

THE GOOD LIFE?

Grade 8

A Problem-Based Learning Lesson

OBJECTIVES:

- Students will define urban sprawl.
- Students will investigate the impacts of urban sprawl.
- Students will use critical thinking to develop a future plan for growth in Orange County.

FCAT STRANDS ADDRESSED:

Reading Exam Reference and Research

Writing Exam Expository writing / Organization and support

MEETS THE FOLLOWING SUNSHINE STATE STANDARDS:

SOCIAL STUDIES

Strand A: *Time, Continuity, and Change (History)*

Standard 5: *The student understands United States History from 1880 to present day*

Benchmark SS.A.5.3.1 The student understands the role of physical and cultural geography in shaping events in the United States since 1880.

Grade Level Expectations The student understands the role of physical and cultural geography in shaping events in the United States since 1880 (for example, western settlement, immigration patterns, urbanization).

Benchmark SS.A. 5.3.3 The student knows the causes and consequences of urbanization that occurred in the United States after 1880.

Grade Level Expectations: The student knows the causes and consequences of urbanization that occurred in the United States after 1880 (for example, industrialization, poor living conditions)

Benchmark SS.A 6.3.5 The student understands how Florida has allocated and used resources and the consequences of those economic decisions.

Grade Level Expectations The student understands how Florida has allocated and used resources and the consequences of those economic decisions (for example, the development of transportation systems, preference for tourism).

LANGUAGE ARTS

Strand B: *Writing*

Standard 2: *The student writes to communicate ideas and information effectively*

Benchmark LA.B 2.3.1 The student writes text, notes, outlines, comments, and observations that demonstrate comprehension of content and experiences from a variety of media.

Benchmark LA. B. 2.3.3 The students selects and uses appropriate formats for writing, including narrative, persuasive, and expository formats, according to the intended audience, purpose, and occasion.

Strand D: *Language*

Standard 2: *The student understands the power of language*

Benchmark LA.D 2.3.1 The student selects language that shapes reactions, perceptions, and beliefs.

Benchmark LA.D 2.3.3 The student distinguishes between emotional and logical argument.

MATERIALS:

- Copies of Orlando Sentinel Article “Good Life Evades Many in Orange” 7/6/00 (see last pages)
- Copies of introduction for each student
- Street maps of Orange County
- For additional information, you may also want to contact the Healthy Community Initiative of Greater Orlando <http://www.hciflorida.org/>

ACTIVITIES:

1. Read the introduction to the students and provide copies to them after you have shared it.
2. Ask students to share their hunches and record these on chart paper or the board.
3. Divide the students into small groups each representing one of the issues they have brainstormed to address (i.e. recycling, transportation, water quality). Groups develop plans over 1-2 class periods.
 - Plans must have: 1) an introduction, 2) effective transitional devices, and 3) a conclusion.
 - Plans should also have specific details outlining the plan of action for addressing the issue.
4. Groups present their findings to the rest of the class (outlined on chart paper).

5. Discuss agreement or disagreements with plans and any alternatives.
6. Develop a class plan.
7. Write letter to the Orange County Mayor or your community's County Commissioner sharing their ideas. To locate your County Commissioner or the County Mayor, see <http://www.orangecountyfl.net>

INTRODUCTION:

The Future of Orange County is in Your Hands...

The briefing at the chambers of the Orange County Board of County Commissioners was about to begin. Seated around the table with you are some of the most prominent and outstanding leaders from the community. They have been asked to join this project, as you are, because they are people of vision, as well as expert problem solvers.

The leader begins her comments. She is talking about the growth in Central Florida and what life will be like here in 50 years. She talks about the future quality of life, which recent media reports have highlighted. The reports have stated that the region is low in the “Good Life Index,” scoring particularly low in use of fossil fuels, urban sprawl, crowded schools, recycling efforts, and stream quality.

The leader finishes posing a problem for the group to consider. “This is where the group comes in. The big problem I’m asking you to solve begins like this: “Over 1.5 million people already reside in Central Florida. That number is increasing by approximately 41,000 people per year. We want to become a model community for the future. We need to map out a plan to ensure Central Florida earns an “A” in the Good Life Index for its citizens and visitors. What should be done?”

The people in the room stare at each other. The leader speaks again, “We have the funding. Your ideas are crucial to the future of this community, now who has hunches about what Central Florida should look like? What are the issues we are facing? What questions do we need to answer? Let’s start making some lists.”

“GOOD LIFE EVADES MANY IN ORANGE: THE COUNTY RECEIVED 60 POINTS OUT OF 100 IN A REPORT ON THE HIGHS AND LOWS OF EDUCATION, INCOME AND MORE”

THE ORLANDO SENTINEL

July 6, 2000

Author: Gwyneth K. Shaw of The Sentinel Staff

If it had been a test, Orange County would have failed.

Luckily, on this grading scale, a score of 60 -- out of 100 -- isn't an F. Still, it gives a bird's-eye view of a community with a shiny surface but shaky underpinnings.

"This places our community just below fair and advises strong caution," said Ray Larsen, director of the Healthy Communities Initiative of Greater Orlando, which presented its "Good Life Index" on Wednesday. "In other words, many in our community are not living the good life, and the rest of us are in danger of letting the good life melt away."

For the first time, the study by public officials and citizen activists connects the dots of the area's good and bad points, giving each aspect -- from traffic to child welfare to air quality -- equal weight. The end result shows how intertwined are the region's economy and the well-being of its people. And it details how one person's sunny optimism can be another's ongoing struggle -- a distinction based almost completely on income level.

In short, the area's service-based economy affects us deeply. The troubles that plague Orange County and its environs, from urban sprawl to struggling schools to transience, can be at least partially attributed to the prevalence here of jobs that never seem to pay quite enough.

Among the pieces of the puzzle:

- While it's easier to buy a home these days, it's more expensive to rent an apartment.
- More than 20 percent of the county's residents are without health insurance.
- The region's economy has become less diverse during the past 30 years, to the point where service jobs outnumber the closest competitor nearly 2-to-1.
- Infant-mortality rates are down, but the number of low-birth-weight babies has risen.

Bob Morin, district administrator for the local branch of the state Department of Children & Families, sees the fallout of these facts every day. Child abuse and neglect often stem from families that are stretched to the emotional breaking point by too many needs and too little money.

Morin highlights two of the statistics listed in the study as particularly alarming: the high

rate of students who switch schools at least once during the year, and the nearly 25 percent of Orange County's children who are living in poverty. That second number is predicted to grow to 40 percent within the next decade, unless major steps are taken.

"I think that's really scary," Morin said. "It's going to affect the community and commerce. I think it's important for the community to understand that if we can't protect our children and give them the nurturing and the access to health insurance and the proper care and housing, we're going to be suffering as a result in the future."

The number of kids who finish the school year in a different school in which they started, Morin said, makes it tough for families to connect to the community. Families without strong support systems typically have a tougher time. Children & Families is already working with Heart of Florida United Way and other agencies to help track families that are constantly on the move and help them gain a solid footing.

"When we start to target neighborhoods, that's when we'll start to see some changes," he said. For Orange County School Board member Linda Sutherland, the high rate of school-switching says something else -- that children are paying a terrible price in terms of their education. That's a big reason why local schools got a failing grade from the study, said Sutherland, who is on the board of directors for the initiative.

The economic straits of many families also play a role, she said. It's hard to take a test on an empty stomach, no matter how hard a student has drilled for the exam.

"This shows you can't just point the finger at education," she said. "I think the board certainly will think this is interesting. I hope it will spur an interest in looking into the other problems. You can't just say we need better teachers."

County Chairman Mel Martinez agrees most of the woes can be traced to the economy's dependence on tourism and service-sector jobs. When people are making minimum wage, a lot of other quality-of-life issues suffer, he said. Low wages, for example, are related to the lack of affordable housing and the high number of underinsured residents.

But Martinez still described the initiative's number grade of 60 as a "disservice" to the community.

"I would give us an 80," Martinez said. "I mean, I know there are challenges out there -- I hear you -- but we're working on them."

For instance, Martinez has taken a strong stand against sprawl, vowing to put off new homes and apartments in areas where schools are crowded. The county also is committed to providing more affordable housing.

But Larsen and others associated with the initiative expect, and even welcome, a surprised or negative response to the report. Getting a reaction out of people is the first step, they

say, toward pushing local leaders and citizens to hammer out solutions.

The initiative, a nonprofit organization devoted to long-term improvement, plans to hold public meetings and set some community goals during the next year. The next version of the index will be released in 2002.

"We hope this report will generate some controversy," said Linda Chapin, Orange County clerk of courts and the outgoing chairman of the initiative. "We hope that all of you will be a part of this conversation."

Scott Maxwell of the Sentinel staff contributed to this report.

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