and present information; and use a variety of electronic technologies to assist in accessing and managing information.
  Standard V.2 Conducting Investigations
  ♦ All students will conduct investigations by formulating a clear statement of a question, gathering and organizing information from a variety of sources, analyzing and interpreting information, formulating and testing hypotheses, reporting results both orally and in writing, and making use of appropriate technology.
Strand VI. Public Discourse and Decision Making
Standard VI.2 Group Discussion
  ♦ All students will engage their peers in constructive conversation about matters of public concern.
**Assessment of Community Photographs**

Each student should number their six best photos from 1-6. Next enter the number of each photograph into the table below (under photo #) next to as many of the neighborhood features that are illustrated in the photo. Write what you like or dislike about the particular features illustrated in each photograph. Place your numbered photos into an envelope and turn in with this assignment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Photo #</th>
<th>Neighborhood Features</th>
<th>What I Like About Photo</th>
<th>What I Don’t Like About Photo</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1. Visual character of area.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>2. Signage on &amp; off-premise</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>3. Parking lot design</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>4. Landscaping</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>5. Streetlights, utility poles, parking meters, street barriers.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>6. Street art, street furniture, fountains and other features.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>7. Open space or green spaces.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>8. Architecture of buildings</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>9. Compatibility of building design and other built features.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Answer these questions.

1. Describe the 'cultural and natural character' of your area---pleasing, unpleasant, colorful, cluttered, open space, scenic views, shade trees, landscaping, etc.

2. Do all of the buildings in the neighborhood have the same 'look' and blend together well? What materials were used to construct the buildings?

3. Are there lots of signs, streetlights, and utility poles visible? Do they blend into the area or stand out? Is the community inviting? Does it encourage people to visit? Hang out?

4. Compare characteristics of your neighborhood to another group's neighborhood and explain whether your two neighborhoods look similar or different. Consider whether buildings from your neighborhood would fit in well with buildings in the other groups' neighborhoods.