



Unit: Mapping Our Neighborhood History

Introduction:

PhilaPlace connects stories to places across time in Philadelphia's neighborhoods to create an enduring record of the city's heritage. The stories are constructed from archival material such as images, maps, and census records, but many rely upon the memories of Philadelphia's residents whose stories bring the past to life. Through interactive mapping on the PhilaPlace Web site, the public is invited to add their recollections through text, audio, and video related to specific sites in the city's neighborhoods. Capturing the voices of residents in this way commits their memories to the historical record. These shared stories provide a deeper and more personal understanding of what specific sites meant to the larger community and how the use of space changed over time. What PhilaPlace demonstrates is that Philadelphia's streets and alleys house layer-upon-layer of rich historical data that reveals much about our past, but also brings to light the ever-changing space we live in.

This lesson is not an activity, but rather a guide to developing a local history mapping project. Through the incorporation of mapping techniques, students can explore the history and culture of their own communities and neighborhoods. Historical and cultural inquiry allows students to not only understand how their neighborhood has changed over time, but to also be reflective about their place in the neighborhood. Students gain an understanding of the diversity of experience, memory, and meaning that exists around them, and can also see how their story or that of their family connects to the larger communities they live in. This unit outlines potential research topics related to local history that teachers might consider exploring with their class. Through a mapping project, students will delve deeper into their local history as they gather, analyze, and interpret data about the world they live in. An overview of gathering historical data through oral histories is provided. The final section of this unit provides information about incorporating mapping technology into the history classroom through the use of Google Maps to display the data the students have



gathered.

Defining our Neighborhood:

As an introduction to this unit, have students reflect upon their own neighborhood. They should define their neighborhood boundaries, identify locations/sites that have or had importance to them, and explain why the sites were selected. Teachers may choose to have students draw a map or use Google Maps to display this information. As a class, have students share their maps. Teachers should use this exercise to discuss the differences in the construction of personal maps. Discuss place as a repository for memory and explain that each map is a personalized reflection of places that are significant for each creator. This project will allow students to learn about the history that surrounds them locally and to further understand the significance that the places in their neighborhood hold for community members.

Developing a research topic:

An important first step in organizing a mapping lesson is selecting a topic to guide the project. The following are some suggestions of potential themes to explore.

Who are Our Neighbors?:

A block is a microcosm of the larger community revealing a great deal about a neighborhood's past as well as present transformations, particularly if several blocks of data within a neighborhood are compiled. Having students survey the block they live on reveals important information about ethnicity, family size, age of residents, and occupation of residents. Additionally, interviewing neighbors reveals more personal information about why residents settled where they did and how the block or neighborhood changed over time.



- **PhilaPlace Connections:** The PhilaPlace website contains static maps that depict specific historical data such as land use or census information to reveal change over time. Static maps for the 9th Street Market and for South 4th Street reveal the dramatic ethnic and commercial changes these areas underwent. Using these static GIS maps as a guide, each student might plot specific information such as ethnicity or age from their interviews and then compare it with other blocks.
- **Mapping Suggestions:** As a class, students could review the data they have collected from the interviews and discuss consistencies and connections they find across blocks. Then a Google Map could be generated that pulls together their data to reflect these consistencies. (See the final section of this lesson for instructions on how to create a Google Map.) For example, perhaps the interviews revealed a large number of young families who had purchased homes in the neighborhood within the last five years. Or perhaps the data reveals certain patterns of settlement among specific ethnic groups during the same time period. These households could be displayed on a neighborhood map to visually reflect these patterns or trends.

Mapping Neighborhood Sites:

Have students brainstorm certain landmarks in their neighborhoods such as schools, religious and secular buildings, parks, and commercial areas. Assign or allow students to select a specific site to research. In addition to learning about the history of the site, students should explore the role the site played in the larger community. Students may, for example, investigate how the congregation of a church changed over time or how the activities of the church shifted to meet the needs of its changing congregation. Students should engage in oral history interviews to deepen their understanding of their site.



- **PhilaPlace Connections:** If practical, this lesson could be developed into a walking tour, allowing students to present their knowledge of each site. The PhilaPlace website contains tours of Old Southwark (South Philadelphia) and the Greater Northern Liberties, both of which can be used as a guide in this activity. Additionally, to see an example of a mapping exercise related to a commercial area, see the 9th Street Market Treasure Hunt Lesson <http://www.philaplace.org/resource/466/>.
- **Mapping Suggestions:** If it is not practical to organize a walking tour, teachers could develop a map on Google Maps and allow students to add their sites, text, photographs, etc. to the map creating a virtual tour.

Adaptive Reuse:

An examination of how the use of particular spaces has changed reveals demographic transformations in the area over time. It also points to the different meanings that spaces held for people that used them. Have students identify examples of adaptive reuse in their neighborhood and create a list. Each student could investigate the history of a particular site. Students should try to look for patterns through the investigation of space. In a neighborhood such as Northern Liberties, the adaptation of buildings into residential space reflects much about the area's industrial past and current redevelopment.

- **PhilaPlace Connections:** PhilaPlace looks at how place and space has changed over time and the meaning people attach to it. The website is filled with examples of industrial sites that have been converted into residential properties or of religious space that has been adapted to serve changing groups over time. Search the term “adaptive re-use” <http://www.philaplace.org/tags/168/> on the website to display these sites and use the My PhilaPlace <http://www.philaplace.org/myphilaplace/> feature on the site to create a tour.



- **Mapping Suggestions:** Plot local sites that are examples of adaptive reuse on a map using Google Maps or create thematic maps.

From Developments to Disasters:

Perhaps a neighborhood's main street of mom-and-pop shops gave way to a retail strip. Or the construction of a roadway or the destruction of a major industry profoundly impacted the growth and development of a community. The recollections of community members provide important information about how places or events impacted the greater community. This type of mapping activity provides teachers with an opportunity to discuss the generational differences in understanding local history. Some dramatic changes within a community such as the development of a roadway or the loss of a major industry may lie outside of the memory of young residents, but may stir an emotional response from older residents. Additionally, diverse perspectives generated from oral testimony can lead to greater discussions about how point of view impacts historical understanding.

- **PhilaPlace Connections:** The *Pennsylvania Legacies* article, "The Ninth Street Market and South Philadelphia: Personal Connections, Particular Views, Past Times, and Embodied Places," <http://www.philaplace.org/download/object/3612/> features the recollections of three South Philadelphia residents. Although the three discuss life around Ninth Street from different cultural and generational vantage points, there is continuity in their experiences.
- **Mapping Suggestions:** Oral interviews provide diverse perspectives and mapping these perspectives can sometimes reveal continuity or even conflict in the way community members experienced an event or a space.

Gathering Historical Data:



Oral History:

Conducting oral history interviews allows students to directly engage with historical data. The following are online resources related to the development of oral history projects:

- The Library of Congress website, “Learning about Immigration through Oral History.”
<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/ndlpedu/lessons/97/oh1/ammem.html>.
- The Historical Society of Pennsylvania’s “Voices from the Past: Oral History.”
<http://www.hsp.org/default.aspx?id=517>
- Resource List for Oral Tradition compiled by Joan Saverino.
<http://www.philaplace.org/download/object/3613/>

Mapping Tools:

A map can be as simple as a rough sketch of the houses on a block or as sophisticated as utilizing GIS technology. There are online resources such as Google Maps that provide an accessible, free, and user-friendly option for teachers wishing to organize an interactive mapping project.

- Go to Google Maps <http://maps.google.com/> and click on “My Maps”
- To learn about creating a personalized map, click on the “learn more” at the top of the webpage. Customized maps allow users to plot specific locations and add text.
- Teachers might consider creating a class Google account and using the “Collaborating with Others” feature on Google Maps to allow the class to access and plot their information on one map. Students are able to add photos and video to their markers.

As indicated throughout this unit, students should place their findings in a larger historical context. In addition to gathering information through oral testimony and



displaying it in a visual format, the goal is to provide interpretation and analysis of responses or patterns that emerge from the mapping project.

Please review the “Resources” page for additional online mapping and oral history projects.

Unit Overview:

Skill Objectives:

Students will:

1. Gather, analyze, and interpret data.
2. Use technology to display data.
3. Develop critical thinking skills.

Content Objectives:

Students will:

1. Engage in an historical and cultural investigation of their neighborhood.
2. Understand the changing demographics of a neighborhood over time and how the use of place and spaces changes as well.
3. Understand the importance of oral history as an historical tool.
4. Use GIS mapping through Google Maps to display historical data.

Teaching Time: Varies depending on the type of project

Grade Level: Middle School to High School

Historical Time Periods Addressed: Varies depending on the type of project

Disciplines Encompassed: History, Geography, Reading, Speaking, and Listening

Pennsylvania State Standards:

Reading, Writing, Speaking, Listening: 1.2, 1.6, 1.8



History: 8.1, 8.2, 8.3

Geography: 7.1, 7.2, 7.3, 7.4

Resources:

Philadelphia Specific Mapping/GIS websites and resources:

The Free Public Library of Philadelphia, “Directories”

<http://libwww.library.phila.gov/faq/guides/genealogy/directory.cfm>

Greater Philadelphia GeoHistory Network

<http://www.philageohistory.org/geohistory/index.cfm>

Mapping the Du Bois Philadelphia Negro

www.mappingdubois.org

Philadelphia’s City Archives “Map Your Memories”

<http://www.phillyhistory.org/PhotoArchive/>

Samuel S. Fleisher Art Memorial: Neighborhood Mapping Project

<http://www.rosenbach.org/NM-Root/Content/Story/Intro.htm>

West Philadelphia Digital Atlas

<http://web.mit.edu/4.243j/www/wplp/r-pub-db-atlas.html>



University of Pennsylvania's Quantitative and Geospatial Data

<http://www.library.upenn.edu/datasets/philamaps.html>



General GIS/Mapping Websites and Resources:

Area Chicago: Mapping 1968 Through the Lens of 2008

<http://www.areachicago.org/p/issues/6808/mapping-1968-through-2008/>

Boston Streets: Mapping Directory Data

<http://dca.lib.tufts.edu/features/bostonstreets/>

GIS for Schools (includes literature to help teachers develop an activity. Also includes examples of student projects).

<http://www.esri.com/industries/k-12/index.html>

Social Explorer: Interactive Demography Maps

<http://www.socialexplorer.com/pub/maps/home.aspx>

Upper Midwestern Cultures “Cultural Maps, Cultural Tours”

<http://csumc.wisc.edu/?q=node/19>

Oral History Resources and Projects:

American Century Project

<http://www.doingoralhistory.org/>

Historical Society of Pennsylvania “Voices from the Past: Oral History”

<http://www.hsp.org/default.aspx?id=517>



The Library of Congress: “Learning About Immigration Through Oral History”

<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/ndlpedu/lessons/97/oh1/ammem.html>

Fourth Street Resources:

Boonin, Harry D. *The Jewish Quarter of Philadelphia: A History and Guide, 1881-1930*. Philadelphia, PA: Jewish Walking Tours of Philadelphia, Inc, 1999.

Friedman, Murray. *Philadelphia Jewish Life, 1940-2000*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2003.

Palmer, Michele Winitsky. “The Fabric of Our Lives: A History of Philadelphia’s South Fourth Street.” The Fabric Museum.

http://www.fabricmuseum.org/Fourth_Street_intro.html