

Mixing It Up

National Standards of Learning: Math – Problem Solving; Social Studies – 1, 2, 3; Tech Lit – 18, 19, 20; Visual Arts – 3

Duration: One class period, 45 – 60 minutes

Overview

Zoning is a legally binding tool used by local governments to implement their planning goals and shape their community's physical appearance. For much of the 20th century, zoning practice emphasized the separation of land by use (e.g., commercial, residential). This idea of separating space grew out of concern in the early 20th century about conditions in industrial cities in which smokestack pollution and overcrowded housing caused disease.

Zoning by use kept industry and commercial uses away from housing and emphasized light, air, and open space in residential areas. In the suburbs, "zoning by use" meant apartment buildings and single family houses could not be in the same neighborhood. This relatively low-density development meant that the best way to get around the suburbs was by car. While separating uses allowed people to have larger homes and yards, it also helped to create the condition known as sprawl— traffic jams, air pollution, the loss of open space, and long distances between homes, stores, parks, and work.

In response to this sprawl, urban planners and local governments are beginning to embrace more traditional approaches to community planning that mix rather than separate uses. During this activity students will explore how different types of land uses may be mixed together, thus improving our everyday life.



Objectives

Students will:

- Identify the functions of various parts of a school;
- Categorize places by use; and
- List various solutions for organizing a school or neighborhood.

Materials

- Paper or graph paper
- Pencils
- Rulers
- Markers or crayons

Teacher Prep

- *Optional*: Prepare a bird's-eye view plan of the school. Make copies for each child or group. (See example on page 42).

Vocabulary

- Mixed-use
- Residential
- Commercial
- Institutional
- Industrial

Lesson Plan

1. Explore and Zone the School.

- To help students understand the benefits of a mixed-use community, have them explore the many different uses that exist within their school building. Draw a bird's-eye view plan of the school (either provide this to your students or have them draw it themselves), and give one copy to each student or a group of students. Have the students color the school to represent the different activities that occur in the building (see page 14 for the colors assigned to each land use category). For example, they may color the classrooms blue for institutional because this part of the building helps people learn. They may color the cafeteria red to represent commercial because they can buy food there. And, they may color the playground green because it is a recreational space (see example of a bird's-eye view plan of a school building after lesson plan).

2. Discuss Student Plans and Functions of the School.

- After investigating their own school, discuss with students the many different functions of the building. Ask them if only children use the building or if adults use it, too? Do citizens use the school for neighborhood meetings? Do people vote there during elections? Do scout troops meet there in the afternoons? Is there an after-school program in one part of the school? Explain to the students that schools are really mixed-use buildings.
- Compare and discuss the various plans that the students created and the different uses that occur in the school. How do all the services within the building benefit the students and surrounding community? What would it be like if they had to learn in one building, eat lunch in another, and travel to a third to have recess? What would their day be like if they had to travel a long distance to play on the playground or eat lunch?

3. Discuss the Mixed-Use Planning at school and in your neighborhood.

- Like their school building, neighborhoods can also have many spaces with different uses mixed together. With your students, discuss the pros and cons of mixing different land uses together either in one building or in neighboring buildings. Discuss the types of buildings near the school and chart these on the board. Make a list of the ways in which they travel to the grocery store, pharmacy, playground, park, library, hospital, and school. And, document how long it takes to get to each. What conclusions can they draw from this information about traveling time and traffic? Would it be better if these places were closer to where they lived? Why? What other mixed-use buildings or neighborhoods can students think of?
- Summarize why a mixed-use community can be a better community. Explain to the students that in addition to making getting around more convenient, there are other benefits to having different buildings close together. Discuss how, by having buildings close together, the community is more environmentally friendly since people do not need to drive as much to get what they need. These neighborhoods also encourage a sense of community because people are all using the same buildings in a smaller area; it's easier to get to know your neighbors. See page 15 for ideas about local mixed-use developments, or see if you can discover one on your own.

Sample Bird's-Eye View Plan of School Building

