

River Interview

Objective: Students will learn about their family and Bronx community members through oral history and about people and their interaction with the physical environment. Students will take a trip to the Bronx River and record sensory observations.

Materials: Notebook/Journal, pens, and colored pencils.
Optional: oak tag for concertina folders, roll paper, index cards, digital camera, and “sit upon” (see note below).

ACTIVITY SUMMARY:

Students will learn about the history of the Bronx River and then will be asked to gather an oral history involving the river from a family or Bronx community member. Students will share their stories with the class. The five senses will be discussed. Students will take a trip to the Bronx River and record observations using multiple senses and then write a narrative and/or draw a picture of the trip.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

Throughout history, humans have had a special connection with water. The Bronx River is no exception. The Mohegans selected it as a social center and food source well before the area’s development by the Dutch.

Though recent history has separated Bronx citizens from their river both physically and mentally, a discussion and subsequent timeline charting the memories of family and neighbors will surely spark an animated discussion between the generations. Diaries, journals, and media interviews are some of the best resources for local history we have.

A brief history of the Bronx River may be found in the introduction section of the unit ISSUES AND ACTION. This is also a good source for students to use to create an interview form.

SUGGESTION! *Make a “Sit-upon:”*
 Place a newspaper in a plastic bag – use it as a dry seat while at the river! Don’t forget to take it with you when you leave!

EVERYBODY

IN THE CLASSROOM AT HOME AT THE RIVER

Skills:

*Reading/Writing,
 Communication, Research,
 Critical Thinking.*

Subject/Discipline:

*Language Arts, Social Studies,
 History, the Bronx.*

Science Standards:

S2, S4, S8

Time:

Several class meetings, a field trip and independent work.

The Inside Track:

For more information on the Bronx River’s past, present, and future, see the intro pages of the ISSUES AND ACTION section in this guide, and visit the Alliance website:
<http://www.bronxriver.org/plans>

One may also visit the Bronx County Historical Society:
www.bronxhistoricalsociety.org.

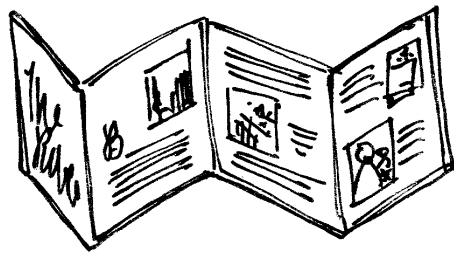


PROCEDURE:

You may choose to do either or both of these parts.

Part 1

1. Familiarize students with the Bronx River and the role it has played in the communities that live along it. Have students work in small groups to develop questions for them to ask a family or Bronx community member regarding the Bronx River. Examples:
Do you remember the first time you saw the river? What was it like?
Have you used the river? How?
Does the river have any importance in your life or hold any memories?
How do you think the river is used now?
2. Have students bring their research in to class. Some suggested ways to share:
 - Rewrite into a concertina folder with decorations, illustrations, and photos. Have them share these folders in small groups and make them available class wide during free time.
 - Oral presentations, live interviews, and/or guest speakers.
 - Timeline bulletin board. Hang a long piece of roll paper around one or more bulletin boards. Draw a long horizontal line and break it up into years. Be sure to notate the Mohegans, the Dutch arrival, the unification of New York City, and the installation of the Kensico Dam. Have students install info cards at dates that correspond with their interview data. Do some checking to know what years are most represented by your student's work, so there will be room for everyone's cards. There is a good chance much of the info will represent the 60's, 70's, and 80's. This era is not thoroughly represented by history books, so this should be interesting. Don't miss this opportunity to discuss Robert Moses and the major impacts his development plans had on Bronx communities.



Part 2

Students have learned about the Bronx River through the lens of history and that of their family and community. In this second part, students will develop an historical article of their own.

1. Review the five senses (sight, sound, touch, taste, and smell.)
Our senses are very important and in use all the time.
Ask: *Do you have a memory of a happy time that has a smell?*
Thanksgiving or birthdays are a good example. The smells we smell and the sights we see are just as important to a memory as what was happening, who was there, and, when it happened. They complete the picture.

Ask: *When you were interviewing your subject, how often did they mention sensory memories like: "I can still remember the smell of that bakery..."*

Tell students they will be visiting the Bronx River and will create a memory folder of their own using drawing, photography, and reflection writing. Their senses will guide this work.

2. Try to survey the site in advance so you have a plan for where students will sit or stand. Upon arrival at the site, walk around and discuss the name of the site and its location: Where is it in the Bronx? What roadways or landmarks are nearby? How far away are you from the mouth of the river, Long Island Sound, etc.? Also take a moment to note the weather: wind, sun.... this will affect their experience today.

Have students select a place to stand or sit and get comfortable.... and quiet.

First 2 minutes

Let's take the first few minutes to visually survey the site from where you are.

What do you think happens here?

See if students can isolate human happenings, nature happenings, and when and where they interact.

Have the students take some time to write down their observations.

Next 2 minutes

Everybody close your eyes! Listen and start taking an auditory inventory of the site.

What are you hearing? Where are the sounds coming from? Is the sound happening all the time, or is it intermittent?

Is there any auditory evidence of the nature and human happenings? Have

some new happenings been discovered now that the students' eyes are closed?

Next 1 minute

What about the smells? Would you consider them good? Bad? Why do you think that? Can you figure out where they are coming from? Can you compare them with anything else?

In places like the east side of Soundview Park students may notice a strong odor when the tide is out. This is perfectly normal in a salt marsh habitat. Do they confuse the smell with something humans may have done?

Next 2 minutes

Open your eyes everyone! Take some time now to write down some of the descriptions of the sounds and smells... Can you link them with human and nature activity?

Next 15 – 20 minutes

Let's go back to our visual assessment. There is no "right way" to do this. Can you draw the whole scene? What about detailed sketches of a few things that interest you? I will ask you to draw from where you are right now.



The segment lengths are a suggestion. You may find that your class likes spending more time on any or all of the segments.

3. Back at the classroom.

Lead a discussion about your experience at the river. *Was it what you expected?*

Ask the students to volunteer a few questions for the whole class. Try to steer the conversation to cover natural and social issues.

Consider comparing the work with Part One to Part Two.

Is this place different than it was a long time ago? How do you know?

Next...

If students recorded their work in existing journals, give them some time to put the finishing touches on their drawing and writing. Have them share their work in small groups.

If the work was done on loose paper, consider making booklets or pasting into concertina folders similar to the ones derived from their earlier interviews. It will be an historical resource they can share with their families now and in the future.



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