

Exploring Neighborhoods through Art

Grades K-4 with appropriate adjustment

Missouri Knowledge Standards:

Social Studies Standard 5- the major elements of geographical study and analysis (such as location, place, movement, regions) and their relationships to changes in society and environment

Fine Arts Standards 1- process and techniques for the production, exhibition or performance of one or more of the visual or performed arts: 2- the principles and elements of different art forms

Learning Goals: Students will learn about the concepts of neighbors and neighborhoods. Students will create a painting of their neighborhood.

Materials List:

- Image of E. L. Karasek's *Lafayette Square* provided here.
- Other image showing diverse neighborhood settings, such as from magazines and textbooks.
- Painting supplies for each student.

Time Required: Two class periods

Implementation:

Discuss with the class the definition of a neighborhood. Technically, a neighborhood is defined as a district or area with distinctive characteristics. It is generally an urban area made up of several streets. Although neighborhoods can be defined by their geographic borders, often the people who live in a neighborhood also share certain qualities and are part of a shared community. Thus, neighborhood can also define the people who live near one another or in a particular district or area. The neighborhood is where these people live, and often it is also where they work and go to school.

Give students examples of the types of neighborhoods found in their own city or country. Show pictures of what a variety of neighborhoods can look like, including diverse views and those that are different from the students' own neighborhood settings.

Broaden the discussion to point out that people live in many different places. Invite the students to tell the class about places they have lived or visited, or places their family members live. Discuss the differences and similarities between these other places and the students' own neighborhoods. Create a reference list of what is familiar and what is different about the places that are discussed.

Exploring a neighborhood through art:



Look carefully at this painting and discussion these questions:

- What do you notice first in this painting? Why?
- Is this a neighborhood? What do you see that makes you think so?
- Would you like to live there? Why or why not?
- Can you tell what is happening in this neighborhood?
- Does this look like a neighborhood you have seen before?
- Sometimes artists paint images from their imagination, and sometimes they paint scenes they have really seen. Do you think it is a painting of a real neighborhood or just the artist's imagination? Why do you think so?

Follow-up to the art discussion:

Introduce the history of Lafayette Square, an actual neighborhood in St. Louis:

Lafayette Square Neighborhood, surrounding Lafayette Park, is St. Louis's oldest historic district. It began as a 30 acre park that was platted in 1836, making it the first city park as well as the first park west of the Mississippi. It was named to honor the Marquis de Lafayette, the popular hero of the American Revolution, who visited St. Louis in 1825. For many years the area was considered too remote for residential development and it was used to train the "Home Guard."

The city made few improvements to the park until 1860 when the population of St. Louis had increased nine hundred percent over the previous 20 years. During the prosperous post-Civil War years, Lafayette Square became one of the most fashionable neighborhoods in St. Louis and the park became the city's most popular recreation spot. Many well-known individuals built magnificent residences there. In the 1890s many people preferred to live farther west, outside the busy parts of the city, and in 1896 Lafayette Park was largely destroyed by a tornado. Most residents did not move back, and the neighborhood lost much of its earlier glory.

In the late 1960's a small group of individuals began rebuilding the neighborhood and organized the Lafayette Square Restoration Committee. The area continues to be restored, and in 1973 it was placed on the National Register of Historic Places by the U.S. Congress.

This neighborhood pride is clearly reflected in E. L. Karasek's painting, *Lafayette Square*, created in the 1980s, that illustrates the relationship between the lush lawn of the park and the restored historic homes across the street.

Activity: Painting a Neighborhood

Now the students can use their creativity to help people understand what their neighborhood is like. By viewing their artwork, people can "visit" their neighborhood without actually being there, just as they have "visited" *Lafayette Square* by seeing the painting. Each student will create a piece of artwork that represents his or her neighborhood.

Tell students to close their eyes and envision their neighborhoods. What sort of things do they see? A street? A sidewalk? Houses? Trees or bushes? What colors do they see? Bring out the reference list of familiar and unfamiliar things created during the earlier discussion of neighborhoods as an aid.

Adapted from ARTSEEDGE, "Exploring Neighborhoods through Art" by Rebecca Holden, Educator, Virginia Beach, VA.

Available at: <http://artsedge.kennedy-center.org/content/2373/>