

## UNIT 5 | SHARING SPACES

# OUR TOWN

### METHOD

Students discuss the places that make up a community, construct an imaginary 3-D town, and model how communities change when the population grows.

### MATERIALS

#### Part 1:

- *Look Where We Live* by Scot Ritchie (optional)

#### For each group:

- Large sheet of butcher paper
- Small boxes of various sizes (e.g. tissue box, shoe box, cereal box) covered in white paper – at least six
  - If appropriate, ask each student to bring in 1-2 covered boxes from home to lessen the prep time.
- Art supplies

#### Part 2:

- Additional small, wrapped boxes – at least two per group

## INTRODUCTION

Most of us live in a **community** – a place where a group of people lives and shares resources like libraries, parks, and schools. We depend on the places and people in our community so that we all can be healthy and happy.

If the population of a community grows, the community can change in positive and negative ways. When more people live in an area, more houses, doctors' offices, and schools need to be built to support them. There might be more trash or crowding, but positive things can also occur, like more people to volunteer at the fire station.

**NOTE:** If lack of time and materials makes it difficult to implement this lesson, consider simplifying the procedure by using sticky notes for the buildings and a piece of printer paper as the base instead of butcher paper.

**NOTE:** This lesson is written for small groups, but could also be completed as a whole class exercise.



### CONCEPT

A community is a place where people live and share resources. The needs of a community change as the population grows.

### GRADE LEVEL

Lower elementary

### SUBJECTS

Social Studies, Science

### OBJECTIVES

Students will be able to:

- Identify places that are typically found in a community and explain why they are important.
- Describe how a community might change when the population grows.

### SKILLS

Brainstorming, collaborating in small groups, making decisions, spatial reasoning, critical thinking, public speaking

# PART 1: BUILDING COMMUNITIES

## PROCEDURE

1. Explain to students that they are a part of many different communities – their school community, their town or city community, and our global community. Today they'll be focusing on the local community where they live.
2. As a class, brainstorm a list of places, buildings, and ways that people get around (roads, bike lanes, sidewalks, etc.) in your community and discuss why each is important. List students' ideas on the board. Keep this list visible for reference throughout the course of the lesson. To help students come up with a wide array of ideas, consider one of the following:
  - Share *Look Where We Live* by Scot Ritchie (2015) or another book that examines the features of a community.
  - Share photos of places from around your town and ask students to identify them. For example, pictures of the grocery store, school, police station, post office, or theatre.

If your students haven't mentioned any green spaces, be sure to point out that green space is an important part of communities. Green space includes parks where people play and also open areas where plants and animals live.

3. Divide students into four small groups, and explain that in their groups, they will be building a community together.
4. Give each group six "buildings" (small boxes covered in plain paper) and a variety of art supplies.
5. In their groups, ask students to decide what six buildings they would like to have in their community. Remind them to refer to the brainstorming list on the board for ideas. They should decorate and label each box to represent one of their selected buildings (adding windows, doors, signs, pictures, etc.).

If students don't have enough boxes for all of the buildings they want in their community, they can use square pieces of paper labeled with words or pictures to represent additional buildings.

6. Give each group a large piece of butcher paper. Explain that they will work cooperatively to design and build a community by placing their buildings on the paper. Students should also consider how people will get from place to place and add things like roads, sidewalks, or bike lanes between their buildings. If students have extra time, they can add features like lakes, playgrounds, or green spaces to their community.

**NOTE:** There are no specific dimensions for the sheets of butcher paper. The aim of this activity is to make it challenging for the students to fit Part 2's additional buildings into their community. Select a size that can allow the students to have this challenge, based on the dimensions of the provided boxes.

7. Allow students time to build their communities by placing their buildings on their large paper. Don't attach them, as they may be moved later on!
8. Ask each group to give a tour of their community with the class. Use the following questions to structure your group share:
  - a. What places did you include in your community? Why?
  - b. What kinds of things do you see, hear, and smell in your community?
  - c. What kinds of transportation do people in your community use?

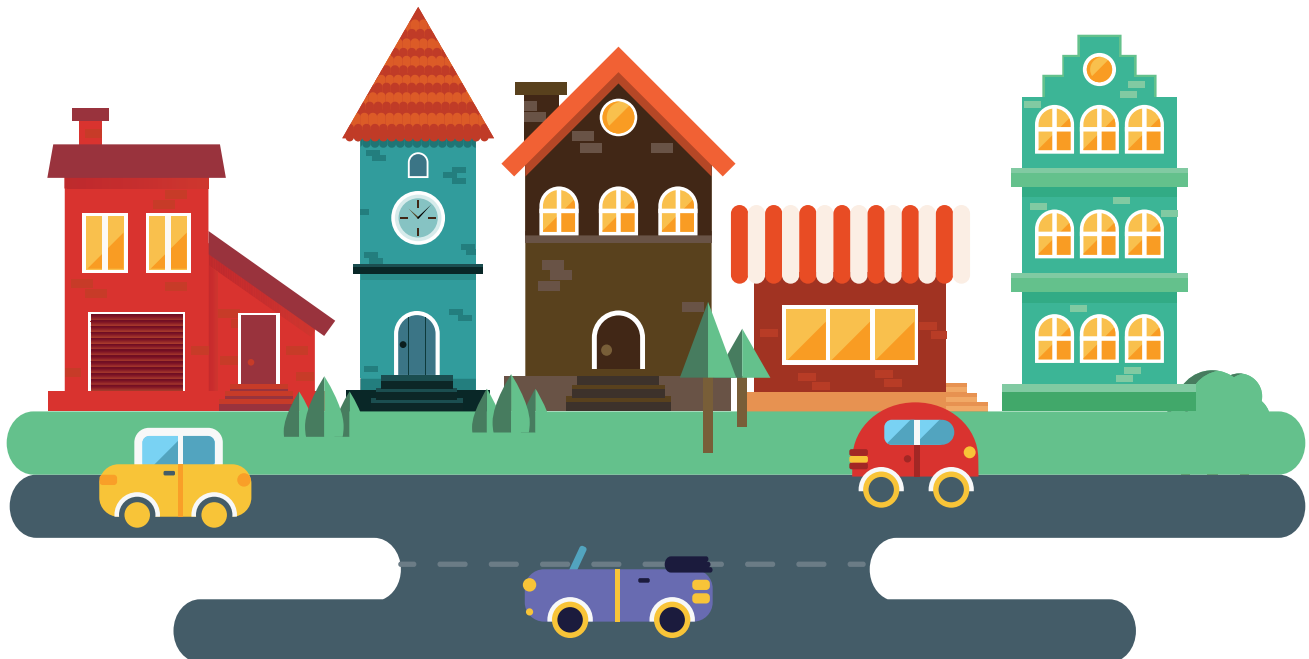
### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Can you think of any other things that make up a community, besides buildings and places?

*Answers may include: people, pets, wildlife, statues, a water tower, special events, holiday celebrations, and festivals.*

2. What buildings might be in other communities that you didn't include in yours? Consider different parts of the country or even different places around the world?

*Answers will vary.*



# PART 2: GROWING COMMUNITIES

## PROCEDURE

1. Explain to students that sometimes the population (the number of people living in a place) of a community gets bigger - more people live, work, and play there.
2. Ask students to pretend the population of their community is growing. Ask students: "What buildings will there need to be more of in a community if more people live there?" (Answers may include: houses, grocery stores, etc.)
3. Give each group at least two additional boxes to represent new buildings that will be needed to accommodate the additional people. Just like the previous buildings, students should decorate these boxes to represent the buildings.
4. Ask the students to place these new boxes in their community. Just like in Part 1, they can also add things other than buildings that might be needed to support the larger population (roads, sidewalks, parks, etc.)

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What new buildings did you add to your community and why? Did you add anything other than buildings in order to support more people?

*Answers may include: more houses, another school, another grocery store, a bigger hospital, etc. Students may also mention adding more roads, park space, or bike lanes.*

2. How did adding more buildings impact the original places in your community?

*Students might mention that buildings were more crowded together or that the green, open space might have been taken over by buildings or roads.*

3. Why is having all of these different buildings in a community important?

*Answers may include: so everyone can have a place to live; so people have places to work, learn new things, get the things they need, and spend time with friends and family; so there are places to go if people get sick, injured, or need help.*

4. What are some good things that might happen when community's population grows quickly? What might be some bad things?

*If the population in a community grows quickly, it might mean more friends to play with, more businesses opening, and more people working together to take care of the town. However, it might also be hard to make sure there's still room for green spaces, that everyone has a job, and that there are enough resources like schools, housing, fire stations, etc.*

5. If five new students joined our class, what do you think would change in the classroom?

*Answers may include: there would need to be more desks; there would be less room on the class carpet; there would be more people to play with at recess; etc.*

**NOTE:** Drawing parallels between your classroom community and the broader, external community can help students understand how communities function and how growth can impact them. This shrinks the focus of the lesson and can make the key takeaways clearer for students who are struggling to see the big picture.

## MEASURING LEARNING

Monitor students' participation in small groups and gauge answers during the class discussion to ensure understanding of what makes up a community.

Students complete the following sentences, in writing if possible: "My group put \_\_\_\_\_ in our community because \_\_\_\_\_. When the population of my community grew, we had to \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_. Encourage students to share their responses with the class.

## FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITY

Invite someone who has lived in your community for many years to visit your class and discuss the changes they've seen over time. Students should think of specific questions to ask prior to the visit. Are there any new buildings? New roads or transportation systems? More people? Fewer people?

While the visitor is presenting, create an anchor chart and record some of the changes that they mention.

After the visit, ask students to write a response to the question: What changed in our community during [visitor's] lifetime? Students should recall and share some of the presented information, with or without referring to the teacher-created anchor chart.