



Activity #4 MODEL CITIES AND YOU

BACKGROUND

For the first time in human history, the majority of the world's people live in cities. And though cities cover only two percent of the Earth's surface, they already consume seventy-five percent of the planet's natural resources. As more people continue crowding into cities, that figure will climb even higher, which means that urban areas have become the main driver in the ecological crisis.

At the same time, many cities are sinkholes of human suffering, especially for a marginalized population of low-income earners and people of color. Many urban neighborhoods are plagued by economic desperation, violence, pollution, and crumbling infrastructure.

Creating cities that work for people and with nature is a challenge being taken on by communities all over the world. Model "Green" Cities – cities designed for both environmental and social health – are spreading like wildfire, from Curitiba, Brazil to Oakland, California.

ACTIVITY OVERVIEW

In this activity, students are broken into small groups and assigned a "green city" that is taking a lead in environmental and social sustainability. After researching the characteristics and accomplishments of this city, each group presents their findings to the entire class.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

- * Students understand the characteristics of a model city
- * Students learn about exemplar model green cities

KEY CONCEPTS

- * Model City / Green City
- * Sustainability

TIME

2 class periods

MATERIALS

- * Student handout
- * Computers with Internet access

EXTENSIONS

- 1 Students research their own city's record in the categories of sustainability. In addition to web research, they can also choose to interview local leaders (city officials, community organizers, etc.). Students may be divided into groups, each researching a different aspect (i.e.: water, food/agriculture, energy, etc.). Research is followed by class presentations.

- 2 Students create a vision of their model green city. What would they do if they were in charge of their city? Process options include: drawing a vision of their green city, brainstorming elements of an “ideal” city, and/or having group discussions about their dreams for their city.
- 3 Invite city officials to speak to your class about the city’s sustainability plan.

RESOURCES

www.thegreenguide.com www.sustainlane.com www.newurbanism.org/
 TUNZA, the UNEP Magazine for Youth Green Cities Edition:
www.ourplanet.com/tunza/issue0301en/pages/contents.html

PROCESS

Day One

- 1 Frame the activity by asking what percentage of Americans live in urban areas? (Answer: 80%) Note that for the first time in world history, the number of people living in cities exceeds those living in rural environments. (5)
- 2 Break the class into small groups with 4-5 students in each group. Assign each group ONE of the following cities (you may want an equal number of US and international cities represented). NOTE: Each of these cities has excelled in certain areas of sustainability and has been heralded as “green.” (5)
United States cities: Portland, OR; Austin, TX; San Francisco, CA; Oakland, CA; Seattle, WA; Chicago, IL; Honolulu, HI; Denver, CO; Boston, MA; Minneapolis, MN.
International cities: Curitiba, Brazil; Reykjavik, Iceland; Vancouver, Canada; Barcelona, Spain; Malmo, Sweden; Sydney, Australia; Freiburg, Germany)
- 3 Hand out student worksheet. Students begin web research. (30)
- 4 Assign homework: Students break up remaining questions among themselves so they will have completed their worksheets by the following class period. (5)

Day Two

- 1 Gather students in their city groups to share information (from their homework assignments) and prepare for their presentation (10)
- 2 Have groups make a 3-4 minute presentation on their city. Students not presenting should take notes to see how the city presented compares with their assigned city. (30)
- 3 Facilitate a discussion on what was learned. Sample questions: What are the characteristics of a model green city? What is missing from the typical sustainability index used? How green do students think their own city is? What do you notice about where these cities are located in the US? (They are mainly in the Northern US.) Where are these cities located in the world? (They are mainly in the “Global North.”)

