

About the Guide

This Winslow Press Teacher Guide has been designed to be of use to the classroom teacher by offering enrichment activities and discussion materials to complement *My Building*. These activities can help students to better understand and enjoy the story as well as assist teachers in implementing strategies and experiences that support their district's learning standards for language arts.

The Guide presents a story synopsis and outlines pre-reading activities. It also presents some concepts related to the story and includes: a brief discussion of related curriculum areas; a list of vocabulary words; class discussion questions; and independent study ideas related to *My Building*. The activities are designed to cover a range of language arts skills development that meets the needs of multiple learning styles. The final part of the Guide lists additional resources (books, museums, reference materials, related Internet Web sites) for both teachers and students.

The interdisciplinary activities were developed to support the New York State Learning Standards for English Language Arts. The Standards can be downloaded from the New York State Education Department's Web site at <http://www.nysed.gov/rscs/stds/contents.html>.

If you have questions about specific standards applied to these activities, please call Winslow Press at 800-617-3947.

We hope this Teacher Guide will be a useful and positive part of your teaching experience!

Sincerely,

Diane F. Kessenich
Chief Executive Officer and Publisher

Introduction

My Building, a story in verse, takes the reader along with a young boy as he experiences and describes daily life in his apartment building. As the narrator makes his way through the building and environs, he tells us about his neighbors and how they live and about the other people (mailman, delivery men, etc.) who are part of life there.

In this story, the reader meets some of the many different kinds of people in one urban community and gets a child's-eye view of the lives of neighbors in an apartment building. *My Building* can serve as an introduction to the concept of communities as places where people live, work and play.

Robin Ahrens' book can also provide children with a point from which to explore the concept of shelter, both as a basic human need and also as it relates to specific cultures and communities.

The apartment building where I live
Has twenty-seven floors.
All kinds of people come and go
Through hallways lined with doors.

Critical Thinking Questions

Knowledge: What does a mail carrier do? What is a post office? Look at the picture in the book. Did the mail carrier come at ten? How can you tell?

Comprehension: Describe a building superintendent's job? Why does he have so many keys? What kinds of tools do you think he has? Why is it a big problem if water overflows in the sink?

Application: Why is it important to have good manners? Which people in the book are being polite and helpful to others? Why do the children who are dancing in the hall have headphones? What people might they disturb?

Analysis: What sorts of problems might you have with keeping a pet dog in an apartment? Why must dogs be on a leash in the city? What do you think would be a good pet for a child living in a city apartment? Why?

Synthesis: What do you imagine the little boy does all day while the older children in the apartment are at school? If you could spend a day with the little boy in his apartment building, what are some of the things you would like to do?

Evaluation: What do you think are some good things and some bad things about living in an apartment in the city?

Related Concepts

Communities

Through *My Building*, the reader meets some of the many different kinds of people living in one urban community and gains a sense of the interactions among the neighbors who live there in an apartment building. This opens the door for children to explore such concepts as the lives and interactions of people in communities and the human need for both shelter and community.

In relation to *My Building* we may define community primarily as a neighborhood or shared residence, but class discussion can be generated by exploration of the idea that we all belong to more than one community and that these communities are defined in different ways and serve different purposes. Communities exist for the help and support of their members in one way or another. People are members of communities through their religions and houses of worship, through their schools, businesses, hobbies, and in a variety of other ways.

To Read Aloud and/or Discuss

- What makes a community? Is it the people who live there? Is it the **location** (where the community is)? Is it more than just one thing?
- People who live together in an apartment building are part of the building's community. They are also part of the neighborhood, which is a larger community. Are they part of even bigger communities? (Like a town, a city, etc.)
- Why do you think people form communities? (For example: for company, survival, worship, education, trading of goods and services, etc.)
- What communities are you a part of? How do they help you? How do you contribute to them?

Related Concepts

- Could you live if you weren't part of any communities at all? Would that mean living without any other people?
- Do other living things like insects and animals live in communities? How are their communities like ours? How are their communities different from ours?


Shelter

Along with food and water, shelter is a basic human need. Whether we live in caves, beneath leafy branches, in tents, in apartment buildings, or anywhere else, we do so because we require protection from weather and from predators. A class can look at the ways in which history, climate, geography, and cultural traditions determine the kinds of shelters that are found in a community.

From the beginning, humans have created forms of shelter that make use of materials available in their environments. Some of our earliest ancestors lived in shelters under existing rock formations and used caves for storage or other activities, finding them too dark to live in. It was not until the discovery of fire that humans could live *inside* caves successfully.

Later in our history, communities of people lived in adjoining caves that either occurred naturally or were carved into the sides of a cliff or mountain (in Cappadocia, Turkey, and in the pueblos of the American southwest, for example). These were some of the earliest apartment communities, settled and altered (with human-made materials) thousands of years ago.

Approximately ten thousand years ago, we discovered ways of heating and molding clay that allowed us to mat grasses, sticks, or reeds together to create building materials. Though the makeup of these building materials differed from region to region, the process was similar in many parts of the world. Huts, pile dwellings (built on stilts over water),



and adobe dwellings (clay houses) are all a result of this discovery. Nowadays, building materials can be transported globally and are not always locally produced (steel, bricks, etc.). What are dwellings in your community made of? Are there many built from locally-produced materials? Can students identify those materials? Of what materials were the earliest shelters in your community built?

Climate is an important factor. Have the class look at pictures of traditional shelters from differing climates (like a mud house in central Africa and an Inuit igloo). Discuss what specific purposes they serve (keeping the inhabitants cool or warm, for example) and how they accomplish those purposes. Consider construction materials and architectural features when discussing these different kinds of shelters. For instance, many buildings in snowy or rainy climates feature sloped roofs, which direct the snow or water towards the ground—a flat roof couldn't support the weight of substantial snow or rain and would collapse.

Humans have built shelters to protect themselves not just from animal predators but from other humans. Pictures of castles with moats, fortifications with narrow windows, and contemporary American houses with bars on the doors and/or windows can illustrate this point. How were these shelters constructed to fulfill their purpose of protecting the people inside?

We may also build shelter in order to display wealth (William Randolph Hearst's "San Simeon"), to symbolize power (Beijing's Forbidden City), to house a religious community (Machu Picchu in Peru), or even to protect people *outside* from the people *inside*, rather than the reverse (any prison). These are just some of the reasons why we build—can students suggest others?

Related Concepts

To Read Aloud and/or Discuss

A need for shelter is one thing that all human beings and animals have in common. Why do people and animals need shelter?

A bird lives in a nest or inside a tree. A bear lives in a cave. A rabbit lives in a burrow in the earth. Where do you live?

People live in communities in different areas. Their homes reflect the types of communities they live in. A home also reflects the environment where it is built. People who live in very cold climates build different shelters than do people who live in very hot climates. People who live in the mountains build different shelters than do people who live in the desert.

What sort of environment do you live in?

What is the weather like where you live?

Does your home protect you from the weather?

What is your home made out of?

Resources Used in the Development of This Section Include:

James, Alan. **Homes in Hot Places**. Minneapolis: Lerner Publications Company, 1987. **Homes in Cold Places**. Minneapolis: Lerner Publications Company, 1989. (Two in a series on homes around the world. Though text is more suited for upper-elementary readers, it can be read aloud to younger students and is a good teacher resource. Generously illustrated with photographs.)

Other resources of use to teachers and students may be found in the final section of this Teacher Guide.

Independent Learning

To help facilitate independent study, we have provided a starting list of ideas as well as Special Project Planning Sheets to help children get started. Some areas of interest may include the following:

Community workers

Constructing an apartment building

Transportation in the city

Firehouse

Life in the city

Life in the country

Postal service

Pets

Recreation

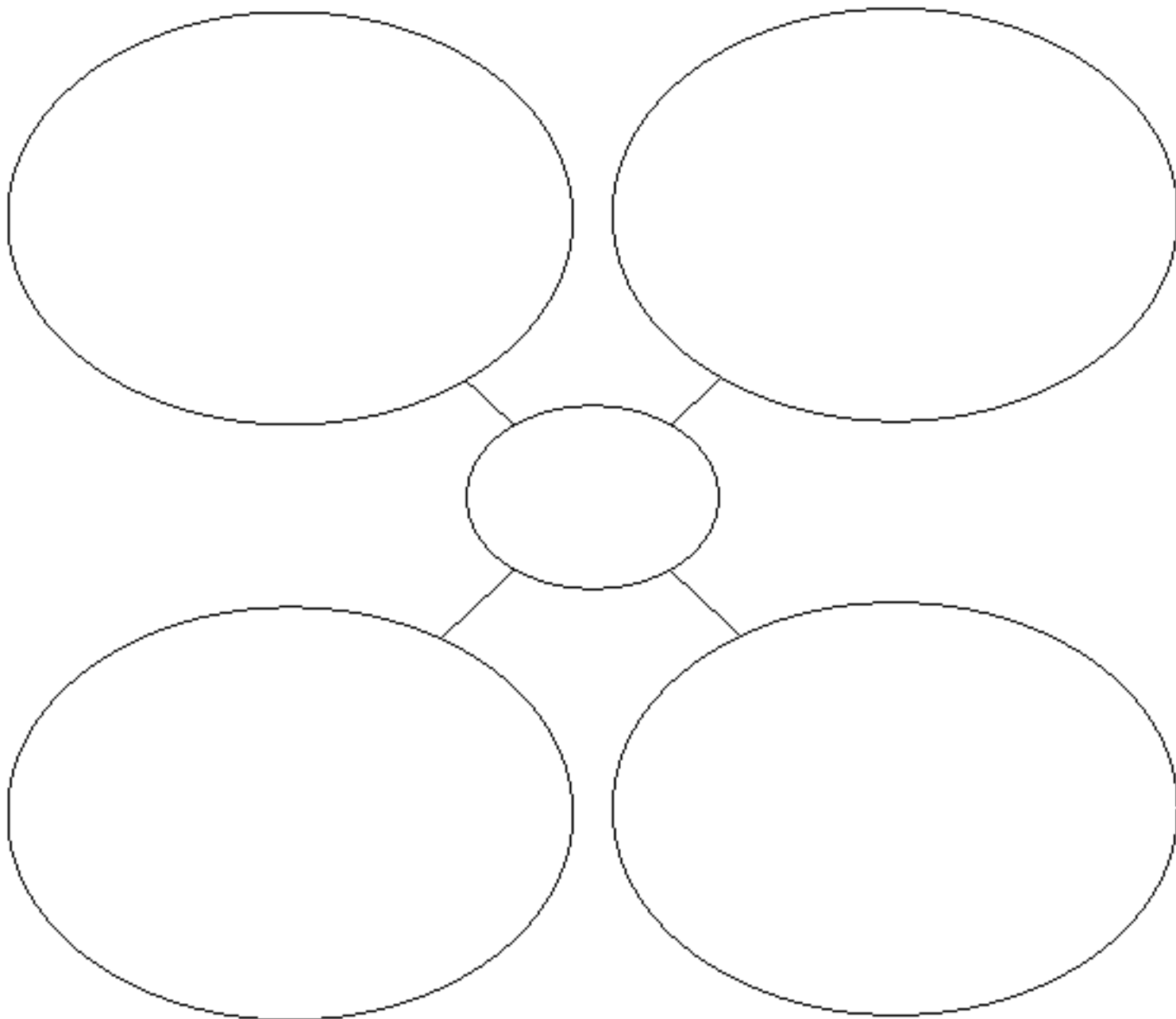
Houses in different countries and cultures

Animal homes

Name: _____

My Special Project Learning Web

Group related topics together using the Learning Web below.



Name: _____

My Special Project Planning Sheet

Some things I want to know about are:

My plan for finding facts/sources of information:

List of important facts:

Writing Prompts: Problem Scenarios

- Mrs. Scott is elderly. She owns a poodle who loves to run and play in the park, but Mrs. Scott finds it difficult to take him there every day. What should she do?
- The teenagers who live here like to gather in front of the apartment house and play music late into the night. Many people have to wake early to go to work the next day, and they are bothered by the noise. How can this problem be solved?
- Whenever I get into the elevator at the eighth floor, two big boys from the tenth floor pick on me. Now I'm afraid to ride in the elevator. Can you help me?
- Mrs. Jackson lives on the 14th floor of the apartment house. The elevator is broken, and Mrs. Jackson, who does not feel well, needs to go to the doctor. How can we help?

Interdisciplinary Activities

Language Arts/Social Studies: Meet the Workers

The children have met many workers in *My Building*. Guide a discussion about the workers likely to be found in a big city. Allow the children to build a list of workers (example follows):

Doorman
Delivery Person
Police Officer
Plumber
Building Superintendent (Super)
Taxi Driver
Bus Driver
Firefighter
Construction Worker
Shop Worker
Postal Worker

When the list is complete, let students role play the workers. A student can pantomime the activities done by this worker while the rest of the students guess which worker is being portrayed. Simple props such as keys, envelopes, tools and assorted hats can be supplied.

Skills: Analyzing; Role Playing

Language Arts/Physical Education: The Walking Game

Children will learn to follow directions and to balance safely.

Place a line of masking tape on the floor.

Encourage children to:

walk forward, alternating feet

walk heel-toe

walk backward

walk with hands extended laterally for balance

walk with hands held at side

walk sideways

walk on tiptoe

walk with a bean bag on the head

Skills: Following Directions

Language Arts/Vocabulary: Your Building!

Attach a large piece of butcher paper to the board.

Draw a rough outline of a large apartment building.

Have the children collect pictures from magazines of people and objects you might see in an apartment building.

As a child glues her picture to the building, have the child tell about her choice.

Skills: Sharing Knowledge; Creative Expression

Interdisciplinary Activities

Science/Language Arts: Elevator

Begin a class discussion about elevators by asking the children some questions like the ones that follow:

How does an elevator work?

What are all those buttons for?

How do you know it is safe?

Why is it important for children not to play with the elevator?

Have students work together as a class, or in groups, to make a miniature elevator from a small cereal box, string, and a spool.

Cut the front of the box open.

Draw the control box.

Draw the safety inspection certificate.

Fasten string to the top of the box and wind remainder around spool. Holding the spool, unwind and rewind the string to make the elevator work. Students can use small toys as passengers.

Explain each item and have the children become elevator operators as they operate this simple machine

Skills: Listening; Expressing Knowledge

Language Arts/Art: What's My Line?

Create puppets of the postman, the nanny, the plumber, the delivery man, etc.

Provide the children with pre-cut puppet shapes, crayons or markers, and pieces of construction paper to create their puppet.

Encourage the children to have their puppet “talk” about what they do each day.

Plan a skit.

Skills: Role Playing; Evaluating

Language Arts/Social Studies: The Post Office

Plan a trip to the local post office to see how the mail is sorted and delivered. Create mailboxes in the classroom just like those in an apartment building.

The children should bring boxes of a similar size to school.

Stack boxes so that each child has her own mailbox.

Put a name (and number) on each box.

Encourage children to “mail” letters to each other.

Skills: Interpreting; Creative Expression; Acquiring Information; Social Interaction

Language Arts/Art: Box Buildings

Ask each child to bring in a shoebox. Each child can make a diorama of an apartment. Paste a family picture inside.

Stack the boxes to make several small apartments.

The front of each building may be painted and windows added to look like a real building.

Skills: Listening; Following Directions; Creative Expression

Interdisciplinary Activities

Language Arts/Math/Art/Social Studies: Our City Neighborhood

Discuss with the children what kinds of buildings (and other things) they might expect to find in a city neighborhood. Make a list with the children (grocery store, apartment buildings, flower shop, drugstore, school, police station, etc.). Let each child choose a building from the list. Ask children to bring in small boxes (cereal boxes, shoeboxes, etc.).

Decide with the children on a good spot in the classroom to put their neighborhood. Cover the top of this surface with large sheets of paper. Have the children plan and draw the streets.

The children cover the small boxes using paper, tape, crayons, and markers. Have boxes of various sizes and shapes available. Which size box might be good for an apartment house? A pet shop? Can two boxes be combined? Make signs to tape on stores and other special buildings in the neighborhood. What other things can be added to the neighborhood?

Skills: Listmaking; Labeling; Maps; Creative Expression

Language Arts/Social Studies: What's My Line?

Discuss with the students the various jobs that people in a community do. Make a list (nurse, bus driver, baker, etc.).

Have each student choose a job. What does this worker do? Help them plan a riddle about the worker they have chosen. Can the other students guess what they do?

Example:

I take care of sick people. I work in a big building with many beds for the sick people. Who am I?

Where do I work?

A sign can be made for each worker's occupation. The blank side is held facing the class until someone guesses the occupation.

Skills: Interpreting; Creative Expression; Acquiring Information

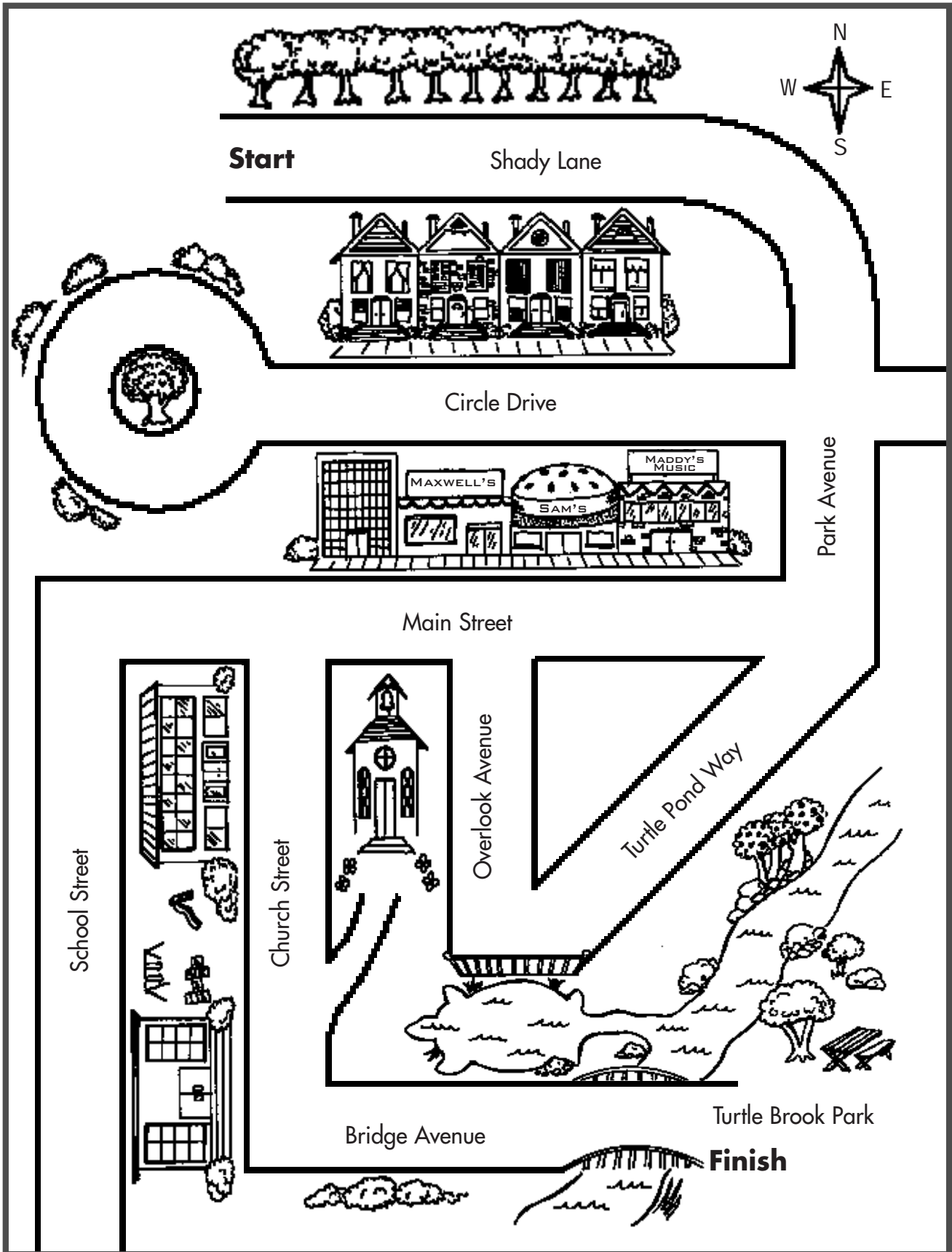
Language Arts/Art/Social Studies: My Fantasy House

Show the students pictures of several out-of-the-ordinary homes for people or animals. Examples could include a tree house, a boat house, a large sailboat, a beaver's dam and a wasp's nest. Encourage the children to think about and discuss movies (such as *Swiss Family Robinson*) or books that feature unusual houses. You may want to include a discussion of past or current homes of other cultures.

Ask each child to draw a picture of their fantasy house. Let each child present his/her fantasy house to the class and tell about its unique features.

Skills: Acquiring Information; Discussion; Creative Expression

Can you help the boy find his way to the park?



Extended Learning Opportunities

Note: We strongly recommend that teachers preview materials before sharing them with students.

Books:

Bozzo, Maxine Zohn. **Toby in the Country, Toby in the City.** New York: Greenwillow Books, 1982. (A look at a child's life in the city and the country that shows how many aspects of life are the same in both places.)

Gibbons, Gail. **Up Goes the Skyscraper.** New York: Four Winds, 1985. (A step-by-step look at the construction of a skyscraper.)

Munro, Roxie. **The Inside-Outside Book of New York City.** New York: Dodd, 1985. (The famous buildings and sights of New York are seen from the outside and the inside in this book of detailed drawings.)

Provinsen, Alice and Martin. **Town and Country.** New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1994. (Beautiful picture book that illustrates, from a child's point of view, the differences between life in the city and in the country.)

Raskin, E. **Nothing Ever Happens on My Block.** New York: Atheneum, 1966. (Chester is so busy complaining about how boring his block is that he fails to notice all the things that are happening!)

Ventura, Piero. **Houses: Structures, Methods, and Ways of Living.** Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1993. (A picture book designed for adults and advanced readers, this fine resource can be used in a classroom with young students. It features detailed cutaway illustrations of houses from ancient Egypt to contemporary America.)

Extended Learning Opportunities

Internet Resources:

The Lower East Side Tenement Museum. This is the official site for the “first museum in the United States to preserve a tenement and have it designated a National Historic Site.” On the Web, visitors can catch glimpses into the lives of many families who once lived in this New York City building.

<http://www.wnet.org/archive/tenement/index.html>

Where We Live. A site for kids, exploring “the houses, environments, and different places where people live.” A number of different urban environments are illustrated, from the richest to the poorest; kids can visit a “variety of lifestyles,” or they can write and tell about their own homes. <http://tqd.advanced.org/3140/>

The White House for Kids. Socks, the First Cat, takes kids on a tour of America’s house—The White House. <http://www2.whitehouse.gov/WH/kids/html/kidshome.html>

The World Famous Tree House. This site takes you to the tree house in southern California that was constructed in the 1930s after Minnie Lilley, an early pioneer of the area, protested plans to cut the tree to build a highway. http://northcoast.com/history/legget/world_tree.html

Sidewalk.com. This site is a guide to entertainment for over 10 major cities including New York, San Francisco and Denver. The site features events and places to go plus a camera that shows live pictures from each city. <http://www.sidewalk.com>



Places to Visit:

These museums offer educational programs and materials:

The Lower East Side Tenement Museum

For information, contact Gail Morse

90 Orchard Street

New York, NY 10002

(212) 431-0233

The Brooklyn Children's Museum (City of New York)

145 Brooklyn Avenue

Brooklyn, NY 11213

(718) 735-4432