

Seeing My Town through Time-Travel Glasses

Abstract

Join the students and put on a pair of time-travel glasses to look at your town from a new perspective – in the future. The easy minilesson inspires students to reflect on their town – how they would like it to be, what they find important for living in the town, or what they would rather change. Finally, students compare their visions with their real-life community.

Unit type and duration

Two consecutive 45-minute lessons. The minilesson begins in the classroom and concludes with a walk around the community.

Target group

Primary programmes – Grades 4 and 5.

Context and cross-curricular links

The activity integrates Reading, writing and literature; and Arts.

Goals and outputs

Goals: Students reflect that places have their meanings and people may perceive those meanings differently.

Students formulate what makes places significant for themselves or others, what they like, what they need for a happy life in the place.

Outputs:

- Students create an artistic representation of their ideal town of the future.
- Directly in the field, students compare their ideal vision of a place with its real-life form.

Outline of the activities

Activity 1: My Town of the Future (tuning in to the topic)

Duration: 15 minutes

Location: classroom

Materials: none – students can use imaginary glasses (optional tip: ask students to bring their own sunglasses to class or devote a previous arts class to creating them)

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Activity description:

Secure the classroom against any sort of disturbance (e.g., by placing a notice on the door's outside, temporarily closing the windows during summer, switch off phones, possibly also pulling the curtains and dimming the lights etc.)

Introduce the magical time-travel glasses. These are glasses that allow students to view the town of their dreams in the future. Whenever a student puts them on, he/she slowly moves into the future, where things gradually change the way he/she desires. We can either wear sunglasses and present them as magical or work with fantasy and merely imagine wearing a pair.

Now invite students to find a comfortable position on their chair and put on the notional time-travel glasses: *“Now if you don't mind, close your eyes, relax your entire body, and take a few deep breaths to make yourselves as comfortable as possible. You can feel your chair providing firm support and you can also feel the ground against which your feet are resting firmly... Imagine putting on a pair of time-travel glasses... Now let's try to walk together through the future town of our dreams, and I will be your guide. This is going to take us about five minutes. During that time, please remain silent and imagine yourselves walking through the town following my instructions.”*

Slowly read out the following text, pausing occasionally (you may adapt the text to your liking):

“Imagine sitting at a town square (village square, central area) in your community, sometime in the future. A lot of things have happened over the years and the place did change a little. Maybe you wouldn't even recognize it. As you're sitting, you can feel the touch of your bench and you want to enjoy that touch properly. That's why you're going to make yourselves comfortable on that bench... Around you, you can hear the voices of people passing by. On your skin, you can feel a gentle breeze blowing and the sun shining. You find this very comfortable... As you're looking at the buildings around you, have you noticed how big, broad and amazingly colourful they are? Look at their fronts. Which ones do you find the most inviting to enter and check out what's inside? But there is more than buildings to this place. It has a plenty of other interesting things: just look around thoroughly... As you are inspecting this place dreamily, you can hear the voices of your friends and you set out to join them. You are walking through the winding streets, feeling the sun peeking through. Footing the beautiful old pavement, you are examining the trees planted next to it. You are passing storefronts, the bus stop, and gardens until your curvy path takes you to a mysterious place... The place is a kind of hidden centre... the heart of the town where you often meet with friends; you feel good in this place. There is a secret hidden in this centre. It has a plenty of things you need in your life. As you are looking

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around slowly, you are inspecting those things, the buildings, the areas and the trees, you are crawling through the corners and you are enjoying every moment. This place provides you with everything you need. What is it actually? Look around carefully to see what the place is like. Examine it as a whole... And also look at the details: there may be some things you have never noticed before, what are they? As you're slowly sitting down on the bench, you can feel the sun shining, you're enjoying the beautiful weather and you're having a good time... When you have enjoyed this feeling, you can slowly open your eyes."

Immediately after the visioning exercise, ask students to express in a single word:

- What was it like for you?
- How did you feel?

Recommendations: Make sure to monitor students for any negative emotions caused by the activity; work with such emotions.

Activity 2: Drawing the future town of my dreams

Duration: 20 minutes

Location: classroom

Materials: sheets of paper, various art supplies (crayons, watercolour paints, ...)

Activity description:

Distribute sheets of paper and art supplies (crayons, watercolour paints etc.) to students. Their assignment is to draw what the town of their dreams looks like. When students are finished, discuss their artwork:

- Which parts of your dream town of the future were interesting or surprising?
- In your imagination, what was important for you to feel good in the town of your dreams?
- Which aspects of your dream town already exist in our real-life town?
- And in contrast, which aspects of your dream town do not exist in our real-life town?
Do you miss them? Would you like to add them?

Volunteers can share with others and add their answers to the above questions.

Activity 3: Taking a walk around town: comparing imagination with reality

Duration: 45 minutes

Location: the community/selected local places

Materials: none

Activity description:

In the final part of the minilesson, tell students they are about to go out and compare the towns of their dreams with our real-life town. Now everyone goes for a and walk students notice any differences between their dream towns and the actual town they live in. Students



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and the teacher can compare which aspects of their imaginary town already exist and work well in their real-life town and, in contrast, which aspects are missing, need to be added and why. Bring students to reflect on any aspects of their future towns that might be transferred to the real-life town and how it would affect their lives and those of other community members.

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Prerequisites and possible follow-up minilessons:

The unit could be preceded by the topic of the town in general, urban development, urban functions etc. But at the same time, the unit can be used as a motivating introduction before teaching the topic of our town/community. As a prelude to the minilesson, students can create their time-travel glasses.

The unit could be followed by another available minilesson, Emotion Mapping of the Place, in which students map how they, their fellow students, parents, grandparents, and other community members feel in their town – which places are popular, liked, where people do not feel safe, unpopular places, mysterious places, etc. Integrating both activities may help students bridge the gap between their imaginary world and the real world, namely the reality of their town.

Integrating the place and the community in the minilesson

As the minilesson provides an introduction to place-based learning, students only begin to reflect on their place through stories and imagination.

Application of PBL principles and the PBL Rung attained

Principles:

On-site learning – As learning steps outside the school during the minilesson, the community and its surroundings become the classroom.

Learning about the place – Local themes and contexts are used for learning. Students reflect on their community as a place for living a happy life. They identify the strengths and weaknesses of their town.

Learning through the place – Students imagine the town of their dreams to learn how their town operates. They consider things that already exist and operate in their community and any changes that could be made.

Learning for the place – The motivational activity may result in mapping things that are missing or not functioning in the community and what students might later do to improve the situation. We advise organising an exhibition of student artwork or a survey on questions like: What does your ideal town look like? What do you miss in our town? – This is only a step short of mapping ways of improving the town.

Place attachment – By comparing their ideal town with their town, students identify its values. This helps them build place attachment.

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Adapting to local situation – The learning process is adapted to specific local conditions and needs. In the final walking debate, students answer why things in real life are different from the town of their dreams.

Personal relevance – Students find the learning process personally relevant, being able to see how it relates to their own lives. Students contribute their own visions and continue by formulating what they personally would like to add or change in their town.

Active student involvement/participation – The activities cultivate the attitude that students can participate in making a difference in their place.

Community partnership – This principle could be applied in follow-up work (see recommended follow-up minilesson, Emotion Mapping of the Place), where students survey fellow community members and invite them to imagine their ideal town and what might be missing from the town now.

Interdisciplinarity – The activity links socio-economic subjects (urban functions) with history (how the town developed), arts and languages (presenting one's town, listening to text during the imaginative session).

Full-fledged teaching tool – The minilesson integrates the following curricular areas: Civics education; Arts. It also touches upon the subject of Moral Education.

Cooperation – This principle is not fully applied by the minilesson, as students work individually. It is only in follow-up work that they can form teams and cooperate on assignments such as survey design.

Place-Based Learning Ladder (the rung attained by the minilesson is in bold):

Rung 1

Lessons are adapted by adding local examples to existing teaching units.

Rung 2

Lessons are designed to include direct experiences of the place (or direct experiences of the place are added to existing teaching units).

Rung 3

Teaching unit is designed to use the advantages of the place and form a community partnership.

Rung 4

Integrated teaching unit based on PBL that involves service learning and a strong community partnership.