

Living City: Cycles of Change

Based on the exhibition [Living in the City](#)
Presented at Photoville 2017 by [The Municipal Archives](#) at the NYC Department of
Records and Information Services



Lesson Overview

Given archival photos and cameras, students will analyze patterns of change in their neighborhoods, between 1988 and present day, by documenting current areas and predicting what will change in the next 30 years.

Learning Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Analyze and compare historic photos and records;
- Research and document buildings that represent the neighborhood today; and
- Identify patterns of change and make informed predictions about how the neighborhood will look in 30 years.

Important Links

- Digital Gallery: <https://nycma.lunaimaging.com/>;
- [Housing, Preservation and Development \(HPD\) Collection](#);
- 1940s Tax Photos – [Bronx](#), [Brooklyn](#), [Manhattan](#), [Queens](#), [Staten Island](#);
- 1980s Tax Photos – [Bronx](#), [Brooklyn](#), [Manhattan](#), [Queens](#), [Staten Island](#).

Part 1: Intro

1. Show a historic photo to your students. A selection of photos is available in the *Living in the City* Image [Bank](#).
2. Examine the photo together using [Visual Thinking Strategies](#).
 - a. Take a silent moment to look at the photo.
 - b. What's going on in this picture?
 - c. What do you see that makes you say that?
 - d. What more can we find?
3. Through this examination, try to identify the time and place this photo was taken.
4. Ask your students to reference outside knowledge or historical references.

Part 2: Activity

1. Look at the NYC Municipal Archives 1980s tax photos of your borough (digital links above). Provide the following information: in the early 1980s, the Department of Finance determined that the 1940 photographs were too outdated for property tax appraisal purposes. So, from 1982 to 1988, they photographed every property in the five boroughs.
2. Have your students research this archive and identify one location they recognize.
3. Assign your students to take a current photo of that location today.
4. Have your students compare the 1980s archival photo with their own current photo. Prompt your students with a few of the following questions:
 - a. What looks the same at this location?
 - b. What has changed about this location?

- c. How was this location used in the 1980s?
 - d. How is this location used now?
 - e. What are the pros and cons of the changes that occurred?
 - f. What conclusions can you draw about why the changes occurred?
5. Ask your students to share their findings with a small group. Have each group share themes and similarities that emerged in their discussion.
 6. Based on their observations of change over the past few decades, ask your students to predict how their location will change in the next 40 years.
 7. Print out one copy of each student's photograph. Provide them with a sheet of transparency or tracing paper. Overlay this sheet on their photograph and ask them to sketch their predictions on it.

Part 3: Reflection/Extension

1. Create a space for students to present their predictions. Here are a few ideas:
 - a. Ask students to present their predictions to the class as if their peers are the city council or local community board. How do they think this location will look and feel in 30 years? What evidence, trends or forces of change lead them to this conclusion? Do they think this change makes a positive or negative impact on their community? If positive, how so? If negative, what can be done to change the outcome?
 - b. Set up an exhibition of this work around your classroom and conduct a neighborhood walking tour. Ask each student to be the docent of their location by explaining the history, current state, and future of it.

Standards Addressed

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.3](#)

Analyze in detail a series of events described in a text; determine whether earlier events caused later ones or simply preceded them.

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.9](#)

Compare and contrast treatments of the same topic in several primary and secondary sources.