

Exploring Our City Through Images, Poetry, and Music

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Content Objectives

Abstract

This unit is designed for the 7th grade English/Language Arts class. The purpose of this unit is to have students think, discuss and write critically about cities, Philadelphia, and their identity in relation to Philadelphia, through the reading and writing of poetry about cities. Students will read, listen to, discuss and analyze poems and songs about cities. These poems will help students view and discuss their cities through different lenses such as race, class, and gender. They will study photos of cities in relation to the poems. Students will take neighborhood walks in which they will observe, discuss, and photograph. They will write several poems about cities, and pick one to revise and publish. Their final product will be a presentation of their poem paired with original music and photographs.

Problem Statement

This is my twelfth year teaching seventh grade English/Language Arts at Greenberg Elementary School. Greenberg is a K-8 school within the school district of Philadelphia. However, it is located in a very suburban looking area, only two blocks from the border with Montgomery County. Greenberg's Ethnic make-up for the 2018-19 year was 48% White, 27% Asian, 11% Black/African American, 8% Hispanic/Latino, 5% Multi Racial/Other. There are dozens of languages spoken at Greenberg. The most spoken languages other than English at Greenberg, from greatest to least, are Malayalam, Uzbek, Russian, Mandarin, Arabic, and Ukrainian. (School District of Philadelphia 2018). Most of Greenberg's students live in the school's catchment area, which extends a few miles around the school. However, many children in this area attend Catholic or charter schools, so the empty seats are mainly filled by students in nearby catchment areas whose schools are usually overcrowded. We also have a small number of students who travel from different areas of the city to our school. Because of higher than average test scores on standardized tests and other published metrics, Greenberg is a sought after school. More parents call to try to get their children into Greenberg than there is space available. This allows the administration to pick top students to let in. In my opinion, Greenberg's high performance comes from its historic advantages connected to race and class. This persists despite Greenberg's changing demographics because of its great reputation. Greenberg has more choice in teachers and students than most other K-8 schools because it is a sought after school.

The diversity in my school manifests itself in different ways, including differing experiences of the city, differing views of the city, and even confusion about the city. Discussions with students have revealed that many do not understand how big Philadelphia is or where they are located within it. Since we are so close to the suburbs,

some are not even sure if they live in the city or not. Some students go into center city for entertainment frequently, while others have only been to center city for school trips. Some students go to other parts of the city to visit family. Other students do not have a reason to go to any other part of Philadelphia, but travel to cities in other parts of the U.S. or the world to visit family. While most students do not know much about the city they live in, some have strong opinions (often negative) about Philadelphia. That saddens me. I assume these opinions are shaped by the rhetoric of the adults in the students' lives. I believe being an informed and engaged citizen means forming knowledge and experience based opinions on the communities and societies in which we live at all levels, school, neighborhood, region, city, state, country, and world. Students affect and are affected by their communities. Exploring, learning about, and discussing these communities is necessary to help students develop their identities as maturing young adults.

- When designing our curriculum units for the Teacher Institute of Philadelphia (TIP), we as fellows are asked first to start by determining a specific need that our unit will fill. I believe reading and writing poetry are areas in both my curriculum and pedagogy that could use growth. Poetry has been a way for people to express their feelings about society and relationships to it from ancients to the rappers of today. Therefore, using poetry to explore the city with my students would be adding to a long tradition. However, my students often have negative views about reading and writing poetry. I understand. Similar to many of my students, I was scared away from poetry in my K-12 schooling. It made me feel dumb because I did not know how to interpret it. When I stuck out a college composition class on African American poetry that I accidentally signed up for, I developed an appreciation for poetry. I learned what a powerful vehicle of expression it could be. I have developed different poetry units over the years, borrowing from various curricula. Yet, the units never engaged my students or me as much as my other units did. I was never able to really change students' minds who had already formed a negative view of poetry. Therefore, my goal for this unit is to use the fascinating topic of the city to create an engaging poetry unit that will inspire my students.

Rationale

This course, *Cities through the Lens of Race, Class, and Gender* has given me so many new ideas and ways to think about Philadelphia and the area I teach and live in. Some of the topics that we discussed and read about in the course that I would like to explore with my students include:

- **Geography:** This includes the idea of Philadelphia as a legal entity with definite borders, versus other ways to define a city, such as density gradients. Here I would like to bring in the ideas we explored in "What is a City?" by Lewis Mumford (1937), including looking at the social aspects of a city instead of just the physical aspects,

and how the social and physical aspects connect and influence each other. This unit should start and end with a discussion of the definition of a city.

- Race: I am extremely interested in how racial politics has shaped Philadelphia, especially the northeast. This course has led me to read *The Color of Law* (Rothstein, 2017) about the pervasiveness in housing segregation in all aspects of all cities in the US. I began reading *The "White Island": Whiteness in the Making of Public and Private Space in Northeast Philadelphia, 1854-1990* (Smalarz, 2016), a dissertation on the pervasiveness of red lining in the development of Northeast Philadelphia's geography and identity. However, this type of discussion of race does not seem to fit within the confines of a seventh grade literacy class. In this course, we did discuss the experience of race on a micro personal level through the book *Who's Afraid Of Post Blackness?: What It Means To Be Black Now* (Toure, 2020) and the This American Life episode "Get Back to Where You Once Belonged" (Glass, 2020). Therefore, I would like to use specific poems, as I will talk about below, to discuss the intersection of race, cities, and identity within my students' lives.
- Class: As famed writer on class Barbara Ehrenreich says, class is always present under the surface, but taboo to talk about. This is very true for students, who I theorize may not even have the words to talk about class. I think photographs can show aspects that are hard to put into words and can spark discussion in class (Washington College - Campus Events, 2017).
- Immigration: I think this topic will be very relevant when discussing cities in my class because over half my students are either immigrants or the children of immigrants. During our class session on immigration we listened to the This American Life episode "I Can't Be Your Hero Baby" (Glass, 2020). This podcast contained the theme, "The media portrays a single story about immigration, but there is no single story." In our small group lesson planning exercise following listening to this text, my classmates and I felt this theme would resonate with our students as they immigrated from many different places for a variety of reasons.
- Media representations -I believe the theories of Stuart Hall, which we discussed in one course session, can shed light on my students' current views of cities and Philadelphia. Hall rejects the idea that media audiences are passive consumers of content. He instead posits that there is an encoding and decoding process going on. First messages are created by media producers based on the beliefs and values of mainstream society. The message is then circulated through the media and interpreted by the audience. Once the message has been decoded, it is reproduced. This leads me to the questions, What messages are my students getting from the media? What media are these messages coming from? How are they interpreting and reproducing these messages? What beliefs are they bringing to these interpretations? How are these beliefs modifying the media's intended message? How will my unit on cities impact this act of interpretation and reproduction? (Hall, 1973)

- Intersectionality: In preparation for our class session on intersectionality, Dr. Saunders asked us to answer the discussion question, “Name 3 aspects of your identity; which do you foreground – where/when/why?” I think this is a great way to open a discussion about intersectionality for almost any age. I would like to use this with my students and then ask them how these identities interact and how they are connected to where they live.
- Gender and Intersectionality - One course reading about gender and intersectionality by Irazabal and Huerta was about young LGBTQ youth of color who gave educational and performative tours of NYC and participated in local planning through the organization FIERCE. A key take away from this article that I think will be relevant to my students is “People experience a place/space differently based on their intersectional identities” from Emma Connolly’s summary of Irazabal and Huerta). I wonder how my students’ intersectional identities influence their experiences of where they live. Also, how might their intersectional identities marginalize them from their neighborhood and communities? How might they reclaim their place and power as the youth in FIERCE did?

I was at a loss for how I would convey this material to seventh graders in a English/Language Arts class. However, when we read and discussed songs and poetry about cities in the second course meeting, I thought *My City* might be the perfect theme for a poetry unit. I am very interested in the subject of the city. However, as I discussed in my problem statement, I have not had much enthusiasm for planning and teaching poetry lessons. Therefore, I would be more invested in the planning of this poetry unit than my previous ones. I also believe that students will be interested in discussing their views of the city and expressing them. This will be a more personal way to explore both poetry and the city.

Poetry will be a vehicle for students to express those views as they develop them. It will teach students that the purpose of writing a poem is to express something personal while playing with words. The purpose of reading a poem is to learn something that is important to the poet while bringing your own interpretation to it. The purpose is not to finish, or dissect, or find the “right answers” to a poem, as many students are wrongly taught to think.

Unit Outline

I want to start this unit using some of the same activities and materials that we engaged in during the second meeting of the course. I want students to listen to and read the lyrics of songs about cities and then read poetry about cities. I want them to read them for enjoyment, and then dissect them for both meaning and connection. This will involve class discussion, close readings, annotating, and reflective writing. I want to activate students’ prior knowledge, opinions, thinking, and confusions about the city before we engage with the poetry. Therefore, I plan to start with a prompt such as this for students’

daily journal entries: *What do you think of when you hear the word city? What do you picture? If someone asked you what a city was, what would you say (without looking it up)? What do you think of when you hear Philadelphia? What do you picture?*

To have students really dissect and grapple with these poems, and discover what they say about their city and identity, we need to do some sort of close reading. Here I need to pause and take a look at my history with, and ambivalence towards, the term “close reading”. In thinking about this I realize that my method of employing close reading in the past, may be part of the reason why I have not much enjoyed or felt successful in teaching poetry in the past.

Close reading entered into the School District of Philadelphia’s jargon of instructional best practices in the 2014-2015 year, to go along with the new Common Core PA Standards and Text Dependent Analysis (TDA) essay. (Students are required to write two TDAs on the Pennsylvania State Standardized Assessment {PSSA} every year.) In practice, in my school, close reading looks like reading a text multiple times with annotation- marking a text for main ideas, details, word choice, figurative language, inferences, text features, and more. I do not find this annotating process fun. It sucks the enjoyment out of reading. I have done it with poetry before. Both the students and I throw up our hands and say, “I don’t know what the poem means!” Yet, annotating poetry with students leads us both to complain, “Not another poem to annotate!” because it is so tedious.

The term close reading seemed so familiar to me when it was introduced in 2014 in training. I realized later that is also the name of a process I have engaged in periodically in a group I attend called Philadelphia Teaching Learning Cooperative (PTLC). PTLC is a group of teachers that conduct their own professional development, based on their own needs, using the descriptive processes developed by the Prospect Center for Education and Research. According to Prospect’s *Descriptive Processes: The Child, The Art of Teaching, The Classroom and School: Revised Edition.*, “Close reading is slow, intensive work.” It is a specific process of a group of educators reading through and discussing a text (usually a student’s work) multiple times. The first time is straight through for first impressions. Then the group reads line by line, commenting on the meaning behind almost every word. I had not thought of using this type of close reading in my classroom until now, thinking it would be difficult with more participants who are less dedicated to the process and purpose. However, this form of close reading achieves many of the same goals as Common Core’s close reading such as slowing down to interpret meaning by looking at word choice and sentence structure. Yet it does so orally and through collaboration, so it is not as tedious as annotating. I plan to adapt the Prospect process for close reading (which I detail in the Teaching Strategies section) to use with my class to take a deep dive into a few songs and poems about cities, and specifically poems about Philadelphia. I hope that students take to the process well enough that I can have them do close readings in small groups, choosing poems and songs they are most interested in out of the many I have compiled in the appendix and possibly from some of the students’ own suggestions (Strieb, 2012, p. 61-63).

Breaking down poetry into individual words that speak to students will help students who struggle with comprehending and analyzing text. It will also help my English Language Learners. Exploring the subjects of these poems visually is also important to aiding comprehension and experience. This will involve a lot of work with photographs and maps. I think I will need some sort of geography/cartography lesson on Philadelphia as I do not think most students have a good visual representation of Philadelphia's shape and size, as well as their place in it. The now closed Philadelphia History Museum had a room with a giant scale map of Philadelphia on the floor where you could literally stand on different landmarks and neighborhoods in the city. I know that I could do something like this virtually with Google maps, but I feel as though geography, space, and place are more comprehensible when it is experienced physically. I am envisioning some kind of scavenger hunt around the classroom where the students would match landmarks, both of Northeast Philadelphia and Philadelphia as a whole, to a map of the area where the landmark is located. Then the maps would be put together to create Philadelphia as a whole. This would lead to a discussion of space and place similar to the one we had in the Cities course. I also plan to have some sort of discussion (possibly debate) over how we should define the city of Philadelphia, and therefore is the area we live in actually the city or is it the suburbs?

Close reading can also be done with visual images. I did this in a school district training on the new close reading for teachers of English Language Learners. It started with people sharing details of what they see, down to every little detail. Only then do participants share what they are inferring based on what they see. I often do shortened versions of this with students to introduce a topic we will be reading about. It helps students learn that all "seeing" is inferring and involves some background knowledge, bias, and assumptions. It also proves that we automatically infer and make assumptions without consciously realizing it. I will do close reading in this unit by starting with one photo I pick that I think very much relates to one of the poems we have read, and taking our time "reading" it, interpreting it, and connecting it to the poem. Then we will do a gallery walk of photos of Philadelphia, where students will pair one of the lines of a poem that spoke to them to a photo that they think best connects to that photo. They will then do close readings of these photos in small groups.

Once we have explored artists' views of the city through poetry and photographs, it will be time for my students to express their views of Philadelphia and the parts they live in, through poetry, photography, and (hopefully) music. We will start with a neighborhood walk. We will walk the few blocks around the school, taking pictures, discussing, jotting down words that come to mind. Maybe we could even do a version of a close read of an area outside. I will then assign students to do this same neighborhood walk on the block they live on as most do not live in the few block perimeter of the school that we will be walking in.

In my previous poetry units, I always started with reading poetry and moved to writing poetry in the second half. However, I received advice from other teachers in this course to have students experiment with writing poetry throughout. That way students can more readily use the poems they are reading as mentor texts to inspire their writing. I plan

to take this advice and structure the unit so that each poetry reading lesson is followed by a poetry writing lesson.

In my experience, students have a really difficult time translating their thoughts, feelings, and experiences into a poem. (I do too.) Recently, I heard a poet say she loved writing poetry because it was playing with words. This description of poetry as playing with words made me think of playing with Legos or Play-Dough. A light went off. Could we look at poetry as building something with words, as a creative, fun, experiment? Looking at poetry in this way might be easier and more enjoyable for my students. First, my students would need buckets of words to build with, similar to my nephew's buckets of Legos.

When I think of creating buckets of words, I think of another process I learned in PTLC called reflection on a word. We do this often in our PTLC meetings in order to explore a topic relevant to teaching and to help us be more reflective teachers. Recently, I saw how one member successfully utilizes the practice with her entire class of third graders (which I detail in the Teaching Strategies section). The benefit of the reflection on a word is summarized by master teachers, "The point of a reflection is not to winnow or define a word. The point is to uncover some of the richness of layered meaning the word embodies" (Strieb, 2012, p. 42). For our reflections on words, we as a class will pick a few words that were very salient in our discussions and note-taking during our close readings and neighborhood walks. We will go through the reflection on a word process with these words. From this process, I assume, we will end up with pages of words and phrases, because that was always the result for me when I engaged in reflection on a word. These pages of words and phrases will be our Legos or Play-Dough from which we will build our poems.

After we have read and written several poems, students will pick the poem they wrote that they are most proud of. They will then go through a process of peer revision with their poems. Once they finish they will pair the lines of the poems to photos they or other class members took on our neighborhood walks. Students will put the poems and photos into slideshow presentations in preparation for a final presentation.

In our TIP class meeting looking at poetry, we started by listening to songs about the city. Music is much more prevalent in most students' lives than poetry is. I want to start the poetry unit by listening to songs about cities and looking at poems that are the lyrics of the songs. Since music is so prevalent in many students' lives I would like to bring music into the creation part of the unit as well. Greenberg has a wonderful music teacher who has been using applications to help students create music virtually this year. I hope to partner with him. I think he would be happy to have a project in his class in which students create original music to go with the poem they have written and the photos they have selected.

I hope that students are really proud of the multimedia pieces of art they have created. I want to celebrate their art with a ceremony called a Celebration of Writing. I have adopted and adapted this process from Teachers College Writing Workshop. Students will recite their poems aloud while they run their slideshows of photos and play their original music pieces in the background. I try to make the Celebration of Writing into a party atmosphere with some candy and snacks. Students also fill out compliment cards where

they write down specific positive feedback about their peers writing and give the cards to each other. Finally, I hope to have students record themselves reading their poems while playing the slide show and music, so that both they and I have a permanent record of the complete multimedia piece.

Major Unit Objectives

- Students will be able to comprehend and discuss poetry about cities in order to interpret and identify with cities and poetry.
- Students will be able to reflect on words and images in order to interpret and find deeper meaning in them.
- Students will be able to synthesize their learning about poetry and cities in order to write poems about their experiences of Philadelphia.
- Students will be able to brainstorm using words and images in order to use them to understand and make sense of their experiences of Philadelphia.

Teaching Strategies

Gallery Walk of Photographs: Gallery walk is a practice where texts (including writing pieces of any kind, artwork of any kind, or even brainstorming lists) are placed on the walls around the room. Students (usually in groups) take time “reading”, engaging with, and reflecting on the text, often aided by guiding questions. Students are often asked to write down their reflections either at each station (on sticky notes or chart paper) or on a paper they are carrying with them. I plan to use this technique to help students engage with photographs of the city.

Neighborhood Walk: Students walk around a few block area slowly and try to just observe details they have not seen before while suspending judgement. Students should say what they are seeing to each other and record what they are seeing in photographs and note-taking. Students should use their recordings to later reflect on and draw conclusions about what they saw.

Journal Entries: Students respond to a daily journal prompt during the first ten minutes of class. The prompt is often a question to access prior knowledge about the topic of the upcoming lesson and a question to get students to reflect on the ongoing unit. I often use the journal entry as thinking of a think-pair-share (described below). I collect, read, and respond to students' journals once a week.

Celebration of Writing: This is an idea I took from Lucy Calkins' Writer's Workshop. The point is for students to feel a sense of accomplishment in a finished piece of writing, to feel that they are writers who just published a piece, not just students who completed an assignment. A quick search will give you many different ways teachers conduct their Celebration of Writings. Since many middle schoolers are shy about reading their work out loud to the entire class, I usually have students share their work in small groups of their

choosing. Students fill out compliment cards for each other and I give out small treats. Later I use a book binding machine to make a book out of the classes' work. The finished piece for this unit will have a visual and audio aspect so I want to encourage all students to present it in front of the class at the celebration at the end of the unit.

Mini-lessons: A mini-lesson is a short lesson that introduces a concept, teaches an isolated skill, extends previous learning, or introduces strategies. The students will then use what they learn in their mini-lesson, tasks, and subsequent class periods.

Reflection on a word: Reflection on a word brings forth the vast and layered meaning of a word, phrase or concept through the input of all students/participants. Participants sit in a circle. The leader of the discussion announces the word and gives participants a few minutes for silent writing. "Each participant writes down the words, images, phrases the word calls to mind" (Strieb, 2012, p. 62). Participants take turns sharing what they wrote. Then the chair pulls together the main themes brought up in everyone's reflections.

Close Reading:

The Prospect Center's close reading process goes as follows:

1. A group of six to eight participants sit in a circle. There is a notetaker and a chair.
2. Participants give their first impressions of the text based on a quick read through. The chair gives a summary of the main themes of the first impressions.
3. The chair asks someone to read the passage aloud. A second person can also be asked to read the passage aloud so that it is heard in more than one voice.
4. The chair asks someone to start a line-by-line reading and description. - After reading a line, the reader might make an observation about the structure of the sentence, say what stands out to them, say something about the word choice, or say what a particular word makes them think of.
5. The participants continue going line by line through the text until the text is finished. If the text is short, and the group larger, the group may go through the text multiple times.
6. The chair gives a summary of the main themes that came out during the line by line description.
7. There may be another discussion of the text as a whole followed by another summary from the chair.

School District of Philadelphia close reading process: Close reading is a deep dive into a text, involving at least three readings of the same text. The first reading is for enjoyment and to get the main idea of the text. The second reading is for deeper meaning. In this reading, we pause often to discuss and annotate the text. We look at structure, word choice, and figurative language, and determine how these affect meaning in the text. This involves annotating the text. The third reading is with a specific purpose, usually analysis, comparison, or reflection. This is often done in pairs and with the aid of a graphic organizer to help students focus their thoughts on the specific purpose and record their learnings and realizations.

Shared Reading: Shared reading is when the teacher reads a text aloud while the students read along silently. This models reading fluency for students. This is a particularly important first step in shared reading, because in heterogeneous classrooms, the texts will almost always be above some students' independent reading levels. Teachers need to ensure that all students are able to access the content.

Annotating: Annotating is the act of marking up a text as you read to bring attention to certain elements in order to help the reader create meaning from the text. These elements could be structure, word choice, and figurative language. Students may also mark down their own thoughts and questions, including connections, inferences, and confusions.

Think-aloud: A think-aloud is when a teacher is explicitly verbalizing the teacher's thought process to students as they perform a task as a form of modeling for students.

Discussion: Different types of discussion models used include whole group discussion, turn and talk, and **think/write-pair-share**. **Turn and talk** is when a teacher poses an open-ended question for students to discuss with an assigned partner sitting close to them. **Think/write-pair-share** is when students think or write independently about a question or topic. Then students engage in discussion with a partner about the question or topic. Finally, students can volunteer to share out in a whole class discussion.

Graphic organizers: This unit uses several teacher-made graphic organizers to scaffold students' learning and achieve the content objective. Graphic organizers are papers given out to students to write on that already have visuals to show relationships between facts, terms, and ideas.

Cooperative Learning: Cooperative learning is a form of scaffolding where students work in groups on specific tasks. Each member has the responsibility to learn and accomplish individually while also having the responsibility of group success. Cooperative learning aids students in practicing communication skills, problem solving, and critical thinking.

Group Reflection and Self Assessment: These are valuable learning tools for both the students and the teacher that should be done during and at the end of the unit. During the unit, I dedicate some of the class's daily journal entry topics to answering reflective questions about what they are reading, thinking, and learning. This helps both me and the students have a clearer picture of their progress and needs. At the end of a unit, I give students a teacher-made "Group Reflection/Self Assessment" report to rate and explain their achievement, effort, organization, and teamwork. I use this as a small part of their grade.

Modeling Writing: Modeled writing is a scaffold that helps students move toward writing independently using targeted skills. The students watch and listen while the teacher creates a written piece in front of them, sharing her thinking and decision-making process aloud.

Gradual Release of Responsibility Model (Gradual Release): Gradual Release is a style of teaching in which activity moves slowly from being completely teacher centered to completely student centered as students become more confident and competent at the task. The lesson usually starts with the teacher modeling a task. Then the teacher models but gets help from the class as a whole. Then the students do the task in groups, with the

teacher circulating to help those who are struggling. Finally, the students complete the task independently.

Classroom Activities

Lesson 1: What is a city?

Time: 90+ Minutes

Materials:

1. An overhead projector or smart board
2. Student journals
3. "What is a City?" Handout (Appendix B)
4. Photos of Philadelphia (or the city the school is in) - both electronic and physical
5. Sticky notes

Objective:

- Students will be able to brainstorm using words and images in order to use them to understand and make sense of their experiences of Philadelphia.
- Students will be able to critically discuss different concepts of cities in collaborative discussions in order to build on each other's ideas and express their own clearly.

Standards:

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.4](#) - Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of rhymes and other repetitions of sounds (e.g., alliteration) on a specific verse or stanza of a poem or section of a story or drama.

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.7.2](#) - Analyze the main ideas and supporting details presented in diverse media and formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) and explain how the ideas clarify a topic, text, or issue under study.

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.7.5](#)- Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.

Procedure:

Introduction/Accessing background knowledge: (20 minutes)

Have this journal entry on the board when students come in:

What do you think of when you hear the word city? What do you picture? If someone asked you what a city was, what would you say (without looking it up)? What do you think of when you hear Philadelphia? What do you picture?

Students write-pair-share their journal entry. Write salient words from their sharing on the board.

Explain to the class that we are starting a unit on reading and writing poetry about cities. We live in the city of Philadelphia. In this unit we will be exploring our city and our thoughts and feelings about it. Before we can start reading and writing about cities, we need to think about and discuss the question, “What is a city?” Even though there are definitions of that word. There is no one correct answer to that question. In fact, everyone has a different answer to that question based on their lived experience.

Lesson part 1: Annotating definitions of a city (20 minutes)

Give out “What is a City?” Handout (Appendix B).

Follow the directions for part one of the handout, having students annotate the three definitions of the city.

Students pair-share their annotations. Write salient words from their sharing on the board. Help students define parts of the definition they are confused about. Have a short discussion about the similarities and differences between the definitions and why there are multiple definitions.

Lesson part 2: Photos of the city: Gradual Release (40 minutes)

Project a photo of Philadelphia (or the city the class is in). Start with a stereotypic photo such as the skyline or a historic landmark.

Model doing a close read of the photo. (Point out to students that these directions are on their “What is a City?” handout.

1. Describe the photo in great detail, but try not to make inferences.
2. Make inferences based on your previous description.
3. Pick some of the terms we used to describe cities that you think fit this picture. (Use words you have written on the board from what the students shared from the journal and the definitions of city.) Write them on sticky notes. Stick them to the photo.

Put up a second photo, but choose a photo that is not as iconic a view. Follow the close reading procedure again, but this time get some of the descriptions, inferences, and words from student volunteers.

Put up a third photo, but choose a photo from the neighborhood the school is in. Follow the close reading procedure again, but this time get most, if not all, of the descriptions, inferences, and words from student volunteers. Try to get all students to contribute.

Put students in pairs or small groups to have students repeat this close reading procedure with more photos. You can either post photos around the room and have students do a

gallery walk, or give each group photos to study at their seats. Students should write their thoughts on part two of the “What is a City?” handout.

Conclusion/Formative Assessment (20 minutes)

Have each group share about at least one photo.

Have students turn to a new page in their journal and answer these questions:

These were the questions you answered in the beginning of this lesson:

What do you think of when you hear the word city? What do you picture? If someone asked you what a city was, what would you say (without looking it up)? What do you think of when you hear Philadelphia? What do you picture?

How have the activities we have done today affected your answers to these questions? How have your answers changed or expanded?

Lesson 2: Whole Class Close Reading of a Poem

Time: 90 Minutes

Materials:

1. A document camera
2. An overhead projector
3. Student journals
4. Student copies of “Stoop-Sitting” from *The Poet-X* by Elizabeth Acevedo (in appendix)

Objectives:

- Students will be able to comprehend and discuss poetry about cities in order to interpret and identify with cities and poetry.
- Students will be able to reflect on words and images in order to interpret and find deeper meaning in them.

Standards:

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.4](#) - Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of rhymes and other repetitions of sounds (e.g., alliteration) on a specific verse or stanza of a poem or section of a story or drama.

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.5](#) - Analyze how a drama's or poem's form or structure (e.g., soliloquy, sonnet) contributes to its meaning

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.10](#) - By the end of the year, read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poems, in the grades 6-8 text complexity band proficiently, with scaffolding as needed at the high end of the range.

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.7.5](#)- Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.

Procedure:

Introduction/Accessing background knowledge:

Have this journal entry on the board when students come in:

Think about an ordinary day in the summer in your neighborhood. If you were sitting outside, what might you see? What might you hear? What might you smell? Use imagery so I feel like I am there.

Students write-pair-share journal entries.

Review the definition of imagery.

Relate the imagery of a neighborhood to the previous lesson about the multiple definitions of a city.

Lesson: Close reading of Stoop-Sitting

1. Have students get in a circle with journals. Remind students they can jot down notes in their journals or on the poem itself after it is given out.
2. First, ask students to listen to the poem with their eyes closed and try to visualize the imagery: feel, hear, see, taste, smell.
3. Go around the circle asking students to share the imagery. Take notes.
4. Summarize student responses.
5. Give each student a copy of this poem. Tell students that you are going to read it again and then ask for reactions and connections.
6. Go around the circle asking students to share reactions and connections. Take notes.
7. Summarize student responses.
8. The teacher starts a line-by-line reading and description of the poem from the beginning. - After reading a line, the reader might make an observation about the structure of the sentence, say what stands out to them, say something about the word choice, or say what a particular word makes them think of.
9. The participants continue going line by line through the text until the text is finished and every student has gone.
10. Give a summary of the main themes that came out during the line by line description.
11. Go around again asking for conclusions about the poem and connections to the previous lessons about the city.

Conclusion/Formative Assessment:

Have students answer this prompt in their journal:

How is Stoop-Sitting about a city? How is Stoop-Sitting about the poet's identity? If you were to write a poem like Stoop-Sitting, what details would you include?

Students-Write-Pair share ending journal entry.

Lesson 4: Poem brainstorming/Prewriting

Time: 90 Minutes

Materials:

1. A document camera
2. An overhead projector
3. Student journals
4. Student copies of “Stoop-Sitting” from *The Poet-X* by Elizabeth Acevedo (in appendix)
5. Notes from neighborhood walks.
6. Neighborhood Imagery Poem Graphic Organizer

Objectives:

- Students will be able to synthesize their learning about poetry and cities in order to write poems about their experiences of Philadelphia.
- Students will be able to brainstorm using words and images in order to use them to understand and make sense of their experiences of Philadelphia.

Standards:

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.7.4](#) -Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience. (Grade-specific expectations for writing types are defined in standards 1-3 above.)

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.7.5](#) - With some guidance and support from peers and adults, develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on how well purpose and audience have been addressed.

Identity 1 - ID.6-8.1 - I know and like who I am and can comfortably talk about my family and myself and describe our various group identities.

Identity 5 - ID.6-8.5 - I know there are similarities and differences between my home culture and the other environments and cultures I encounter, and I can be myself in a diversity of settings.

Procedure:

Introduction/Accessing background knowledge:

Have this journal entry on the board when students come in:

Remember back to our neighborhood walk outside Greenberg and your neighborhood walk around your neighborhood. Look back at your notes and photos from the walks. What did you see? What did you hear? What did you smell? Use imagery so I feel like I am there.

Students write-pair-share journal entries.

Review the definition of imagery.

Relate the imagery of the neighborhood walks to the previous first lesson about the multiple definitions of a city and to the second lesson reading "Stoop Sitting"

Lesson:

1. Have students take out "Stoop Sitting".
2. Think-Pair-Share: How does Elizabeth Acevedo paint a scene in the poem?
3. Think-Pair-Share: How does Elizabeth Acevedo tell a story? What's the story?
4. Have students reread their notes and look at their pictures of their two neighborhood walks. (They can do this independently, in pairs, or in small groups.) They should be discussing and writing down their answers to the question: What scenes and stories come out of your neighborhood walk?
5. Hand out and discuss Neighborhood Imagery Poem Graphic Organizer.
6. Modeled writing - model using "Stoop-Sitting" and notes from the walk to fill out the prewriting graphic organizer.
7. Have students fill out the prewriting graphic organizer using "Stoop-Sitting" and notes from the walk as aids.

Conclusion/Formative Assessment:

Have students share their prewriting with their writing partners and have a few volunteers to share with the class.

Pair-Share: What do these poems communicate about you and your neighborhood?

Resources

Reading List

Adewumbi, B. (2014, April 2). Kimberle Crenshaw on Intersectionality: "I wanted to come up with an everyday metaphor anyone could use". *The New Statesman*.

<https://www.newstatesman.com/lifestyle/2014/04/kimberl-crenshaw-intersectionality-i-wanted-come-everyday-metaphor-anyone-could>

This article was a course reading that introduced us to the idea of intersectionality.

Crenshaw, K. (1991) Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color. In D. Kelly Weisberg (Ed.), *Applications Of Feminist Legal Theory* (pp. 363-374) Temple University Press.

This article was a course reading that introduced us to the idea of intersectionality.

Glass, I. (Producer). (2020, February, 14) 694: Get Back to Where You Once Belonged [Audio podcast]. *This American Life*. Podcast retrieved from

<https://www.thisamericanlife.org/694/get-back-to-where-you-once-belonged>

This podcast has two true narratives about race, racism, and belonging in the United States and Russia. We listened to this podcast and used it to discuss experiencing racism on a micro personal level.

Glass, I. (Producer). (2020, April 10) 700: I Can't Be Your Hero Baby [Audio podcast]. *This American Life*. Podcast retrieved from:

<https://www.thisamericanlife.org/700/embiggening/act-one-7>

This podcast had true narratives of undocumented immigrants that counters the media's portrayal of immigration being a single story.

Hall, S. (1973) Encoding and Decoding in the Television Discourse. *Council on Europe Colloquy on "Training in the Critical Reading of Televisual Language"* Birmingham: University of Birmingham.

This article was a course reading that introduced us to the idea of media encoding and decoding.

Irazábal, I. & Huerta, C. (2016) Intersectionality and planning at the margins: LGBTQ youth of color in New York. In *Gender, Place & Culture*, 23:5, 714-732, DOI: 10.1080/0966369X.2015.1058755

This article was a course reading that introduced us to the idea of intersectionality, as well as performative reflexivity, and participatory research.

Mumford, Lewis (1937) What is a City? *Architectural Record*

This article was a course reading that was an introduction to the class and thinking of the multiple definitions of the city. This article mainly talks about the city in terms of social interaction.

Rothstein, R. (2017) *The Color of Law*. New York: Liveright Press/W.W. Norton and Co.

This article was a course reading that extensively detailed the de jure segregation of cities across the U.S. across all levels and systems of government throughout the history of the U.S.

School District of Philadelphia (2018) Students by Primary Home Language [Table].

Retrieved

from <https://dashboards.philasd.org/extensions/philadelphia/index.html#/enrollment>

This chart gave me information on the ethnic makeup of my school for context.

Smalarz, M. (2015) Northeast Philadelphia. In C. Maires and H. Gillete (Eds.) *Encyclopedia of Great Philadelphia*. <https://philadelphiaencyclopedia.org/archive/northeast-philadelphia-essay/>

This is a good overview of the history of Northeast Philadelphia. I thought it was important for me to have more historical background knowledge of the neighborhoods we are discussing and writing about.

Smalarz, M. (2016). *The "White Island": Whiteness in the Making of Public and Private Space in Northeast Philadelphia, 1854-1990* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). University of Rochester, Rochester, New York.

This work was shared with me by a fellow teacher in Northeast Philadelphia before I began the course. It sparked my interest in learning more about the history of Northeast Philadelphia and focusing on Northeast Philadelphia in my unit.

[Washington College - Campus Events]. (2017, April 18). "Nickel and Dime: On (Not) Getting By in America," a talk by Barbara Ehrenreich [Video]. YouTube.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ezeitD4jG17g&t=2388s>

This was an interview with author Barbara Ehrenreich in which she talks about class and her book about the working poor, Nickel and Dime.

Strieb, L. Carini, P., Kanevsky, R. & Wice, B. (2012). *Prospect's Descriptive Processes: The Child, The Art of Teaching, The Classroom and School: Revised Edition*. (M. Himley, Ed). The Prospect Archives and Center for Education and Research.

This book is a how-to for the reflective practices developed for teacher learning cooperatives by the Prospect Center. I used it as a reference for how to conduct a reflection on a word and close reading.

Torre (2011) *Who's Afraid Of Post Blackness?: What It Means To Be Black Now*. New York: Free Press.

This article was a course reading that discussed being Black in America and racism on a personal micro level.

Student Resources

Three annotated lists of materials you have reviewed: a bibliography for teachers, reading list for students, and a list of materials for classroom use.

Poetry/ Music that are possible resources for this unit:

Acevedo, E. (2000). *The Poet X*. New York : HarperCollins Publishers.

[Bruce Springsteen]. (2009, October 3). Bruce Springsteen - Streets of Philadelphia (Official Video) [Video]. YouTube.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4z2DtNW79sQ>

Cisneros, S. (2004). *The House on Mango Street*. Bloomsbury Publishing PLC.

Drew. *Manhattan Script - Dialogue Transcript*. [script-o-rama.com](http://www.script-o-rama.com). http://www.script-o-rama.com/movie_scripts/m/manhattan-script-transcript-woody-allen.html

- [johnniewalker23] (2007, November 23). Stevie Wonder - Living for the City [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rc0XEw4m-3w>
- [luzfarol] malvina reynolds - little boxes [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2_2lGkEU4Xs
- Reynolds, M. (1962) Little Boxes [Lyrics]. Retrieved from <https://genius.com/Malvina-reynolds-little-boxes-lyrics>
- Sanders, Rickie. (2021). Cities Thru the Lens of Race, Class, and Gender [Syllabus]. Philadelphia, PA: Department of Sociology, Temple University.
- Springsteen, Bruce. (1994). Streets of Philadelphia [Lyrics]. Retrieved from <https://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/brucepringsteen/streetsofphiladelphia.html>
- [vitoriancu2011]. (2011, December 7). *Manhattan - Opening scene (Woody Allen, 1979)* [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g2akLhosPEg>
- [wannermusic]. (2020, June 17.) Jay-Z, Alicia Keys - Empire State of Mind [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZxZFCh9GBhg>
- Woodson, J. (2019). *Brown Girl Dreaming*. Penguin.
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4z2DtNW79sQ> - Bruce Springsteen – Streets of

Appendix

Appendix A: **Standards**

Common Core Standards for English Language Arts

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.4](#) - Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of rhymes and other repetitions of sounds (e.g., alliteration) on a specific verse or stanza of a poem or section of a story or drama.

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.5](#) - Analyze how a drama's or poem's form or structure (e.g., soliloquy, sonnet) contributes to its meaning

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.10](#) - By the end of the year, read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poems, in the grades 6-8 text complexity band proficiently, with scaffolding as needed at the high end of the range.

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.7.4](#) - Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience. (Grade-specific expectations for writing types are defined in standards 1-3 above.)

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.7.5](#) - With some guidance and support from peers and adults, develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on how well purpose and audience have been addressed.

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.7.2](#) - Analyze the main ideas and supporting details presented in diverse media and formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) and explain how the ideas clarify a topic, text, or issue under study.

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.7.5](#)- Include multimedia components and visual displays in presentations to clarify claims and findings and emphasize salient points.

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.7.5](#)- Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.

Learning for Justice (Formerly Teaching Tolerance) Social Justice Standards

Identity 1 - ID.6-8.1 - I know and like who I am and can comfortably talk about my family and myself and describe our various group identities.

Identity 5 - ID.6-8.5 - I know there are similarities and differences between my home culture and the other environments and cultures I encounter, and I can be myself in a diversity of settings.

Diversity 6 - DI.6-8.6 - I interact with people who are similar to and different from me, and I show respect to all people.

Diversity 8 - DI.6-8.8 - I am curious and want to know more about other people's histories and lived experiences, and I ask questions respectfully and listen carefully and non-judgmentally

Teacher Created Materials

Appendix B: What is a City? Handout

Part 1: Definitions of city

Directions: We will read through these definitions several times. As we read through them, annotate them.

- Circle words you do not know.
- Put exclamation marks next to words or phrases you find surprising.
- Put question marks next to words or phrases you find confusing.
- Highlight words or phrases that you personally think are most important to defining a city.

City: (noun) a *city* is an area in which a large number of people live fairly close together. *Cities* usually have their own separate governments and systems for maintaining and providing utilities and transportation. **(From vocabulary.com)**

City: (noun) an inhabited place of greater size, population, or importance than a town or village **(From www.merriam-webster.com)**

City: (noun) relatively permanent and highly organized center of population, of greater size or importance than a town or village. The name *city* is given to certain urban communities by virtue of some legal or conventional distinction that can vary between regions or nations. In most cases, however, the concept of city refers to a particular type of community, the urban community, and its culture, known as “urbanism.” **(From britannica.com)**

Part 1: Photos of a city

Directions: We will do close readings of photos of Philadelphia.

1. Describe the photo in great detail, but try not to make inferences.
2. Make inferences based on your previous description.
3. Pick some of the terms we used to describe cities that you think fit this picture.

Write them on sticky notes. Stick them to the photo.

Gallery Walk photo 1:

Details: _____

Inferences: _____

City words that fit this picture: _____

Gallery Walk photo 2:

Details: _____

Inferences: _____

City words that fit this picture: _____

Gallery Walk photo 3:

Details: _____

Inferences: _____

City words that fit this picture: _____

Appendix C: “Stoop-Sitting” from *The Poet-X* by Elizabeth Acevedo *handout*

Stoop-Sitting
From *The Poet-X*
by Elizabeth Acevedo

The summer is made for stoop-sitting
and since it's the last week before school starts,
Harlem is opening its eyes to September.
I scope out this block I've always called home.
Watch the old church ladies, chancletas flapping
against the pavement, their mouths letting loose a train
of island Spanish as they spread he said, she said.
Peep Papote from down the block
as he opens the fire hydrant
so the little kids have a sprinkler to run through.
Listen to honking cabs with bachata blaring
from their open windows
compete with basketballs echoing from the Little Park.
Laugh at the viejos—my father not included—
finishing their dominoes tournament with hard slaps
and yells of “Capicu!”
Shake my head as even the drug dealers posted up
near the building smile more in the summer, their hard scowls
softening into glue-eyed stares in the direction
of the girls in summer dresses and short shorts:
“Ayo, Xiomara, you need to start wearing dresses like that!”
“Shit, you'd be wifed up before going back to school.”
“Especially knowing you church girls are all freaks.”
But I ignore their taunts, enjoy this last bit of freedom,
and wait for the long shadows to tell me
when Mami is almost home from work,
when it's time to sneak upstairs.

Appendix D:

Neighborhood Imagery Poem Graphic Organizer

You can cross out and replace any of the sentence starters as long as you focus on the imagery of the neighborhood.

The _____ (time of year) is made for _____
and since it's _____,
_____ (neighborhood name or Northeast Philly or Philly) is _____.

I _____.

Watch _____

_____.

Peep _____

_____.

Listen to _____

_____.

Laugh at _____

_____.

Shake my head as _____

_____.

“ _____ ”

“ _____ ”

“ _____ ”

But I _____

and wait for _____
when _____,

when _____.

Poem Title: _____

Appendix D: Other Songs and Poems about cities that can be used as resources for this unit.

Lyrics to Stevie Wonder LIVING FOR THE CITY

A boy is born in hard time Mississippi
Surrounded by four walls that ain't so pretty
His parents give him love and affection
To keep him strong, moving in the right direction
Living just enough, just enough for the city
His father works some days for fourteen hours
And you can bet, he barely makes a dollar
His mother goes to scrub the floors for many
And you'd best believe, she hardly gets a penny
Living just enough, just enough for the city
His sister's black, but she is sho'nuff pretty
Her skirt is short, but Lord her legs are sturdy
To walk to school, she's got to get up early
Her clothes are old, but never are they dirty
Living just enough, just enough for the city
Her brother's smart, he's got more sense than many
His patience's long, but soon he won't have any
To find a job is like a haystack needle
'Cause where he lives they don't use colored people
Living just enough, just enough for the city, yeah
Everybody, city, yeah
(Living just enough for the city, whoa) Ain't nothin' but the city
(Living just enough for the city, whoa) Everybody, city, yeah
(Living just enough for the city, whoa) Ain't nothin' but the city
(Living just enough for the city, whoa) Living for the city, yeah
(Living just enough, for the city, whoa) The funky, cryin' city
(Living just enough, for the city, whoa) Living for the city
Ain't nothin' but the city
(Living just enough, for the city, whoa) Everybody clap you hand together now
(Living just enough, for the city, whoa) For the city
(Living just enough, for the city, whoa) For the city, yeah, yeah
(Living just enough, for the city, whoa)
(Living just enough, for the city, whoa)
The bus for New York City!
Hey bus driver, I'm getting on that, hold it
Thanks a lot
Wow, New York, just like I pictured it

Skyscrapers and everything
Psst, hey, hey brother, hey come here slick
Hey you look, you look hip man
Hey, you wanna make yourself five bucks, man?
Yeah, brother
Look here, run this across the street for me right quick
Okay, run this across the street for me
What? (Up against that goddamn car!) Huh? (Let's go)
I didn't know, what?
Gimme your hands up, you punk
I'm just going across the street
Put that leg up, shut your mouth
Hell no, what did I do?
Okay, turn around, turn around
Put your hands behind your back, let's go, let's go
A jury of your peers having found you guilty, ten years
What?
Come on, come on, get in that cell, nigger
God, Lord
His hair is long, his feet are hard and gritty
He spends the life walking the streets of New York City
He's almost dead from breathing in air pollution
He tried and fought, but to him there's no solution
Living just enough, just enough for the city (yeah, yeah, yeah)
I hope you hear inside my voice of sorrow
And that it motivates you to make a better tomorrow
This place is cruel, nowhere could be much colder
If we don't change, the world will soon be over
Living just enough, stop giving just enough for the city

Source: [Musixmatch](#)

Songwriters: Stevie Wonder

Living For The City lyrics © Jack Russell Music, Black Bull Music, Jobete Music Co. Ltd.,
Jobete Music Co Inc, Black-bull-music, Inc., Jobete Music Co., Inc.

Lyrics to Jay-Z and Alicia Keys EMPIRE STATE OF MIND

Yeah

Yeah I'm out that Brooklyn, now I'm down in Tribeca
Right next to DeNiro, but I'll be hood forever
I'm the new Sinatra, and, since I made it here
I can make it anywhere, yeah, they love me everywhere
I used to cop in Harlem, all of my Dominicanos

Right there up on Broadway, pull me back to that McDonald's
Took it to my stashbox, 560 State St
Catch me in the kitchen like a Simmons wippin' pastry's
Cruisin' down 8th St, off white Lexus
Drivin' so slow, but BK is from Texas
Me, I'm out that Bed-Stuy, home of that boy Biggie
Now I live on Billboard and I brought my boys with me
Say what up to Ty-Ty, still sippin' Mai Tais
Sittin' courtside, Knicks and Nets give me high five
Nigga I be Spike'd out, I could trip a referee (come on, come on, come on)
Tell by my attitude that I'm most definitely from
In New York (ayy, ah-ha) (uh, yeah)
Concrete jungle (yeah) where dreams are made of
There's nothin' you can't do (yeah) (okay)
Now you're in New York (ah-ha, ah-ha, ah-ha) (uh, yeah)
These streets will make you feel brand new (new)
Big lights will inspire you (come on) (okay)
Let's hear it for New York (you're welcome, OG) (come on)
New York (yeah), New York (uh) (I made you hot)
Catch me at the X with OG at a Yankee game
Shit, I made the Yankee hat more famous then a Yankee can
You should know I bleed blue, but I ain't a Crip though
But I got a gang of niggas walkin' with my clique though
Welcome to the melting pot, corners where we sellin' rock
Afrika Bambataa shit, home of the hip-hop
Yellow cab, gypsy cab, dollar cab, holla back
For foreigners it ain't fair, they act like they forgot how to act
Eight million stories, out there in the naked
City is a pity, half of y'all won't make it
Me, I got a plug, Special Ed "I Got It Made"
If Jesus payin' Lebron, I'm payin' Dwyane Wade
Three dice cee-lo, three card Monte
Labor Day Parade, rest in peace Bob Marley
Statue of Liberty, long live the World Trade (come on, come on, come on)
Long live the King yo, I'm from the Empire State that's
In New York (ayy, ah-ha) (uh, yeah)
Concrete jungle (yeah) where dreams are made of
There's nothin' you can't do (that boy good) (okay)
Now you're in New York (uh, yeah)
(Welcome to the bright lights, baby)
These streets will make you feel brand new
Big lights will inspire you (okay)

Let's hear it for New York (come on)
New York (yeah), New York (uh)
Lights is blinding, girls need blinders
So they can step out of bounds quick, the sidelines is
Lined with casualties, who sip the life casually
Then gradually become worse, don't bite the apple, Eve
Caught up in the in-crowd, now you're in style
End of the winter gets cold, en vogue, with your skin out
City of sin, it's a pity on the whim
Good girls gone bad, the city's filled with them
Mommy took a bus trip, now she got her bust out
Everybody ride her, just like a bus route
"Hail Mary" to the city, you're a virgin
And Jesus can't save you, life starts when the church end
Came here for school, graduated to the high life
Ball players, rap stars, addicted to the limelight
MDMA got you feelin' like a champion (come on, come on, come on)
The city never sleeps, better slip you an Ambien
In New York (ayy, ah-ha) (uh, yeah)
Concrete jungle where dreams are made of
There's nothin' you can't do (okay)
Now you're in New York (uh, yeah)
These streets will make you feel brand new
Big lights will inspire you (okay)
Let's hear it for New York (come on)
New York (yeah), New York (uh)
One hand in the air for the big city
Street lights, big dreams, all lookin' pretty
No place in the world that could compare
Put your lighters in the air everybody say
"Yeah, yeah" (come on, come on, come on)
"Yeah, yeah"
In New York (uh, yeah)
Concrete jungle where dreams are made of
There's nothin' you can't do (okay)
Now you're in New York (uh, yeah)
These streets will make you feel brand new
Big lights will inspire you
Let's hear it for New York (come on)
New York (yeah), New York (uh)

Source: [LyricFind](#)

Songwriters: Alexander William Shuckburgh / Alicia J Augello-Cook / Shawn C Carter /
Angela Hunte / Bert Keyes / Sylvia Robinson / Janette Sewell
Empire State Of Mind lyrics © Kobalt Music Publishing Ltd., Sony/ATV Music Publishing
LLC, Warner Chappell Music, Inc, Global Talent Publishing, Universal Music Publishing
Group

Little boxes on the hillside
Little boxes made of ticky tacky
Little boxes on the hillside
Little boxes all the same
There's a pink one and a green one
And a blue one and a yellow one
And they're all made out of ticky tacky
And they all look just the same
And the people in the houses
All went to the university
Where they were put in boxes
And they came out all the same
And there's doctors and lawyers
And business executives
And they're all made out of ticky tacky
And they all look just the same
And they all play on the golf course
And drink their martinis dry
And they all have pretty children
And the children go to school
And the children go to summer camp
And then to the university
Where they are put in boxes
And they come out all the same
And the boys go into business
And marry and raise a family
In boxes made of ticky tacky
And they all look just the same
There's a pink one and a green one
And a blue one and a yellow one
And they're all made out of ticky tacky
And they all look just the same

Source: <https://genius.com/Malvina-reynolds-little-boxes-lyrics>

Songwriters: Malvina Reynolds

"Streets Of Philadelphia"

**I was bruised and battered, I couldn't tell what I felt
I was unrecognizable to myself
I saw my reflection in a window, I didn't know my own face
Oh brother are you gonna leave me wasting away
On the Streets of Philadelphia**

**I walked the avenue, 'til my legs felt like stone
I heard the voices of friends vanished and gone
At night I could hear the blood in my veins
Just as black and whispering as the rain
On the Streets of Philadelphia**

**Ain't no angel gonna greet me
It's just you and I my friend
And my clothes don't fit me no more
I walked a thousand miles
Just to slip this skin**

**The night has fallen, I'm lying awake
I can feel myself fading away
So receive me brother with your faithless kiss
Or will we leave each other alone like this
On the Streets of Philadelphia**

<https://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/brucespringsteen/streetsophiladelphia.html>

It's Rarely Sunny in Philadelphia

BY VINCENT FLANNERY

Being a Philadelphia sports fan is like being a Hawaiian who likes icicles...
what's the point

I barely remember the two years the Flyers won in the seventies

Now the Sixers in 83 that was amazing, but since then...nothing

When I was fifteen I seen the Phillies win it all back in 1980

The next time they won it all I had a son who was fifteen, 28 long years

Oh, and the Eagles, they never won at all, but they're the "gold standard of the league"

In desperation I once rooted for a horse named Smarty Jones to win the Triple Crown

He was from Philly

You guessed it,

He lost at the wire as my son and I watched in the rain on the Parkway right near the Rocky statue

In fact, Rocky is this towns biggest sports hero, shame he's imaginary.

But as of late I have been cheering my mighty Sixer's

Just honoring the guy who made famous the 'who needs practice' quote
They have now lost 21 in a row, a team record
Now our sights are set on the league record at 26 loses in a row
I may take off from work that day
Maybe take a lunch and go downtown and eat with Rocky
Hopefully it isn't raining

Awaking in New York

BY MAYA ANGELOU

Curtains forcing their will
against the wind,
children sleep,
exchanging dreams with
seraphim. The city
drags itself awake on
subway straps; and
I, an alarm, awake as a
rumor of war,
lie stretching into dawn,
unmasked and unheeded.

Harlem

BY LANGSTON HUGHES

What happens to a dream deferred?
Does it dry up
like a raisin in the sun?
Or fester like a sore—

And then run?

Does it stink like rotten meat?

Or crust and sugar over—

like a syrupy sweet?

Maybe it just sags

like a heavy load.

Or does it explode?

From NYC students:

When I look at the New York sky, I see little pencils fly
Flying thru the sky, writing words way up high
Writing a poem of many hues-reds, oranges, greens, blues
How did it get up there so high, was it written by a butterfly?
Or was sit a giant skipping across the New York sky
Bending over the clouds to write
Thinking a million thoughts that you can think
In shining sunset purple ink
Most see only a concrete paradise, rough blocks, the scent of gasoline and sugared nuts,
buildings building up, lives flying by, planes overhead, people below, sirens wailing, and car
horns blaring,
But there is a poem growing from the core of this big apple.

LOVE LETTER TO PHILADELPHIA BY YOLANDA WISHER

Dear Philly,

Sonia always puts the words a place called before your name. Girl, you've been called so many names. Been called out of your name, too. Philly. Illadelph. 215. Killadelphia. You are corner stores and cranes, murals and museums, litter and Love Park.

I used to be a girl poet from the suburbs in the backseat of my stepfather Doug's army-green sedan, yearning for you to look my way with your tragic smile. Doug knew you like the back of his hand; I memorized all your street names: Indian Queen Lane. Rising Sun Avenue. Minerva Street. Venango was a poisonous fruit of a word, cassava-sweet:
Riding the R5 down to Market East Station to promenade in the Gallery in a tennis dress with my hair wrapped tight and smooth like Halle Berry's in Boomerang, I acted grown so you'd notice me. I would drive myself into you one day:

And then I started to really hear you, came to love you beyond pity and promiscuity. Fed you black beans and Jean Toomer's "Georgia Dusk" at Tovia's Thrift Store out West. Sat straight-backed in a plastic chair—room M18 in the Bonnell Building of CCP—while you coaxed a soprano out of me, and I sang—yeah, I sang—"Thank You, Lord" with your sinners and your savers. I caught your spirit.

You're always in season, blooming with another renaissance. Artists all up in your first forests, heathens all up under your churches and mosques. We come to you as atheists and leave as preachers. Railroads run through your gut. Harriet's tribe raced through here on their way to Canada. Archaeological shards vibrating with black-bottomed beats.

Sometimes I hear heels outside my window and mistake a woman for a horse from a neighborhood stable. Once I saw a young woman, like a petulant-shouldered Ntozake Shange with black and blonde braids, red lipstick, and tight blue jeans, riding a stallion down the middle of modern-day Morris Street like she'd been doing it for centuries. I think these women are you. No offense, I see you in the stray cats on the block, too. I can't name all of the dangers or kindnesses in the broken glass of their eyes.

Walking up Schoolhouse Lane makes me think about old black schoolhouses in the woods of Northern Neck, Virginia, where my people are really from. Proud teachers in crinolines. Children dusty, but hungry for knowledge. When I taught at the Quaker School four blocks up, your kids would walk alongside me in the morning with bags of red-hot pork rinds, hungry for knowledge. Eleven-year-old Cheryl would be on her way to Pickett Middle School where the hard rock (she said bad) kids didn't let her learn. Could you take me to your school?

I'm still thinking about how to take Cheryl (and a couple of the hard rock kids) with me. And here I am, walking my daily, grown woman sojourn through you. Someone's planted irises and tiger lilies in a bed à la feng shui next to the train overpass. Past the Mactavish home, huge, with its big guard dog that has learned to like smooth rocks like me. The droopy branches of their heirloom trees form a canopy over the pavement.

When I get to Pulaski, I reminisce over Jackie-turned-Sis-Het-Heru who years ago saw my husband Mark on the street and said, "Here, take these books to your woman. I know she is a bibliophile." Hundreds of books from her personal library, a Ph.D at Temple University. She had forsaken the academic gods up North for your Egyptian ones along Germantown Avenue, rocking a bald head and a tunic in December. We wheeled her Baldwins and Emechetas home in a little red shopping cart. And so, as I stroll through your Green Society Hill streets, I say a simple prayer to/for Jackie-turned-Sis-Het-Heru, which is also a prayer to/for you.

And I get to singing something out loud, maybe one of my own songs or some jazz standard I'm practicing for a gig, and it's when I'm walking up Schoolhouse like this, or any of your streets whose names I've made romantic, that I feel like I'm on stage—a real chanteuse—and I'm perfectly pitched as I get to Wayne Avenue, not before I nod towards your brothers on the halfway house porch and to the banana tree in front of the Sawyer house. I got married in the Sawyers' backyard, beyond that banana tree.

Born to you and not from you. Bound for you and bound to you. I find pieces of you on each block and gather them up. You give me love. Like the brother walking up the street in a funk and a daze. Like the kids smoking an L in the brash light of morning. Like the sister on a corner prowl. The part of you I love best is darker than Poe.

I was searching for a pyramid in you, Philly. But pyramids don't grow here, and that's alright. Poems do.

Love, Yolanda

BECAUSE THERE WAS A GUN (2016)

By 4th grader, Philadelphia Public School

Because there was a gun

My cousin's . . . life was done

Because there was a gun

She had no more fun

Because there was a gun

His life was bad

Because there was a gun

She felt really really sad

Because there was a gun

Her family had to run

The Liberty Bell

BY RICH BEATO

One cracked bell rings

Mighty echoes of immortality

Silent across two centuries

Hand after hand reaches out to touch and to hear

Our shared ancestral heritage in which the bell tolls

Deafening in its permanent silence

IDEAL CITIES

BY ERIKA MEITNER

Ideal cities are cities where the neighbors

Play soul music all night long and don't care

Who they bother because who doesn't like Holly Ghost Or Loose Booty?

Ideal cities have at least one drunk lady

Outside the liquor store mornings, who asks you to hold

Her cigarette so she can lean in to touch your baby

In ideal cities, the pharmacist knows your prescriptions By heart.

In ideal cities your neighbor sells pot to the copy

For a living, though you've never seen him do it and most days

He wears a caftan to glue rhinestones on the cement frogs

In his yard.

On trash night in ideal cities your other neighbors

Swap stories in the alleys.

Ideal cities

Have margins that aren't pretty or bleak

And are without proper representation

But have no grievances.

My ideal city

Has a wish list written on the back

Of an envelope scrap, an ATM slip.

My ideal city is peripheral and claims

Uneven sidewalks. In the ideal city

My neighbor is a taxi driver.

My neighbor is at sea.

My neighbor thinks

His house is haunted

While his wife's away

On business.

My neighbor

Gives a robber a glass

Of Chateau Malescot St. Exupery

And a hug.

In the ideal city my neighbors

Are a multi generational

Family and one guy

Who puts chairs

In the street

To save a spot

For our moving truck