

Where  
the past  
is present

# DETROIT HISTORICAL SOCIETY

# EDUCATOR LESSON PLAN

## BRICK BY BRICK: BUILDING DETROIT



Bird's-eye view of buildings in downtown Detroit. Penobscot Building and Guardian Building on left. C.1957

Courtesy of the Detroit Public Library

### INTRODUCTION

This lesson will provide first and second grade students with a general understanding of Detroit's growth as an city. They'll analyze what it means to be a city, and how the humans change the existing landscape for construction based on a growing population.

### LEARNING OBJECTIVE

Students will:

- Analyze maps, drawing conclusions about what amenities a city needs to grow.
- Explain how cities expand and grow based on population
- Construct and design their own cities based on discussion.

### Learning Standards

#### Places and Regions

1 – G2.0.1 Distinguish between physical and human characteristics of places.

2 – G2.0.1 Compare the physical and human characteristics of the local community with those of another community.

#### The World in Spatial Terms

1 – G1.0.2 Describe places using absolute location or relative location.

#### Environment and Society

1 – G5.0.1 Describe ways in which people are part of, modify, and adapt to their physical environments.

#### Living and Working Together in Community

2 – H2.0.4 Describe changes in the local community over time.

#### The World in Spatial Terms

2 – G1.0.1 Construct maps of the local community that contain symbols, labels, and legends denoting human and physical characteristics of place.

2 – G1.0.2 Use maps to describe the spatial organization of the local community by applying concepts including relative location, and using distance, direction, and scale.

The Detroit Historical Society would like to thank Heather Rivard for her generous support of this program.

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## BACKGROUND - Brick by Brick

The 1920s was an exciting time in southeastern Michigan. The automobile had become a national trend and Detroit is officially America's undisputed Motor City. Unemployment was low and good wages brought hundreds of thousands of new people to the City. At the same time, skyscrapers grow toward the sun and Detroit's neighborhoods begin to spread out across former farmland in the area.

Following the American Civil War, growth in manufacturing caused Detroit to expand quickly from 80,000 residents in 1870 to 300,000 in 1900. The borders pushed out along the Detroit River, and northward into to a neighborhood known today as the Boston-Edison district. The city also built a road called Grand Boulevard around the city and even purchased Belle Isle.



The Federal Building and Post Office [background left] is the tallest structure by 1890.

Courtesy of the Detroit Historical Society Collection



Downtown Detroit, Woodward Ave. C1875

Detroit Historical Society Collection

By the 1890s the town of Detroit was becoming a first class city! The Federal Building and post office are now the tallest buildings in Detroit.

Detroit's place on the water was an advantage to her citizens, too. Belle Isle was developed into the largest island park in the nation, complete with canoe lagoons and seven miles of recreational shoreline. Eventually, becoming home to a zoo and aquarium.

Between 1900 and 1918 – the end of World War I – Detroit grew a bit, pushing out slightly especially along the river. Where freight and goods could be easily manufactured and shipped.

By the 1920s and the City of Detroit truly expands its borders. In the next seven years, Detroit nearly doubles in size, finally reaching the current 138.75 square miles.

## MATERIALS USED

- Reading: “Background—Brick by Brick”
- Maps: Detroit in 1890 & 1920
- Photos: Detroit in 1890 & 1920
- Worksheet: Blank Streets
- City Templates
- Crayons/Markers
- Tape/Glue Sticks

## LESSON SEQUENCE

### *Opening the Activity*

1. Show maps of Detroit growing from 1890 to 1920. Explain the color blocks are different neighborhoods people are moving too.  
Questions for class discussion:
  - On 1890 map, how many neighborhoods can you count?
  - On 1920 map, how many neighborhoods can you count?
  - Why are there more neighborhoods in 1920?
  - Why might there be more people moving to Detroit?
2. Show a picture of Downtown Detroit 1890 and 1900. Allow students to compare and contrast, what they see in the two photos.
  - How are these pictures different?

- Black and white vs color?  
Why is the photo black and white?
- ‘Old’ buildings vs new? How can you tell they are old?

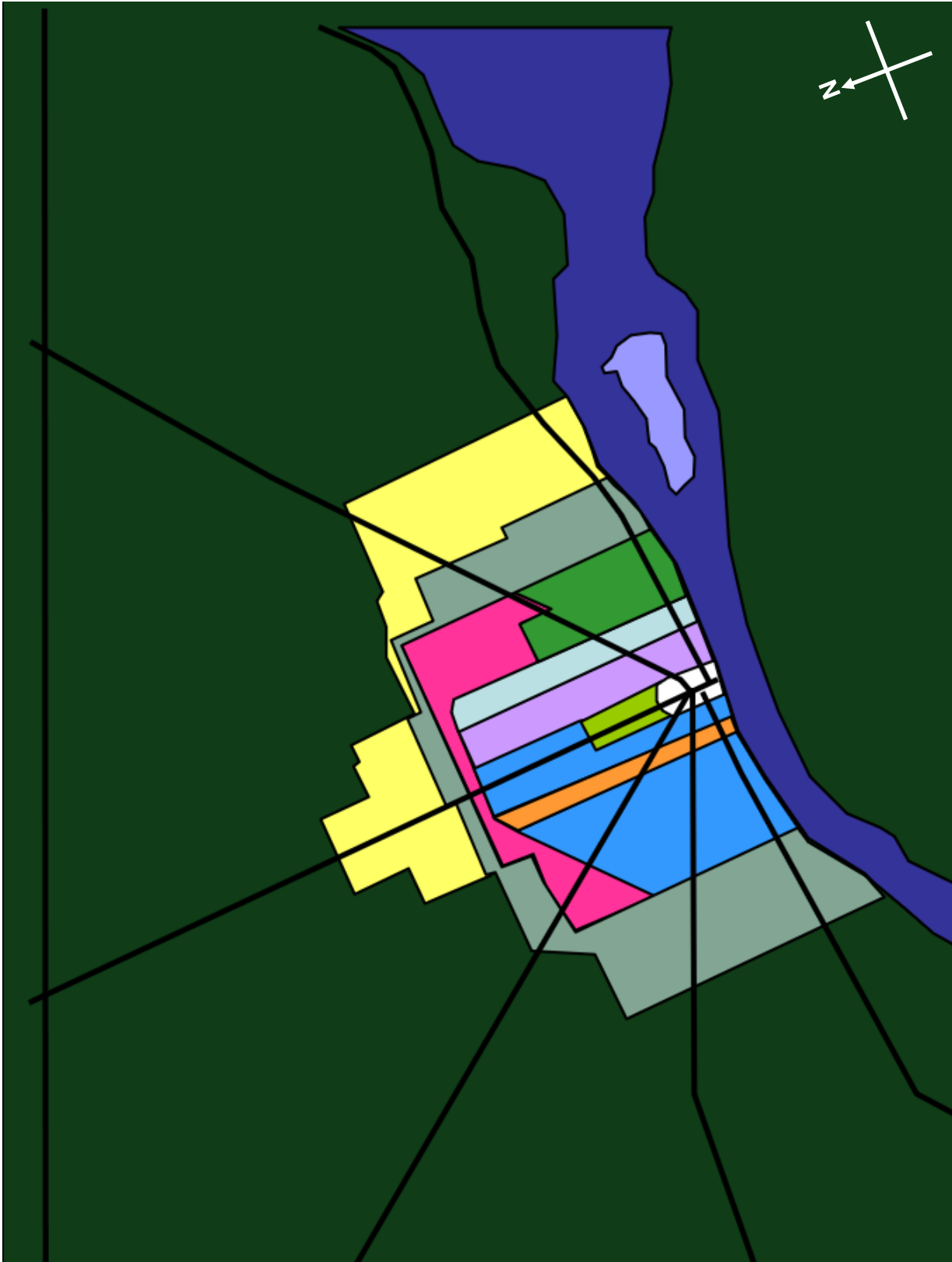
### *Developing the Activity*

1. Divide class into groups of 5-6 students.  
Have them fill out the worksheet provided “Building Our City” allowing them to define what characteristics ‘define’ a city.
2. On the back of the worksheet have students begin to develop their own city.
  - Establish a name
  - What amenities will they include?
  - While students are creating their cities, highlight the discussion of what they saw in the two pictures.
3. After the student groups have highlighted what they want to build, provide them the ‘Streets’ Worksheet to begin drawing out their city.
  - Provide more sheets as needed for them to create their city.

## ASSESSING THE LEARNING

- Have students present their cities to the class, discussing what makes them unique.
- Encourage students to discuss how their cities may be the Detroit in the future, explain why?.

## PICTURE: MAP OF THE CITY OF DETROIT—1900



*City of Detroit expansion by 1900*  
*Courtesy of the Detroit Historical Society*



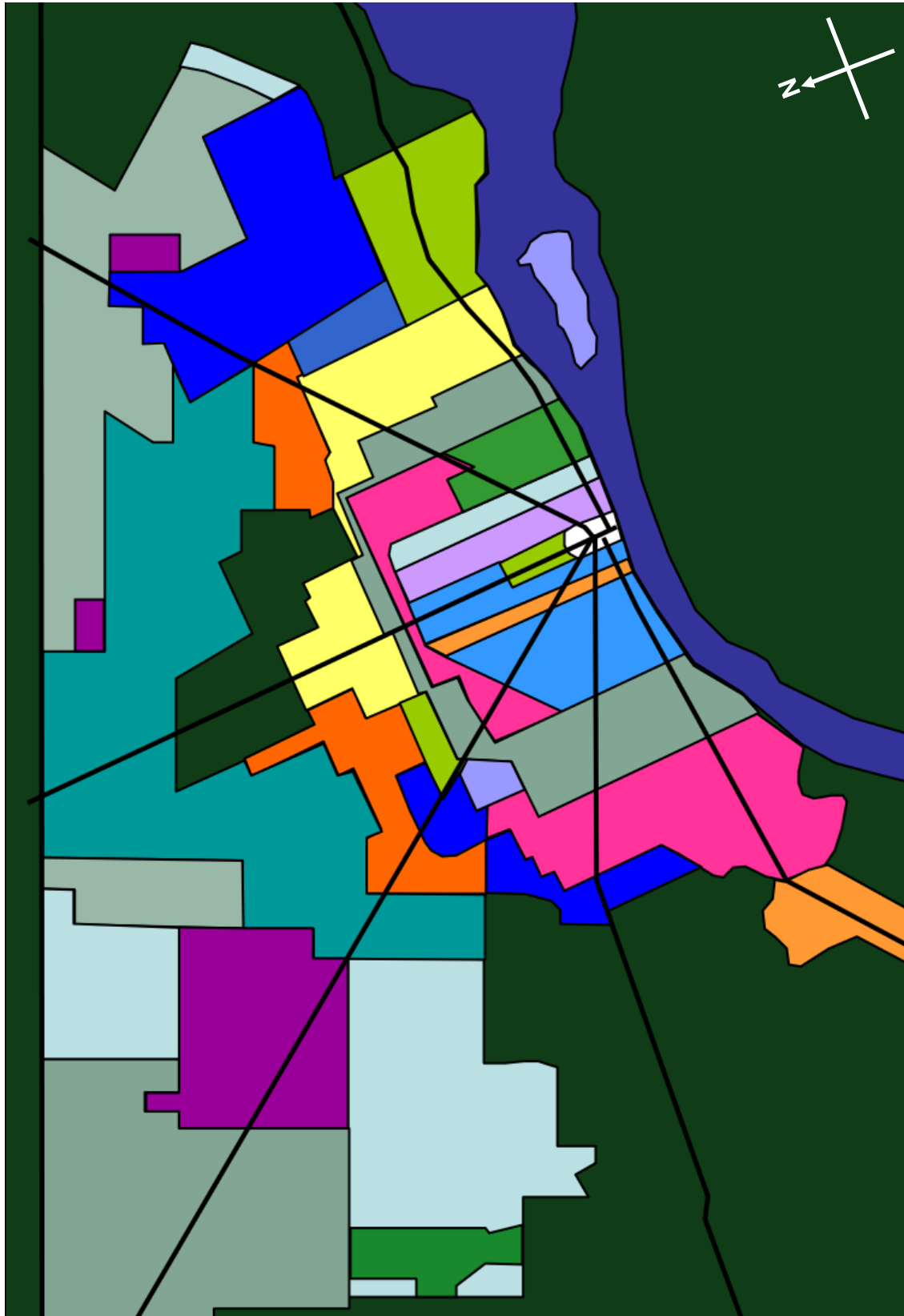
## PICTURE: DOWNTOWN DETROIT — 1900



*Downtown Detroit circa 1910*

*Courtesy of the Detroit Public Library*

PICTURE: MAP OF THE CITY OF DETROIT—1920



City of Detroit expansion by 1920  
Courtesy of the Detroit Historical Society



## PICTURE: DOWNTOWN DETROIT — 2018



*Downtown Detroit circa 2018*

*Courtesy of Bedrock Detroit*

## BUILDING OUR CITY

Name:

Teacher:

Directions: In the columns below, **circle** the types of buildings you would find in your neighborhood and what buildings you would see in the City of Detroit.

### In my neighborhood.....

**you can find:**

Grocery Store	Post Office
Hardware Store	Elementary School
Factory	High School
Ice Cream Shop	Fire Station
Pharmacy	Police Station
Convenience Store	Playground
Bank	Park
Farmers Market	Skyscraper
Art Studio	Townhall
Gym	Parking Lot
	Stop Signs

### In the City of Detroit....

**you can find:**

Grocery Store	Post Office
Hardware Store	Elementary School
Factory	High School
Ice Cream Shop	Fire Station
Pharmacy	Police Station
Convenience Store	Playground
Bank	Farmers Market
Park	Skyscraper
Art Studio	Townhall
Gym	Parking Lot
	Stop Light



## BUILDING OUR CITY

Name:

Teacher:

**Directions:** Now as a group circle that you need to build a city.

Work together to ensure your city has everything it needs for the people who live there. If there is a business missing, write what you want to add to your city so it can be built!

### In our imaginary city we will need

**Circle the following:**

Grocery Store	Post Office
Hardware Store	Elementary School
Factory	High School
Ice Cream Shop	Farmers Market
Pharmacy	Art Studio
Convenience Store	Gym
Bank	Skyscraper
Fire Station	Townhall
Police Station	Parking Lot
Playground	Stop Signs
Park	

### Every City needs a Name!

As a group, create a name for your new City

### Is there anything missing?

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