

BEFORE
THE GRID

THE
1811 PLAN

BUILDING
THE GRID

19TH-CENTURY
DEVELOPMENT

20TH CENTURY
– NOW

**LIVING ON
THE GRID**

OTHER
GRIDS

Lesson Plan 6

Living on the Grid



Sidewalk Traffic (Detail) [[Link](#)]

OVERVIEW

Using a series of quotes spanning the 19th to 21st centuries, students will encounter the various changing attitudes planners had about the grid and will reflect on how the grid affected development above and below ground.

RESOURCES

Quotes on the next page.

[Living on the Grid](#) [[Link](#)]

STUDENT GOALS

- Students will discuss and analyze quotes from people and newspapers from the 19th-century to present day to consider how the Grid affected daily life
- Students will compare and contrast view points
- Students will choose and analyze images to support the viewpoints expressed.

COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

1st Grade:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.1.1

Ask and answer questions about key details in a text.

5th Grade:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.5.2

Determine two or more main ideas of a text and explain how they are supported by key details; summarize the text.

11th Grade:

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.2

Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary that makes clear the relationships among the key details and ideas.

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RESOURCES

In 1807 the commissioners, men responsible for proposing and preparing the street plan, stated:

That one of the first objects which claimed their attention was the form and manner in which the business should be conducted; that is to say, whether they should confine themselves to rectilinear and rectangular streets, or whether they should adopt some of those supposed improvements by circles, ovals, and stars, which certainly embellish a plan, whatever may be their effect as to convenience and utility. In considering that subject they could not but bear in mind that a city is to be composed principally of the habitations of men, and that straight-sided and right-angled houses are the most cheap to build and the most convenient to live in.

– Remarks of the Commissioners for Laying Out Streets and Roads in the City of New York, Under the Act of April 3, 1807

Nothing is to be left unmolested which does not coincide with the street commissioner's plummet and level. These are men ... who would have cut down the seven hills of Rome.

– Land owner Clement Clarke Moore, 1818

Traversing for the first time the newly opened section of Madison Avenue between Fortieth Street and the College [Columbia], a rough and ragged track ... and hardly a thoroughfare, rich in mudholes, goats, pigs, geese and stramonium. Here and there Irish shanties 'come out' (like smallpox postules), each composed of a dozen rotten boards and a piece of stove-pipe for a chimney.

– George Templeton Strong, October 22, 1867

This is one of the inevitable consequences of progress and improvement. Comfort, cleanliness, and convenience are of more importance to society than the merely picturesque.

– Harper's Weekly, October 28, 1871

The west side of the city presents just now a scene of building activity such as was never before witnessed in that section, and which gives promise of the speedy disappearance of all the shanties in the neighborhood and the rapid population of this long neglected part of New-York. ... The huge masses of rock which formerly met the eye, usually crowned by a rickety shanty and a browsing goat, are being blasted out of existence.

– New York Times, 1886

The Grid defines a new balance between control and de-control in which the city can be at the same time ordered and fluid, a metropolis of rigid chaos.

– Rem Koolhaas, 1978

Manhattan has no center ... If you asked a New Yorker for directions to 'the center of town,' he would be bewildered.

– James Traub, 2011

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KEY TERMS/VOCABULARY

- Chaos
- Effect
- Embellish
- Fluid
- Habitations
- Metropolis
- Picturesque
- Plummet
- Rapid
- Rectilinear
- Rectangular
- Shanties
- Stramonium
- Traversing
- Utility

DOCUMENT BASED QUESTIONS

- Does the quote express an opinion about the grid? If so, what is it?
- Find a quote that is against the development of the street plan. What is the reasoning behind the sentiment expressed?
- Find a quote that is supportive of the development. What reasons are given for the grid?
- Find a quote that describes an effect of the grid. What is the result specified in the statement?
- How has the grid either attributed to or detracted from the growth and success of the city?

DOCUMENT ACTIVITY

Divide the class into groups of seven with each group receiving one of the quotes above. Students will use the document based questions as they read their group's quote to understand the perspective expressed. Each group will present their quote and perspective to the class at large followed by a general discussion on the difference and similarities expressed. Following the discussion, students will be directed to the Museum's online Collections Portal and will be instructed with the task of finding an image that best represents the perspective of the quote. (For further instructions on using the Collections Portal visit: <http://www.mcny.org/content/using-museums-collection-portal>.) Each group will print out the image and write a Museum label, not only appropriately identifying the image but explaining its connection to the quote. For a final step, each group will write their own statement stating their opinion about the grid responding to the guiding question, "how has the grid either attributed to or detracted from the growth and success of the city?" Both the image and the quotes will be hung in the classroom, in chronological order, creating a timeline of perspectives on the grid.

RELATED COLLECTIONS PORTAL IMAGES



Plan of the City of New York with the recent and intended improvements. Drawn from actual survey by William Bridges, City Surveyor. 1807. [[Link](#)]
Museum of the City. 37.152.3



Map of property belonging to Clement C. Moore at Greenwich in the City of New York. [[Link](#)]
Museum of the City. 29.100.2867



Jacob A. (Jacob August) Riis. Shanty town. 1896. [[Link](#)]
Museum of the City. 90.13.2.137