

Sustainable cities: Canada, the Crown, and environmental stewardship



Overview

In this activity, students will reflect on the decisions and considerations that are involved in urban planning, in particular regarding green spaces in Canada. They will also learn about the connections between King Charles III and sustainability. Students will be able to answer the following question:

- How can we work towards building resilient communities and cities to ensure a healthy future for our planet?

Time required

1.5 hours

Grade level

Grades 7-12

Subjects

Social Studies, Science

Materials needed

- Copies of the Discovery Place article *Seeds of Change* by Nathan Tidridge in the 2023 May/June issue of *Canadian Geographic*
- Copies of the Sustainable Cities infographic
- A projector, SMART board or chalkboard
- Blank paper
- Writing utensils

Learning goals

Student will:

- Explore how sustainable development in cities can improve the lives of its citizens and the environment.
- Consider how to bring nature into a city and the positive effects of nature on people.
- Develop spatial skills through mapping.

Lesson implementation

Minds on

St. James Town is a neighbourhood located in downtown Toronto, Ont. The neighbourhood has 19 high-rise buildings that range in height from 14 to 32 stories, many of which were built in the 1960s. This neighbourhood is estimated to be the most densely populated neighbourhood in Canada as there are at least 17,000 people living there (but possibly up to 25,000). Roughly half of the residents of St. James Town identify as having immigrated to Canada and as living in poverty. Many of the amenities and buildings are in need of significant repairs, and many residents describe a lack of funding and support services from city officials.

Discuss St. James Town with students and explain that this neighbourhood is an extreme example of the challenges that urban planners and city officials face with respect to managing population growth and an increasing lack of space available for development in Canada's most populated cities. With increasing evidence that natural outdoor community spaces promote health and wellness among residents, and that urban expansion has negative impacts on the biodiversity and ecology of natural systems, urban planners and city officials are under pressure to design communities that support our growing population while being respectful of the natural world.

Ask students the following questions, and look for answers by doing research, as necessary:

1. What are some examples of things that contribute to your community (e.g., houses, apartment buildings, parks, schools, arenas, gardens, statues, waterways, bridges, factories, farms)?
2. Is your community densely populated?
3. What is the population density of your community?
4. What words would you use to describe your community? (e.g., wet, friendly, peaceful, old, hectic)

Next, challenge students to map their community from memory. Either individually on pieces of paper or as a class on the classroom board, draw the outline of your community, including major landforms, buildings, roads, landmarks, museums, bridges, etc. (Alternatively, assign a neighbourhood to each student or group of students, and reconstruct the community by taping all of their papers together on the classroom board).

This activity should get students thinking about the different elements that are considered in urban design as well as the challenges of balancing urban spaces with natural places. Compare the end-result with a digital or paper map of the community and list items that were overlooked.

Sustainable cities: Canada, the Crown, and environmental stewardship



- Reflect on the influences that the King can have on environmental stewardship in Canada.

Connection to the Canadian Geography Learning Framework

Concepts of Geographic Thinking

- Spatial significance
- Patterns and trends
- Interrelationships
- Geographic perspectives

Inquiry Process

- Ask geographic questions
- Acquire geographic resources
- Interpret and analyze
- Evaluate and draw conclusions
- Communicate
- Reflect and respond

Geospatial Skills

- Foundational elements
- Spatial representations

Developed in collaboration with

Gabrielle Rogers, New Brunswick representative for Canadian Geographic Education

Action

Ask students to consider their five senses and to reflect further on their community. Ask them the following questions:

1. What smells are present in your community?
2. What sounds are common in your community?
3. What things can you taste in your community (e.g., ethnic food, local specialities)?
4. What is something you see frequently in your community?
5. What types of surfaces have you touched in your community (e.g., pavement, hot metal slide, tree bark)?
6. What is an example of a thing that you love about your community? (e.g., central park)
7. What is something that you do not find enjoyable about your community (e.g., dumpsters)?
8. What is missing from your community?

Questions 6-8 should uncover a general respect for beautiful spaces that are clean and welcoming or that have a special meaning to students. This could include community centres, arcades, parks, and backyards.

Guide the conversation to consider what natural and/or green spaces contribute to a city. Consider parks, cemeteries, meadows, green roofs, playing fields, etc.

As a class, discuss the following:

- Why would an urban planner choose to add in gardens, green spaces, and parks?
- Why would a community leader (e.g., a mayor) or the leader of a country (e.g., the prime minister, the monarch) care about the prioritization of green spaces?
- Should different communities have similar green spaces? Why might communities benefit from green spaces that are uniquely tailored to those specific communities?

Have students read the *Seeds of Change* article as a class, independently or in pairs. Reflect on the following:

- What roles does this garden play in the city of Yellowknife?
- How could it improve the lives of people living in the city?
- What role can a monarch play in encouraging urban designs that prioritize a positive relationship with nature?
- Can you think of other ways the King could help cities develop green spaces?

Have students generate a list by themselves or in a group of positive benefits of including more gardens, green spaces, and parks in a community. Provide copies of the Sustainable Cities infographic and have students contrast their ideas with the illustrated examples. Are any of their ideas missing from the infographic?

Sustainable cities: Canada, the Crown, and environmental stewardship



Conclusion and consolidation

Have students answer the following questions in a discussion setting or as a journal response:

- How could your community benefit from a garden like the Platinum Jubilee Garden in Yellowknife?
- Planning a new neighbourhood or making changes to an existing neighbourhood means making a lot of choices. What should planners prioritize? What could be positive and negative consequences of those priorities?
- What would you ask the King for help with in regards to improving the human-nature relationship in your community?

Extend your geographical thinking

- Invite your students outside! Walk around the school grounds and immediate neighbourhood to investigate green spaces. How many are there? What are they used for? Can you see many different species of plants and animals?
- Develop a proposal to submit to your municipal government or your lieutenant governor. Include a proposed map of new or improved green spaces. What could be changed to improve the lives of humans, plants, and animals now and into the future?
- Create a Public Service Announcement (PSA) or infographic, or write a letter to King Charles III, asking him to visit your community. Describe the physical landscape, known cultural traditions, and the types of outdoor or eco-friendly activities in which he could be invited to participate. Include references to the [Seeds of Change](#) article.

Accommodations and supports

- Assign the article and infographic to students to read the night before, allowing them to review the information ahead of time.

Assessment opportunities

- Journal responses could be collected and evaluated by the educator or be peer- or self-evaluated.
- Question students on how their thinking changed over the course of the activity.