

River Mapping

Connecting Individuals to their Environment through Student-Centered Urban Design



This lesson plan comes from a series of lessons developed in conjunction with the Moving Waters Workbook. These art-making activities are based on the principles of the [Visual Thinking Strategies](#), a student-centered, discovery-based method that uses art to teach thinking, communication skills, and visual literacy to young people.

Teaching art and environmental awareness through the VTS provides students with open-ended forums for discovery and reflection. The lessons are designed to be experimental and flexible, focusing on the process over the final product. Learn more about the VTS and how you can get involved on our website O4ARTS.ORG.

Goals

- ◆ To create a long-term student driven project that fosters collaboration, spatial and material problem solving, and discovery based learning.
- ◆ To encourage students to investigate the social and material systems which connect individuals to the greater community.
- ◆ To investigate the co-existence of nature and industry in an urban environment, focusing on the San Antonio River, its tributaries, and the Watershed.
- ◆ To encourage students to use recycled and discarded materials in new and innovative ways.

MATERIALS

- ❑ Drawing materials for initial map drawings
- ❑ Recycled boxes, cans, toys etc. for the full scale city model
- ❑ Paint, scissors, glue, construction paper, for the full scale city model

PROCESS

- Divide students into groups of three or four with a designated team leader and ask them to create a list of necessary structures and systems to create a functioning city. Talk about the importance of water to a city system.

Why is water important for our city?

What does the San Antonio River bring to our city?

Where does it come from? And where does it go?

The San Antonio River Authority (sara-tx.org) as well as the San Antonio Water System (saws.org) both have great websites for information about our city's water systems.

- Students will then design and map their cities on two dimensional poster boards, and create an accompanying key to identify buildings, parks, waterways and landmarks.
- It is important to conduct a series of discussions along the way that ask students to reflect on their designs, and collectively assess what could be missing or could be improved.
- Before beginning the larger 3-dimensional version of your city, students will be faced with the challenge of devising a way to integrate the work of each individual into a cohesive whole. We decided to create rectangular city modules that could be put together like a puzzle. This way students would have the flexibility to sometimes work on their individual panel, and sometimes work on the city as a unified whole.
- The centerpiece of our city project was a central river with several tributaries and lakes. This aspect of the project, which was informed to a large degree by a series of art-making lesson plans investigating the water cycle, and the creatures that live in water, allowed for students to learn about the workings of urban waterways through productive participation and material discovery.

EVALUATION

Ask students to evaluate the completed city both on its aesthetic appeal, and its practical workings. How does this model of a city compare to our own?