Lesson Plan 1
Before the Grid – 18th-Century City

OVERVIEW
Students will analyze the print *McSpedon & Baker Five Points, 1827* to note how New York City life was depicted during the 19th century and to understand the impetus behind city planning.

RESOURCES

**Background information**
Unplanned City: Five Points, 1827 [Link]

**Print**  
Museum of the City of New York, Print Archives, 97.227.3

**Text**  
Touring the Five Points: James D. McCabe, Writer, 1872

STUDENT GOALS

- Students will understand the motivations behind developing a city-wide plan.
- Students will use a 19th-century image to explore the streets of Manhattan predating the grid.
- Students will be introduced to the concept of urban planning and explore how planning helps ensure that communities serve the needs of the people who live in them.

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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KEY TERMS/ VOCABULARY
- Adjective
- Decay
- Depiction
- Environment
- Wretched

DOCUMENT BASED QUESTIONS
Print:

From Unplanned City: Five Points, 1827
Five Points, 1827 [Link]
Museum of the City of New York, Print Archives, 97.227.3

- How is city life depicted in this 19th-century image?
- What activities are taking place in the image?
- What might the challenges be for someone living in this environment?
- In the student’s opinion, is this a positive or negative depiction of New York in the 19th-century?
Just back of the City Hall, toward the East River, and within full sight of Broadway, is the terrible and wretched district known as the Five Points. ... The “Old Bowery” was everywhere recognized as the headquarters of crime in the metropolis... The narrow thoroughfare extending around it was known as “Murderers’ Alley” and “The Den of Thieves.” No respectable person ever ventured near it, and even the officers of the law avoided it except when their duty compelled them to enter it... Here the vilest and most poisonous compounds are sold as whiskey, gin, rum, and brandy. Some of these houses are brothels of the lowest description. The filth that is thrown into the street lies there and decays... As a natural consequence, the neighborhood is sickly and sometimes the infection amounts almost to a plague. Between 14th Street and the Bowery, half a million people are crowded into about 1/5 of the island of Manhattan. Within this section there are about 13,000 tenement houses, fully one-half of which are in bad condition, dirty, and unhealthy... Every room is crowded with people. Sometimes as many as a dozen are packed into a single apartment. Decency and morality fade away here. Drunkenness is the general rule.

Touring the Five Points: James D. McCabe, Writer, 1872

What are the problems the author warns of in the text? Underline the words that help you answer the question.

How do the living conditions contribute to the problems?

Is the text in agreement or disagreement with the activities depicted in the image?
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DOCUMENT BASED ACTIVITY

Print  Unplanned City: Five Points, 1827 [Link]
Five Points, 1827, Engraving after a painting by George Catlin,
Museum of the City of New York, Print Archives, 97.227.3

Text  Touring the Five Points: James D. McCabe, Writer, 1872

Prior to revealing any background information, students will be shown the
print and will write down one adjective that describes city life as depicted in
the image. Examples might be "loud", "busy", "crowded." Students will share
their individual words noting what in the image inspired their choice. After
explaining that the print was created with a specific viewpoint, read aloud
or distribute the text for close reading (may be read in entirety or further
excerpted according to grade level). Ask students to consider if the text
is in agreement or disagreement with the image, citing specific examples
of where the text correlates to the image or where it is in opposition. As
a culminating activity, students will create a chart, listing on one side the
"problems" depicted in the text and image, and the other side solutions that
they come up with in small groups or in pairs. Students will come together to
share the solutions they came up with.