

HERE'S LOOKING AT YOUR PLACE: A COMMUNITY PROFILE EXCHANGE

Subject: Social Studies, English

Skills: Comparison, Description, Discussion, Drawing, Gathering, Investigation, Large Group, Media Construction, Observation, Writing

Duration: Two weeks preparation, plus 2-4 additional weeks to exchange profiles

Setting: Classroom

Materials:

- profile notebook/ring binder
- camera and film
- community tourism brochure
- state, county, and/or community maps
- article from the local paper describing a recent school or community event, especially if it relates to land use
- rocks and leaves gathered locally and labeled. Look for things that are unique or characteristic of the community (for example: sandstone if that is the predominant kind of rock, a dried alfalfa plant or apple leaf if you're in a farming community)
- bulletin board
- mailing/shipping materials OR email capabilities
- local phone book (including yellow pages)
- local newspaper
- school newsletter

Michigan Curriculum Framework Content Standards and Benchmarks:

- **Social Studies II.1.LE.2:** Strand II. Geographic Perspective, Standard 1. Diversity of People, Places, and Cultures, Benchmark LE 2. Locate and describe diverse kinds of communities and explain the reasons for their characteristics and locations.
- **Social Studies II.4.LE.1:** Strand II. Geographic Perspective, Standard 4. Regions, Patterns and Processes, Benchmark LE 1. Draw sketch maps of the community, region, and nation.
- **Social Studies II.4.LE.2:** Strand II. Geographic Perspective, Standard 4. Regions, Patterns and Processes, Benchmark LE 2. Describe places, cultures, and communities in the United States and compare them with those in other regions and countries.
- **Social Studies II.4.LE.4:** Strand II. Geographic Perspective, Standard 4. Regions, Patterns and Processes, Benchmark LE 4. Describe the physical, economic, and cultural geography of contemporary Michigan and its causes, advantages and disadvantages.
- **Social Studies V.1.LE.1:** Strand V. Inquiry, Standard 1. Information Processing, Benchmark LE 1. Locate information about local, state and national communities using a variety of traditional sources, electronic technologies, and direct observations.
- **Social Studies II.1.MS 3:** Geographic Perspective, Standard 1. Describe, compare and explain the locations and characteristics of places, cultures, and settlements. Benchmark MS 3. Explain why people live and work as they do in different regions.

Kent County Collaborative Core Curriculum (KC⁴):

- Social Studies: 4:4, 4:6
6:3, 6:4, 6:5
7:4
8:3

OVERVIEW

Students explore their own community and create a community profile that they exchange with students of other Michigan or Great Lakes communities. Students gather information for and write letters to an exchange classroom.

OBJECTIVES

After participating in this activity, students will be able to:

- Identify, describe, and write characteristics of their own local community.
- Compare, recognize, and describe characteristics of another Michigan or Great Lakes community.
- Demonstrate the skills necessary to perform a community profile such as observing, gathering, compiling, and letter writing.

BACKGROUND

Our hometown is familiar to us. The geography and land uses of places we have never seen are often unfamiliar and strange. This activity will bring personality and life to a study of Michigan and the Great Lakes coast. It will also help students to appreciate their own environments as they develop a community profile.

Community profiles help governmental officials plan for economic development, municipal services (sewer, water, and roads), social services (recreation facilities, clinics or hospitals, community centers, financial assistance) and nearly every element of community supported programs. Businesses review such profiles when considering whether to locate in a particular community.

Profiles usually include the following elements:

1. History
2. Physical geography and land uses
3. Environmental characteristics including climate and weather

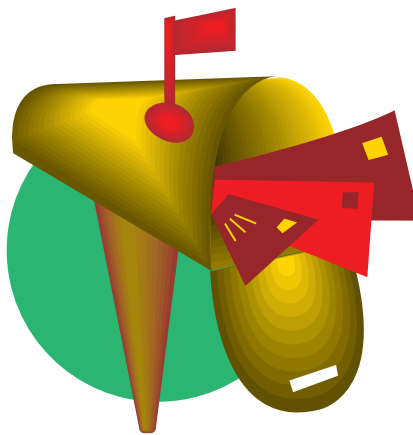
4. Economics — sources of jobs and income
5. Demographics — the ages, incomes, ethnic backgrounds, training, etc. of the people who live there.
6. Sociological characteristics — the behaviors and values of people who live in the community. This can be seen in the types of organizations, festivals celebrated, recreational activities, and annual events.
7. Any major problems or issues facing the community (like urban redevelopment and sprawl, school integration, pollution, entry or departure of a major employer, poverty, etc.)
8. Any special assets which enhance the community (highly educated population, attractive physical/environmental features, quality schools and government, major new developments like downtown revitalization, new harbor and boat docking facilities, ports, airports and rail depots).
9. Population — current, past, and projections for the future.
10. Transportation — systems of transport such as highways, roads, air travel, trains, shipping, etc.

tinuing with the project. Discuss procedures, such as: the development of discussion questions, general timetable, availability of special equipment like video cameras and playback equipment, plans for student letter exchange, etc. The Internet is also an excellent source for finding exchange classrooms. (See the Computer Extensions for a list of options.)

4. Help your students develop questions for the exchange class. Make sure the questions focus on how people use land: city space, farmland, open space, and waterfront property. You will want to identify an important geographic feature near you (for example, forests, rivers, hills, farmland, etc.). It may be more of a challenge for urban schools to identify the important geographic features that attracted settlers to the area. Offer a few example questions, and then ask them to write down five possible community exchange questions. Your students will answer the same questions for the profile on their own community. Some of the following questions might be included in your list:

- When did the community get started?
- Why did people (including Native Americans) settle in your community?
- Which ethnic groups moved there and when?
- What were the early occupations of these early residents?
- What important land features are in the area?

- What makes the land special?
- How close to the lake or river did these early residents live?
- Who lives in your community today?
- How many residents are there?
- How many children and adults live there?
- Which ethnic groups live there now? (Name at least five.)
- What are some of the major occupations of community members today?
- How close do people live to the water?
- What do people like to eat there? (At home? At restaurants? At events like festivals?)
- What do people do for recreation?
- What annual celebrations does your community share?
- How big is your community geographically?
- Describe what your community looks like.
- What are some of the things (places or landmarks) one is likely to see by driving or walking around?
- If you were to recommend someplace in your community to visit, what would it be?
- What is the weather and climate like?



PROCEDURE

1. Introduce the lesson by asking the students where they would like to live in their community. For example, ask "If you were going to buy a house, where would it be?" What would they look for when choosing a neighborhood? List the student responses on the chalkboard or overhead. Then, ask the same questions about other areas of Michigan.
2. Explain the idea of a community profile exchange to your students. Talk about how it will help them get to know their own community and compare it to another in Michigan or in the Great Lakes region. Help students choose and discuss locations they would like to learn about, then select a couple of communities. You may want to exchange with more than one community, and you should have one in reserve in case you cannot locate a cooperating teacher in your first choice community.
3. Contact a teacher in a grade level close to yours in the chosen community(ies). You can do this by calling the public school office in that town. Use long distance telephone information or check your library for telephone books from the community(ies) you are interested in. The social studies, science or general curriculum coordinator for the school system may know an enthusiastic teacher who would enjoy the exchange opportunity. Get the name, address, and phone number of the teacher you want to contact, and call him or her directly. Secure the teacher's agreement before con-

- What kinds of trees, grasses, flowers, and crops grow in your area?
 - What is the animal life like?
 - What kinds of fish live in the water near your community?
 - How do people use the water (river or lakes) where the community is located?
 - What environmental problems or issues (if any) does your community have?
 - What is the most important asset the community has?
 - What is the community's current challenge or issue?
 - What makes the community unique (one-of-a-kind, no place else like it on earth?)
 - What makes your community special to you?
5. Include the students' questions in your letter to the exchange teacher. A sample letter is included in this lesson. Your students may also want to help write the letter. Be sure to enclose a copy of this lesson plan for the teacher.
 6. Have each student in the class write a letter to the exchange class describing a favorite outdoor place and why it is special, their parents' occupations, and one or two things about themselves (favorite sport or activity, interesting experience, future plans, etc.) Enclose student letters with your letter to the teacher.
 7. After the two classes have agreed on the questions to answer, develop a profile notebook or "scrapbook" about your community. Student volunteers can take photographs or make drawings of the community and surrounding landscape. Make sure that each question you have developed is matched to at least one photo or drawing. Collect photos that are brought in by the students, or take pictures all at once on a neighborhood or community journey. You might have to be the photographer if issues like traffic are a concern. Do not forget to include photos of the class, school and teacher. Let the students choose which photos and drawings best show the community scenes. Students not involved in the picture-taking can write captions describing each photo or drawing. Glue the photo to a sheet of paper and copy the description below it. Compile the photos and drawings in a binder.
 8. Other materials that students have collected may also be included in the scrapbook. These might include a community tourism brochure from the chamber of commerce, photo postcards, state and community maps (marked with photo locations if appropriate), an article from the local paper describing a recent school or community event (especially if it relates to land use), and rocks and leaves gathered from the local area and labeled (look for things that are unique or characteristic — sandstone if that is the predominant kind of rock locally, or a dried alfalfa plant or apple leaf if you are in a farming community).
 9. You might want to keep a copy of your notebook for your-
- selves. Make a bulletin board display of your community profile. Leave it half-empty to display your exchange school. This will build up excitement and expectation for the materials coming from your exchange class. If you are exchanging with more than one community, describe your letter exchange with other communities in your cover letter. Those communities may also want to contact each other.
10. When the materials arrive from your exchange school, review them with the class and have students arrange them on a bulletin board. Discuss the various parts of the community as the exchange class describes them. Check to see how each question was answered and compare the answers to your own community profile.
 11. Discuss the activity with your students and ask the following questions:
 - What have you learned about Michigan or the Great Lakes that you did not know before?
 - What questions do you have about Michigan, the Great Lakes, the exchange community, or other topic that are still unanswered?
 - What have you learned about your community that you did not know before?
 - What kinds of activities are important to your community? The exchange community?
 - What questions do you still have about your community?
 - How does where we live affect our behavior and lifestyle?
 - How is the exchange community similar to your community? Different?
 - What evidence is there of the influence of geography on the exchange community?
 - What effects have physical features like hills, water, or forests had on shaping the exchange community? Your community?
 - What forms of transportation do people use? What other places are the exchange community linked to by transport?
 - What do you like best about the exchange community? Your community?
 12. Summarize your discussion and include it with thank you notes to the exchange class. Have the students answer one of the discussion questions on their own individual thank you notes. Take a photograph of your bulletin board display to send along.



ASSESSMENT OPTIONS

1. Evaluate written letters and thank you notes for proper format, spelling, and content.
2. Evaluate the students' five community exchange questions and participation in observing and compiling facts about their community.
3. Ask the students to list three things they learned about their own community and three things they learned about the exchange community. Have them explain their favorite piece of new information and why it is their favorite.
4. Have students list and compare characteristics of their own community and the exchange community.
5. Assess student participation in group discussions.

TEACHER MEMOS

SOURCE

Adapted with permission from Our Great Lakes Connection: A Curriculum Guide for Grades Kindergarten Through Eight, "Activity 6: Here's Looking at Your Place: A Community Profile Exchange," Pp. 39-41, University of Wisconsin Systems, 1985.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Contacts:

Local Chamber of Commerce
Local Historical Society
Michigan Society of Planning
Tourism Bureau

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK REFERENCE

E2, IE4, IIIA1, IIIA3, IIIA4, IIIC1, IIID

Adaptations/Extensions

1. If your community or county has a planning department, invite a planner to come to your class and tell how he/she develops community profiles. Display your own profile efforts. Ask how profiles have been used in your area.
2. Consider conducting a community exchange with a local community that is very different than your own to learn more about the communities in your county. For example, a rural school could exchange with an urban school. If the community is nearby, arrange for the classes to meet and share unique community characteristics such as ethnic foods, and games; and make class presentations or perform skits.

Computer Extensions

1. This activity could incorporate electronic mail as a supplement and/or replacement for elements of the procedure that involve typical mail-based communication. Make sure the exchange class has electronic mail capabilities compatible with yours.
2. Classes with access to the World Wide Web, especially if the class or school has its own web site, could post community profiles of their own community and their exchange community(ies). Again, all involved classes would need Internet access.
3. Consider using one of the many existing community development computer simulation games (such as Sim City) after reviewing elements of the profiles for both your community and the exchange community that would be likely to influence community development.
4. U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. EPA Penpal-Partners for the Environment. May 2002. 28 May 2002. <<http://www.epa.gov/region6/penpals/>>The Eco-Pals program is a classroom to classroom collaborative learning experience for students in which classes in different parts of the country can communicate with one another on a broad array of environmental interests. Options for collaboration are unlimited.
5. Teaching.Com. About KeyPals Club. 2002. 28 May 2002. <http://www.teaching.com/KeyPals/about_us.cfm> Mighty Media presents the KeyPals Club, a place for young people, teachers and students to locate and correspond with other youth and students around the world. The service provides a free, incredibly easy-to-use interface and database to quickly locate and contact a student or a class from around the world.
6. Open Learning Agency. Internet Keypal Exchanges. Sept. 1999. 28 May 2002. <http://www.cln.org/int_keypals.html> This organization lists sites that will aid teachers who are looking for Internet keypal exchanges for their classes. They have identified keypal resources for matching classes of students together, as well as offering information on student safety.
7. Redmond, Sandy. Michigan Genealogical Council. MIGen-Web: Michigan Genealogy on the Web. Part of the USGen Web Project. 2002. 28 Mar. 2002. <<http://www.rootsweb.com/~migenweb/migensoc.htm>> Contains most of the genealogy and historical societies of Michigan listed by county or city.

Sample letter to an exchange class

Address
City, State (Province), Zip Code (Postal Code)
Area Code and Phone Number
Date

Mr./Ms. (teacher's name)
School Name
Address
City, State (Province, CANADA), Zip Code (Postal Code)

Dear Mr./Ms. _____ and Class:

We are studying Michigan and our local community and are eager to know about your community and its natural environment. After talking to you on the phone, I know you would also enjoy knowing about our community. We will send you a notebook describing our community in exchange for similar information about yours. The enclosed activity sheet describes the procedure for the lesson. We hope to have our community and natural environment profile ready to send you by (date).

To help us both in developing our community and natural environment profiles, here are some specific questions we would like you to answer:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____ etc.

Our class developed these questions. We will answer the same ones and more to describe our community. Please include any others your students may want to add.

We look forward to hearing from you soon. To get us started, we have each written a letter describing ourselves and something about our community. They are enclosed.

Sincerely,

Mr./Ms. _____
4th Grade Class (School Name)
and Student Letters