

## **Exploring Your Backyard**

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Narrative

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This unit is designed to make students at the Middle School level more aware of the historic impact their neighborhood has had on history. The unit could be adapted for any class to show the historic background of their own neighborhood. It was also written keeping in mind various learning abilities and styles. The unit will enable the students to develop skills that they will be able to build on in the future.

This unit will spark interest in the students because the old news stories will be about the places that they see on a daily basis. Knowing the history of these places could help the students develop more of an ownership of where they live. One of the main resources the students are going to use is old newspaper articles. By letting the students discover the rich history of their neighborhood it could help them develop a sense of pride in their neighborhood. Many students do not see their neighborhoods as a special place or understand that they have a choice where to live.

The topics used in this unit were chosen because each place has an effect, one way or another, on most students. The first research topic, "The Arsenal", is the name of the school that the students attend. The second topic, St. Francis Hospital, where many of the students have their medical needs met. St. Francis nurses are at the school to service the students because of collaboration with the school. The third topic, Allegheny Cemetery, is one of the largest urban cemeteries in the country. Many students walk through the cemetery or pass it on the way to and from school. Some students also have family members buried in the cemetery. All of these places are located in a large urban neighborhood, blocks from downtown Pittsburgh.

## **Objectives**

There are four main objectives in this unit. One is to have the students develop research skills. The second is to have the students become more aware of the history of their neighborhood. The third is to introduce the students to using the newspaper as a resource. The fourth is to refine basic geography skills. Through the activities the students will be able to understand the objectives and satisfy them.

## **Standards**

The Pittsburgh Public School has a standard based curriculum. While working through the projects the students will be achieving many of the standards. Throughout this unit the students will be working in cooperative groups. Students will meet citizenship standard number eight, which states that all students will demonstrate that they can work effectively with others. When the students do their research at the public library they will also be meeting a standard. Communication Standard number one will be met because the students would use effective research and information management skills, including locating primary and secondary sources of information with traditional and emerging library technologies. Another Communication standard that would be met is number two because the students must read and use a variety of methods to make sense of various kinds of complex texts during their research.

After the unit is completed and the students view their work it would be productive to get some feedback on how they perceived the validity of the assignments. Included is a questionnaire (worksheet 6) for the students to fill out that might help the teacher when planning to do the unit again.

## **Section I**

The history of the Arsenal began in 1754. Early records show that George Washington in crossed the Allegheny River near the site of the Fortieth Street Bridge. After the Revolutionary War, several families moved up the Allegheny River a few miles away from Pittsburgh. Among them was William E. Foster, father of Stephen C. Foster, who came here from Virginia.

During the War of 1812, William Foster laid out the village of Lawrenceville. His original intention was to name it Fosterville. However, in honor of Captain Lawrence who was killed during a naval battle on Lake Erie, he changed the name to Lawrenceville. Captain Lawrence is remembered for his famous battle cry, "Don't give up the ship!"

The construction of an arsenal in or near Pittsburgh became a necessity when the federal government felt that the western frontier and Lake Erie would be vulnerable to enemy attacks. Mr. Foster and Colonel Aaron R. Wooley, who became the first

commandant, chose Thirty-seven acres for an arsenal site in Lawrenceville. In 1814 construction was begun on the arsenal.

The Allegheny Arsenal extended from Penn Avenue (the Philadelphia Turnpike) to the Allegheny River, bounded by Thirty-ninth and Fortieth Streets and was bisected by Butler Street (Butler Road). Stonewalls surrounded each section of the arsenal. The area between the river and Butler Street consisted of the main building that included the magazine of arms, commandant's house, officers' quarters, barracks and shops. The upper section included the stables and the powder magazines.

The construction of the arsenal was conducive in attracting many families to settle in or near Lawrenceville. Until the Civil War, the population increased as industry and commerce attracted more people to settle there. In 1861, over eight hundred people were employed at the arsenal and in 1867, the borough was incorporated into the city of Pittsburgh.

Two events occurred at the arsenal, which received national attention. They were the successful efforts of local residents to impede an attempt by southern sympathizers to steal the heavy cannon in 1860 and the gunpowder explosion on September 17, 1862. The explosion took the lives of over seventy people, mostly girls and women. The arsenal explosion is commemorated with a bronze tablet, which is located in the main entrance of Arsenal Middle School.

The arsenal continued to play an important role in the lives of the local residents for several years following the Civil War. As the need for arsenals dwindled, the Allegheny Arsenal became a storage and supply depot. In 1914, the government decided that the unit had outlived its usefulness and began to dispose of the property. Part of the upper section located between Butler Street and Penn Avenue was given to the city for use as a park. Lawrenceville Board of Trade was instrumental in purchasing the Butler Street frontage for the construction of the Arsenal High School.

On June 11, 1931, the cornerstone was laid. The school was dedicated on November 1, 1932, with a full day of festivities. Over ten thousand people surveyed the new facilities and the legendary Honus Wagner officiated at a baseball game on September 1, 1932.

Although the school was constructed during The Great Depression, no efforts were spared in making it one of the most beautiful and functional schools to be built in the city. The exterior was faced with Indiana limestone and the interior walls on the stairwells and in the halls were faced with Tennessee marble. The towering foyer at the entrance to the auditorium served as a grand entranceway into the building.

The building was partially completed by dedication day. Plans were drafted to increase its size so that it could not only accommodate more junior high school students but also a thousand elementary students. The Arsenal Elementary School occupying the thirty-ninth Street wing was built in 1938-1939 and dedicated April 25, 1940.

The early years at the school were filled with many activities and programs that enriched the lives of the students. The Patriot, the school newspaper was printed in the school shops and contained many articles relating to the numbers of activities that were offered. Today the patriot is still Arsenal Middle School's mascot.

Arsenal Junior High School ceased to exist suddenly in February 1957, when all students were transferred to other schools. The name was changed to Arsenal Girls Vocational High School and it served the girls from the Bellefield School whose building had recently been destroyed by fire. The vocational school remained in existence until 1969 when it was closed for remodeling. In 1971 the building reopened again as Arsenal Middle School to house students from the sixth through the eighth grades.

In September 1980, enrollment at Arsenal Middle School was increased from five hundred fifty students to nine hundred fifty students. The additional students came from Sunnyside, Morningside, Lemington, Rogers and Dilworth elementary school. The right wing to the building, which formerly housed the Arsenal Elementary School, became part of Arsenal Middle School.

## **Section II**

In 1865 two Franciscan Sisters began a hospital in a house on 37th street in Lawrenceville. Dr. Philip Weisenberger bought six acres of land including a frame house on 44th street in 1866. This is where the sisters started a 42-bed hospital. Throughout the years more departments opened and the hospital expanded very quickly. By 1964 St. Francis Hospital was a large hospital that took up many city blocks.

## **Section III**

The Allegheny Cemetery has many points of interest. It spans four neighborhoods. Within its huge black walls are three hundred acres of land. There are many things that a person just walking through the cemetery might miss. Many Arsenal Students visit Allegheny cemetery to celebrate Memorial Day. Without a detailed tour many of the students would never realize all of the treasures that the cemetery holds. It is rumored that there are Indian caves in the cemetery. There are many famous people buried in Allegheny Cemetery. There are seventeen formal Mayors of Pittsburgh buried in the cemetery. Stephen Foster and Lillian Russell are also buried there.

## **Section IV: Finding Newspapers**

Many of the local libraries have old newspapers where the students could get copies. Arsenal Middle School is just two blocks from the Lawrenceville Carnegie Library. Classes could easily walk there and back within a class period. If teachers are interested in using current newspaper articles they should call their local newspaper and see if there is anyway to get a class set donated. Some places have programs where businesses sponsor free newspapers for a school.

## **Section V: Lesson 1 - Introducing the newspaper Objectives**

Students will be able to find specific information in the newspapers.  
Students will locate places on a map.

Many middle school students have never used the newspaper before. It is important to start with very basic skills so that the students do not become frustrated with the papers on the first try. The first day of the Unit should be dedicated to introducing the newspaper. Since there is only a class set and many teachers will need this set for the whole day it will benefit the teacher to make sure the students know how to put the paper back together at the end of the lesson. Try to use a daily newspaper opposed to a Sunday newspaper because the Sunday edition usually is too complicated to start with.

There are worksheets included that will help the students discover the different parts of the paper and what information can be found in them. The first worksheet could be used as a warm-up. The first worksheet deals with the front page. This is a good start because the students do not have to open the newspapers to get the information that they need. Go over the warm-up carefully pointing out where each of the answers is located on the front page and where the index would be. Before, letting the students open the paper remembers that it might be hard for them to hold up the newspaper to fold it open. It might help if the students do not have large desk to have the students to lay the newspaper on the floor next to their desk and turn the pages that way at first. If the students take one section or even one page at a time it will cut down on tears.

The second worksheet is more like a scavenger hunt; it leads the students to discover where to find important information throughout the newspaper. The worksheet also requires the students to define key words that they will need to understand. For example, most students know what the sports section is but have no idea what is an obituary. The teacher could customize the hunt to fit into her lesson and the information she wants the students to get. After the students go over the answers for the second worksheet let the students have time to read articles that they find interesting.

The third worksheet will develop the student's awareness of how the news comes from all over the world. Since students in Middle School are still practicing their geography skills, this activity will benefit them. The teacher could expand on the worksheet to cover specific geography skills. For example, worksheet three will have students search for articles from different places in the world and then locate them on the map. This would be an excellent group activity. The teacher could use this activity as a warm-up for many days, which will enable the students, find as many places on the map as possible. The first day of going over how to use a newspaper is important because the students will be more incline to read a newspaper on their own if they feel comfortable with using it.

## **Section VI - Lesson 2**

### **Objectives**

The students will use effective research and information management skills.  
The students will demonstrate an understanding of major historic events in their neighborhoods.

The first lesson of the unit is on "The Arsenal." The warm-up is to show an old picture of the area where school now sits. The question on the board is "Does anyone recognize this place?" By doing this the students will realize how much a place can change overtime. Discuss the picture with the students. Read the passage from "Monsters on the Allegheny ... and Other Lawrenceville Stories" and read some old newspaper articles. Take the students on a walking tour of the school grounds. During the tour the students' assignment is to write down anything that they see that they think is very old and why they believe it is old. (This does not include their teacher.)

There are special things that could be pointed out, for example the cannon in Arsenal Park and the old stone wall that surrounds the park. The plaque in the entrance hall of the school is extremely interesting. It is a large bronze Angel that has the names of the girls that were killed in the Arsenal explosion of 1862. Using a large sheet of paper the students will do a rubbing of the plaque that could be taken back to the classroom. Ask the students if there are any last names that sound familiar to them. For example, the name of their teacher, McCarthy, is on the plaque twice. After discussing the origins of the name for their school the students will start to research the beginnings of the school itself.

The students will spend two days at the local library (80 minutes. total for each class). It is important to prepare the students to go to the library because they might not understand what the time limits are to gather the information. Since sometimes students try to copy all of the information from a source word by word, it might be a good idea to have students use index cards when collecting the information. The students should understand that they are only allowed to write down a few ideas on the index cards and later back at school they can expand in their own words what they had read. The students should be reminded to write down what will be needed for their bibliography. This assignment could be done individually or as a group. Giving the groups different time periods to research will help because they will not want to listen to the same oral report over and over. Also when the students are researching a certain time period they could read about other things that were going on in this area at that time.

The next two periods at school that the class meets the students will, write a rough draft of the information that they found at the library. A good copy will be typed up on the computer and then the students will present their findings to the class. It would be nice that since each child found information on the history of Arsenal for different years that they orally present in order. When all of the students have presented, they will put together a timeline of the events in Arsenal's past. This could include their written

reports, pictures that they drew and old newspaper clippings. Each class will display their finished assignment in the main hallway of the school.

One assessment could be to have the each student make up two good questions for each oral presentation. After all of the presentations the students could trade their questions with a partner. When finished with the quiz they could check them together. The students may have to ask different presenters certain questions for clarification. For an extra credit assignment the students could interview a person who went to Arsenal years ago.

### **Section VII - Lesson 3**

#### **Objectives**

Students will design a map key.  
Students will work successfully in cooperative groups.

After showing a picture of an old house, ask the students "What could this possibly have been?" The picture is a house on Forty-fourth Street that was used as the beginnings of St. Francis Hospital. Discuss how and why places change over time. Ask students to share any experiences they might have had at the hospital. It is a known fact that many of the students go to the hospital just to ride the elevators with their friends. The materials needed for this activity is an old aerial photo of St. Francis Hospital thirty-years ago. Also each student will have an individual blank map of the area, with only street names on it.

During a walking tour the students will identify the buildings in the old photo that no longer exist. Then the students will label the blank street map with a symbol of the building that now stands. For example, in the old photo there is a firehouse on Forty-fourth Street. The firehouse is long gone, now there is a new emergency room in its' place. The one building in the picture that is still standing today is the house that the teacher grew up in. Before the students returned to school it would be a special treat if they could have lunch in the hospital cafeteria.

During the next class period the students will work in-groups and collaborate to fill in another blank map together, using each of their maps from the tour. When the students finish their maps they could work on making a student made rubric to use when scoring their work. After the rubric was made there would be time for the groups to go over their maps to make sure they have all the requirements needed to score high. An example of what a student made rubric might look like is included.

### **Section VIII - Lesson 4**

#### **Objectives**

Students will read from different texts and demonstrate an understanding of different aspects of local history.

This lesson will start with the students listening to a few pieces of Stephen Foster's music. After listening to Foster's music the class will discuss his role in the local history. The students will also be given articles on the Allegheny Cemetery that they will read. The students will then discuss the things that they found interesting from the readings. Following this discussion the class will work together to compile a list of what they would find fascinating and want to view. They will use a section map of Allegheny Cemetery to locate the points of interest. Some of the possible points of interest would be the shark tombstone, the stables or the buried Civil War Cannons. The students might also want to see the grave for the unidentified girls that were killed in the Arsenal explosion. Before the students go on a walking tour of the cemetery it might be

necessary to remind them about appropriate behavior on the street and in a cemetery. The students will then take a walking tour of the cemetery.

During the next class period the students will discuss what they found interesting on the tour. Each student will then write a short essay describing what they learned about the history of the area through touring Allegheny Cemetery. The teacher assessment can be accomplished with observation and teacher made rubrics.

## Worksheet 1 - How to use a Newspaper

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Group #: \_\_\_\_\_

What is the name of the Newspaper you are using?

\_\_\_\_\_

What date is on the newspaper? \_\_\_\_\_

Where would you find the index for the Newspaper? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Name three sections of the newspaper:

Describe how you would find the comics' section. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

From each section that you have named find an article in that section and read it. Then summarize what you have read.

Article 1 - Section \_\_\_\_\_

Title of Article \_\_\_\_\_

Written by \_\_\_\_\_

Summary

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Article 2 Section \_\_\_\_\_

Title of Article \_\_\_\_\_

Written by \_\_\_\_\_

Summary \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Article 3 Section \_\_\_\_\_

Title of Article \_\_\_\_\_

Written by \_\_\_\_\_

Summary \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Discuss with a partner the different articles you have read.

## Worksheet 2 - Finding Information in the Newspaper

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Group Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Using a dictionary define the key words.

International \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

National \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Local \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Editorial \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Obituary \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Find an article for the first three definitions. Read each article and write a summary of the article.

**International**

Title of article \_\_\_\_\_

Written by \_\_\_\_\_

Summary \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**National**

Title of the Article \_\_\_\_\_

Written by \_\_\_\_\_

Summary \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Local**

Title of Article \_\_\_\_\_

Written by \_\_\_\_\_

Summary \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

### Worksheet 3 - Where in the World does News come from?

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Group # \_\_\_\_\_

Materials: newspapers  
World Maps  
National Maps  
Local Maps  
Large Blank World Map

Find an article from the International section of the newspaper. Read the article. Which map would you find the place where the news occurred? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Find the place on the correct map. On the large blank map label the country. Also put the title of the article on the map.

Find an article from the National section of the newspaper. Read the article. Which map would you find the place where the news occurred? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Find the place on the correct map and label it.

Find an article in the local section of the newspaper. Read the article.

Which map would you find the place where the news occurred? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Find the place on the map then label the blank map.

## Worksheet 4 - Worksheet for the Library Trip

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Topic \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

1. Where would you find information on the topic that you are researching? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

2. What time period are you researching for your topic? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

3. While you are researching, what are some other things happening in the area at the same time? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Take notes on your index cards on the information you read about your topic.

Make sure to get the following information from each source.

Author \_\_\_\_\_

Title \_\_\_\_\_

Publisher \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Worksheet 5 - Student Made Rubric

### St. Francis Hospital Map Project

#### Scoring the Map

1 is the lowest score

1. The map includes all of the new buildings found on the walking tour.

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

2. The buildings are in the right location.

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

3. The map is neat and accurate.

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

4. There was a combined effort of the whole group on this project.

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

5. The map key is complete.

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

## Worksheet 6 - Students Critique

1. What part of the Unit did you like best?

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2. What part did you like least?

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3. What do you think you will remember most from the activities?

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4. When your teacher does the unit again, in what ways can she improve it?

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