

JANE JACOBS AND THE FUTURE OF NEW YORK

Jane Jacobs and the Future of New York is a project of The Municipal Art Society and is sponsored by the Rockefeller Foundation.

Post-Visit Activities

After the in-class presentation and visit to the Municipal Art Society to view the Jane Jacobs' exhibit, students should have an understanding of Jacobs' ideas and approach to what makes cities successful. In addition to being a thinker and writer, Jacobs was also an activist, and worked hard to stop planning decisions that she knew would ultimately be harmful to cities. It is the hope of the Municipal Art Society that after learning about Jacobs, students will be inspired to become involved in their communities to make a positive impact. Jacobs' example shows us that ordinary citizens can make a difference.

The following activities will encourage students to become involved in the life and future of New York.

1. **Help improve your school.**

Materials: School improvement worksheet (enclosed), plus various materials, depending on which issue will be tackled, but most likely paper and pens.

Time: Approximately 90 minutes (two periods) for strategizing, more for follow-up

Ask students to recall some of the causes with which Jacobs became involved. They may remember keeping traffic out of Washington Square Park, defeating the Lower Manhattan Expressway, the creation of the West Village Houses, or protesting the demolition of Penn Station. Discuss the fact that sometimes, Jacobs' activism was reactive, whereas other times, it was proactive. Make sure students understand the distinction between these terms. Discuss the difficulties of battling politicians, developers, real-estate interests, etc. Have students recall some of the methods that Jacobs and her fellow activists employed, such as picketing, letter-writing, petition-signing, and speaking at public hearings.

Break the class up into groups. Using the enclosed worksheet, have students brainstorm to identify an issue at school that they might try to improve upon. Students may then take action to put their ideas into effect. Ideas might include ways to make school greener by reducing

energy consumption and garbage while increasing recycling; a physical improvement to the school, such as plantings or a mural; working with the cafeteria staff to bring more healthful meals to the cafeteria; bringing a greenmarket to the schoolyard, etc.

2. What would Jane think?

Materials: web access, information about various big developments (see list of web sites in supplementary materials), Jane Jacobs analysis questionnaire. NOTE TO TEACHERS: Some of the material on the websites is extremely dense. Please preview the websites before conducting this lesson. Only you can determine what is suitable for your students.

Time: Approximately 90 minutes, two periods

Discuss with the class that during Jacobs' time, New York City was in the midst of an enormous building boom. In many ways, we are living in a very similar age. Ask students to share their experience with construction sites that they've seen, or large-scale development projects that might be in the news. Students might mention the (failed) bid for the 2012 Olympics; the (failed) bid to construct a stadium for the Jets on the west side of Manhattan; the redevelopment of the High Line; the development of the Atlantic Yards site; the creation of Moynihan Station; the redevelopment of Coney Island; the reconstruction of the WTC site, etc. The effects of these development projects will be felt permanently in New York City. What will these projects mean to New Yorkers? To the people who live nearby? Will these projects have a positive, enlivening effect, or will these projects serve to deaden streets? The time to be aware of these projects is now.

Split the class into groups. Assign each group a large-scale development project and have them work through the worksheet to analyze the project. Afterwards, each group presents their findings to the class, and reaches a conclusion as to what Jacobs' opinion might be.

3. Neighborhood analysis, according to Jacobs

Materials: Maps of the school neighborhood. (Sources of maps include: Hagstrom road atlases; Oasis mapping—create map by zip code: <http://www.oasisnyc.net/oasismap.htm>

Citi (Community Information Technology Initiative): http://www.myciti.org/make_a_map_citi2.html

(Create a map by address. Maps may show locations of schools, fire departments, etc., depending upon how the user designs it)

Or, use Google maps.

Time: 90 minutes, two periods

Using the neighborhood maps, have students analyze them. Label and color-code them. Categories might include: residential (which may be broken down into several sub-categories, such as: attached one family [as in a brownstone]; 6-story apartment building; small apartment building, 2 or 3 stories; tall apartment tower; housing project; free-standing house; semi-attached house, etc.), commercial, mixed, open space, cultural site, public facility, etc. Based upon the map, students use the attached sheet to reach conclusions about how their neighborhood developed and was planned. Did their neighborhood grow organically? Or was it the product of a large-scale development project? Students present their analyses to the class. An extension of this is to have the students research the history of how their neighborhood developed.

4. Form a neighborhood task force.

Materials: neighborhood newspapers, agenda from recent Community Board meeting (if you go to www.myciti.org, and make a map, you can find out which community board your school is in. Once you make the map, click on "my neighborhood.")

Time: initially approximately 45 minutes (one period) but after that, could go on all year

Have the students peruse the materials to see if there are issues that appear both in the newspaper and on the Community Board agenda. If so, that is probably an issue that is currently very important in the neighborhood. Have students discuss this issue. What is their opinion of it? Is this a problem for the neighborhood? Is this an improvement for the neighborhood? What does this issue mean for kids? Have the class brainstorm ways they can become involved in this issue. Is this an issue that should be stopped in the neighborhood? Or is this an issue that should be advanced? They could form a youth group that deals with this issue. They could join forces with an existing community group to volunteer their help. The possibilities are limited to the students' imagination and enthusiasm.

Students may visit a meeting of the Community Board, but these meetings usually occur in the evening. Check your local board's website for information.

5. Join a community group/invite a community activist to address the class.

Materials: no special materials

Time: 45 minutes to begin, but can go on indefinitely

Have students conduct Internet research to discover the names of various community groups that exist. Neighborhood groups can range in size from small block associations, to larger merchants' associations, to groups organized around a specific issues, such as defeating a construction project, or a group dedicated to the local park or library. If students are interested in any of the activities of these groups, they may contact them and find out how they may become involved. An address from a neighborhood activist can be very inspiring and help students realize that they can make a difference in their neighborhood.