Main Street America

Teachers Guide

Remember when you used to head downtown to shop, to eat, to enjoy a night on the town? It seemed like everywhere you needed or wanted to go was "downtown," from your medical doctor to your favorite diner.

Fifty years ago, downtown Akron was the thriving center of an industrial city, supporting a mix of small businesses, residents and industry. Everybody went downtown, whether to conduct day-to-day business or to celebrate the holidays.

But like many American Main Streets, downtown Akron's began to devolve into a collection of failed businesses and abandoned buildings. By the late 1950's an exodus began as people moved away from the city and into the suburbs, acquired cars and began shopping at the malls.

And like many of the cities that suffered that fate, Akron is determined to reverse the trend toward decay. A number of "revitalization" plans have been proposed over the years — the reinvention of downtown is both a work in progress and an ongoing source of anxiety. But is downtown Akron worth saving? Is it need or nostalgia that fuels the drive to revitalize urban centers? Whose interests are met through revitalization? And why is it so difficult to achieve?

To get a better understanding, **Main Street America**, a PBS 45 & 49 production, explores the stories of four different cities — Akron, Ohio; Port Gibson, Mississippi; Springfield, Illinois; and Portland, Oregon — all in various stages of rejuvenation and working to overcome problems that have been years in the making. Reporter Jody Miller of PBS 45 & 49's **NewsNight Akron** explores why these cities are pursuing urban renewal and the various ways they are hoping to achieve it.

"The hardest part of revitalization ... is helping a community see what the opportunities are and see what the obstacles are," explains Kennedy Smith, director of the National Main Street Program based in Washington, DC. "There is a very strong tendency in the U.S. to believe that the answer to problems can be bought, that the way to revitalize your downtown is to bring in a convention center, a festival marketplace, a ball park, a whatever the big project du jour may happen to be, whatever the next big city over just did. Everybody thinks that if they do that it's going to work. And that's not really a solution, that's not thinking through what really is best for this community. That's the hardest thing of all."

PBS 45 & 49's **Main Street America** considers Smith's remarks in light of urban renewal projects, looks at what is worth saving downtown and explores what kind of revitalization plans actually work toward realizing the dream of renewal.

Four cities featured in Main Street America

Akron, Ohio
Akron has been working on a new revitalization project in the last few years. To see the city of Akron's home page, go to **http://www.ci.akron.oh.us**.

Port Gibson, Mississippi
Port Gibson is the third oldest incorporated town in the State of Mississippi and is the county seat. Located in the far southwest corner of Mississippi on the Natchez Trace, the town has been working on revitalization over the last ten years. To check out Port Gibson, check out **http://www.win.net/~kudzu/portgibs.html**.

Springfield, Illinois
Springfield is on the northernmost reach of the Mason-Dixon Line. The state capital, this city is located mid-way between Chicago and St. Louis. Springfield is known best as the home of Abraham Lincoln and supports a large tourism business. They have been working on revitalization since the mid-1980s. To go to the official site for Springfield, visit **http://www.springfield.il.us**.

Portland, Oregon
Portland is located on the western coast of Oregon on the Willamette River near Mt. Hood. *Money Magazine* named Portland the "Most Livable City in America" in 2000. They have been working on revitalization since the early 1960s. To go to Portland's official home page, log on to **http://www.ci.portland.or.us**.

Before viewing Main Street America

***Money Magazine* has developed a list titled "Best Places to Live"**

- Go to **http://money.cnn.com/best/bplive/bplive_allcities.html**.
- Select one or two cities about which you would like information. Maybe you'd like to think about moving to one of these places or maybe you want to find out about a city close to you.
- Print out this sheet and answer the eight questions about the city of your choice.
- Go to a search engine. Try Google at **http://www.google.com**. Put in the name of the city you've selected and find out more information about your city. Capture the logo or any picture you want to use.
- Make a poster that tells about the city you selected. Be creative.
- Use the rubric on the **next page** for grading your poster.

1. How many days per year is there mostly sun? _____

2. What is the average annual snowfall in your city?_____

3. What is the average Personal Crime Risk? _____

4. What is the median home price in your city? _____

5. How much does your city spend per pupil in school? _____

6. What is the student/teacher ratio? _____

7. What is the unemployment rate for your city? _____

8. Name two other issues that you think are important in choosing a city and tell why you believe them to be important. (Use this as part of your poster.)

_____

_____

_____

_____

Before viewing Main Street America

Rubric for Pre-Viewing Activity

CATEGORY	Excellent	Good	Satisfactory	Needs Improvement
Content Accuracy	At least 7 accurate facts are displayed on the poster.	5-6 accurate facts are displayed on the poster.	3-4 accurate facts are displayed on the poster.	Less than 3 accurate facts are displayed on the poster.
Clarity	Graphics are all in focus and the content easily viewed and identified from 6 ft. away.	Most graphics are in focus and the content easily viewed and identified from 6 ft. away.	Most graphics are in focus and the content is easily viewed and identified from 4 ft. away.	Many graphics are not clear or are too small.
Relevance	All graphics are related to the topic and make it easier to understand. All borrowed graphics have a source citation.	All graphics are related to the topic and most make it easier to understand. All borrowed graphics have a source citation.	All graphics relate to the topic. Most borrowed graphics have a source citation.	Graphics do not relate to the topic OR several borrowed graphics do not have a source citation.
Originality	Several of the graphics used on the poster reflect an exceptional degree of student creativity in their creation and/or display.	One or two of the graphics used on the poster reflect student creativity in their creation and/or display.	The graphics are made by the student, but are based on the designs or ideas of others.	No graphics made by the student are included.

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Goals of Main Street America

The producers of **Main Street America** want people to look at urban renewal projects, determine what is worth saving downtown and explore what kind of revitalization plans actually work toward realizing the dream of renewal.

Goals of Revitalization

- Beautification of the city and a sense of community pride.

- Restoration of historic sites.

- Reuse of pubic spaces.

- Rebuild infastructure of the city.

- Build community/business partnerships.

- Build consensus among many community groups.

General Philosophy of Revitalization

Below is described the general philosophy of the National Main Street Project, an initiative to generate revitalization of the city centers of America.

- It is better to have a series of **small projects** than one big project. An ongoing series of initiatives is vital to build community support.
- Small projects make a big difference. If people **start simple**, they are more willing to take on bigger projects as the revitalization continues.
- **Local leadership** is essential. Leaders need to get community support and involvement to be successful.
- **Support** from the public and private sectors is needed.
- Recognize and make the best use of **unique aspects** of your community. This provides a firm basis for renovation initiatives.
- Always strive for **quality**.
- Change is difficult. **Careful planning** helps the public to accept and encourage the changes that are being made.
- Make sure early **changes are frequent and visible**. This reinforces the idea that the revitalization effort is underway.

Benefits of Revitalization

- Builds community pride.
- Creates jobs.
- Increases collaboration among city groups and public and private partnerships.
- Adds to property value.
- Increases tax base.
- Encourages new businesses to come to community.
- Protects historic assets of the community.
- Strengthens the economic base of the community.
- Can enhance the quality of life (particularly if the infastructure is dealt with).
- Brings people to the "downtown" area.
- Finds the best use for underutilized or empty buildings.

Hotlist

Four cities featured in Main Street America

Akron, Ohio: **http://www.ci.akron.oh.us**

Port Gibson, Mississippi: **http://www.win.net/~kudzu/portgibs.html**

Springfield, Illinois: **http://www.springfield.il.us**

Portland, Oregon: **http://www.ci.portland.or.us**

Other sites dealing with revitalization of cities

National Main Street Center: **http://www.mainst.org**

Growth Management Toolbox: A Better Way to Live: **http://www.vapreservation.org/growth/intro.htm**

Other cities that have done revitalization projects

Main Street O'Fallon: **http://ofallonil.com/mainstrt/history.html**

Massillon, Ohio Main Street: **http://www.massillongateway.com/mainstreet/benefits.html**

Rockville Downtown Association, Inc.: **http://www.vernonct.com/rda/who.html**

Staunton, Virginia Historic Downtown: **http://sdda.staunton.va.us/**

To find other cities that have done revitalization projects, go to a search engine (try **http://www.altavista.com**) and use the key words "city" and "revitalization."

Lesson Plans

Kids and Community gives information on what a city planner is and what he/she does. The site features games student can play and helps them recreate Dead Skunk Junction as a thriving city. Go to **http://www.planning.org/kidsandcommunity**.

Main Street America Lesson Plan

Places Rated Almanac (by David Savageau and Richard Boyer, Prentice Hall Travel, 1994) is a widely used for rating and ranking cities. All metropolitan areas of the United States are rated in 10 categories, including jobs, housing costs, education, crime and recreational facilities.

The ratings are established by using the following criteria:

- **Housing** — establishes the annual payment on a 15-year, eight percent mortgage for an average-priced home after making a 20 percent down payment.

- **Jobs** — looks at the number of new jobs and the percent increase of new jobs.

- **Education** — uses a formula that measures two-year and four-year college enrollment.

- **Crime** — rates both violent crime and property crime.

- **Recreation** — looks at the number of public golf courses, good restaurants, zoos, aquariums, professional sports teams, miles of coastline, national forests, parks wildlife refuges and state parks.

For more accurate descriptions go to either *Places Rated Almanac* or *Data-Driven Mathematics: Exploring Symbols*, (by Gail Burrill, Miriam Clifford and Richard Scheaffer, New York: Dale Seymour Publications, 1998).

Below are listed the ratings for the following cities from *Places Rated Almanac*. These ratings are based on the criteria specified above.

City	Housing	Jobs	Education	Crime	Recreation
Boston, MA	$18,903	3,456	4,178	1,051	2,278
Washington, DC	$15,466	16,288	3,764	1,028	1,857
Atlanta, GA	$8,676	16,777	1,692	1,474	1,822
San Diego, CA	$20,322	14,772	2,335	1,266	3,800
Terra Haute, IN	$4,116	2,028	290	823	1,100
Lincoln, NE	$6,362	2,457	554	993	1,486
Greenville, SC	$6,911	3,477	377	882	900
Salem, OR	$6,226	2,787	237	869	1,784

1. Look at the data above. In which areas do you think a high rating would be bad?

2. In which categories would you expect bigger cities to do better?

3. In which category are the ratings most variable? Why do you think this is?

4. Rank the cities in regard to recreation, using 1 as the highest rank. Why do you think this is true?

5. Do you think the beauty of the city would have an effect on your choice of where you would want to live? Can this be rated? How?

Table is from Data Driven Mathematics Exploring Symbols listed above.

Answers for Main Street America
Lesson Plan Questions

City	Housing	Jobs	Education	Crime	Recreation
Boston, MA	$18,903	3,456	4,178	1,051	2,278
Washington, DC	$15,466	16,288	3,764	1,028	1,857
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1. Look at the data above. For which areas do you think a high rating would be bad?

A high number in the **Crime** area would not be a good thing.

2. In which categories would you expect bigger cities to do better?

Large cities will do better in **Recreation** because there are more people to support the facilities. There would also be a higher score in **Education** because larger cities are more likely to have more colleges and universities.

3. In which category are the ratings most variable? Why do you think this is?

Housing is the most varied. It goes from $4,116 to $20,322.

4. Rank the cities in regard to recreation, using 1 as the highest rank. Why do you think this is true?

Boston   2
Washington 3
Atlanta   4
San Diego   1
Terra Haute 7
Lincoln   6
Greenville   8
Salem   5

5. Do you think the beauty of the city would have an effect on your choice of where you would want to live? Can this be rated? How?

Answers will vary but students should get some ideas from watching **Main Street America**.

PBS 45 & 49
P.O. Box 5191
Kent, OH 44240-5191
330-677-4549
http://www.pbs4549.org