

Curriculum Toolkit

CHICAGO
ARCHITECTURE
BIENNIAL

The
Available
City

DEAR EDUCATORS,

We are excited to welcome you and your students into the world of the Chicago Architecture Biennial and *The Available City*.

Every two years, the Chicago Architecture Biennial (CAB) hosts a major festival at sites across Chicago. Through public exhibitions, events, and programs, CAB offers a chance to look, listen, create, observe, think about, and discuss how architecture shapes everything around us. The Biennial is a platform that brings together international voices on the most important topics and questions facing architecture, design, and beyond—and we welcome you and your students to join the conversation.

This toolkit was created in the fall of 2021 on the occasion of the fourth edition of the Chicago Architecture Biennial, titled *The Available City*. *The Available City* addresses the transformative power of local communities and residents in reimagining vacant lots citywide. Engaging youth in conversations about the future of our city is critical, and we hope this toolkit provides some of the resources necessary to encourage your students to reimagine their communities and city through the lens of architecture and design.

Throughout the year, CAB programs and resources for students, educators, and families promote exploration of the built environment and encourage audiences to see architecture and design as tools for change. A wide variety of free educational programs include curriculum resources and trainings, field trips, student competitions, workshops, family programs, and a youth council.

We invite you to join us to listen, learn, and collaborate.

Sincerely,

Rachel Kaplan, Director
David Brown, Artistic Director
Chicago Architecture Biennial, Fall 2021

ABOUT THE CHICAGO ARCHITECTURE BIENNIAL

The Chicago Architecture Biennial (CAB) is a non-profit organization that hosts conversations, exhibitions, public programs, and performances highlighting the importance of architecture and design in shaping our communities, cities, and environment. CAB's mission is to engage and inspire a diverse audience of designers, educators, advocates, and students to see the transformative power of architecture and envision a future that is equitable and sustainable. CAB provides programming and educational opportunities year-round and hosts a major citywide exposition about architecture and design every two years in sites across Chicago and digitally. The fourth edition, held in 2021, is titled *The Available City* and looks at the transformative power of community-led design to reimagine vacant lots in Chicago.

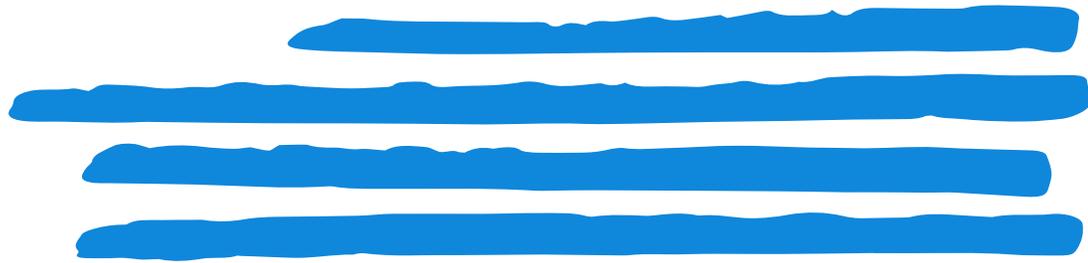
DID YOU KNOW?

The word biennial means
“occurring (or happening)
every two years.”

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WHAT'S INCLUDED IN THIS TOOLKIT

The toolkit provides both general lessons around architecture and design as well as content specific to *The Available City* that reinforces these larger lessons through the specific example of community-led design of vacant spaces in Chicago. The goal of this toolkit is to show students how architecture and design shape their daily lives, and in turn, how they can use architecture and design to shape their lives, communities, city, and world.

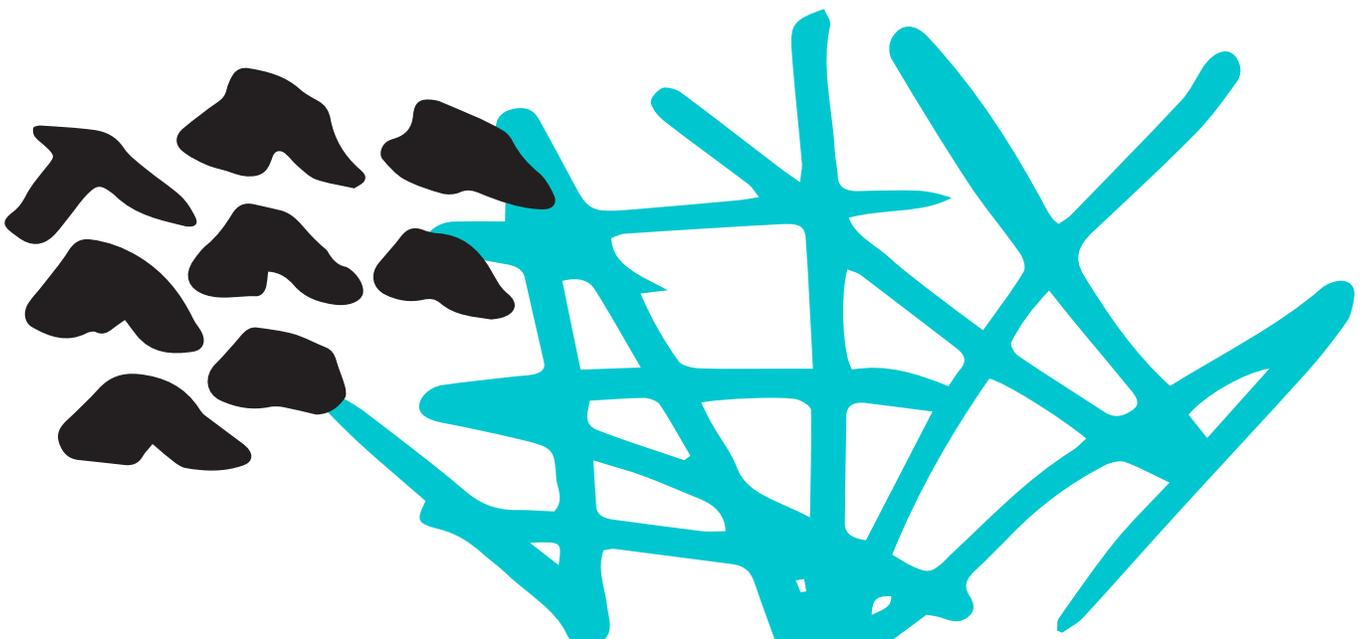
LEARNING FRAMEWORK: The Framework includes information about why and how architecture and design are relevant for your classroom; curriculum standards; learning goals; and essential questions and understandings that the toolkit aims to address.

SITE VISITS: The Site Visits take students to three spaces across Chicago where everyday people have worked to transform vacant spaces into vibrant community resources through design. The Site Visits include background information on the sites to share with students as well as discussion questions.

EXPLORATIONS: The Explorations are activities structured around the essential understandings outlined in the Learning Framework that range from bell ringer activities to more in-depth projects. Each exploration includes ways to scale back or dig deeper depending on the needs and interests of your students.

RESOURCES: The Resources are additional materials, readings, and examples that can provide you with background information or be shared with students to supplement Explorations.

GLOSSARY: The Glossary includes student-friendly definitions of key terms used in the toolkit. Terms and phrases included in the glossary are italicized throughout the toolkit.





ABOUT THE AVAILABLE CITY

The Available City is a decade-long project developed by 2021 Chicago Architecture Biennial Artistic Director David Brown. *The Available City* is rooted in community engagement—the fundamental approach brings together design thinkers with community stakeholders, residents, and students to chart new, impactful uses for design. Conceived of as an urban design approach that responds to the reality of the existing city fabric, *The Available City* is designed to support the work of multiple players—designers, community members, and local organizations. Through sustained and deep collaboration, opportunities emerge to reimagine and remake the city through design interventions.

Since its inception, *The Available City* has focused on identifying uses for vacant lots owned by the city of Chicago. These unused sites—which currently number more than 10,000—are concentrated in the city’s most under-resourced neighborhoods on the west and south sides. In aggregate, these sites represent an area larger than Chicago’s central business district. The project demonstrates how communal spaces can and do shape cities and the role of architecture and design as a tool that can be used by both neighborhood residents and architects to reimagine communities and cities.



“Architecture is inhabited sculpture.”

– Constantin Brancusi

Learning Framework

Information about why and how architecture and design connect to learning in your classroom.



LEARNING FRAMEWORK

This learning framework introduces core components of *architecture* and *design* as they are aligned with CAB's mission and vision. As you read through the materials included in this toolkit, you can refer back to the learning framework to identify connections between CAB's programming and relevant areas of inquiry in your classroom.

The first section offers student-friendly insights into the nature of architecture and design. How should we understand these topics? In what ways are they relevant to our lives?

In the second section, we ask, why study architecture? Here, we propose several ways in which the skills and dispositions of architecture might inform learning goals for the classroom, as well as areas where they overlap with more familiar topics and disciplines.

INTRODUCING BIG IDEAS ABOUT ARCHITECTURE AND DESIGN

As you will see in the quotes in this section, architecture is about more than just buildings; it has to do with all the different ways we interact with our built environment. Architecture, like all forms of design, is fundamentally about the relationships between people and purposes. We can ask the same questions of a building as we can of a teacup: Who made this? What is it for? And why should it matter?

Below are key insights and questions we hope you and your students will consider throughout their engagement with CAB's programs and materials. They are written to be student-friendly, open-ended, and generative.

Feel free to introduce the following information in the classroom and use it directly in your activities and discussions with your students.

ENDURING UNDERSTANDINGS

Ways to think about architecture and design in the classroom

1. EVERY CITY HAS A STRUCTURE.

Cities are places where large numbers of people live in close proximity to one another. Because of this, cities typically have a more visible *built environment* (e.g., buildings, roads, etc.) and robust systems of government, transportation, and infrastructure. People interact with these environments and systems all the time, whether they know it or not. Our neighborhoods and buildings influence the way we relate to ourselves, our spaces, and each other.

Most cities have been built up over time, though some are older than others. Some cities were carefully planned while others evolved more organically. Moreover, each city has its own unique challenges. Because of this, what we see in Chicago can be connected to other cities around the world.

2. ALL SPACES ARE DESIGNED, AND ANYTHING THAT IS DESIGNED CAN BE REDESIGNED.

Everything from your home, to the street outside, to your classroom is a result of design. As we look around the spaces we inhabit, we can remind ourselves that everything in our environment was put there by someone for a reason. Before we got here, someone else was thinking and making choices about how things should be set up.

“Good design is obvious. Great design is transparent.”

– Joe Sparano

Remember, spaces have histories; we didn't just land here. Long before today's cities were established, the land on which they exist was tended by Indigenous populations. Before that, the complex interactions of plants and animals shaped the landscape. Whether intentionally or unintentionally, spaces are constantly being redesigned. As conscious, thinking beings, we have the capacity to make choices about how we want our spaces to be designed, and for whom.

3. EVERYONE IS A DESIGNER.

Whether we realize it or not, we make design choices all the time. Every time we pick out an item of clothing to wear or decide what to put on our bedroom wall, we are thinking and acting like designers. These choices are based on what we're drawn to—our favorite colors, shapes, textures, and styles. Just like we express ourselves through our clothes, music, or hairstyles, we can also express our worldview in the way we contribute to the design of physical spaces, whether that's in our own home or in a public square. In this way, learning about design and architecture is not just for the professionals; it can be a source of interest and fun for anyone.

4. WE SHAPE OUR CITY AND OUR CITY SHAPES US.

Architects play a big role in influencing the design of cities, but it takes lots of different people and roles to shape the way a city functions. While some people may have positions of formal authority in our cities—like the mayor, alderpeople, elected officials, and civic leaders—it's important to remember that power doesn't always come from formal authority. All people in a community have varying levels of decision-making power and responsibility.

Through means like volunteering, *activism*, and organizing, anybody can have an impact on how a city is run. But it's not just one-directional. Just as we shape our cities, they also shape us. The realities of the built environment affect the way we live, work, learn, and experience every day.

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

Wonderings that can fuel our curiosity and learning around architecture and design

1. WHO DOES DESIGN SERVE? HOW DOES IT SHOW UP IN OUR LIVES?
2. WHAT ROLES DO PEOPLE PLAY IN MAKING AND TRANSFORMING CITIES?
3. WHO DECIDES HOW SPACES GET USED? HOW DO THESE DECISIONS GET MADE?
4. IN WHAT WAYS DO WE SHAPE OUR CITY, AND HOW DOES OUR CITY SHAPE US?



“Whatever good things we build end up building us.”

– Jim Rohn

WHY STUDY ARCHITECTURE?

“To make improvements and help be a change agent in the communities and places in which you exist.”

“The field of architecture and design opens many potential career paths. One can go the traditional route and work in a design firm, or apply the skills learned to products, fashion, furniture, user experience, or a whole slew of other disciplines.”

“Studying architecture gives you choices in the work you do. Architecture teaches analysis, visual communication, strategic thinking, and persuasion—skills relevant to a large number of fields.”

“If you choose to practice architecture, be ready to be a pioneer: creating new markets, firing unworthy clients, and steering your own course.”

“Architecture is a great foundation for understanding how the world works. It touches on a variety of related disciplines and teaches you how to think laterally about a problem. What solutions seem crazy but might actually work better?”

“You might learn to see many possibilities beyond the obvious ones.”

“Design brings to fruition and gives you the skill sets needed to listen to competing forces, seek solutions and love the problem. Architects collaborate with a large group of stakeholders and help them answer the question what if? why? and how?”

“The opportunity to learn to optimistically engage and address complex social and physical puzzles at every scale.”

“Because it is the most fulfilling profession. The skills an architect develops can help with a simple design problem, but it can also help solve climate change, hunger, equity issues, etc. Architecture is not about simply design, it is about problem solving, which happens to be well designed.”

“After a rigorous and thoughtful study of design, one aspires to deliver beautiful architecture that is functional, creative, economical, and sustainable. Great architecture synthesizes art and engineering, creating spaces that enrich the human spirit and achieve stewardship with nature.”

TRY THIS!

Read through the quotes above. Choose one that you think is interesting. Discuss it with a partner. What do you think it means?



“I try to give people a different way of looking at their surroundings. That’s art to me.”

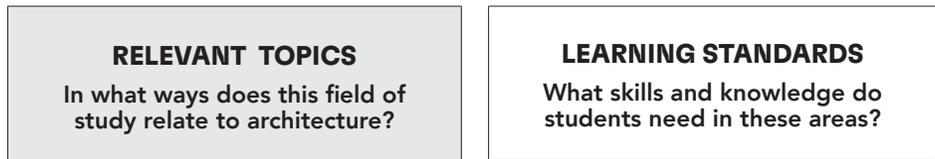
– Maya Lin

STANDARDS FOR LEARNING

Understanding architecture and design across disciplines

As you can see, there are many reasons to study architecture, only some of which have to do with becoming an architect as your job.

Architecture, like any field of study, is made up of many different skills, abilities, and understandings of how the world works. It's a multidisciplinary field that draws on social sciences like anthropology, geography, psychology, and civics; "hard" sciences like ecology and earth science; visual arts and design; and even language, literacy, and communication skills!



Social Science & Civics	Earth Science & Ecology	Engineering Design	Visual Art & Design	ELA/Literacy
<p>Cultural histories</p> <p>Political processes and decision-making</p> <p>Organizing and advocacy</p>	<p>Land use</p> <p>Sustainability</p> <p>Environmental justice</p>	<p>Defining problems</p> <p>Understanding systems</p> <p>Prototyping solutions</p>	<p>Visual literacy / culture(s)</p> <p>Maps, symbols, and representations</p> <p>Human-centered design</p>	<p>Expressing opinions</p> <p>Research and analysis</p> <p>Point of view/perspective</p>
<p>HIGH SCHOOL: SS.G.3.9-12. Analyze and explain how humans impact and interact with the environment and vice versa.</p> <p>HIGH SCHOOL: SS.G.4.9-12. Evaluate how political and economic decisions have influenced cultural and environmental characteristics of various places and regions.</p>	<p>GRADE 4: SS.G.2.4. Analyze how the cultural and environmental characteristics of places in Illinois change over time.</p> <p>GRADE 5: SS.G.2.5. Describe how humans have utilized natural resources in the United States</p>	<p>MS-ESS3-3. Apply scientific principles to design an object, tool, process or system.</p> <p>MS-ETS1-1. Define the criteria and constraints of a design problem with sufficient precision to ensure a successful solution, taking into account relevant scientific principles and potential impacts on people and the natural environment that may limit possible solutions.</p>	<p>CREATING WORKS: VA:Cr2.3.6a Design or redesign objects, places, or systems that meet the identified needs of diverse users.</p> <p>RESPONDING TO WORKS: VA:Re7.1.HSII Recognize and describe personal aesthetic and empathetic responses to the natural world and constructed environments.</p>	<p>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.5.1 Write opinion pieces on topics or texts, supporting a point of view with reasons and information.</p> <p>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.7 Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects based on focused questions, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.</p>

We should attempt to bring nature, houses, and human beings together in a higher unity.”

– Ludwig Mies van der Rohe

LEARNING GOALS

Skills and knowledge we hope students will develop through this toolkit

Below, you'll find a set of cross-curricular learning goals that synthesize these discrete disciplinary skills into comprehensive opportunities for learning about and through architecture and design. These are just a few of the ways in which students might demonstrate their understanding of how architecture and design function in the world.

For specific suggestions on how to address these goals, check out the Explorations section on page 20. There, you'll find activities and tools you can use to fulfill this learning in the classroom.

Through engaging with the resources in this toolkit, students will be able to...

- Identify the various people, spaces, and systems that make up a city
- Describe how people shape their environments through design choices
- Analyze how architecture and design decisions impact people's lives
- Reimagine or reinvent new uses for objects, spaces, and systems to better meet the needs of different people or groups

THINKING LIKE AN ARCHITECT

As you and your students move through this guide, you'll have to put yourselves in the shoes of someone who thinks about the meaning of buildings and spaces. In a sense, you'll be thinking and learning like an architect. You'll be combining skills and knowledge from many different fields of practice to better understand your own role and relationship to your city.

What does it mean to "think like an architect"? See below for some possible answers shared by professional architects and designers from Chicago:

"To love the challenge and purpose of your clients goals and be at the intersection of design, art, culture, equity, technology, craft and construction."

"To constantly learn and be a student of the built world."

"To look at space - the physical embodiment of how and where we live - as key to living a healthy and fulfilling life."

"To be curious about how we shape the world and how it shapes us and to use that curiosity to investigate solutions for how to make the world a better place."

"To consider how the built environment participates in our lives and culture while questioning how it might do so in a better way."

"The architect brings the optimism of improving the world we engage with, while simultaneously carrying the weight of responsibility of not causing harm."

"To be thoughtfully irrational."

"Architects are problem solvers, innovators, and creators of buildings, spaces, and environments. A good way to solve problems is for architects to listen, to collaborate, and to encourage diverse and inclusive dialogue and discussion, as this holistic approach provides tremendous results and community based favorable outcomes."

"It means to constantly be thinking about solutions. Different ways to solve a puzzle. All the while, considering the numerous limitations and parameters involved in the potential solution. It also means understanding the advantages and disadvantages of a potential solution."

"Architects are problem solvers. We seek to fully understand a design problem and context before chasing after solutions. We make design investigations and decisions holistically. We accept it is normal that there is no one right answer to a problem. And we continually look for alternate options and ideas, no matter where we are in the process."

"A science of what might be, rather than what is."

Site Visits

Examples of places in Chicago where everyday people have used design to transform vacant spaces into vibrant community resources.





REIMAGINING VACANT LOTS IN CHICAGO

There are currently more than 10,000 city-owned *vacant lots* in Chicago. There may be an equal number of privately-owned vacant lots across the city, but we have no way of accurately tracking this number. A standard Chicago city lot measures 25 feet x 125 feet. The majority of both city- and privately-owned vacant lots in Chicago are located on the South and West Sides of the city in Black and Brown neighborhoods that have been historically *under-resourced*. Through various initiatives, some lots have been transformed into small parks or community gardens, but the majority remain vacant.

The Available City, the 2021 edition of the Chicago Architecture Biennial, highlights the transformative power of *community-led* design to reimagine city-owned vacant lots in Chicago. The project explored formerly-vacant sites that have become vibrant and active community spaces and positioned these sites as inspiration for what could happen in the many remaining vacant lots across the city.

In the following pages, we'll visit three formerly-vacant sites located in the North Lawndale, Pilsen, and Bronzeville neighborhoods that have been activated in creative ways that respond to the needs and interests of local residents. Throughout this toolkit, we are encouraging and challenging students to reimagine vacant city lots into *collective spaces* with a variety of purposes and goals in mind.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What does it mean for something to be "vacant"?
2. What is collective or communal space? How is it different from another public space?
3. What does it mean to transform a space? How can individual people play a part in transforming spaces?
4. Why is it significant that there are so many vacant lots in Chicago? Why is it significant that most of these vacant lots are located in certain areas of the city and not others?

"Design is Art People Use."

– Ellen Lupton



1 EXCHANGES / EXCHANGING

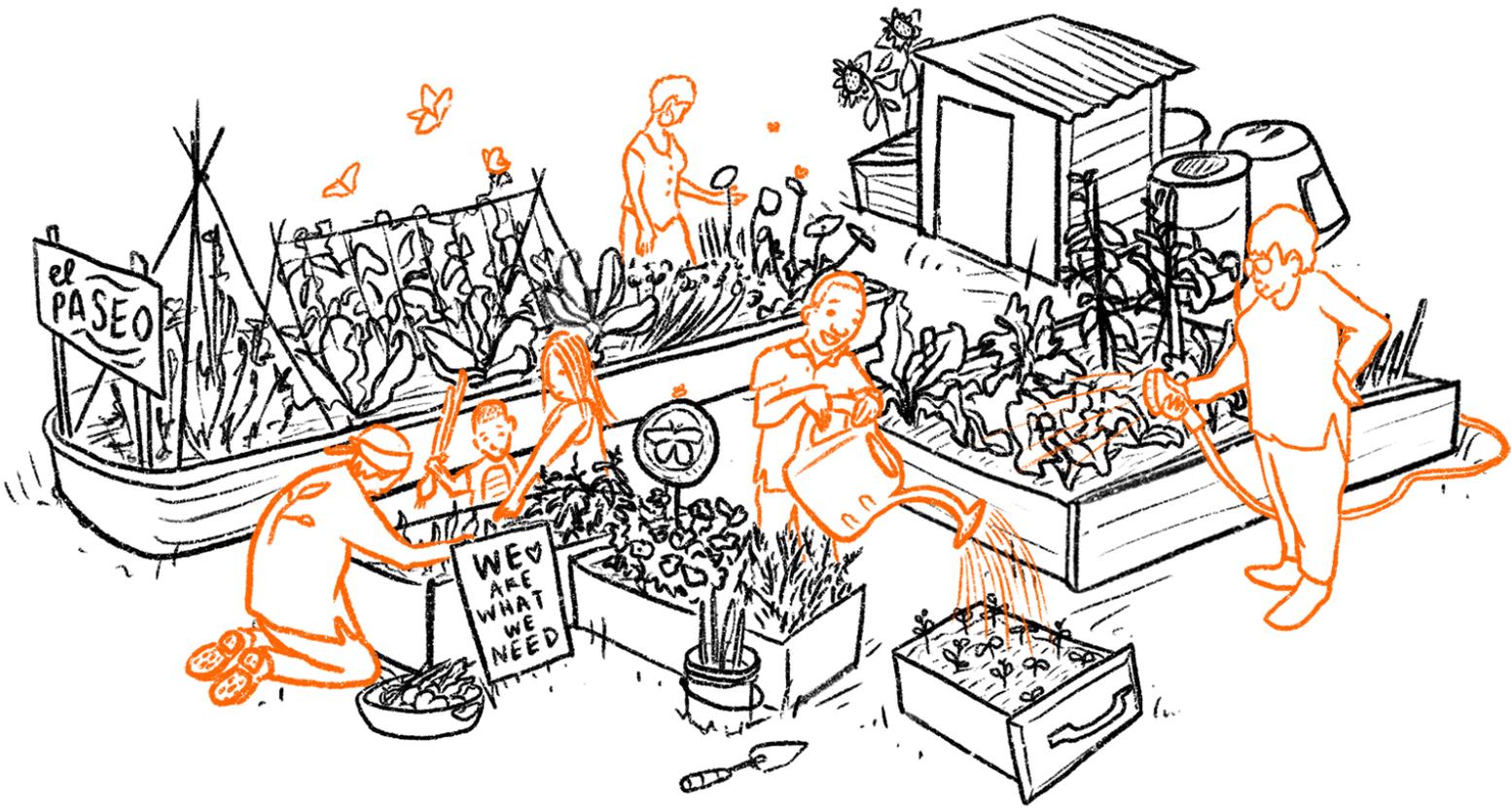
Exchanges can be large or small markets in one location, or a number of spaces spread out across a larger area. The space can be for the exchange of goods, services, knowledge, or something else. Goods are things that people grow or make, such as food or craft. Services are things that people know how to do well, such as repairing a car or providing care for someone who is sick. Exchanging knowledge could mean sharing your experiences or ideas with others. Exchanging is a form of social organization; it is a way for people or groups to interact with one another.

QUESTIONS TO HELP STUDENTS THINK ABOUT SPACES DESIGNED FOR EXCHANGES AND EXCHANGING:

1. What different types of exchanges might be possible? Goods? Services? Knowledge?
2. How might the space change from day to day? Does it rotate?
3. How might historical marketplaces inform your design?
4. Is the space permanent or temporary?

“We shape our buildings; thereafter they shape us.”

– Winston Churchill



2 PLANTS / PLANTING

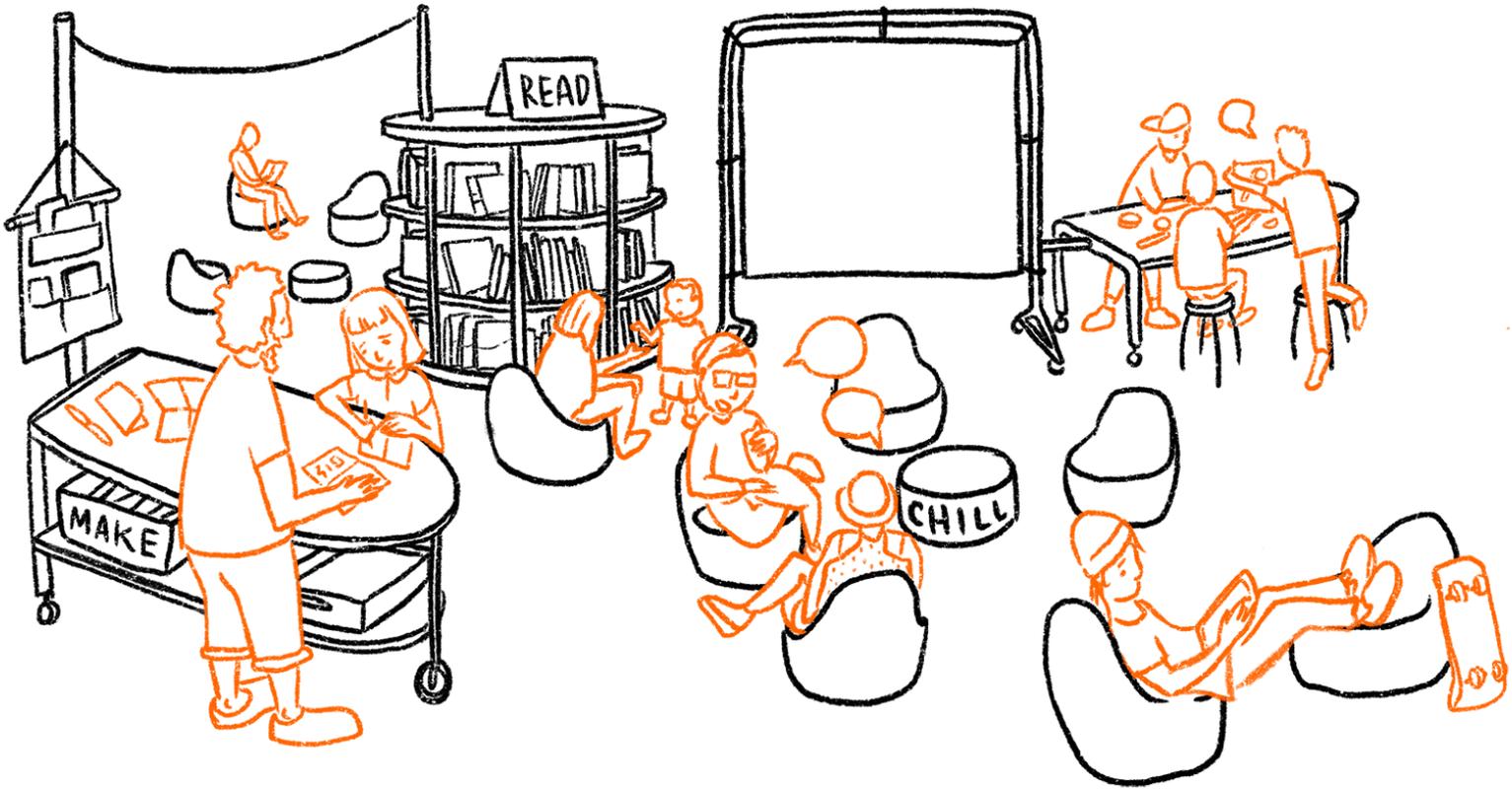
Living in a city, it can be easy to forget that we live amongst nature. Yet, the presence of plants—or a lack thereof—impacts us in significant ways. Plants tell, show, and do so much. Plants tell us what season it is—they are perennial, annual, full, barren, fruiting, flowering. Plants have relationships with pollinators—birds, bees, butterflies, bats—that impact and shape their environment. Plants also have relationships with each other. As they grow, some plants may intertwine, becoming canopies that we can sit under. Or perhaps they form rows that we walk between. They may form a thicket, into which we must move with caution. Plants are sometimes, but not always, food.

QUESTIONS TO HELP STUDENTS THINK ABOUT SPACES DESIGNED FOR EXCHANGES AND EXCHANGING:

1. How does the site grow over time? Does it change when in 'bloom'?
2. What ideas might get 'planted' in this space?
3. Do the plants obscure views? Do they create a clearing? Do they form pathways? Do they make visitors move slowly? Quickly? Does it wind up or down?
4. Is this site a space for humans, or is it meant for animals or plants?
5. Do the plants create furniture? Shading? Beds?

“People ignore design that ignores people.”

– Frank Chimero



3

COMMONS / COMMONING

Commons are spaces or resources that are shared by groups of people. Commons can be natural (land, water, air) or cultural (languages, libraries, history). Because commons are social—they are created by people and for people to use together—people must agree to uphold them. For example, if a fire pit is created as a common space, everyone who uses it is responsible for its care and maintenance. If there is a pile of wood and the wood runs out, the fire pit becomes useless. Creating common spaces and encouraging those who use them to care for them can be a political practice. It brings people together around a shared resource and a common cause. Through this, relationships can develop, trust can be established, and people can become empowered to create their own spaces in the city.

QUESTIONS TO HELP STUDENTS THINK ABOUT SPACES DESIGNED FOR EXCHANGES AND EXCHANGING:

1. What are the shared resources located on the site? Can one take from the site? Can one bring things to it?
2. Does the space have one set purpose or can it be changed for various purposes?
3. What happens at the site? Do events take place there? Is it for entertainment? Nourishment? Education? Production?
4. How do community members interact with the space and with each other?

“Architecture is inhabited sculpture.”

– Constantin Brancusi

CCA ACADEMY PERMAPARK

A Collective Space for Plants and Planting

This site visit shows how six connected vacant lots were transformed into an urban farm and outdoor classroom by students at CCA Academy high school along with community residents and partners in North Lawndale.



VACANT SPACE

Six lots sitting empty across the street from a high school that was looking for ways to teach its students about health and wellness.



REIMAGINED

A thriving urban farm that produces fruits and vegetables and has spaces for outdoor classes to take place.

KEY THEMES / TERMS

Youth-Led Design: Students at CCA Academy created designs for a space that met their needs and interests.

Sustainability: The PermaPark grows healthy, local food using a process that is environmentally friendly.

Community: The PermaPark is a space designed by CCA Academy students for both their own use and for use by members of the larger North Lawndale neighborhood community.

WARM-UP

Discuss as a group or pair and share.

Do you know where your food comes from? What is the last fruit or vegetable that you ate? Where did it come from? How far can you trace it back?

ABOUT THE SITE

The CCA Academy PermaPark is located on the 1300 block of South Pulaski Road in the North Lawndale neighborhood of Chicago. The PermaPark is a permaculture garden and community gathering space that was created on six formerly-vacant lots by students at a high school across the street called CCA Academy. The garden was started in 2013 as part of a program designed to teach students healthy eating and physical activity habits to achieve and maintain lifelong health and well-being. The PermaPark has a vegetable garden, fruit trees, walking paths, a shed made from a repurposed shipping container, and more. In 2021, an outdoor classroom area called the *Living Room* that was designed collaboratively with CCA Academy students and the architecture firm The Bittertang Studio was installed in the garden.

“We wanted to have a pavilion, a space where the community could come—artists, students—and they could perform, they could be heard. And it also provided for our students hands-on, project-based experience so they could learn the whole cycle—us taking care of the earth and the earth taking care of us.”

Dr. Myra Sampson, Principal & CEO, CCA Academy

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. This site includes a food garden and farm on a formerly vacant lot to help create opportunities for healthy eating in North Lawndale. What need could be met by reimagining a vacant space in your community?

2. The students at CCA Academy worked with the architects at The Bittertang Farm to design their outdoor classroom space called the *Living Room*. If you could redesign your classroom, what would you change? What would you keep the same?

EL PASEO COMMUNITY GARDEN

A Collective Space for Commons and Commoning

This site visit shows how unused land next to a former rail line was transformed into a multigenerational communal haven that hosts art and wellness programs, shared meals, performances, an urban garden, beehives, and more, in the Pilsen neighborhood.



VACANT SPACE

Unused land bordering a former rail line.



REIMAGINED

A community gathering space that offers programming and healthy food for residents and visitors of all ages.

KEY THEMES / TERMS

Multigenerational: El Paseo neighbors a building for elderly adults and is surrounded by a community with residents of all ages; it is important to them to provide opportunities for all visitors to interact with one another.

Cultural Heritage: The large mural that spans the sides of two large buildings adjacent to El Paseo celebrates Mexican culture and history.

Gentrification: El Paseo is located in Pilsen, which has been a predominantly Mexican neighborhood for many years. Increasingly, the demographics of the neighborhood are changing as people move to Pilsen from other neighborhoods, driving up the cost of living for long-time residents who have made their homes there.

WARM-UP

Discuss as a group or pair and share.

Throughout Pilsen, beautiful painted murals speak to the history and culture of the neighborhood's Mexican population. As the makeup of the neighborhood changes due to *gentrification*, why is it important to maintain and celebrate Pilsen's murals?

ABOUT THE SITE

El Paseo Community Garden is located at 944 W. 21st Street in the Pilsen neighborhood of Chicago. It is a volunteer-run, 1.1 acre garden and green space that has been serving Pilsen since 2009. El Paseo's mission is to strengthen environmental stewardship and civic engagement while protecting equitable green space on behalf of the community. El Paseo grows not only healthy food, but community leaders as well. The outdoor space has become a community center and partner for anyone willing to share accessible community resources. Since 2009, El Paseo has been fostering community and wellness for Pilsen residents through stewardship, conservation, placemaking, partnerships, programming, and community gardening. Recently, El Paseo added a new piece of land to their community garden and are deciding how to use this space by asking members of their community to share what they would like to see in the garden.

“People have an idea of what a community garden is. When they hear El Paseo Community Garden they automatically ask what we grow, and we’ve really grown beyond that. The possibilities of a community garden, of a community managed space, are endless.”

Paula Acevedo, Co-Director, El Paseo Community Garden

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. El Paseo is a community garden, but they do much more than grow fruits and vegetables. Why do you think they decided to add other things to the garden, like an outdoor grill, game tables, tables and chairs, and artwork?
2. El Paseo is asking community members what they would like to see added to the garden space. What do you think would be a good addition to this space?

OVERTON INCUBATOR

A Collective Space for Exchanges and Exchanging

This site visit shows how a closed Chicago Public Schools elementary school has been turned into a creative incubator space and site for mutual aid in the Bronzeville neighborhood.



VACANT SPACE

A closed elementary school.



REIMAGINED

A community incubator with spaces for mutual aid, art making, sports, community gatherings, and more.

KEY THEMES / TERMS

CPS School Closings: Anthony Overton Elementary School was one of 50 Chicago Public Schools buildings that were closed in 2013 citing budget cuts, under-enrollment, and low performance.

Adaptive Reuse: Rather than tearing down the closed school and building something new, the Overton Incubator found ways to repurpose the existing building for new uses, saving resources, energy, and materials.

Mutual Aid: The Overton Incubator hosts events focused on mutual aid where community members can get free food, clothing, and other resources.

WARM-UP

Discuss as a group or pair and share.

Pick any building that you visit frequently (like your school or a grocery store) and imagine how you would use that building if it were no longer needed for its original purpose.

ABOUT THE SITE

Overton Incubator (formerly Anthony Overton Elementary School) is located at 221 E. 49th Street in the Bronzeville neighborhood of Chicago. Anthony Overton Elementary School, built in 1963 and designed by Perkins+Will, was one of 50 Chicago Public Schools buildings that were closed in 2013 citing budget cuts, under-enrollment, and low performance. Washington Park Development Group has since purchased the school, and through collaborations with artists, designers, and small businesses, has transformed the school grounds into an experimental hub, referred to as the Overton Incubator, that is intended to serve the community to support creative entrepreneurship in business, technology and design.

“Anthony Overton School was built in 1963 by the architecture firm Perkins+Will, that’s the same firm that built the Sears Tower...We found an article where the architect actually said, look, I’m designing this as a school today, but I’m making it different from any other school that you see because one day, it might not be a school. And so sure enough, when CPS decided to close schools, we had to think about what could this become?”

Ghian Foreman, Overton Incubator Owner

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What impact do you think the closing of Anthony Overton Elementary school had on the neighborhood? How might the opening of the Overton Incubator have addressed that impact?
2. An incubator is a space where new ideas, programs, or businesses can be tested out. What idea would you want to test out if you were invited to use an incubator space?

Explorations for the Classroom

Activities structured around the essential understandings outlined in the Learning Framework.



EXPLORATIONS FOR THE CLASSROOM

In this section, you will find classroom explorations that are aligned with CAB’s four learning goals. Through engaging with these explorations, students will be able to:

- Identify the various people, spaces, and systems that make up a city
- Describe how people shape their environments through design choices
- Analyze how architecture and design decisions impact people’s lives
- Reimagine or reinvent new uses for objects, spaces, and systems to better meet the needs of different people or groups

The explorations themselves are divided into four categories, each of which emphasizes different aspects of the design process. The categories are:

1. **My designed environment:** *Activities that activate understanding of how environments have been designed*
2. **How things get made:** *Activities that explore the civic planning process*
3. **Different uses over time / reimagining space:** *Activities that explore the different uses of a place over time*
4. **By whom, for whom?:** *Activities that ask who design is for and imagine different functions of a space based on who uses it*

In each section, we have provided an overview of the big ideas, quick picks which are brief prompts for short classroom activities, and one main exploration that can last an entire class period. Main explorations include step-by-step instructions for guiding students through the activity, reflection questions for discussion, and variations or ways to dig deeper.

Design as Literacy

Tools for reading and writing with the built environment

Even a teacher who is new to understanding design can lead the explorations in this guide.

One way to think about design is like we are learning a new language. In the same way that we learn to read and write with verbal language, we can build our familiarity with design as a kind of literacy. We learn to “read” by noticing the various features of our environment and how they function. We “write” by creating new environments—or redesigning existing ones—to meet the needs of different people over time.

The next section offers two tools to help students with the process of noticing (or “reading”) design as well as creating (“writing”) with design in mind.



“Recognizing the need is the primary condition for design.”

– Charles Eames

TOOLS

Learning to Look

“Reading” the built environment

Just as books are full of written language, the built environment of a city contains all sorts of information that can be decoded for meaning. Everything from the colors and shapes, to the materials used, to the location and function of different structures in a city contains clues about how people live.

By learning to look more closely at things we might ordinarily take for granted, we can gain a better appreciation for how our built environment was designed and how it impacts our daily lives. How can what you see tell you about how your city is built?

Try this: Choose something you see every day, or almost every day, like a building near your home, or a sign on your way to school. See if you can “read” it in a new way using the steps below. When you do this, you are not just thinking about what’s on the surface; you’re building a deeper understanding of how something actually functions in the world. Now you are truly thinking like a designer!

1 NOTICE

- **What do I notice?** Interesting details
- **What do I like about it?** Personal response

2 DESCRIBE

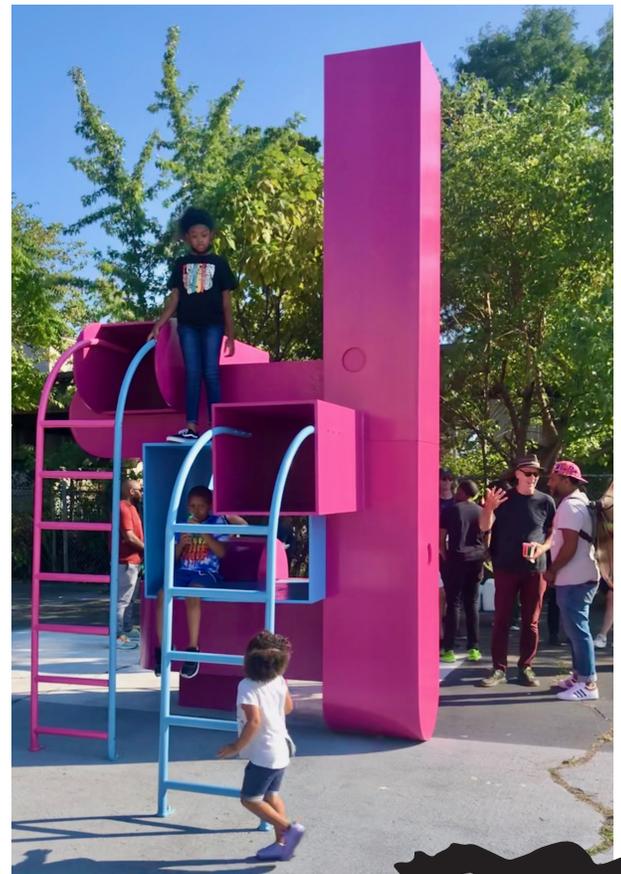
- **What does it look like?** Size, shape, color, texture
- **What is it made out of?** Materials and structure
- **Where is it located?** Environment and surroundings

3 INVESTIGATE

- **Who made it?** Artists, designers, technicians
- **Why was it made?** Purpose and function
- **How was it made? What are its parts?** Manufacturing
- **How did it get here? How long has it been here?** History and usage

4 IMAGINE

- **Who might use this? What might they use it for?** Purpose and function
- **How might I design it differently?** Adaptations



“To create, one must first question everything.”

– Eileen Gray

Thinking like a Designer

Tips for breaking out of familiar habits

Have you ever struggled to come up with a new idea, or noticed that everything you make looks similar? If so, you're not alone! You can think of it like "writer's block," but for making things. Anyone who's ever designed something has had to find creative ways to challenge themselves to do things differently.

As you try out the explorations in this guide, you'll notice that a few of them invite you to reimagine the way things look or function. Here are a few suggestions to help you break out of habits that may be holding back your most imaginative ideas:

- 1. Go very big! (or very small):** See what happens if you make something way bigger (or way smaller) than you think it should be. A tiny house or a giant flower could be the key to making your design truly unique.
- 2. Try the opposite:** We all get used to seeing things a certain way. We even tend to associate certain colors or textures with particular settings or purposes. What happens if you do the exact *opposite* of how you think something should be? Imagine a school that happens at night or a skyscraper that goes down instead of up.
- 3. Take something away:** It might be hard to imagine a restaurant without tables or a classroom without a teacher, but oftentimes taking something away gives us exactly the freedom we need to imagine something fresh. What would fill the space in the tableless restaurant? Use your imagination to fill in the gaps!
- 4. Do multiple versions:** The quickest way to try something new is just to keep on trying! If you're itching to get to a new idea, challenge yourself to try 5 or 10 different ways before choosing the one you like most. Often we get stuck thinking we only have one shot. Real designers go through many different drafts before deciding how to move a project forward.
- 5. Look for inspiration:** So many brilliant designs are modeled off inspiration from other contexts. There are buildings based on patterns found in nature, gatherings and events planned around themes, and even sculptures derived from abstract concepts like "eternity." If you're truly stuck for ideas, try looking closely at something you like and seeing if there are ways to bring some aspect of its form or function into your design.

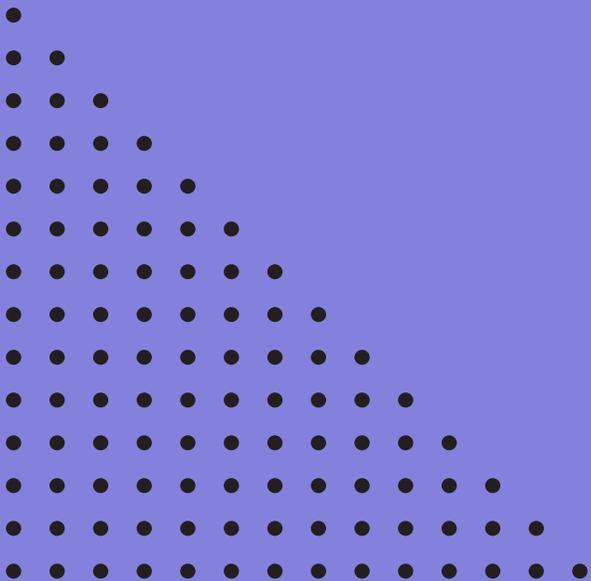


“A design isn’t finished until someone is using it.”

– Brenda Laurel

Activities

Four sections of activities that each include an overview, 2-3 quick picks, and 1 main exploration.



MY DESIGNED ENVIRONMENT

Activities that activate understanding of how environments have been designed



OVERVIEW

Every part of our lives is impacted by design, from the blankets we sleep with and the streets we drive on, to the logos on our sneakers and the desks we sit at in school. The built environment that surrounds us is the result of the work of designers, architects, urban planners, manufacturers, builders, and others. In these activities you'll have the opportunity to identify and investigate the features of your school or neighborhood that were thought up by designers and architects.

A

QUICK PICKS

Try these if you only have a few minutes

Pick an item in your school (such as a chair or a pair of shoes) and name (or draw) as many different types or versions of that item as you can. Or, go on a scavenger hunt and take photos or notes of the different variations you encounter.

Identify a shared space (such as a playground) and consider both its intended use (for children to play) and how it is used in unintended ways (for teens to skateboard, for a vendor to sell snacks).

MY DESIGNED ENVIRONMENT

Activities that activate understanding of how environments have been designed

B MAIN EXPLORATION

Deeper activity for a class period or assignment

1. Choose a space either inside your school or in the immediate vicinity, such as the parking lot or street outside.
2. As a group, identify something human-made in the environment, such as a stop sign. Introduce the first two steps of the “Learning to Look” framework (found on page 22):
NOTICE: What do I notice? What do I like about it?
DESCRIBE: What does it look like? What is it made of? Where is it located?
3. Instruct students to make a list of everything else they can see that is human-made. Encourage them to look at everything around them. Give students a few minutes to sit with their surroundings and think about all the different things that were “designed.”
4. Invite students to choose one item from their list that interests them. Have them repeat the first two steps (NOTICE and DESCRIBE) from the “Learning to Look” framework, either on their own or with a small group.
5. After they’ve made some observations, ask them to identify thoughts or questions they have about those items. Use the next two steps in the “Learning to Look” framework:
INVESTIGATE: Who made it? Why was it made? How did it get here?
IMAGINE: Who might use this? What might they use it for?
6. Share back responses. Explain that everything students have identified has been designed, which means a person or group of people thought carefully about what it is for, how it should look, and how it should work.
7. Reflect on the activity using any of the questions below.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

- What new things did you observe or realize during the activity today? Do you think this will change the way you think about your surroundings?
- What is important to do, know, or ask before designing something?
- How can you tell the difference between an intended and unintended use of space?

VARIATIONS

This activity can be done using Google Maps, at home in students’ neighborhoods, or in any space outside (or inside) the classroom.

EXTENSIONS

Turn this exploration into a long-term project by going deeper into the Learning to Look questions and researching the history of design, material, the neighborhood, or a specific object. For example, students could research the history of traffic light design and manufacturing or architecture and urban planning in Chicago.

HOW THINGS GET MADE

Activities that explore the processes of civic planning



OVERVIEW

The cities and towns we live in have grown and changed over time. The way they are laid out is determined in different measures by natural landscapes, city governments, community organizers, urban planners, architects, real estate developers, and residents. In these activities you'll have the opportunity to explore city planning and consider how and why certain decisions are made.

A

QUICK PICKS

Try these if you only have a few minutes

Think about the space surrounding your school. What features are there? A playground, a busy street, a parking lot? Discuss what things you like having near your school and which things you would add, take away, or change.

Use GoogleMaps to explore how the city has changed over time. Visit a specific location in Street View and click through images of that place 1, 2, or 5 years ago. Notice what has changed and what has stayed the same.

HOW THINGS GET MADE

Activities that explore the civic planning process

B MAIN EXPLORATION

Deeper activity for a class period or assignment

1. Begin the lesson by giving small student groups each a 5 x 5 grid (or students can make this themselves). Instruct students to locate their school building in the center square.
2. Task students to place elements throughout the grid with the goal of designing a city that prioritizes students and their families. (*The grid and building block icons can be found in the Resources section on pages 34-35*).
3. Share the following 'building blocks' of a city that can be placed within the grid.
 - A: **Nature:** stream, pond, nature refuge, river
 - B: **Transit:** L stop, bus stop, parking lot
 - C: **Play:** jungle gym, sports field
 - D: **Agriculture:** industrial farm, orchard, garden, urban farm
 - E: **Industry:** landfill, factory, warehouse
 - F: **Government:** post office, city council, library, community center
 - G: **Health & Safety:** hospital, free clinic, fire department,, homeless shelter, food bank
 - H: **Food:** grocery store, farmers market, corner store, superstore
 - I: **Commercial:** office building, store/shop
 - J: **Residential:** apartment building, house
4. Students can work in small groups to fill the blocks of the grid, or complete the activity individually. If in groups, challenge students to notice how personal opinions affect design decisions.
5. Reflect on the activity using the questions below. Discuss any conflicts that emerged as students compared their city layouts.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

- How did this activity make you think about your neighborhood or the city differently?
- What questions or thoughts do you now have about why the various 'building blocks' are located in certain areas of the city and not others?

VARIATIONS

The list of building blocks is a starting point and many other elements can be added to this list, either individually or as a class. Instead of designing an imagined space around a school, students could also be tasked with designing or redesigning a specific area of the city.

EXTENSIONS

Use the structure of this activity to assign students to design their own city using a game or program like Animal Crossing or using hand drawing or building materials.

Explore historic and current city plans of Chicago and other cities before beginning this activity. Notice and discuss what cities have in common, how they are different, and what things might shape a city design (for example, the lakefront in Chicago).

DIFFERENT USES OVER TIME / REIMAGINING SPACE

Activities that explore the different uses of a place over time



OVERVIEW

The urban spaces we often think of as static have actually changed drastically over time and continue to shift in response to new conditions and needs. Thinking about what elements of the built environment once were (Chicago is built on land that was used for a variety of purposes by Indigenous peoples for centuries prior) or could be (a vacant lot that has the potential to become an urban farm) can help us understand how we got to where we are and what the future could look like. In these activities, students will consider what vacant lots can tell us about the history, present, and future of a place.

A

QUICK PICKS

Try these if you only have a few minutes

Pick an area of the city or a specific building (such as your school) and discuss what was in that same place 10 years ago, 50 years ago, 100 years ago, and 1,000 years ago.

Explore the City of Chicago's map of city-owned vacant land located online. Discuss where the vacant lots are located and where they aren't and why that might be.

Ask your students what they would do if they have access to a vacant lot or storefront on their block. What would they put there and why?

DIFFERENT USES OVER TIME / REIMAGINING SPACE

Activities that explore the different uses of a place over time

B MAIN EXPLORATION

Deeper activity for a class period or assignment

1. Pull up an image of a vacant lot (*there is one provided in the Resources section on pages 36 or you can use GoogleMaps to visit an address from the City of Chicago's map of city-owned vacant land located online*). Have students write down or call out anything they notice about the lot.
2. Have a brief discussion about how the things the students noticed about the lot point to the ways that it has changed over time as a result of human intervention, or the interactions of plants and animals (*flora and fauna*).
3. Next, have students work on envisioning both the past and potential future of this vacant space. Students can write, draw, and otherwise explore responses to the following questions:
 - What do you think this lot looked like thousands of years ago before the city of Chicago existed?
 - If this lot stays empty, what might it look like in another 6 months? In another 10 years?
 - How would you envision the future life of this lot? What would you put there and who would be involved in creating it? Using it? Maintaining it?
3. Ask students to share examples from each phase of lot transformation. Use the below reflection questions to prompt discussion.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

- How has the landscape of our city changed over time? What factors have most influenced these changes?
- How did you decide what to do with the vacant space? Who do you think typically makes these decisions?
- Why do you think Chicago has so many vacant lots? What might be some barriers to developing and maintaining these spaces into the future?

VARIATIONS

This exercise can focus on a specific vacant lot that students know of, perhaps one that is located near your school. You can also expand the definition of vacant to include an underutilized space like a parking lot or an empty storefront.

EXTENSIONS

Have students develop ideas for how they would transform a vacant lot with a specific goal or purpose in mind. Student ideas can be submitted to CAB's bp Student Ideas Competition between September 27 - December 6, 2021.

BY WHOM, FOR WHOM?

Activities that ask who design is for and imagine different functions of a space based on who uses it



OVERVIEW

When things are designed they're often done so with a specific audience or use in mind. Many times, designers will work with the intended audience throughout the design process to make sure they are creating something that will work well for the most number of people. Designs may also be changed over time if they no longer work, or if new needs arise. Sometimes, people will change objects or spaces themselves to make them work better for their needs. These activities will encourage students to think about how the spaces they occupy and the objects they use are designed, who they are designed for, and how they might better meet the needs of different kinds of people.

A

QUICK PICKS

Try these if you only have a few minutes

Imagine you're designing a public plaza. How will different people use this space? Either discuss or write down several different types of people who might use the space (a parent, a teen, a paleta seller) and what they would want or need to make the space work for them.

Ask students to reflect on how they feel about their classroom. What do they like and not like about it? In what ways does it meet or inhibit their needs? Would they like more space to move around, different kinds of tables, additional materials? This can be done through silent journaling or pair dialogue.

Pick a few objects and discuss how their designs match their functions (eg. a pair of headphones are designed to play sound in each ear and keep outside noises out, a chair is designed to support a person's bottom and back). If students were going to design a better version of this object, what might they change?

BY WHOM, FOR WHOM?

Activities that ask who design is for and imagine different functions of a space based on who uses it

B MAIN EXPLORATION

Deeper activity for a class period or assignment

1. Together, make a list of the features that are part of your classroom. As you go, write each one on the board. Make sure to consider both:

- Physical or structural features (e.g., walls, floors, chairs, carpets, books, windows, clocks)
- Other features that shape a space (e.g., teachers, homework, class duration, curriculum)

2. Explain that these features are designed to meet the needs of a real or imagined audience (in the case of the classroom, it's your students!). Because spaces like classrooms are designed, they can always be redesigned to accommodate a different set of needs.

3. In small groups, have students choose one of the features from the list on the board to subtract from the classroom environment and ask, *what might a classroom without X be like?* For example, how might we reimagine a classroom that doesn't have any chairs? Teachers? Books? Have each group choose a different feature to work with.

4. Once they have chosen a feature to remove, groups should write, draw, or otherwise imagine this new classroom. Encourage them to consider the following questions:

- How would the classroom change without this feature?
- What else might emerge in its place?
- Who might like this new classroom more? Less?

5. Ask students to share their visions of these reimaged classrooms and their answers to the above questions.

6. Reflect on the below questions after and during these presentations.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

- How did this activity change the way you see your classroom?
- Were any of the proposed re-designs appealing to you? Why or why not?
- Do you think it's possible to make a space that works for everyone? How might the needs of some people conflict with the needs of others?

VARIATIONS

Have students plan out their new classroom in 3D using paper, wood, or modeling clay. For a truly transformative experience, try rearranging the actual classroom according to the students' thinking and observe how the new environment feels!

EXTENSIONS

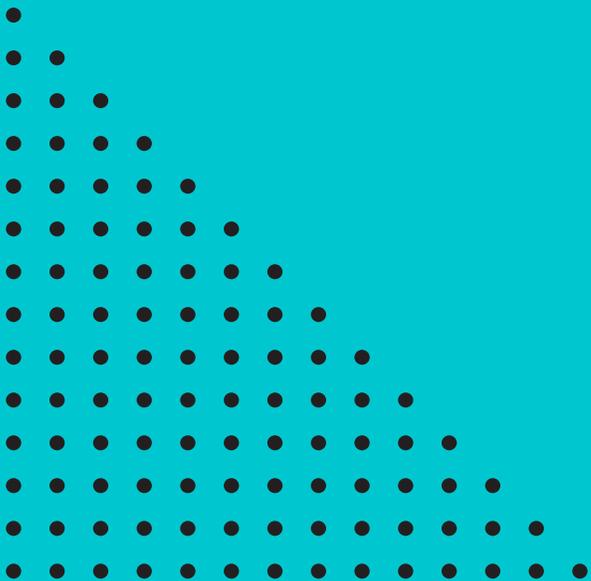
Use the "Learning to Look" framework (page 22) to explore ways in which the physical classroom environment may have been shaped by different people for different uses over time.

Consider how the school has already been changed over time, for instance, to meet needs like modern heating and cooling systems.

Have students research and become knowledgeable about a particular need (e.g., a physical or hidden disability) and then design a classroom space that suits that purpose.

Resources

Materials, readings, and examples that supplement activities and provide background information.



5 X 5 CITY PLANNING GRID

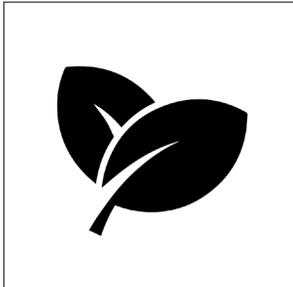
For use with the 'How things get made' exploration on page 28





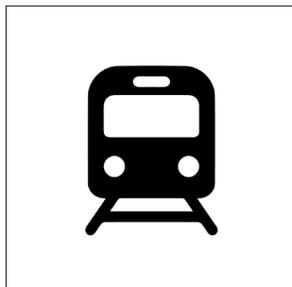
CITY BUILDING BLOCKS

For use with the 'How things get made' exploration on page 28



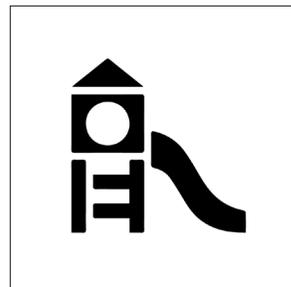
Nature

stream, pond, nature
refuge, river



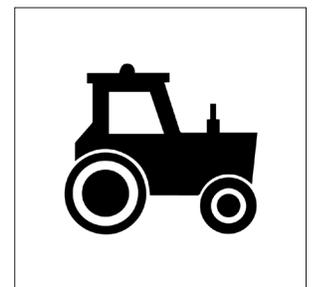
Transit

L stop, bus stop,
parking lot



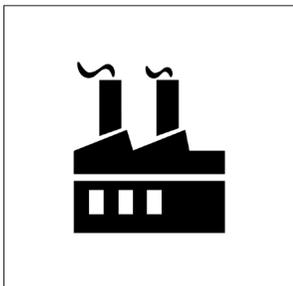
Play

jungle gym, sports field



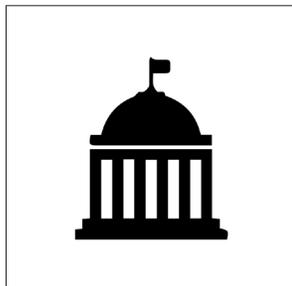
Agriculture

industrial farm,
orchard, garden,
urban farm



Industry

landfill, factory,
warehouse



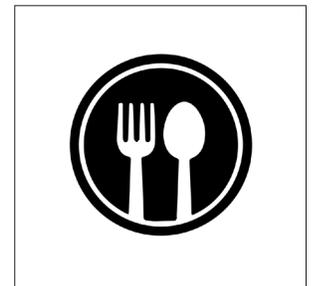
Government

post office, city
council, library,
community center



Health & Safety

hospital, free clinic,
fire department,
homeless shelter,
food bank



Food

grocery store,
farmers market,
corner store,
superstore



Commercial
office building,
store/shop



Residential
apartment building,
house

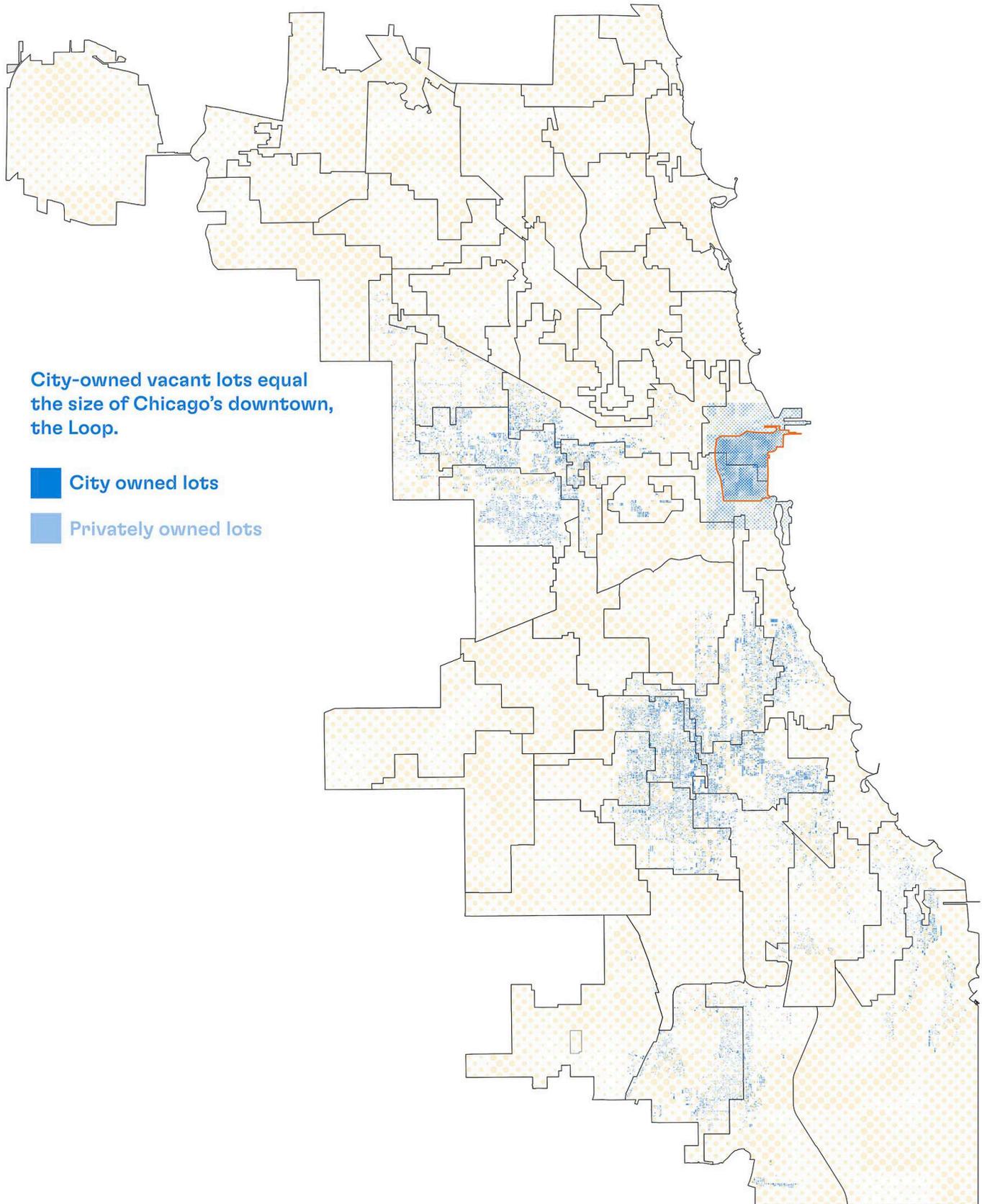
VACANT LOT IMAGE

For use with the 'Different uses over time / reimagining space' exploration on page 30



CHICAGO VACANT LOT MAP

Relates to the 'Different uses over time / reimagining space' exploration on page 30



CASE STUDY: REIMAGINED VACANT LOTS IN DETROIT

Relates to the 'Different uses over time / reimagining space' exploration on page 30

Many cities across the United States and around the world have a large number of vacant spaces, both for similar reasons as in Chicago and for other reasons. In each of these cities, local residents including organizers, artists, architects, teachers, and others, have come together to transform and take stewardship of vacant land in their communities. The examples below show some of the ways that one nearby city, Detroit, Michigan, is reimagining vacant spaces.

**HEIDELBERG PROJECT,
EAST SIDE**
HEIDELBERG.ORG



The Heidelberg Project is an outdoor art installation on Detroit's East side. Started by Detroit artist Tyree Guyton, it is a community based organization with a mission to improve the lives of people and neighborhoods through art. In 1986 Guyton returned to Heidelberg, the street where he grew up, and found it in shambles. Impacted by the loss of his three brothers, Guyton was encouraged by his grandfather to pick up a paintbrush and find a new way to change their block.

The community came together, children included, and cleaned up the vacant lots on their street. From the objects and refuse they collected, Guyton transformed the lots and boarded up buildings into a collective, massive sculpture. Guyton not only transformed vacant houses and lots, he integrated the street, sidewalks, and trees into his mammoth installation and called the work the Heidelberg Project.

**DETROIT FARM & CIDER,
DEXTER-LINWOOD, WESTSIDE**
DETROITFARMANDCIDER.COM



In 2018, Leandra King (above) bought a four-acre vacant plot of land that was an abandoned school in the Dexter-Linwood neighborhood. There, she opened Detroit Farm and Cider, the first Black-owned cider mill in the country. She works with other local farmers and community members to bring produce directly to the community. Farming initiatives like this one have taken over many previous vacant lots in Detroit.

**OAKLAND AVENUE URBAN FARM,
NORTH END DETROIT**
OAKLANDURBANFARM.ORG



The nation's first "Agri-Cultural" urban landscape in Detroit's North End, The Oakland Avenue Urban Farm, a program of North End Christian Community Development Corporation, is a non-profit, community-based organization dedicated to cultivating healthy foods, sustainable economies, and active cultural environments. Like many of Detroit's urban farms, it was started on land that didn't belong to the farmers—land left vacant during the Great Recession of 2008 that local residents couldn't imagine having any real value. Over time, the farmers took ownership over the land and developed the 6 acre farm to what it is today.

RESOURCES FOR CONTINUED INTEREST

A few places to explore for further inspiration

Adventures of Archie

methodarchitecture.com/adventures-of-archie-architecture-activity-book-for-kids

An architecture activity book filled with fun exercises to introduce you to the basics of design, engineering, and construction!

American Institute of Architects

aia.org

Online resources for students grades K-12.

The Centre for Excellence in Universal Design

universaldesign.ie

The Centre for Excellence in Universal Design offers information and resources about the design of environments that can be accessed, understood, and used regardless of a person's age, size, ability, or disability.

CKD Architecture Lessons

carakurodadesign.com/education

Activities including Message Mural, Carditecture, and Neighborhood of Geometric Shapes.

Folded Map Project

foldedmapproject.com

Tonika Lewis Johnson's Folded Map Project visually connects residents who live at corresponding addresses on the North and South Sides of Chicago.

Learning From North Lawndale Booklet

saic.edu/sites/default/files/Learning%20from%20North%20Lawndale.pdf

The history of the North Lawndale neighborhood touches the larger history of the city of Chicago. This catalogue was created by 2021 CAB Artistic Director David Brown as part of a 2006 exhibition at the Chicago Architecture Center (then Foundation).

NEXT.CC

next.cc

NEXT.cc introduces what design is, what design does, and why design is important. It offers activities across nine scales—nano, pattern, object, space, architecture, neighborhood, urban, region, and world. NEXT.cc's 350+ journeys introduce activities online, in the classroom, in the community and globally.

No Small Plans

architecture.org/learn/resources/no-small-plans

No Small Plans is a full-color graphic novel that follows the adventures of young people in Chicago's past, present and future.

"Replacement" by WG Clark

scribd.com/document/27944504/Replacement-by-W-G-Clark

An essay that is often recommended for any student or architecture, young or old.

Shannon Finnegan

shannonfinnegan.com

Shannon Finnegan is a disabled artist based in New York who makes work that challenges the many issues around access in virtual and physical spaces.

Your Guide to a Career in Architecture

ncarb.org/sites/default/files/GuidetoArchCareer.pdf

A resource for more advanced students who are thinking about college and career plans that explains what it means to pursue a career in architecture.

RESOURCES FOR CONTINUED INTEREST

A selection of Chicago groups using architecture & design to enact change

These groups are all current or former partners or collaborators of the Chicago Architecture Biennial.

Blacks in Green

blacksingreen.org

Blacks In Green serves as a bridge and catalyst among communities and their stakeholders in the design and development of green, self-sustaining, mixed-income, walkable-villages in communities owned and populated by African Americans. In these places, every household can walk-to-work, walk-to-shop, walk-to-learn, walk-to-play, and neighbor dollars circulate to reduce greenhouse gases.

Chicago Mobile Makers

chicagomobilemakers.org

Chicago Mobile Makers creates programming that encourages Chicago youth to become advocates and change-makers in their own communities through design focused skill-building workshops. Their objectives are threefold: First, to engage and empower youth through making and skill-building; second, to train and support future public interest architects, designers, and makers; and third, to advocate for social, economic, gender, and racial diversity in the architecture and broader design fields.

NeighborSpace

neighbor-space.org

NeighborSpace is a nonprofit urban land trust in Chicago that preserves and sustains gardens on behalf of dedicated community groups. We support community gardens – through property ownership, insurance, water, stewardship, education, tool lending, project planning, fundraising support, troubleshooting, and more — so that community groups can focus on gardening and on their community-building vision, generating food, beauty, play, health, and safety for their neighborhoods.

Open Architecture Chicago

openarchchicago.org

Open Architecture Chicago's mission is to work with communities to create sustainable, innovative, and socially responsive design. They mobilize architects, designers, and community leaders to use design to expand opportunities and develop solutions to transform our city.

ProjectH.O.O.D.

projecthood.org

ProjectH.O.O.D. (Helping Others Obtain Destiny) is an organization based in the Woodlawn and Englewood communities that offers job training, essential resources, and tools to empower community members to become peacemakers, problem solvers, leaders, and entrepreneurs.

Sweet Water Foundation

sweetwaterfoundation.com

Sweet Water Foundation practices Regenerative Neighborhood Development, a creative and regenerative social justice method, that creates safe and inspiring spaces and curates healthy, intergenerational communities that transform the ecology of so-called "blighted" neighborhoods. Sweet Water Foundation utilizes a blend of urban agriculture, art, and education to transform vacant spaces and abandoned buildings into economically and ecologically productive and sustainable community assets that produce engaged youth, art, locally-grown food, and affordable housing.

Terra Firma

emeraldsouth.org/terra-firma

Terra Firma, launched in 2021, is a 5-year, \$25 million land care initiative to beautify, maintain, and activate over 205 acres of vacant land on Chicago's mid-South Side. In its first year, Terra Firma is supporting the stabilization of 20-30 acres. Terra Firma helps our communities recapture the value of their land for themselves. Through targeted investment we can protect the neighborhood against the negative consequences vacant land creates while also transforming the neighborhood's current vulnerabilities into opportunities for local residents and businesses.

Territory NFP

territorychicago.org

Territory is young people building voice, vision and agency through the practice of design in their communities. Through Territory's design studio programs, young people practice urban design, public art, and community planning in the neighborhoods where they live and learn. Through Territory's partnerships, young people have a seat at the table working with local organizations and funders to strengthen communities through design. Through Territory's apprenticeship design team model, young people find their voice and step up to lead, using design as a platform for civic engagement. Through Territory's leadership programs young designers ages 16-21 are using the tools, resources, and power of their practice to transform their neighborhoods and the city.

UrbanLab

urbanlab.com

UrbanLab is an architecture and urban design firm founded by Sarah Dunn and Martin Felsen. UrbanLab's projects span scales, from large, urban designs to small, residential projects and exhibitions. Their primary interest is in forward-looking projects that speculate on a more resilient and resourceful tomorrow.

Whose Lakefront

jeeyeunlee.com

Whose Lakefront is a public art piece that highlights unceded indigenous land in the heart of downtown Chicago. It marks the original 1830 shoreline at Michigan Ave and the unceded landfill to the east through public workshops that invite the community to examine settler colonialist assumptions about land, place, history, and belonging.



DESIGN CHALLENGE: CREATE A SHARED SPACE FOR YOUR COMMUNITY

The prompts below were developed for a student competition hosted by the Chicago Architecture Biennial in the fall of 2021, though we encourage you to share this design challenge with your students as a classroom activity or homework assignment at any time. See past competition winners and stay up-to-date about future competitions at bit.ly/cabcompetition

Prompt 1: Design a collective space for exchanges / exchanging

This prompt asks you to design a collective space for exchanges and/or exchanging. Exchanges could be large or small markets in one location, or a number of spaces spread out across a larger area. The space can be for the exchange of goods, services, knowledge, or something else. Goods are things that people grow or make, such as food or craft. Services are things that people know how to do well, such as repairing a car or providing care for someone who is sick. Exchanging knowledge could mean sharing your experiences or ideas with others. Exchanging is a form of social organization; it is a way for people or groups to interact with one another.

Guiding Questions: What different types of exchanges might be possible? Goods? Services? Knowledge? How might the space change from day to day? Does it rotate? How might historical marketplaces inform your design? Is there food? Performance? Is it permanent or temporary?

Prompt 2: Design a collective space for plants / planting

This prompt asks you to design a collective space for plants and/or planting. Living in a city, it can be easy to forget that we live amongst nature. The presence of plants—or a lack thereof—impacts us in significant ways. Plants tell, show, and do so much. Plants tell us what season it is—they are perennial, annual, full, barren, fruiting, flowering. Plants have relationships with pollinators—birds, bees, butterflies, bats—that impact and shape their environment. Plants also have relationships with each other. As they grow, some plants may intertwine, becoming canopies that we can sit under. Or perhaps they form rows that we walk between. They may form a thicket, into which we must move with caution. Plants are sometimes, but not always, food.

“Planting a seed” can be literal or figurative—planting a plant or planting an idea. Either can be meditative, either can be wild, either can be productive. By planting, we can learn and labor together, forming connections between each other and our production. Once planted, there is an expectation of growth, a continual change, affected by time and seasons.

Guiding Questions: How does the site grow over time? Does it change when in ‘bloom’? What ideas might get ‘planted’ in this space? Does it obscure views? Does it create a clearing? Does it live different lives during different seasons? Do the plants form pathways? Does it make visitors move slowly? Quickly? Does it wind up or down? Is it a space for humans or is it meant for animals or plants? Do the plants create furniture? Shading? Beds?

Prompt 3: Design a collective space for commons / commoning

Commons are spaces or resources that are shared by groups of people. Commons can be natural (land, water, air) or cultural (languages, libraries, history). Because commons are social—they are created by people and for people to use together—people must agree to uphold them. For example, if a fire pit is created as a common space, everyone who uses it is responsible for its care and maintenance. If there is a pile of wood and the wood runs out, the fire pit becomes useless. Creating common spaces and encouraging those who use them to care for them can be a political practice. It brings people together around a shared resource and a common cause. Through this, relationships can develop, trust can be established, and people can become empowered to create their own spaces in the city.

Guiding Questions: How does the space allow for free movement and exchange? What are the resources? The ways to access them? Can one take from the site? Can one bring things to it? Does it allow for change or is it fixed? Do events take place there? Does it serve a function? Entertainment? Nourishment? Educational? Production? Does it get assembled? Disassembled? Is it for play? Work? How do community members interact with it? With each other? Does it provide benefits? Or provide services? Exercise?

WHAT IS ARCHITECTURE? WHAT IS DESIGN?

Quotes from well-known designers and others

"Design is Art People Use" – Ellen Lupton

"The alternative to good design is always bad design. There is no such thing as no design." – Adam Judge

"We shape our buildings: thereafter they shape us." – Winston Churchill

"People ignore design that ignores people." – Frank Chimero

"Whatever good things we build end up building us." – Jim Rohn

"Architecture is inhabited sculpture." – Constantin Brancusi

"A design isn't finished until someone is using it." – Brenda Laurel

"Everything is designed. Few things are designed well." – Brian Reed

"Architecture is not based on concrete and steel, and the elements of the soil. It's based on wonder." – Daniel Libeskind

"Architecture is basically a container of something. I hope they will enjoy not so much the teacup, but the tea."
– Yoshio Taniguchi

"Recognizing the need is the primary condition for design." – Charles Eames

"To create, one must first question everything." – Eileen Gray

"As an architect, you design for the present, with an awareness of the past for a future which is essentially unknown"
– Norman Foster

"We should attempt to bring nature, houses, and human beings together in a higher unity" – Ludwig Mies van der Rohe

"Good design is obvious. Great design is transparent." – Joe Sparano

"For me, design is like choosing what I'm going to wear for the day—only much more complicated and not really the same at all." – Robynne Raye

"Architecture is really about well-being. I think that people want to feel good in a space...On the one hand it's about shelter, but it's also about pleasure." – Zaha Hadid

"The room is there for the human being—not the human being for the room." – El Lissitzky

"I try to give people a different way of looking at their surroundings. That's art to me." – Maya Lin

WHY STUDY ARCHITECTURE?

Quotes from Chicago architects and designers

"To make improvements and help be a change agent in the communities and places in which you exist."

"You might learn to see many possibilities beyond the obvious ones."

"The field of architecture and design opens many potential career paths. One can go the traditional route and work in a design firm, or apply the skills learned to products, fashion, furniture, user experience, or a whole slew of other disciplines."

"Studying architecture gives you choices in the work you do. Architecture teaches analysis, visual communication, strategic thinking, and persuasion—skills relevant to a large number of fields."

"If you choose to practice architecture, be ready to be a pioneer: creating new markets, firing unworthy clients, and steering your own course."

"Architecture is a great foundation for understanding how the world works. It touches on a variety of related disciplines and teaches you how to think laterally about a problem. What solutions seem crazy but might actually work better?"

"Design brings to fruition and gives you the skill sets needed to listen to competing forces, seek solutions and love the problem. Architects collaborate with a large group of stakeholders and help them answer the question what if? why? and how?"

"The opportunity to learn to optimistically engage and address complex social and physical puzzles at every scale."

"Because it is the most fulfilling profession. The skills an architect develops can help with a simple design problem, but it can also help solve climate change, hunger, equity issues, etc. Architecture is not about simply design, it is about problem solving, which happens to be well designed."

"After a rigorous and thoughtful study of design, one aspires to deliver beautiful architecture that is functional, creative, economical, and sustainable. Great architecture synthesizes art and engineering, creating spaces that enrich the human spirit and achieve stewardship with nature."

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO “THINK LIKE AN ARCHITECT?”

Quotes from Chicago architects and designers

“To be thoughtfully irrational.”

“A science of what might be, rather than what is.”

“To love the challenge and purpose of your clients goals and be at the intersection of design, art, culture, equity, technology, craft and construction.”

“To constantly learn and be a student of the built world.”

“To look at space - the physical embodiment of how and where we live - as key to living a healthy and fulfilling life.”

“To be curious about how we shape the world and how it shapes us and to use that curiosity to investigate solutions for how to make the world a better place.”

“To consider how the built environment participates in our lives and culture while questioning how it might do so in a better way.”

“The architect brings the optimism of improving the world we engage with, while simultaneously carrying the weight of responsibility of not causing harm.”

“Architects are problem solvers, innovators, and creators of buildings, spaces, and environments. A good way to solve problems is for architects to listen, to collaborate, and to encourage diverse and inclusive dialogue and discussion, as this holistic approach provides tremendous results and community based favorable outcomes.”

“It means to constantly be thinking about solutions. Different ways to solve a puzzle. All the while, considering the numerous limitations and parameters involved in the potential solution. It also means understanding the advantages and disadvantages of a potential solution.”

“Architects are problem solvers. We seek to fully understand a design problem and context before chasing after solutions. We make design investigations and decisions holistically. We accept it is normal that there is no one right answer to a problem. And we continually look for alternate options and ideas, no matter where we are in the process.”

WHAT MAKES A CITY? POSTER KEY

This poster highlights some of the people, places, and things that make up a city. It can be printed as an 11 x 17 poster to be hung in your classroom or used as a coloring sheet. Students can explore the poster and identify the various roles, structures, and systems that make up this shared space, or you can use the key below to identify specific items.

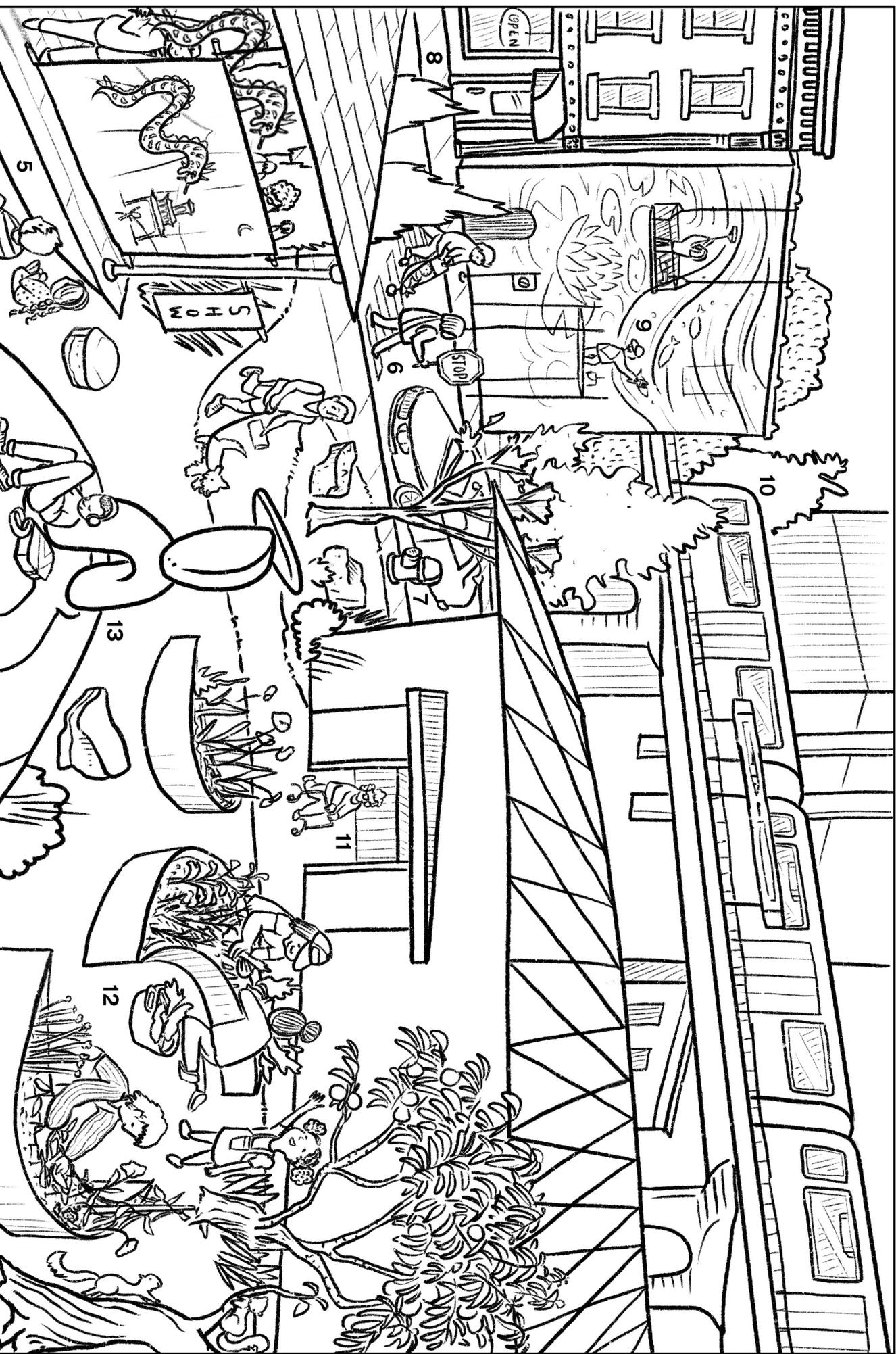


1. A place to buy food and drinks.
2. Animals (and plants) are important for the biodiversity of our cities.
3. Residents use and interact with various aspects of the city and form opinions about what they like and what they might like to change.
4. Architects, urban planners, construction workers, and others understand how our cities should be laid out and how they should look so they best suit the needs and interests of residents.
5. Performers and audiences allow people to express themselves, share their cultures and interests, engage with one another, and have fun.
6. Crossing guards and others help us navigate our cities safely.
7. Infrastructure like fire hydrants help keep our cities safe.
8. Shops and stores provide goods and services and employ residents.
9. Public art and murals provide a way for residents to express themselves and help beautify and add color to the city.
10. Public transportation and its staff, like train conductors, help us move around our city in efficient and sustainable ways.
11. Public buildings such as community centers, cultural spaces, and athletic facilities provide a number of free, important services for residents.
12. Gardens and gardeners beautify our city and provide access to local, fresh, healthy foods.
13. Sculptures, monuments, and public plazas add beauty to the city, commemorate important people and moments in history, and provide spaces for gathering and organizing.
14. Nurses and doctors help keep us safe and healthy.
15. Teachers and students work together to build knowledge and help shape the future of our cities.
16. All kinds of workers with different skills create and fix things.
17. Infrastructure like public transportation, streets, roads, and sidewalks help us navigate the city in ways that are efficient and safe.

What Makes a City?

Explore the scene below filled with some of the people, places, and things that come together to make a shared, urban space.

CHICAGO
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BIENNIAL



Glossary

Student-friendly definitions of key terms and ideas used and referenced throughout the toolkit.



GLOSSARY

ACTIVIST (ACTIVIST)

A person who uses or supports strong actions (such as public protests) to help make changes in politics or society.

ARCHITECTURE (ARCHITECT)

The art or science of designing and creating buildings and other structures or spaces.

ADVOCACY

To speak publicly in favor of a cause to bring greater visibility and support to that issue, person, or event.

BUILT ENVIRONMENT

The human-made surroundings that provide the setting for human activity, including buildings, parks, transportation systems, and more.

CIVIC

Of or relating to a city or town or the people who live there.

COLLABORATION

The action of working together with another person or a group of people to produce or create something.

COMMONS

Social spaces or resources that are shared by groups of people. They can be natural (land, water, air) or cultural (languages, libraries, history). Commons are created by people and for people to use together, and people maintain them collectively.

COMMUNAL SPACE / COLLECTIVE SPACE

A place where a group of people repeatedly engage in an activity within a space that has been specifically designed or built for that purpose.

COMMUNITY

A united group of individuals. These collective groups may share common interests, experiences, ideas, or goals. Through these shared commonalities, community may also refer to the feeling of care shared between group members.

COMMUNITY-LED (AS IN COMMUNITY-LED DESIGN)

The process of working together to decide upon and achieve group visions and goals.

CONSERVATION

When talking about nature it means to prevent waste of a resource. This comes from a science definition for when materials or energy are not wasted within a system.

DESIGN (DESIGNER)

To plan and make something for a specific use or purpose. This process includes creating the plans or drawings that show how something is made.

EXCHANGE

To give one thing and receive another of the similar value in return.

FLORA

The plants found in a specific region, habitat, or time period.

FAUNA

The animals found in a specific region, habitat, or time period.

FOOD DESERT

An area in a city or town where there are no places to buy affordable or good quality fresh food.

FUNCTION (FUNCTIONS)

To work or operate in a proper or particular way.

GLOSSARY

GENTRIFICATION

To change a place, such as an old neighborhood, by making it more appealing to people who have money, often making it unaffordable for the people who have lived there for many years.

INCUBATOR

A place or structure where conditions are controlled to create an ideal environment for growth, hatching or reproduction. When used to describe a community organization this means a place where individuals are supported to grow and achieve their specific goals.

LAND TRUST

A land trust is an organization who owns land as a group, rather than as individuals, and that uses that land for purposes that benefit the group, such as growing food or building affordable housing.

MULTIGENERATIONAL

Involving multiple family generations.

MUTUAL AID

Voluntary shared exchange of resources and services for shared benefit. These projects are a political decision where people take on the responsibility of caring for one another to directly change the conditions of others.

NARRATIVE

A story that is told or written.

PERMACULTURE

A type of farming or gardening system that works with the cycles of the natural landscape. These systems are intended to sustain themselves & to form an integrated relationship between humans and the natural environment.

PLACEMAKING

A community-based collaborative process that re-imagines and creates places of value that people want to live, work, play and learn in, done with the intention to contribute to a community's health, happiness and well being.

RESEARCH

Careful study that is done to find and report new knowledge about something.

STEWARDSHIP

The activity or job of protecting and being responsible for something, often used in reference to taking care of the natural environment.

SPACE

A continuous area or expanse that is available where activities or things may happen over time.

SUSTAINABILITY

The ability for something to be maintained. When pertaining to the natural world, this ability accounts for the avoidance of the depletion of natural resources to achieve ecological balance.

TRANSFORMATION

A thorough or significant change in form; metamorphosis.

UNDER-RESOURCED

Not provided with as much money or as many staff, materials, etc. as are needed, usually pertaining to a neighborhood or area of the city that receives less resources than it needs or as compared to other areas.

URBAN (URBANISM, URBANIZATION)

Of or relating to cities and the people who live in them.

GLOSSARY

URBAN PLANNING (URBAN PLANNER)

The preparation of plans for design and management of towns and cities. Its goals are to organize social and spatial relationships across space. It is concerned with social, economic, and environmental results of creating spatial boundaries that impact the distribution of resources.

URBAN AGRICULTURE

The growing of plants and rearing of animals for food and domestic use in a city environment.

VACANT (VACANT LOT, VACANT SPACE)

Having no structures, furniture or inhabitants; something that has been left empty. A vacant lot is an area of land within an urban setting that is not built on.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



THANK YOU

CONTENT DEVELOPMENT

Tess Landon
Joan Roach
Jacob Watson

SPECIAL THANKS

David Brown
Ayrika Craig
Kris Derek Hechevarria
Rachel Kaplan

GRAPHIC DESIGN

Bre Baab, Baab Kreativ

ILLUSTRATIONS

Kayce Bayer

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Linda M. Usher and
Malcolm Lambe

Susan and Robert Wislow
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Jeffrey Rappin
Revere Properties

Friends

Michelle Cobey
Katherine Darnstadt
Dirk Denison and David Salkin
Philip Hamp
Jeff Jozwiak
Sara Lundgren
Bradley Lynch
Robert Mink
Sara Mirkin
Patricia Saladana Natike
Layton Olson
Tomeka Reid
Tom Rossiter
Tom Shapiro
Site Design
Donna Speigel
Norman Teague

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Lori E. Lightfoot
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IMAGES

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Participants in a workshop at the 2021 Chicago Architecture Biennial site Soil Lab located in North Lawndale / Karen Patinkin, 2021

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Participants in a Chicago Architecture Biennial Youth Studio led by Borderless Studio at the Chicago Cultural Center / Paola Aguirre, 2017

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A vacant lot in North Lawndale / Nathan Keay, 2020

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Cover the Grid commission by Outpost Office for the 2021 Chicago Architecture Biennial in North Lawndale / Dennis Fisher, 2021

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Block Party commission by Studio Barnes, in collaboration with Shawhin Roudbari and MAS Context, for the 2021 Chicago Architecture Biennial in North Lawndale / Karen Patinkin, 2021

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The YMEN Bike Box commission by sekou cooke STUDIO for the 2021 Chicago Architecture Biennial in North Lawndale / Karen Patinkin, 2021

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Woodlawn Canopies; Stories and Future commission by Project H.O.O.D. for the 2021 Chicago Architecture Biennial in North Lawndale / Chicago Architecture Biennial, 2021

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A Chicago Architecture Biennial Youth Studio led by design educator Linda Keane at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago / Nathan Keay, 2019

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Traces of Past Futures, a collaboration between the Central Park Theater Restoration Committee, Manuel Herz Architects, Future Firm, and Thomas Melvin, at the Central park Theater in North Lawndale / Nathan Keay, 2021

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Participants in a workshop at the 2021 Chicago Architecture Biennial site Soil Lab located in North Lawndale / Karen Patinkin, 2021

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Back Cover:

Students tour a future community garden in North Lawndale as part of a Chicago Architecture Biennial Youth Studio / David Brown, 2019



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