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## **Neighborhood as Palimpsest: An Examination of Chicago's Back of the Yards Neighborhood Through Urban Historical Geography**

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"Chicago history comes in layers." Steve Johnson, Chicago Tribune <sup>1</sup>

### **Introduction**

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I live on Cullerton Street in Chicago. It is one of the rare south side streets that interrupted the neatly ordered number system by replacing its number (20th) to honor Edward Cullerton. Cullerton, better known as "Foxy Ed," was an Irish saloonkeeper turned alderman (almost a cliché in Chicago) who served the city for 48 years. <sup>2</sup> Foxy Ed along with other Irish politicians during this period of political machines and patronage jobs won the adoration of his constituents through favors and bribes and was re-elected time and again to the endless frustration of municipal reformers. When I think of Foxy Ed as I drive down my street, I begin to imagine the neighborhood as it was in the late 19th and early 20th centuries where Bohemian (Czech) families lived in cramped, balloon frame houses and built community in order to survive. Today, the rapidly gentrifying neighborhood is predominantly Mexican, a migration that began in the 1920s but accelerated in the 1970s, but you can still see the Czech words etched into the cornerstones reminding the residents of the layers of history that surround us. Even the toponym of the neighborhood, Pilsen, a reference to Plzen, a city in the Czech Republic, hints to this Bohemian past.

If we are alert to the signs while wandering through Chicago streets we can see the ghosts that came before. Looking for these ghosts seems to be a habit for many Chicagoans. I want my students to look for these ghosts and even create them in their minds through an understanding of the history of a place. By seeing the neighborhood as palimpsest, something constantly changing but never wiped clean, one can see what came before. Salt on the streets serving as an inadvertent archeologist working to expose the cobblestone below. The Polish words etched at a building's creation still show through despite the attempts of rival gangs to claim the territory their own. The New Life Church awning in the same frame as the Russian language cornerstone declaring its long forgotten orthodoxy. The signs are everywhere and a walk around the city becomes its own layered time machine. I want my students to experience the city this way. As Dolores Hayden states in her book *The Power of Place*, "from childhood, humans come to know places through engaging all five senses,

sight as well as sound, smell, taste, and touch." <sup>3</sup>

This unit is about a location in Chicago: the Union Stockyards and its adjacent neighborhood that many refer to as "Back of the Yards." Yet far more than a location, this unit is about place and the making and remaking of meaning that is attributed to the place as immigrants move in and out of the neighborhood. Tim Creswell, in his book *Place: a Short Introduction*, discusses the challenge of defining place in its many uses within the English language. We seek out our place in the world, feel out of place, and invite people over to our place. In the same vein, Dolores Hayden writes definitions of place are like a "suitcase so overfilled that one can never shut the lid." <sup>4</sup> These uses imply a clear importance, a weight, to the word as well as a lack of clarity of its meaning. Perhaps nothing is more important to Human Geography than the interaction of people and space and the creation of the concept of "sense of place." Creswell's definition of place as "spaces which people have made meaningful" and Hayden's "the personality of a location" are both useful to focus our work on this never-ending process of place making. <sup>5</sup>

Examining the making of place, as Carl Sauer describes the "combination of natural and man-made elements that comprise, at any given time, the essential character of a place," <sup>6</sup> (Hayden, 16) will serve as the parchment of our palimpsest. I have chosen three time periods as the layers of understanding: 1900, 1910, and 1920. The main reason for selecting these time periods is due to the access to census records for the same street in the most heavily congested part of the Back of the Yards neighborhood and the availability of Progressive Era reports (both municipal reports and settlement house reports). In addition, this is a period of change from "Old" Immigrants (mostly Irish and Germans) to "New" Immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe and then to African American labor during and after World War I. Students will examine multiple sources (census records, photographs, maps, paintings, and texts) for each time period to define the place that is the Back of the Yards. In particular, students will study how these different immigrant and migrant groups encountered one another in the Back of the Yards and how the neighborhood changed and remained static over time.

## Rationale

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My school, situated nearly five miles south of downtown, draws students from all over the south side of the city and our diversities are measured in various ways. Seventy-five percent of our students qualify for free and reduced lunch. African Americans make up 80% of our student body and Latinos (predominantly Mexican Americans) represent nearly all of the remainder and are a growing population each year. This unit was created with a 9th grade Human Geography class in mind, but could be used for U.S. History, Sociology, or Urban History courses as well.

I selected the Back of the Yards neighborhood for a few reasons. First, the Union Stockyards and the Back of the Yards are a great example of industrialization and urbanization both of which are important to understanding the economic and demographic growth of Chicago over time. The neighborhood borders Englewood, the neighborhood where my school is located. Englewood, streetcar suburb created in the late nineteenth century, also served as the outlet for many of those in the Back of the Yards who had the money to relocate to a better neighborhood. This unit precedes the past unit I created on Consumer Culture in the Englewood neighborhood and aims to more deeply root my students in the study of place. I want to show

students that a deep analysis of place is capable for any place. The tools of research and analysis are, in the end, what is useful in our exploration of the Back of the Yards.

## Objectives

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### Enduring Understandings

Long after my students have moved on from Human Geography to their later high school and college classes, I want them to remember certain fundamental ideas about the interaction of people and space across time. First, I want them to be able to identify the ways that many cities of the Northeast and Great Lakes area of the United States changed from settlements for early trade to massive industrial cities to struggling post-industrial urban landscapes. By knowing the history of Chicago, they can apply their learning to other places such as Detroit, Cleveland, and Pittsburgh.

Secondly, I want students to be able to articulate how humans made choices that shaped the landscape over time. The city for many of my students seems inevitable. This building was always going to be right there. Such inevitability creates a distance from the actors and limits our ability to learn from and critique their choices. It also does not allow a conversation about who has the power to shape landscapes and who does not. Simply asking whether some building or place (i.e. the Union Stockyards) was a good idea allows students to see that it was, in fact, a choice and that other choices were possible. It is also important to examine which people had agency in different spaces. Workers likely had little agency in the packinghouses and stockyards themselves, but were able to exert more control over their neighborhood spaces and homes. Helping students see these nuances of power and space is critical to helping them understand power and space in their own lives. As such, history becomes an informant to the future.

Once students realize the human choices that go into place making they can see that such decisions are being made in the present to shape the future of their city. As humans they too can participate in this dialogue about the future of the places they care about. I want my students to be informed place makers who use the past to help create a city, their city, that serves the needs of its residents. Finally, I want my students to know that any city can be analyzed this way and that they now have the tools to take such analysis on.

### Human Geography Content Objectives/Assessment

#### *Objectives*

Since this unit is written for a Human Geography course, there are certain content objectives (aligned to the enduring understandings) that I would like to achieve. This unit follows an introductory unit on location and how geographers use the language of the discipline to identify where they are. Students will arrive to this unit knowing how to identify the stockyards using absolute and relative location as well as explain why meatpacking became a Chicago industry in the 19<sup>th</sup> century using Alfred Weber's theory of industrial location.

This unit aims to switch the conversation from location to place and time. First, students will identify how people and location interact to make meaning and create a "sense of place" in the Back of the Yards neighborhood. Secondly, students will explain, using evidence, the ways that people encounter one another within a space and what those encounters can tell us about relationships, power, and identity. Finally,

students will describe the continuity and change within the neighborhood over the three time periods of our focus and explain why such neighborhood analysis is useful for better understanding the story of a place.

### *Assessment*

A critical part of any unit is an accurate measurement of student learning based on the objectives. One of the main purposes of this unit is to serve as a model for how to analyze a neighborhood's past. There are many formative assessments built into the unit in the form of entrance and exit slips as well as shorter writing prompts. The summative assessment of this unit will be the final document shuffle writing assignment (see below for more details). Transfer of the information from this unit to students will be measured by a neighborhood issue website where they use similar documents to analyze the change over time to their neighborhood and the legacy of that change on the demographics and built environment.

### **Essential Questions**

In examining the Back of the Yards neighborhood, I want to keep both space and time in mind. I have chosen to use various records from the three time periods (1900, 1910, and 1920) in my analysis and ask students the same questions for each period. The questions come from the book from Harvard's Project Zero entitled *Making Thinking Visible*. The first question, "what is the story of the place at this time?," focuses on the stories that emerge from the selected key documents. The follow up question is aimed at evaluating sources, "How do we know the story?" From there, the question, "What are the other stories?" pushes students to think about voices that have not been included in the key documents that emerge from the secondary texts. The last question for each time period is, "Why should we care about these stories?" which establishes the student as meaning maker as opposed to the teacher or textbook. <sup>7</sup>

## **Back of the Yards: A Neighborhood**

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### **Introduction**

The following are two examples of using census records to craft a narrative of the lives of people in the Back of the Yards neighborhood. This was done by identifying the names of people living on the block that I selected as my focus (selected because it was the most densely populated block in Back of the Yards in 1909 according to the map included in the appendix). Once you can identify names from the script, you can search those names in later census records to see if they moved and, if so, where they moved. You can also see changes to the number of children and changes to occupation or education/language. While time-consuming, this kind of reconstruction of the past using primary sources is incredibly rich and will be a part of the work that my students do in understanding the change over time and encounters within the Back of the Yards neighborhood.

Anton Metrikis was an anomaly on his block in 1910. He lived at 4510 South Paulina Street and worked as a tailor with his own shop. Alongside Anton lived his wife, three sons, a boarder, and a servant in the small apartment in the Back of the Yards neighborhood of Chicago. His tailor shop was mentioned proudly in a 1909 article from a Lithuanian newspaper survey in Chicago. Sharing the building with Anton's family were four other families and 15 boarders bring the total to 41 people living in one frame building. Fifteen of those 41 worked in the nearby packing houses adjacent to the Union Stockyards. By 1920, Anton had seen the birth of

another child, a daughter, and moved to a less congested building shared with only one other family away from the densely packed environs of Back of the Yards. His is one story of Chicago's Back of the Yards neighborhood. <sup>8</sup>

Peter Bromarczyk's story is different. He and his wife Mary lived in the same building with Anton Metrikis. Peter was a day laborer in the stockyards. In 1900, Peter was 23 years old and his wife was 19. Peter had arrived in the United States in 1896 and Mary followed two years later. They were likely still trying to find their place by settling in the Polish neighborhood that offered them some of the comforts of home. By 1910, Peter and his wife had four children and a sister-in-law living with them two blocks from where they lived the decade before. While the move was small in scale, they did manage to leave the most densely populated block in the Back of the Yards neighborhood. However, unlike Anton Metrikis, Peter remained at the same address a decade later in 1920. He and Mary had three more children and he still worked in the packing house. He had moved into a more skilled position as an egg candler, but he had not in the 20 years since his arrival been able to move geographically and socially as Anton had. His is another story of the Back of the Yards neighborhood. <sup>9</sup>

## History

The swampy wasteland was selected in the mid-1860s by the small but ambitious meatpackers and investors as a central location for cattle and hogs. When the site was chosen, it was outside of the city boundary in what was called Lake Township. The location, despite its swampy drawbacks, was ideal in many ways. First, it was adjacent to the south branch of the Chicago River which connected with Lake Michigan to the East and the Mississippi to the West through the Illinois & Michigan Canal and near multiple railroad lines. Additionally, it was far enough outside the densely settled area to distant the central business district from the foul odors. Land price, access to transportation, and distance from population center were all factors that went into choosing the location. Much more would make this location a place.

When the Union Stockyards opened on Christmas Day 1865, they immediately needed thousands of workers. The available labor pool at the time was largely made up of rural to urban migrants or Irish and German immigrants some of whom had fled famine and political repression years before. The meatpacking industry had not yet benefitted from Frederick Taylor's efficiency drive and many of the jobs on the line were skilled jobs. At the top were butchers whose skill in carving up animals while wasting little to none of their parts would allow these workers to make more money as a way to maintain a consistent force of skilled butchers. As the plants moved their cost cutting focus from the yard to the plant, the role of the butcher decreased. Some of these skilled workers moved into middle-management positions as foremen and managers and moved their families away from the smell of the yards to the growing ring of streetcar suburbs like Englewood, directly south of the Back of the Yards neighborhood. <sup>10</sup>

Industrial work attracted many different groups to the stockyards creating a need for what historian Louis Carroll Wade called "social anchors." <sup>11</sup> The Irish, as in many cities of the North, arrived in such large numbers that they were able to gain some degree of political power and, as a result, better paying patronage positions within the city. The Irish enclave that developed near the stockyards is called Bridgeport and was the center of Irish political power (the Daley family, the ruling dynasty of Chicago, lived in Bridgeport). Germans too created an enclave adjacent to the yards called Hamburg as well as many others on the north side of the city. For both Irish and Germans the center of social life was the church. Irish Catholics built Nativity of Our Lord Parish in 1868 and many more were added later. <sup>12</sup> For the Irish, religion and nationalism were centrifugal forces to help sustain unity with the city. Other ethnicities, particularly German, were not united under one religion and

struggled to create a voting bloc that would give them political power within the ward. Despite the differences, the church offered not only spiritual comfort but provided needed services for the people of the community. Over time these "old immigrants" were able to gain some degree of membership in American society.

By the turn of the century many of the Irish and Germans moved into higher paying positions or out of the stockyards altogether, the next wave of immigrants, largely from Southern and Eastern Europe, were already arriving in large numbers to take their place in the lowest paying jobs. One way for the previous immigrants to gain in stature was by denigrating the new arrivals by calling them "clannish" people who "lived indescribably filth." <sup>13</sup> Despite these aspersions, or because of them, these groups also worked to establish the social support network that would help them succeed in this new and hostile industrial machine. They established churches, banks, athletic clubs, and social organizations to create a sense of the old world in Chicago.

Polish and Bohemian were followed by Lithuanian and Russia in the early decades of the twentieth century, but all came in search of employment at the packing plants near the yards and, like those before them, needed to live within walking distance of their jobs. The large numbers enabled the creation of new ethnic enclaves to serve the needs of the people and help them in their transition to their new lives in the United States. Churches were the center of community life. There were 15 Catholic Churches in the Back of the Yards neighborhood serving a specific ethnic group. Community organizations and clubs offered new immigrants opportunities to socialize and seek out support. As James Barrett contends in his book, *Work and Community in the Jungle*, "social life in the community flowed along paths shaped by a strong ethnic identification among the various nationalities. One striking indication of this division was the almost total absence of interethnic marriages." <sup>14</sup> Even the saloons were separated by ethnicity and did not offer a friendly welcome to anyone outside the group. Such segregation served the cause of community cohesiveness that softened the hard landing that awaited many immigrants new to the city.

Yet, the creation of enclaves did not separate people entirely. In the Back of the Yards neighborhood, Lithuanians and Polish, Polish and Bohemian, and Slovak and Polish often overlapped by block and interaction and encounter were everyday occurrences. David Roediger's entry in the *Encyclopedia of Chicago* speaks to this: "Workplaces, such as the famously mixed stockyards and garment factories, threw populations together promiscuously. Neighborhoods did likewise, so that the well-studied Italian and Polish districts of the city, for example, were far from only Italian or Polish and sometimes contained only a minority of residents from the group that gave the area its ethnic name and identity." <sup>15</sup> These were spaces of identity and encounter.

Packing house owners were purposeful in their mixing of ethnicities within the factory in order to exacerbate ethnic tensions and limit the workers ability to organize. Eventually unions took hold in the stockyards despite the abundant labor pool. Unions provided another means for community building within the neighborhood and helped the somewhat rigid ethnic lines begin to fade. Encounters between men and women under the common struggle of labor was a unifying force in the neighborhood. Such unity, however, did not extend to everyone.

Until the eve of World War I, European immigrants and their first generation children were more than enough to fill the stockyard labor needs. When war broke out in 1914, European labor could not continue to feed the industrial machine. Factory owners had to find workers elsewhere and continued to seek out African Americans workers from the South to both meet the labor needs and serve as strikebreakers in times of labor tensions. By the 1920s, this demand became even stronger with the passage of the 1924 National Origins Act which established quotas on European immigration. Mexican immigrants were not included in the 1924 act and were increasingly a source of labor for railroad and steel mills in the Midwest. Beginning in the 1940s and

increasing in the 1960s through 1970s, Mexicans began moving into the neighborhood in larger numbers. However, this wave coincided with the closing of the stockyards in 1971.

While work--finding a job, keeping a job, surviving on the pay, trying to move up--was central to the lives of people in Back of the Yards, workers were limited in their agency in this arena. Much of their lives were determined by the decisions of the Packinghouse owners. Because of this, their private lives were places where choices could be made about leisure and interaction. There were many spaces within the community where interactions took place.

One of the unifying spaces for the residents of Back of the Yards was the saloon. Mary McDowell's book states that there was one saloon for every forty voters in the neighborhood. James Barrett maps the saloons and shows the incredible density within the area directly adjacent to the stockyards and packing houses. For many workers the saloon was where you could get a hot meal and a cold beer for lunch. Similar to saloons but serving a mixed gender crowd were dance halls. Dance halls, as Kathy Peiss, argues were an important part of working-class leisure activities. Some dances were sponsored by local organizations or churches and chaperoned by parents and community members who shared a parent's watchful eye while others were run out of saloons by neighborhood gangs who made a profit for themselves. The latter were often places where young people could meet each other away from the watchful eye of first generation parents who brought their traditional beliefs with them to the United States. <sup>16</sup>

Another space of encounter was the University of Chicago settlement. Chartered in 1898 and run by Mary McDowell a sociologist at the university, the settlement offered a variety of activities and opportunities that brought neighbors together. In fact the diversity of the residents was one of the main reasons for the establishment of the settlement house. As Mary McDowell said, "In a community of such widely different social and religious elements there is need for a strong centralizing influence which shall be non-partisan and non-sectarian, yet in the deepest sense religious, drawing men and women together on the basis of a common humanity, emphasizing the fatherliness of God and proving the brotherliness of man by social service." <sup>17</sup> (McDowell, 8) Residents of the Back of the Yards could take their children to play on the playground, enroll their sons in manual training classes, or partake in lectures on topics that ranged from "The Evolution of the Factory System" to "Shakespeare."

Parks and picnics were another form of interaction and recreation in the neighborhood. As Randy McBee mentioned in her book *Dance Hall Days*, public parks provided affordable outings for working class families. Benefitting from the City Beautiful Movement of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, multiple parks were constructed in the the Back of the Yards neighborhood. Cornell Square Park was built in 1904 and both Davis Square Park and Sherman Park were built in 1905 as a result of reform efforts to bring recreation and beauty to underserved communities in Chicago. Davis Square Park, located near the most densely populated area of the Back of the Yards neighborhood, had a community building with a gym and classrooms as well as a swimming pool. Many events listed in the articles from the Foreign Press Survey were held at parks and in park district buildings. <sup>18</sup>

For the neighborhood children schools were another place of encounter. Schools built in the late 19th and early 20th centuries were often built in the neoclassical style as a reminder of the foundations of Greek and Roman learning. While a number of parents sought to limit the influence of the new country on their children and chose to send them to their local parochial schools, those with limited means were resigned to the nearby public school. As such, the rosters of students were a reflection of the demographics of the neighborhood. A 1912 report carried out by the University of Chicago Settlement provides a picture of school life during this

time period.

## My Research Process: Applications Beyond Chicago

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This unit might seem less relevant to someone who does not live in Chicago. Yet, the process I went through to create the document sets for each time period are reproducible and can be applied to any locale. My starting point was to read multiple monographs about the specific neighborhood. Not only did this solidify my understanding of the larger narrative of the community and its place in the city and national history but it also gave me small excerpts to use as secondary documents to help students make sense of what they are seeing. Armed with a greater depth of the narrative I could seek out the sources that best represented a mosaic of partial stories to help my students put the puzzle together for themselves. In one book I found a copy of a 1909 map of population density within the neighborhood. I knew I wanted to show my students what this density looked like at a house level. Once I identified the most densely populated street, I sought out census records from 1900, 1910, 1920 from the same two addresses. Through my local history museum, primary and secondary texts, and the Library of Congress site, I was also able to find images of people in the neighborhood during the three time periods. Similarly maps of the area can be found in housing reports and other government documents as well as the Sanborn Fire maps that are often available at your local library. Finally, I was able to find translation of foreign language newspapers such as the Polish language, *Dziennik Zwizkowy*, and *Lietuva*, a Lithuanian language newspaper for students to get a sense of the community building and sustaining that occurred outside of the working hours.

An important part of our study in seminar focused on seeking the spaces where immigrants encountered one another. So much of the past historiography on immigrants and ethnic enclaves speaks to the isolation and segregation of ethnic groups. Yet, in reality there were many places of interaction including (but not limited to) work, labor union halls, settlement houses, saloons, and dance halls. These encounters show both the ways in which people were shaping their own lives and spaces, but also the fluidity of membership groups within a community.

## Strategies

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I teach using a problem-based, inquiry approach to learning. Confronted with a problem, students identify what they know, create sub-questions for information needed to help solve the problem, generate research questions, and likely begin some version of this process again as information creates new knowledge and new questions. It is a messy approach, but one that yields the deepest understandings for students and models the kind of thinking we hope becomes second nature.

### Problem-Based Learning

Problem-based learning is often guided as a problem formulated into an overarching question or questions. There are two questions that relate to one another for this unit. First, how can we understand the story of a place over time? The second question is how can the understanding of the narrative of place guide our future



decisions about the place? The "problem" for this unit is one of limitations of prior knowledge, access to resources, and knowledge of the skills of inquiry. Problem-based learning requires that teachers spend significant time in planning the problem and assisting in the early research. Since this is a second unit for a 9th grade class, much of the research will be supplied and the focus will be in the geographical and historical thinking skills as well as the reading and writing skills defined in Common Core State Standards.

The other, perhaps most important, outcome of problem-based learning is the focus on a larger, real-world problem. It is not enough to learn about the neighborhood for its own sake. There must be some use for the information, some way of applying the knowledge to inform our present and future decisions. To that end, this unit is one part of the benchmark project where students research the economic, demographic, social development of their neighborhood in order to identify a problem in their neighborhood and propose a solution to the problem.

### **Reading, Thinking, and Writing Skills**

Geographical thinking is the analysis of the ways that humans interact within the physical environment. It is answering the question, where is it and why is it there? Historical thinking focuses on another dimension, time, and asks why the events happened when they did. An important aspect of problem-based learning is the teaching of this kind of thinking through contextual challenges where only a brief lecture may be necessary to move students to new inquiries, but the content is an outgrowth of a well-designed contextual challenge.

Both geographical and historical thinking skills work in tandem with the Common Core State Standards to help students learn to read a variety of "texts" (excerpts of monographs, government reports from the time period, maps and photos to name a few) for the central idea and key details. I want to them to look closely in the way any new detective looks at a case by going back again and again to see what was missed. This kind of disciplined research will allow students to understand the meaning in the text in order to write arguments that can be defended using evidence.

### **Reading Skills**

To guide my focus, I use the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in reading (standards listed in appendix). Despite the controversy around them, they serve as a useful guide for a shared language within the grade level and a outline for how to scaffold through our 7th-12th grade classes. In order to know how to effectively and explicitly teach the reading skills in CCSS, I use Heidi Hayes Jacobs' *Active Literacy* and Jeffrey Wilhelm's *Engaging Readings and Writers with Inquiry*. Both books aim to engage students in reading for answers to big questions that are meaningful and relevant to them. Many students have learned to be passive readers who, as Hayes Jacobs states, have learned to "play 'fetch' in class. Fetch occurs when a teacher asks a restrictive question that seeks one answer. The student then goes out to fetch that prize. The knowledge is not the student's." <sup>19</sup>

In my unit I ask students to read multiple types of "texts" (traditional texts, maps, graphs, etc). If my goal is to have students both comprehend and make meaning of the texts, they need to be armed with a set of well-practiced strategies. In my experience students do little prior to reading and often have to read the document more than once or rely on classmates to fill in the gaps that they missed by reading words but not reading for meaning.

Prior to reading, students review the text and consider the activity to identify structure and understand their purpose for reading. While reading, students annotate the text or take notes with the structure and purpose in

mind. After reading, students reflect on the argument of the text and how effectively the author used the structure to make the argument. Such before, during, and after reading habits using texts from my unit are highlighted in the activity section below.

### **Thinking Skills**

As a Social Studies teacher, I am always envious of the clarity that my math colleagues can get from assessing student work as they figured out a problem. "Show your work" has become a mantra in our math department in order to help identify where students are getting tripped up. Identifying points of misconception or error in reading and thinking skills is much more challenging. That said, it was made much easier through the work of Harvard's Project Zero and the book *Making Thinking Visible*. The book contains specific protocols to use regularly with students to help them "show their work" in thinking. <sup>20</sup>

Showing one's work in thinking is often a matter of doing the thinking out loud. To help students develop this skill I use many of the ideas presented in Jeff Zwiers and Marie Crawford's *Academic Conversations: Classroom Talk that Fosters Critical Thinking and Content Understandings*. Chapter three (Lesson Activities for Developing Core Conversation Skills) has been particularly useful in expanding my pedagogical toolbox with research-based practices.

### **Writing Skills**

The work of teaching writing is often improved by focusing on the two areas above: reading and thinking. Like reading, my writing strategies are inspired by the Common Core State Standards (standards listed in appendix). My focus for this unit is on narrative writing to describe the change over time in the Back of the Yards neighborhood.

### **Developing Academic Resiliency and Independence**

I struggled with what to name this section. It advocates for moving back and forth between two opposite approaches. The first approach is similar to diving into the deep end in order to learn how to swim. You hand the student a document or a small set of documents and ask them to generate a story and clarifying questions. While far from the only strategy in my toolbox, it is one that I think is not used nearly enough in our educational system. More often than not, teachers use only the wading into the deep approach where students are never asked to sit with the inevitable frustrations of research and develop the kind of academic resilience that allows them to reach the high points of self-directed learning.

At the same time, frustrations must be managed through clear, transparent modeling of the kind of reading, thinking, and writing that you expect students to do. There are times when students need to be able to touch the ground and not feel the panic that comes from too much ambiguity. The art of teaching is to know which strategy is needed in the moment for each student.

## Activities

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### Document Shuffle

This is a favorite activity of many Advanced Placement history teachers because it helps prepare them for the document-based question on the exam and allows for students to practice group inquiry. It is critical to practice this multiple times so that the students can improve in their reading, thinking, and discussing the documents. I plan to use this strategy for each of the three time periods I have chosen (1900, 1910, and 1920).

Students will be in groups of four or five (depending on class size) and will have a collection of documents on the table. I often try to make the document packet look like a dossier in order to create a sense of importance to looking at historical artifacts. The documents for this activity will include an article from the Foreign Language Press Survey, census records for the selected street in the Back of the Yards neighborhood, a photograph of people in the community, and an excerpt from a report on the conditions of the neighborhood. I also include a map of the neighborhood as a common document.

In the first round students take one minute with each document and record whatever sticks out to them in that time. After each student has looked at all of the documents, students are given two minutes to form connections between the documents, big ideas about the time period, and, most importantly, questions they have to help them better understand the documents. This round is followed by a reading on the time period with particular focus on industrial Chicago followed by a discussion about the connections between the reading and the documents.

The second round returns to the documents but each student focuses on one document alone for a longer period of time (5-10 minutes) with the intention of working to create an argument using the documents. Students report out what they have learned from their document. This early in the year I use guided questions to help students know what to look for when examining historical documents (i.e. date, source, context, etc).

Once each group creates an argument, students individually write a paragraph using evidence from the sources to defend their argument. Since they are writing for the same purpose, it allows students a much clearer way to peer edit and learn from each other. I often make copies of the paragraphs so that my feedback is read after the student read the feedback from their peers. Students then rewrite the paragraph based on the feedback they received. <sup>21</sup>

### Idea Building

This activity comes from the book, *Academic Conversation*, that I referenced in my strategy section. The purpose of this strategy is to "build on and challenge ideas in conversation." <sup>22</sup> This fits well with the content of the unit as a way for students to create early arguments and weigh the strengths and weaknesses of those arguments in dialogue. I also like this strategy because it uses manipulatives that help keep students engaged. A student will start by writing an idea on an idea card. Classmates then take other cards on the table and begin to respond to the ideas. The other cards include (but are not limited to) examples that supports the idea, importance of the idea, application of the idea, challenges to the idea, comparisons with the idea, and perspectives on the idea. Each of these cards begins with a sentence starter. Some examples provided in the book are: "I would add that...", "To piggyback off your idea about...", "Some people might say...",

This is important because..., Yet some people might argue against this because...." <sup>23</sup>

## See-Think-Wonder

This activity is used to analyze visual artifacts (photos, maps, paintings, etc) and was modeled by one of the teachers in my seminar who was trained at Harvard in the *Making Thinking Visible* protocols. While a relatively simple protocol, the challenge comes in having the patience and discipline to allow students the time to look closely. The basics of the strategy rely on three questions when students are looking at an image: "What do you see? What do you think is going on? What does it make you wonder?" <sup>24</sup> As the book states, "this routine was designed to draw on students' close looking and intent observation as the foundation for greater insights, grounded interpretations, evidence-based theory building, and broad-reaching curiosity." <sup>25</sup>

The process, more thoroughly explained in the book, suggests 2-3 minutes of silent time while students examine the image. Follow the silent time by asking students what they see (this can be full class or in pairs and shared out). Be sure to give time for this part as students begin to look more deeply after hearing what other students are seeing in the image. If the class grows quiet, offer another "What else do you see?" before moving to the next part. The third part of the process is to ask students what they think is happening in the image or what the image makes them think. As the book states, "the goal here is to build up layers of tentative interpretation rather than merely naming the subject matter." <sup>26</sup>

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Johnson, Steve. "'Chicago Time Machine' Looks at Layers of History." Chicago Tribune, (December 2, 2013).

<sup>2</sup> Kass, John. "'Cullerton Tradition May Be Over.'" Chicago Tribune, (February 26, 1993).

<sup>3</sup> Hayden, Dolores. *Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1997), 16.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 15.

<sup>5</sup> Cresswell, Tim. *Place: a short introduction*, (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2004). Kindle Edition.

<sup>6</sup> Hayden, 16.

<sup>7</sup> Ritchhart, Ron, Mark Church, and Karin Morrison. *Making Thinking Visible: How to Promote Engagement, Understanding, and Independence for all Learners*. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2011), Kindle edition.

<sup>8</sup> 1900 U.S. census, Cook County, Illinois, population schedule, 29th Ward, accessed July 10, 2014, <http://ancestry.com>. 1920 U.S. census, Cook County, Illinois, population schedule, 29th Ward, accessed July 10, 2014, <http://ancestry.com>.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Wade, Louise Carroll. *Chicago's Pride: The Stockyards, Packingtown, and Environs in the Nineteenth Century*. (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 280

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 288.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 291.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 297.

<sup>14</sup> Barrett, James. *Work and Community in the Jungle: Chicago's Packinghouse Workers 1894-1922*. (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1987) , 75.

<sup>15</sup> Roediger, "Racism, Ethnicity, and White Identity". *Encyclopedia of Chicago*, (Retrieved on July 13, 2014 from <http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/1033.html>)

<sup>16</sup> Peiss, Kathy. *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in the Turn-of-the-Century New York*. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986), 88-114.

<sup>17</sup> McDowell, Mary. *The University of Chicago settlement-Primary Source Edition*. Public Domain. Reprinted by Nabu Press Charleston, SC in 2014, 8.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, p. 8.

<sup>19</sup> Jacobs, Heidi Hayes. *Active Literacy: Across the Curriculum*, (Larchmont, NY: Eye on Education, 2006), 41.

<sup>20</sup> Ritchhart, Ron, Mark Church, and Karin Morrison. *Making Thinking Visible: How to Promote Engagement, Understanding, and Independence for all Learners*. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2011), Kindle edition.

<sup>21</sup> Zweirs, Jeff and Marie Crawford. *Academic Conversations: Classroom Talk that Fosters Critical Thinking and Content Understandings*. (Portland, ME: Stenhouse Publishers, 2011), Kindle edition.

<sup>22</sup> Zweirs, Jeff and Marie Crawford. *Academic Conversations: Classroom Talk that Fosters Critical Thinking and Content Understandings*. (Portland, ME: Stenhouse Publishers, 2011), Kindle edition.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ritchhart, Ron, Mark Church, and Karin Morrison. *Making Thinking Visible: How to Promote Engagement, Understanding, and Independence for all Learners*. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2011), Kindle edition.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

## Appendix

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### Maps

1900 Map of Families in Economic Distress in Stockyard and Hyde Park Districts

([http://dcc.newberry.org/system/artifacts/779/original/Bushnell\\_Social-Aspects\\_map-7.jpg](http://dcc.newberry.org/system/artifacts/779/original/Bushnell_Social-Aspects_map-7.jpg))

1909 Map of Immigrants and Population Density in the Back of the Yards Neighborhood

(<http://edpaha.com/livingthedream/maps/ethnicneighborhoods1909chicago.jpg>)

1920 Map of Stockyards and Surrounding Neighborhoods

(<http://edpaha.com/livingthedream/maps/packingtown1920.jpg>)

Ethnicity Maps of Chicago 1860, 1870, and 1900

(<http://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft40000586;chunk.id=d0e4347;doc.view=print>)

Halbwach's 1932 ethnicity map of Chicago

(<http://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/1480/2983>)

Maps of Foreign Born Population in Chicago 1920 (<http://www.lib.uchicago.edu/e/collections/maps/ssrc/>)

## **Photographs**

Settlement House Playground 1901

(<http://dcc.newberry.org/collections/the-jungle-and-the-community-workers-and-reformers-in-turn-of-the-century-chicago>)

City Garbage Dump in Stockyards 1901

([http://dcc.newberry.org/system/artifacts/785/original/Bushnell\\_Social-Aspects\\_p302\\_detail.jpg](http://dcc.newberry.org/system/artifacts/785/original/Bushnell_Social-Aspects_p302_detail.jpg) and <http://dcc.newberry.org/collections/the-jungle-and-the-community-workers-and-reformers-in-turn-of-the-century-chicago>)

Strikers Parade 1904

([http://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/data/13030/pn/ft4779n9pn/figures/ft4779n9pn\\_00070.jpg](http://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/data/13030/pn/ft4779n9pn/figures/ft4779n9pn_00070.jpg) and [http://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/data/13030/pn/ft4779n9pn/figures/ft4779n9pn\\_00071.jpg](http://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/data/13030/pn/ft4779n9pn/figures/ft4779n9pn_00071.jpg))

## **Standards**

### *Common Core Reading*

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.1: Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, attending to such features as the date and origin of the information.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.2: Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of how key events or ideas develop over the course of the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.3: Analyze in detail a series of events described in a text; determine whether earlier events caused later ones or simply preceded them.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.4: Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including vocabulary describing political, social, or economic aspects of history/social science.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.5: Analyze how a text uses structure to emphasize key points or advance an explanation or analysis.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.7: Integrate quantitative or technical analysis (e.g., charts, research data) with qualitative analysis in print or digital text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.8: Assess the extent to which the reasoning and evidence in a text support the author's claims.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.9: Compare and contrast treatments of the same topic in several primary and secondary sources.

### *Common Core Writing*

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.9-10.2

Write informative/explanatory texts, including the narration of historical events, scientific procedures/experiments, or technical processes.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.9-10.2.A: Introduce a topic and organize ideas, concepts, and information to make important connections and distinctions; include formatting (e.g., headings), graphics (e.g., figures, tables), and multimedia when useful to aiding comprehension.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.9-10.2.B: Develop the topic with well-chosen, relevant, and sufficient facts, extended definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information and examples appropriate to the audience's knowledge of the topic.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.9-10.2.C: Use varied transitions and sentence structures to link the major sections of the text, create cohesion, and clarify the relationships among ideas and concepts.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.9-10.2.D: Use precise language and domain-specific vocabulary to manage the complexity of the topic and convey a style appropriate to the discipline and context as well as to the expertise of likely readers.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.9-10.2.E: Establish and maintain a formal style and objective tone while attending to the norms and conventions of the discipline in which they are writing.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.9-10.2.F: Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from and supports the information or explanation presented (e.g., articulating implications or the significance of the topic).

### *National Geography Standards*

Standard 9.2B: Evaluate and explain the impact of international migration on physical and human systems.

Standard 17.1A: Analyze and explain the connections between sequences of historical events and the geographic contexts in which they occurred.

Standard 17.2A: Identify and explain the causes and processes of change in geographic characteristics and spatial organization of places, regions, and environments over time.

Standard 17.3A: Analyze and evaluate the role that people's past perceptions of places, regions, and environments played as historical events unfolded.

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