An Integrated Curriculum For The Washington Post Newspaper In Education Program

A Neighborhood’s Identity

- KidsPost Reprint: “What Washington looks like, from the middle school perspective”
- Student Activity: Character of a Community
- Student Activity: What Is a Neighborhood?
- Student Activity: Homes: Technology, Tubs and Trends
- Think Like a Reporter: Develop a Story of Your Neighborhood
The West Saxon word *neahgebur* from *neah* meaning “near” and *gebur* meaning “dweller” is shared in Dutch and German root words — the common idea of being near and a room, hut, dwelling or chamber. So it is we get acquainted with these strangers whom we call neighbors.

Our neighborhoods take on a persona. They have names devised by developers, by historic settlements or census boundaries. They are tied to schools or geographic features. Their character is formed through architecture and the activities that homeowners and renters volunteer to hold for the children and to meet others who live in their community.

The neighborhood is our focus. *The Post* has a Real Estate supplement on Saturdays and daily postings online at *washingtonpost.com/wherewelive*. The Metro and Style sections also reveal something of the happenings in neighborhoods.

Students are encouraged to observe their nearby yards and streets, to photograph daily life and special events to capture the character of their community, and to write an article about their neighborhood. Students are encouraged to read Real Estate articles to evaluate current trends and to understand the influence of the economy on housing decisions. They take a closer look at language through reviewing the advertisements in the Real Estate supplement.

The articles of Real Estate help readers to understand a neighborhood’s identity.
Ask middle schoolers to show you their city through the lens of a camera and here’s what you’ll get: a colorful mosaic of images featuring their favorite people, places and things, from flowers to friends, street scenes to sneakers, and trees to trains. The photographs make up an exhibition that is the end result of a special citywide photography lesson called “Everyday DC.”

“I love that D.C. is a place where people can come all together and be free and be with everyone that they love,” said Lauryn Tharpe, one of the four student curators who worked with their art teacher at Brookland Middle School to put the exhibition together. “There’s more to D.C. than big buildings and important people.”

As part of the “Everyday DC” unit, students across the city learned basic photography and investigative reporting skills thanks to a program started last year by an organization called the Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting and a grant from the D.C. Commission on the Arts and Humanities.

“What Washington looks like, from the middle school perspective”

“Everyday DC” was inspired by a popular Instagram feed called Everyday Africa, started by two professional photographers who noticed that their personal photos of Africa showed a different story than their professional work. The goal of the online photo “exhibit” is to show viewers what it’s like to live in Africa, as opposed to what people outside of Africa see in the news.

Here in Washington, students took photos to reflect their lives in the nation’s capital. Twelve middle schools each submitted about 10 student photographs, from beautiful portraits to abstract close-ups, action shots and delicious images of favorite foods. Lauryn and the other three student curators — Alexis Thomas, Makayla Herrington and Bridney Takoh — were selected to be curators by their art teacher, Maame Bawuah (pronounced MAH-may BEH-we-uh), who coordinated the project for D.C. Public Schools.
An Integrated Curriculum For The Washington Post Newspaper In Education Program

“I have a lot of amazing students, although the four of them are quite exceptional,” said Bawuah, who chose the students to be curators because of their interest in both photography and learning about museum curation when they go to high school.

A curator is someone who collects, organizes, cares for and displays anything in a collection. To get ready for exhibition, the curators had many tasks, including taking their own photographs as well as helping their teacher gather and evaluate the images submitted by schools and grouping photos by theme, such as quiet afternoons, green, streets and blue sky.

As Lauryn, Alexis, Makayla and Bridney worked their way through piles of photographs, they talked about what they liked and what stood out. They thought about how the 126 images would be organized on the walls of the gallery.

“We pinned them on the wall and talked about what each photo meant,” Makayla said. She was in charge of organizing the “green” wall, which includes pictures of grassy parks and trees, among other green things. The team of 13-year-olds also helped measure and hang the framed photos on the gallery walls.

“The process was kind of fun,” Lauryn said, “but hard at the same time.” They ate a lot of cookies along the way and worked after school.

During their final preparations at the downtown Pepco Edison Place Gallery last Friday, Alexis walked around the exhibit with the corner of a soft, blue cloth tucked into the pocket of her jeans.

“I’ve been dusting,” she explained. Alexis also pointed out her own contribution to the exhibit: a portrait of her younger sister Justine, standing on a bridge over a highway near their home. Bridney, who contributed photos including a Metro station and a cloudy street scene, hopes their images might help visitors to the gallery see the diversity of the city.

“It’s a little bit of everything,” she said, “and a fun place.”
Character of a Community

Neighborhoods have personalities. These are formed through the residential and commercial architectural style, the people who live there, and how they interact. Neighborhoods can change in their verve through demographic shifts and take on a different character by the perceptions others have of them. Neighborhoods are best known by residents.

Key –
- Does not exist or needs major improvement
- Exists, could be improved, especially for certain age groups
- Community takes pride in and great care in maintaining

1. Think about the community in which you live. Use the above rating for each quality listed below. Follow with examples of each characteristic that is found in your neighborhood.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rating</th>
<th>Quality</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>_____</td>
<td>Amenities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>_____</td>
<td>Architecture</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>_____</td>
<td>Churches, Religious Institutions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>_____</td>
<td>Cultural Venues</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>_____</td>
<td>Events</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>_____</td>
<td>Identity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>_____</td>
<td>Schools (pre-, elem.-h.s.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>_____</td>
<td>Other:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. Select two of the characteristics to which you gave a minus rating above. What would you do to improve this feature or argue that it should be added?

3. Describe your neighborhood to someone who has not been on your street.
What Is a Neighborhood?

When you hear the word “neighborhood,” you may think of the people who live near you and the community of houses and businesses close to your home. You may think of Mr. Rogers and the neighborhood he created 50 years ago on air.

Communities may self organize within neighborhoods because of common goals, interests or heritage. More collaboration and networking may occur within communities, depending on the size and overall character of neighborhoods. Here are some of the qualities that define neighborhoods.

**Amenities**

The age, personal and family interests, economic level and experience of residents influence the amenities that a neighborhood offers. Developers often devise a master plan with amenities that attract certain potential buyers. Bike and hike trails, clubhouses with pools, little theaters, computer or art labs, dog parks and playgrounds appeal to different people. An Audubon- or LEED-certified or green community may not interest someone looking for basketball courts and no yard work.

Savvy buyers are also conscious of the incorporation of technology. Cameras, key card entry systems, smartphone connectivity and energy efficiency matter to them.

**Architecture**

Federal, Colonial, Craftsman or modern. Brick, wood or stucco. Townhouse, duplex, highrise or single family. Architectural styles, material and density influence the look of a community. Landscaping adds curb appeal. A neighborhood of ranch houses on two-acre lots is quite different from three-story rows of brick townhomes. Some neighborhoods are “cookie cutter” in design while others provide a collage of influences.

**Boundaries**

Geographic areas form neighborhoods — wooded acres, lakes or a peninsula. Builders and developers of tracts give names to these new communities. Realtors may define these by the streets on the north and south, east and west that form the invisible boundary lines — NoMa and SoHo, for example. City planning offices may designate neighborhood boundaries by Census tract boundaries.

**Demographics**

Data about age, race, education level and income give one picture of a neighborhood and influence whether one seeks to live in it or can afford it. If demographics indicate that a high proportion of baby boomers own homes in a neighborhood, this may indicate older individuals may enjoy living there, that owners may be interested in a retirement/second property or that many homes may become available to younger home buyers in the
next years.

Crossing demographic lines, communities form neighborhood watches for the benefit of all and to protect their major investments. Others create websites for their neighborhood to share the contacts of businesses and handymen who do good work, neighbors who will provide day care and babysit, and information on break-ins to cars and homes.

**Events**

Some neighborhoods hold annual block or pool parties, cleanup days and shred-your-documents days to encourage interaction and a cleaner environment. D.C.’s Georgetown neighborhood of Book Hill transforms itself annually into a French open-air market [https://www.georgetownfrenchmarketdc.com](https://www.georgetownfrenchmarketdc.com) to attract people to its businesses while having fun with facepainting, street performers and music. Thanksgiving parades, ethnic festivals to celebrate diversity and cross-cultural appreciation, and barbecues bring people together.

Other neighborhoods organize events to financially support other neighborhood projects. These events might include garage sales, pumpkin patches, art shows and plant sales.

**Schools, Churches and Other Institutions**

The quality of schools is often a major factor in buyers with children selecting a neighborhood. They want to be in the district of schools with the best reputations. When you receive the list of school bus routes at the beginning of a school year, you may find neighborhoods and street names to indicate stops. You may live in the Annandale or the South River High School district.

Community institutions and groups are often committed to the social good of the community. They donate food, serve as centers for clothing drives and provide recreation and entertainment opportunities in addition to their main purpose.

**Services and Goods**

Businesses will often try to be good neighbors. They sponsor youth league and school teams, allow girl scout troops to sell cookies, and donate to community events. This outreach may be greater if the business is located within easy access to many neighborhoods.

Before buying, people often look for the availability of restaurants and coffee shops, groceries and health care, parks and recreation facilities. They want goods and services and other amenities.
Homes: Technology, Tubs and Trends

Developers keep in mind the projected demographics and the changing expectations of homebuyers and renters when they design their new projects. Open concept, energy efficient and high-tech are current trends. Avocado and white appliances are out; cobalt blue, orange and smudge-resistant surfaces are in.

1. *The Post* Real Estate supplement indicates Spring 2018 home trends include smart toilets, large free-standing tubs and large showers; voice-controlled technology in bathrooms and kitchens; column refrigerators and low maintenance materials. Which of these or other trends would you want in your home? Explain your answer.

2. What do people need at different stages of their lives? If you were a developer, what would you include in your home and community designs for each of the following age groups?
   - Children
   - Teens
   - College and Twenty-year-olds
   - Single
   - Mothers
   - 40- to 50-year-olds
   - 51- to 70-year-olds
   - 71- to 85-year-olds
   - Over 86 years

3. Observe your neighborhood. How would it be viewed from the perspectives of the age groups listed above? Select from two of the above age groups to compare and contrast your neighborhood’s appeal.

4. What would your family want in their home and neighborhood if they could buy a new home anywhere? What would they want for their own interests and needs? What would they want to provide for your education and recreation?

5. Read the advertisements in *The Washington Post* Real Estate supplement.
   a. What are some adjectives that are used to describe homes?
   b. What are some phrases used to distinguish properties?
   c. What features are highlighted to appeal to buyers?

   d. Write an advertisement for your home if your were to sell it. Be honest. Select features to highlight that will appeal to the demographic most likely to look in your neighborhood.
Think Like a Reporter  |  Develop a Story of Your Neighborhood

A neighborhood has its own culture and character. Demographics — population statistics and census data — give one perspective. Architecture, public spaces and events, and the interaction among neighbors add dimension. Its history and its present morph into the unique place that people call home.

Your Assignment
Think like a real estate reporter. Write a 500 to 1,000 word article about your neighborhood that could appear in the Where We Live feature of The Washington Post’s Real Estate supplement.

Where Do You Begin?
Establish the Boundaries.
• Does your neighborhood have a name? What is its origin?
• If your neighborhood has north, south, east and west boundaries, what are they?

Observe. Take notes about the buildings, parks and yards, and people you see outside. This is part of your eyewitness account.

Photograph. Take photographs at three to five times one day. Capture the activities, people and places that take place on an ordinary day. Be sure to record the day and times.

Reflect. What are your most distinct memories of living in this neighborhood?

Turn to Other Sources
Conduct Research. This process of being a reporter will take time, but it will give you insight into your neighborhood. You may look at buildings differently when you learn their past uses. Paved streets, modern houses and stores that once housed other businesses or produced fruits and vegetables on acres of farmland will give you a different perspective. People who once lived next door or down the street might surprise you.

Here are the places to search:
• Census reports
• History in print
  Diaries
  Historical societies
  Homeowners association records
  Library history collections
  Phone books — white and yellow pages
• Photographs
An Integrated Curriculum For The Washington Post Newspaper In Education Program

• Records and Official Documents
  Government (ownership information)
  Religious institutions (marriages, births, baptisms, deaths)
• Google maps
• Real estate information in public records
• Interviews
  Long-time residents
  New residents
  Visitors
• Local schools
  Athletic records
  Activities and events sponsored for the community
  Student newspapers
  Yearbooks
• Neighborhood annual events

Write a First Draft
When you have completed enough research to see a focus or an interesting theme, order your material and write a first draft.

Share this draft with a classmate or reading-writing group.
• Do they see your neighborhood? If not, you may need to add description and details.
• Do they know your theme? Ask them what they think your focus is. If they don’t agree, ask them what is unclear or what else they need to know.
• Do they have questions? Listen. They are there to help you strengthen your article.
  You may need to do more research. Or you may need to change the order in which you tell about this place.

Write Your Next Draft.
Complete the same process as you did with the first draft.
You may need some refining and final edits for grammar and usage.

Share Your Final Draft.
In addition to your teacher, who would enjoy reading your article to learn more about your neighborhood. You will be sharing an unique perspective on this place you can home — your neighborhood.