

Walking Through Portland with a Panther: Gentrification and the History of Portland

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This lesson — **designed for high school students** — will teach students about the topic of gentrification and its effects on Portland's history, giving them a greater understanding of their local history and how to connect with it. In conjunction with *Walking Through Portland with a Panther*, the students will gain a greater understanding of the world and their place within it.

Timing Note for Educators: The total time allotted for each section of this lesson adds up to approximately 55 minutes, this is to provide a cushion in case one section takes longer than expected.

Common Core Educational Standards

Primary Guiding Focus:

- **TH:Cn11.2.III.b**
 - Present and support an opinion about the social, cultural, and **historical understandings** of a drama/theatre work, based on critical research.
- **JU.9-12.13**
 - I can explain the short and **long-term impact** of biased words and behaviors and unjust practices, **laws and institutions** that limit the rights and freedoms of people based on their identity groups.

Secondary Guiding Focus:

- **TH: Re7.1.-III.a**
 - Use **historical and cultural context** to structure and justify personal responses to a drama/theatre work.
- **JU.9-12.12**
 - I can recognize, describe and distinguish **unfairness and injustice** at different levels of society.

Warm-up

~5 minutes

Students will turn to their neighbors to make groups of two, and spend time practicing active listening. Let them decide who will talk first. Each pair will take turns talking for one minute responding to two prompts, alternating the speaker after each minute.

Students should be allowed to choose how much they are comfortable with sharing, and should be reminded to be respectful of each other's ideas and shared information.

Share the prompts below to the students before they begin talking:

- ❖ Recall a location in *Walking Through Portland with a Panther* that Mr. Kent Ford shared. What do you remember about this space? What was interesting about it?

- ❖ Tell a story about a specific area you remember being in as a child. How has this area changed as you've grown up? What do you think might have caused it to change?

At the end of the warm up, the students should be ready and willing to discuss somewhat sensitive topics, and share their opinions and experiences where fit.

Historical Context and Information

~10 minutes

Spend this time presenting the information below to the students.

Gentrification, as defined by Merriam-Webster, is the process in which a poor area (as of a city) experiences an influx of middle-class or wealthy people who renovate and rebuild homes and businesses and which often results in an increase in property values and the displacement of earlier, usually working-class residents.

- Term coined in the 1960's by Ruth Glass – “The social character of the district is changed”
- The **intersection** of identities, often caused by the United States's long history of racism, leaves People of Color more likely to be affected by displacement

Gentrification is a long term process with a range of overlapping causes and effects. On a federal level, there are tax incentives that encourage urban development. Urban development projects often involve the displacement of current communities in an effort to make the space more appealing to new residents. This can also mean that large luxury projects and single family housing take precedence over affordable living spaces. The neighborhoods designated as “underdeveloped” are often thriving, culturally connected, working-class communities.

Victims of gentrification are pushed into the few remaining available residential spaces, which are often food deserts, or neighborhoods without the same access to quality transport, jobs, or environment. These factors are often influenced by state legislation. Zoning laws can dictate access to public transportation, what types of projects and housing will be built, and the population density of an area. Working class neighborhoods are crowded and become more susceptible to disease and crime. States can also adopt legislation that combats gentrification, like inclusionary zoning plans and community land trusts.

[Broken Windows by George Kelling and James Wilson](#)

[The Criminalization of Gentrifying Neighborhoods by Abdallah Fayyad](#)

These two articles from the Atlantic (the second one partially revising the first) detail the flawed justifications and cyclical nature of over-policing, which is both a cause and a consequence of gentrification. Instead of reducing crime or increasing safety, it only changes the appearance of a neighborhood and increases the risk of police brutality and gun violence. The higher cost of living caused by an influx of wealthier residents leads to increased evictions, but homelessness is criminalized.

<https://nextcity.org/gentrification>

https://nationalequityatlas.org/indicators/Neighborhood_poverty

[https://www.huffpost.com/entry/gentrification-types.](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/gentrification-types)

Map Activity!

Total Activity time: ~30-35 minutes

In *Walking Through Portland With a Panther*, Kent Ford references many locations and their histories. He tells stories that take the audience through 60 years of history, often involving locations that have new names or no longer exist.

In this activity, students will learn about and research different areas of Portland, OR and familiarize themselves with the history of these regions. They will dive deeper into the formation of modern landmarks while reflecting on the ways locations change over time as results of gentrification.

Step 1: Map Sections: ~20 Minutes

Students will be divided into small groups to research and learn about the history of a specific region of Portland, OR. Each group will receive a map of their region (either [South Auditorium](#) or [Interstate Corridor](#)) to help visualize. Instruct students to:

1. Become familiar with their assigned region and/or identify their pre-existing conceptions about the space, if they have any.
2. Spend **20 minutes** learning more about their separate regions through the articles that are provided (and potentially their own additional research) for each location.

During this time, ask the students to consider the following questions:

- How has this area changed? How has this change impacted the area?
 - i. Would you define this change as gentrification? Why or why not?
 - What communities historically occupied these regions and what forced them to relocate? How did the social character of the area change?
 - How are the histories of these spaces remembered?
 - How do different biases affect public perception of these projects?
3. As students discuss, pay attention to their conversations and findings. If any groups seem stuck, remind them of the questions above (or your own) to think about.

Step 2: Map Building (Large Group Discussion): ~10-15 Minutes

After students have familiarized themselves more with the history of their regions, they will come back together as a full class and share their findings with the class. Spend **10-15 minutes** discussing what they have learned from this research.

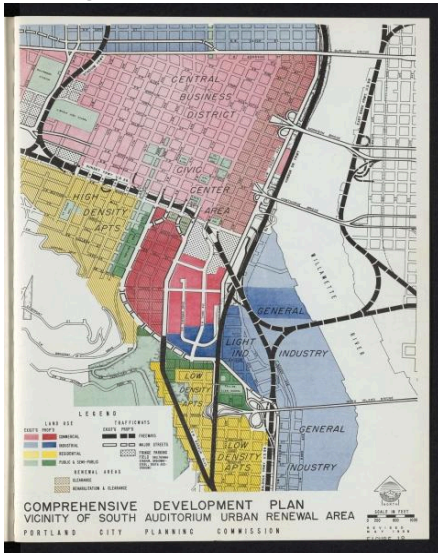
- What was surprising about what you found?
- How has this changed your perspectives about certain areas of Portland?
- How has this changed your perspectives about where you live?

Maps and Resources

For use in the Mapping Activity and throughout the lesson

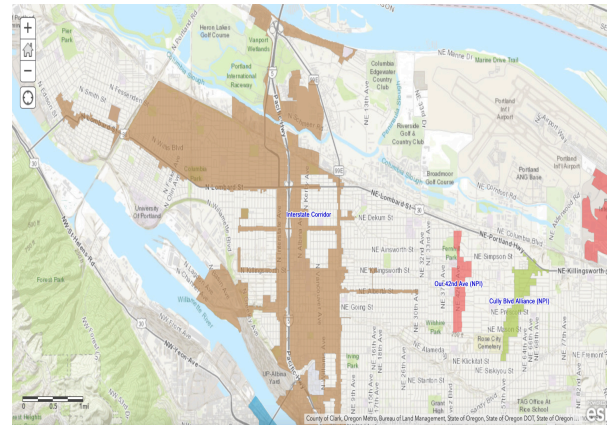
Each map will have an accompanying (very brief) info blurb to give the students a quick overview of what they will be researching/learning more about.

South Auditorium: Portland's first urban renewal project, it encompassed 110 acres (with over 50 blocks being bulldozed) and displaced an entire neighborhood.



[Comprehensive development plan: vicinity of South Auditorium...](#)

Interstate Corridor: The city's largest urban renewal district, the second phase focused more towards affordable housing after resident protests against phase one's implementation.



[Portland City Council](#)

General info sourced from: [A Mixed Record on Urban Renewal](#) by The Oregonian

Article 1 on South Auditorium: [“South Portland/South Auditorium Urban Renewal Project”](#)

Written by a well known urban historian for a respected publication.

Article 2 on South Auditorium: [“Throwback Thursday: 60 years ago, Portland began urban renewal plan for South Auditorium district”](#)

Written by a longtime editor and reporter for The Oregonian, on Oregon history

Collected Articles on the Interstate Corridor: [Articles for Interstate Corridor](#)

Two excerpts from longer articles about the Interstate Corridor project

End-of-Lesson Journaling

~5 minutes

Have students independently journal during this final section of the lesson plan. Encourage them to keep journaling throughout the allotted time. They will each reflect and respond to the following questions:

- ❖ How familiar were you with gentrification before participating in this lesson? How has your understanding of the concept changed?
- ❖ What is your biggest takeaway from the lesson? How will you share what you have learned today with others?
- ❖ How can you work to honor spaces that have experienced the effects of gentrification?

After the students have finished journaling, share with them that they should continue to *question, discuss, and engage* with difficult topics such as gentrification. Encourage them to share what they have learned today with family, friends, etc. to increase awareness of these challenging conversations.

By the end of this journaling, students should have demonstrated and be able to demonstrate a deeper understanding of the historical context of gentrification in Portland as well as continue to explore these topics outside of the classroom.