

## **LESSON 8: GREEN SPACE, SOCIAL NETWORKS AND CRIME**

### **OVERVIEW:**

The purpose of this lesson is to investigate how green space influences the interactions between people in cities. Specifically, the lesson focuses on the idea that increased green space provides a location where social networks can be established and supported.

Social networks affect health by improving collaboration and the transmission of knowledge. Green space can also reduce conflict and stress in the neighborhood, which can reduce crime. The lesson starts with students brainstorming what they think is the relationship between the amount of available green space and the interactions between people in cities. The students conduct an activity that focuses on how individuals can be important resources for each other and that social networks can help support people living in cities. Finally, the teacher presents a PowerPoint and leads a discussion around two research studies that were conducted in Chicago that compare available green space to people's sense of community and crime rates. Areas that have more green space and vegetation are more likely to have residents who have a strong sense of community and lower crime rates.

### **SUB-QUESTION:**

How does the availability of green space in a city impact the interactions between people?

### **WAYS OF KNOWING URBAN ECOLOGY:**



*Students will...*

#### **Understand**

- Understand that increased green space provides a location where social networks can be established and that social networks affect health by improving collaboration and the transmission of knowledge. (*ecosystem change, ecosystem state and structure, forces and drivers*)
- Understand that green space can reduce conflict and stress in the neighborhood, which can reduce crime. (*ecosystem change, ecosystem state and structure, forces and drivers*)

#### **Talk**

*No specific goals connected with talking about urban ecology in this lesson.*

#### **Do**

- Analyze how people can be important resources for each other in terms of providing information about their city.

#### **Act**

*No specific goals connected with acting on urban ecology in this lesson.*

### **SAFETY GUIDELINES**

No specific safety issues are associated with this lesson.

### **PREPARATION:**

**Time:**  
1 class period

**Materials:**

**Day 1:**

**Activity 8.1**

Student Journals (Optional)

**Activity 8.2**

For each student

Student sheet for Social Network Game

**Activity 8.3**

Powerpoint and projector (or overheads of slides and projector)

Presentation can be found at <http://lhhl.illinois.edu/crime/htm>

**Reflections:**

Student Journals (Optional)

**INSTRUCTIONAL SEQUENCE**

**Activity 8.1: Brainstorm – Green Space and Interactions Between People**

1. Tell students that today they are going to continue talking about green spaces in cities, but they are going to focus on how green spaces influence the interactions between people. Ask students the following reflection questions either as a discussion or in their journals: How do you think green spaces impact the interactions between people? How do you think more green spaces or parks would impact the building of social networks or communities? How do you think more green spaces or parks would impact the amount of crime in an area?
  - *The purpose of these reflection questions is to get students to think about what they will be exploring in the next lesson. The goal is to provide you with a sense of their prior knowledge and get them actively thinking about the concept.*

**Activity 8.2: Social Network Game**

1. Tell students that they are going to participate in a game to see how quickly they can gather certain information. Ask for two volunteers. Take these two students aside. Have another student pass out the student investigation sheet and have the class read over it as you talk to the two volunteers. Tell the two volunteers that their job is to observe and take notes on how the rest of the class interacted during the game. They should think about how people are moving around, who they are talking to, why they are talking to different people and anything they notice about the networking in the classroom.

2. Read through the directions on the top of the student sheet. Stress that in order to win: students need to have at least 10 different people give them the answers, the person filling out the card also cannot answer the questions him or herself, and there should be no running or pushing. Point out the example in the upper lefthand corner of the Green Monster that has the answer and underneath it the name of the person who provided it. Also, tell students that they can only give other people answers that they knew before the game started. In other words, if they did not know the height of the Green Monster before, they cannot provide it to someone else after they learned it from another member of the class. When they are finished, they should raise their hand and call out Bingo.

**Teaching Strategy**

- You may want to have some sort of prize for the first student who completely and correctly finishes their game card.

3. After the students have completed the game, have the two volunteer observes share some of their observations. How did people interact with each other? Did the dynamics change as the game proceeded? Have some students share their experiences from filling out the table – were some items more difficult to fill in than others? Why?
  - *Students' responses will vary. They may have observed that certain individuals were asked information more frequently. For example, maybe only two people in the class knew the name of the mayor so they were frequently asked for the answer to that question.*
  - *You may also want to ask students to share their responses to a couple of the items you think might be particularly interesting. For example, you might want to discuss what they wrote for "Name of a cheap and healthy restaurant" or a "Place to buy fresh fruits and vegetables"*
4. Tell students that the purpose of the game was to illustrate the idea of a social network and how social networks can impact public health. Have students flip over their student sheet and work in pairs or groups to respond to the three conclusion questions.
5. After students have completed the student sheet, discuss their responses to the questions. Sample responses to these questions can be found on the teacher version of the student sheet.

**Activity 8.3: Presentation and Discussion about social networks and crime****Teacher Background Knowledge**

- The powerpoint for this presentation can be obtained from resources provided by the Landscape and Human Health Laboratory, which is directed by Frances Kuo ([www.lhhl.uiuc.edu/crime.htm](http://www.lhhl.uiuc.edu/crime.htm)). You are welcome to adapt the powerpoints available at their website so that it suits your students best, but they ask that slides 2, 3 and 20 be included to recognize the individuals who conducted the studies and the funding agencies.
- More information on both of these studies can be found in the two articles included at the link. The Kuo and colleagues 1998 article, *Fertile Ground for Community: Inner-*

*City Neighborhood Common Spaces*, is the first study in the powerpoint that focuses on community and social networks. The Kuo and Sullivan 2001 article, *Environment and Crime in the Inner City: Does Vegetation Reduce Crime?*, is the second study in the powerpoint that focuses on green space and crime.

1. Tell students you are now going to share with them some information from two studies conducted in Chicago looking at the relationship between green spaces and the interactions between people. One study focused on social networks or community building and the other focused on crime rates.
2. Go through the Powerpoint slides with students. (Obtain slides from <http://lhh1.illinois.edu/crime.htm>). Before showing the results of the studies, you may want to ask them to predict what the researchers found and why.

### Concluding the Lesson

1. Have students answer the following reflection questions either as a class discussion or in their journals – Think about your own personal social network in your neighborhood. How did you meet people in your social network? Did you meet any of them in green spaces or parks? If there were more green spaces or parks around your home, do you think it would change who you know and how well you know them? Why or why not?
  - *Students' responses will vary. The goal is to get students to apply what they learned during the game and from the two Chicago research studies to their own neighborhood social networks. If students seem to focus on their social network from school, push them to think about who they know where they live and how they met those people.*