

PART 4: CHANGES in a CITY OVER TIME

Vocabulary

City-Planning	also known as Urban Planning—a branch of architecture that deals with the design and organization of public space in municipalities
Landmark	a building, property, or object that has historic, aesthetic, or cultural significance (in New York City, designated landmarks are protected by the Landmarks Preservation Commission, which must approve changes to all designated landmarks)
Zoning Laws	rules the city passes to order its planning and growth (in New York City, laws that restrict the shape, height, or volume of a building and which prescribe the functions for buildings in zones, generally commercial, residential, or industrial)

Like all cities, New York City is constantly changing. Changes in an urban environment can take many forms and have multiple causes: from population growth to the addition of public transportation, from city regulation of pollution to the cost of owning a home.

Wall Street, in Lower Manhattan, is a microcosm of the dramatic change that is possible in a city like New York. The street itself dates back to the original Dutch settlement of New Amsterdam, when Peter Stuyvesant had a wall built to protect the townspeople from raids by Native American tribes, pirates, and other dangers. Over time, it became a main thoroughfare in New York City, the location of one of the city's first churches, the original City Hall, and a number of warehouses and storefronts.

By the time the colonists won the War of Independence, New York City served as their capital, and George Washington was sworn in as President of the newly formed United States on the steps of Federal Hall—located on Wall Street. The New York Stock Exchange was officially founded in 1817, and found its permanent home on Wall Street. To meet the needs of the growing financial industry, banks and real estate speculators constructed buildings on and near Wall Street and rented out the office space within them at high cost.

PART 4: CHANGES in a CITY OVER TIME

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A walk down Wall Street shows the major building booms that happened locally and mirrored national trends. Buildings date to the early 1900s and to 1921-1932. Many buildings that stand on Wall Street today stand on sites that originally held smaller skyscrapers. Others are modified versions of their original selves, like 55 Wall Street. This building was constructed in 1842 and had an addition built in 1910. Originally the Merchant Exchange Building, it later became the home of National City Bank, and is now a residential building.

Economic downturns affect real estate value on Wall Street. The Great Depression of the 1930s, the stockmarket crash of 1987, and the events of September 11, 2001 all had significant effects on the overall value of real estate on Wall Street and on the total occupancy of its offices.

To Do: *For this activity, decide in small groups on a specific block near your home or school that you see often. Discuss the changes you have seen in that block over time. Brainstorm a list of possible reasons for those changes.*

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Document Analysis Activities

Document 10. Wall Street Postcards.

Historic views, 1895, 1905, 1912.

Postcards are rich historical documents that capture the city at a precise moment and can reveal changes over time. The messages written on a postcard can also give clues about life in that time period. These three views show how the Wall Street neighborhood changed at the turn of the 20th century. Over 17 years, Trinity Church, the brown building with the pointed steeple, is the only **landmark** that remained unchanged, although it became dwarfed by taller buildings.

A good example of this rapid change can be found in these three postcards, comparing the right side of the street. In 1895, the six-story Union Building stood at the corner of Wall and Nassau Street. The next year, the 22-story Gillender Building was built. Seen here around 1905, it was the tallest building on Wall Street and the fourth tallest building in the city. But even that building was destroyed after 13 years to make way for the Bankers Trust Tower.



PART 4: CHANGES in a CITY OVER TIME

To Do: *Note evidence supplied by the postcards as to the different time periods they represent. What general trends do you see. Locate the site of the Union, Gillender, and Bankers Trust buildings. Why were new buildings constructed on this site so many times? Justify your answer.*

Document 11. Lower Manhattan Photograph, Aerial View, 1976.

This aerial view shows the southern tip of Manhattan, the Hudson River to the west, and the East River, on the right. On the west is the landfill for Battery Park City, which was created from dirt and rocks excavated from the construction of the World Trade Center, which is completed in this image.

Broadway, one of the oldest streets in New York City, runs up the center of the photograph from Battery Park. In Lower Manhattan, Broadway is nicknamed “the canyon” because the tall skyscrapers in the financial district make the streets below dark.

Document 12. Lower Manhattan Photograph, Aerial View, 2004.

This aerial view shows changes in the development of Lower Manhattan over time. Battery Park City is now a thriving community and the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center are gone. This color photo also shows the city skyline seen from New York harbor.

To Do: *Compare these two aerial views and discuss the differences between the two. List some of the reasons for these changes. Then extend your thinking to other cities, such as Los Angeles, Tokyo, and Nairobi. What reasons for urban development and change might there be in those locations? What motivations for city changes are universal, and which are regional?*

Across the Documents: *Why were so many skyscrapers built in Lower Manhattan?*

Additional Web Resources:

www.skyscraper.org/viva

See the Museum’s collection of over 1000 postcards of NYC skyscrapers and street scenes. Compare any three postcards from VIVA and talk about changes in the City over time.

www.skyscraper.org/webwalk

This feature provides four different virtual walking tours of Manhattan.



VIVA

PART 4: CHANGES in a CITY OVER TIME

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Skylines help give a city its identity and are important to how people think about a city. New York's unique skyline represents more than a collection of buildings: it symbolizes the city's wealth and rich history. Skyscrapers are also places and businesses where people live, work, pay rent, make money, manufacture things, and myriad other functions.

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Document Analysis Activities:

Document 13. Lower Manhattan Map (1966)

This map of Lower Manhattan provides a context for the relation of Lower Manhattan skyscrapers to one another, and offers perspective on the relationship of one block to another in this important part of the city. The streets south of Wall Street, which date back to the colonial era, do not seem to relate to Broadway in the same manner as the streets north of Broadway, for example. This map was created by city planners to study how best to make changes to the historic pattern of cities and blocks, and how to open up the old waterfront for public use.

To Do: *Using your background knowledge of history, including transportation and commerce, speculate on some of the thinking behind the urban planning illustrated by this document.*

Document 14. Lower Manhattan Harbor View Skyline, 1915

This image looks east across the Hudson River to Lower Manhattan. The skyline was transformed during the first decades of the 1900s by an amazing range of new, tall office buildings. This image records three "tallest buildings in the world," built within thirteen years of each other: The Park Row, The Singer Building, and the Woolworth Building.

To Do: *Locate the Park Row, Singer, and Bankers Trust, and Woolworth Buildings in this picture. Research each building to determine when it was built, its height, and to what extent the building was a speculative investment. How are changes in the American economy, including the transition from a rural, agricultural economy, to an urban, industrial economy, illustrated by this skyline?*

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Across the Documents: *Compare the many representations of Lower Manhattan in the Tower Tube documents. What forces have shaped New York's skyline? What can you learn about New York by looking at the transformation of its skyline? How does the skyline mirror the historical development of the United States? What questions do these documents raise that you would like to explore further?*

