

RESOURCE LIBRARY | ACTIVITY : 2 HRS

# Adopt a Vacant Lot

Students identify a need for renewal in their own community, conduct a field study, and make recommendations for renewal.

## GRADES

6 - 12

## SUBJECTS

*Geography, Human Geography, Physical Geography*

## OVERVIEW

Students identify a need for renewal in their own community, conduct a field study, and make recommendations for renewal.

For the complete activity with media resources, visit:

<http://www.nationalgeographic.org/activity/adopt-vacant-lot/>

## DIRECTIONS

### **1. Have students identify and sketch a place in the community that is in need of renewal.**

On the board, write a list of descriptive words and phrases that describe a well-known place in your community that is in need of renewal. Include words that describe both cultural and physical characteristics. Have students guess the name of the place and then sketch a rough map from memory of the area surrounding the place you've described. Show students photographs of the place and have them compare their maps to the photos.

### **2. Explain to students how and why communities change the way they use land.**

Explain to students that most places have human associations as well as physical characteristics that give them meaning. Tell students that every community has places whose significance seems to have been lost or forgotten. Have students brainstorm examples and

write them on the board. Then discuss with students how communities change land uses to better meet current needs or to attract new users. Examples include turning a vacant lot into a community garden, or turning an open area into a children's playground. Include local case studies, if available, to support your points. Include criteria for judging the practicality and value of such plans.

### **3. Have students conduct a field study and keep an observation journal.**

Have students observe the place you discussed in step 1 and identify ways in which the environment and human activities are related. Ask them to compile their findings in an observation journal with sketches, using the following questions as prompts:

- *What features—such as sidewalks, fences, buildings, or trees—define the perimeter of the place?*
- *Do you see any patterns, such as rows of benches or flowerbeds?*
- *Are bodies of water present?*
- *What structures—such as play equipment, sewer drains, or buildings—are located at the place?*
- *What types of vegetation, if any, are found there?*
- *What are the elements of the natural environment? Do they appear to have been modified by humans?*
- *When does it appear the modifications were made? How do you know? What are the consequences of the modifications on the natural environment?*
- *In what ways, if any, do human activities vary there from day to night? Weekday to weekend? Season to season?*

### **4. Have students create a map that shows the cultural and physical characteristics of the place.**

Ask students to create a new map of both the cultural and physical characteristics of the place, using what they've learned and the information from their observation journals.

## Modification

If you cannot get out into the field for step 3, you can have students use the Internet to find information about the cultural and physical characteristics of the place. Students may also be able to use Google Earth to see actual images of the place.

## Modification

This activity can be used as a long-term project if your class pursues the opportunity to change the land use of a vacant lot.

## Informal Assessment

Assess students' observation journals from the field study based on the following criteria:

- quality of field notes
- use of the five senses in field notes
- inclusion of field sketches

## Extending the Learning

Divide students into small groups. Assign each group of students a description of a population that their renewal plan is intended to serve, such as the elderly, mothers with preschool children, adults seeking exercise, or teachers. Ask students to brainstorm a list of items desired by members of their population group. Then have students make and present recommendations for the place's renewal, including how their proposed changes could improve the quality of community life.

## OBJECTIVES

## Subjects & Disciplines

### Geography

- [Human Geography](#)
- [Physical Geography](#)

## Learning Objectives

Students will:

- describe and map the cultural and physical characteristics of a place in their community
- conduct a field study
- make recommendations for improving the quality of the place

## Teaching Approach

- Learning-for-use

# Teaching Methods

- Brainstorming
- Discussions
- Hands-on learning
- Writing

# Skills Summary

This activity targets the following skills:

- 21st Century Student Outcomes
  - Learning and Innovation Skills
    - Critical Thinking and Problem Solving
- Critical Thinking Skills
  - Analyzing
  - Applying
  - Understanding
- Geographic Skills
  - Acquiring Geographic Information
  - Analyzing Geographic Information
  - Organizing Geographic Information

# National Standards, Principles, and Practices

## NATIONAL GEOGRAPHY STANDARDS

- **Standard 18:**

How to apply geography to interpret the present and plan for the future

## Preparation

## What You'll Need

## MATERIALS YOU PROVIDE

- Notebooks
- Pencils
- Pens
- Photographs of a place in your community

## REQUIRED TECHNOLOGY

- Internet Access: Optional
- Tech Setup: 1 computer per classroom, Projector

## PHYSICAL SPACE

- Classroom
- Vacant lot

## GROUPING

- Large-group instruction

## BACKGROUND & VOCABULARY

### Background Information

Hands-on geography activities are as close as the nearest vacant lot. Meaningful field study does not have to involve reserving buses, raising funds, arranging for bag lunches, distributing permission slips, and traveling to faraway places.

### Prior Knowledge

["field notes and field sketches"]

### Recommended Prior Activities

- [Observing and Recording Habitats](#)

### Vocabulary

<b>Term</b>	<b>Part of Speech</b>	<b>Definition</b>
<b>cultural characteristic</b>	<i>noun</i>	feature of an area or population that identifies it. Cultural characteristics are often defined as food, language, art, clothing, religion and holidays.
<b>physical characteristic</b>	<i>noun</i>	physical feature of an organism or object.



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