

Build a City

Time: 30–45 min

Purpose: To simulate the effect of classism on communities of different socio-economic strata.

Skills: Appreciating similarities and differences, Communication, Cooperation, Creativity, Empathy, Listening, Patience, Problem solving

You will need...



- 15–30 participants
- Middle school or high school age participants
- Chart paper, markers, scissors, “Build a City” handouts (attached), Peace First money (attached), envelopes
- Enough space for three separate groups to work independently

Before You Begin



- Cut up Peace First money and prepare envelopes by putting each individual price list and appropriate amount of Peace First money into each team’s envelope and seal completely.
- In this activity participants will be working in three groups (of approximately five participants). Consider whether you will assign groups before the activity or guide participants to choose their own groups. If you have a larger group, you may want to form six groups, where two groups have the same price list and amount of money.
- Prepare the reflection questions you will ask participants in the debrief.

Directions

Introduce the activity Build a City. Use this time to reinforce any established expectations that are important for participants to remember during the activity.

Tell participants that they will be divided into groups. The objective of the activity is to purchase permits for their groups’ structures and then “build” their structures within the allotted time to make their ideal city.

Explain that to build a structure each group will need to receive the approval and a marker from the City Planning and Permit Officer. The group may then use the marker to draw their structure on the piece of chart paper.

DIRECTIONS CONTINUED

Emphasize that groups must discuss their ideal communities and make decisions about what kinds of structures they want in their communities as groups.

Explain the specific guidelines that the groups and their representatives must follow:

- A community may only build one structure in their city at a time. There are no exceptions to this rule. If a community builds a structure without the proper authorization, it will be condemned and the group will have to pay a penalty.
- Only one representative at a time may stand before the City Planning and Permit Officer. If two representatives try to see the City Planning and Permit Officer at the same time, the second representative will be fined and sent back to their group until the first representative has completed his/her transaction.
- The City Planning and Permit Officer is the only one authorized to dispense the “building materials” (i.e., markers or crayons). Any illegal purchase or possession of unauthorized building material is strictly prohibited and subject to fines.
- The City Planning and Permit Officer may at any time change the amount of money needed for permit to build a structure in a community. Costs go up unexpectedly in government all the time, and the community and their representatives should be prepared to deal with it.
- The City Planning and Permit Officer has the right to reject a community’s bid to build a structure in their city. To argue with a government official will only lead to fines.

Ask participants if they have any questions about the activity.

Ask for two volunteers who will play key roles in the game. One volunteer will play the role of a Police Officer; and the other the role of City Inspector. As facilitator, you will play the role of the City Planning and Permit Officer.

Give the two volunteers a description of their roles (attached) and make sure that they fully understand their roles and their responsibilities for the activity.

Divide the large group into three smaller groups of equal size, and **tell** them to find a space to work. Make sure that each group has enough space to work and cannot easily see what the other groups are doing.



Distribute a piece of chart paper and a sealed envelope with money and a price list to each group. Make sure that groups do not share their list or dollar amounts with each other. They should see only their assigned list.

Before beginning, **tell** each group to appoint a “community representative” to go before the City Planning and Permit Officer for permit and building approval.



Give groups 20 minutes to build their city.

DIRECTIONS CONTINUED

Once groups have started working, **tell** the volunteers playing the roles of Police Officer and City Inspector to roam between the three groups, observing the planning and building process, helping to enforce building codes, and maintaining law and order.

What groups do not know:

- Each group has received not only a different amount of money, but also a different price list.
- Groups have been designed to have three distinct “classes”—an upper, a middle, and a lower class.
- City Officials are instructed to reinforce stereotypes of each group in a subtle but persistent way: giving praise to the “upper class” group for their work, while telling the “lower” class group that they are being lazy and uncooperative. (The facilitator and volunteers should exaggerate their roles as much as possible without being overly offensive. It is important to reflect the inequitable treatment frequently given to the three different classes, but it is not a time to abuse or degrade participants.)
- The Permit and Planning Officer may give “upper class” representatives their choice of marker colors, while restricting “lower class” representatives to brown or gray.
- Unforeseen tax increases may burden lower class groups, while un-requested tax breaks or giveaways are offered to upper class groups. The “middle class” group should be largely left to their own devices.
- Be creative; find new ways to reinforce these stereotypes. The objective is to simulate the stratification of society, in which struggling against injustice is an everyday fact of life for some people while others remain completely blind to it. This may show itself in frustration, desperation, outright hostility, civil disobedience, or something different. (It is a rare—though not an unheard of—occurrence that the upper class group should notice and try to correct the imbalance by sharing their resources.)

Bring the groups back together.

Beginning with the “upper class” group, **allow** each group to present their city, as if nothing untoward occurred. Then **ask** them to present the amount of money received, materials, and issues they had with any public officials (if they indeed had any issues).



Thank participants for presenting and explain that now they will reflect on how they experienced the activity.

Debrief

Debrief the activity with participants. Remember, this activity is only as effective as your debrief. This is your opportunity to help participants connect the activity to personal experiences, actions, and beliefs.

DEBRIEF CONTINUED

You will want to reinforce any skills or beliefs you are hoping participants will carry beyond the activity.

For more on facilitating debriefs, refer to the [Debriefing Tip Sheet](#) on our Digital Activity Center.

We've included some suggested questions below to get you started.

Ask:

What happened during this activity? What did you notice, what stood out?

How were you treated by City Officials? What was your reaction to your treatment?

When did you first suspect that you were being treated differently from other players, either positively or negatively? How did you feel about it? How did your feelings change as the game continued?

Have you been in situations where you have seen this type of unequal treatment take place? What happened then?

For City Officials, how did it feel to play the role you were given? Was it easy or hard? Why?

What new perspectives do you take from the game, if any?

Thank participants for taking part in the activity.

“Build a City” Structures and Group Budgets

(For Public Official Eyes Only)

Group 1: \$3,000	Group 2: \$2,000	Group 3: \$900
House \$150	House \$100	House \$100
School \$200	School \$200	School \$150
Apartment Building \$300	Apartment Building \$200	Apartment Building \$150
University \$400	College \$350	Dollar Store \$50
Library \$200	Library \$200	Police Station \$150
Park \$200	Park \$100	Public Transportation \$200
Public Transportation \$200	Public Transportation \$200	Park \$150
Police Station \$150	Police Station \$150	Jail \$200
Fire Station \$75	Fire Station \$150	Liquor Store \$75
Hospital \$350	Hospital \$450	Corner market \$150
“Super” Grocery Store \$150	Grocery Store \$100	Empty Lot \$50
Performing Arts Center \$300	Mall \$200	
Teen Center \$200	Convenience Store \$100	
Mall \$200	Health Clinic \$100	
Museum \$200	Civic Center \$300	
Sports Stadium \$350	Teen Center \$250	
Recycling Services \$75		
Court House \$100		
Other...	Other...	Other...

Other: decided by the City Planning and Permit Officer

Public Official Roles and Responsibilities

(For Public Official Eyes Only)

City Planning and Permit Officer: You have the sole power to decide if, how, and how much it costs to build a structure. You may decide on your own that “certain” groups need approval for every structure while “others” do not. You may approve or reject any structure a group has proposed to build. You have the power to discount or increase the cost of any structure for whomever you please. You decide what materials each team receives. **Be sure to temper your responses at times so as not to cause complete chaos.**

Police Officer: You offer protection and assistance to each group depending on their affluence and resources. The poorer the group, the more assumptions you should voice. (For example, make comments about the character of a city’s residents or their ability to achieve success.) The poorer the group, the more you should hassle its residents. If residents pose a threat to public safety, you may fine them or even, in extreme cases, arrest them. **Be sure to temper your response at times so as not to cause complete chaos.**

City Inspector: You have the right to make sure a structure is up to code. You may issue warnings and fines as you see fit. You have the power to stop a structure from being completed or to condemn a structure that was built without the proper permit or approval. You may *ask for bribes* in order to approve a structure. Feel free to criticize the materials being used to build structures. You may also bring people before the City Planning and Permit Officer for real or perceived violations. **Be sure to temper your responses at times so as not to cause complete chaos.**

Build a City Structures and Price List Worksheet for Group # 1

Budget: \$3,000

House: \$150

School: \$200

Apartment Building: \$300

University: \$400

Library: \$200

Park: \$200

Public Transportation: \$200

Police Station: \$150

Fire Station: \$75

Hospital: \$350

“Super-sized” Grocery Store: \$150

Performing Arts Center: \$300

Teen Center: \$200

Mall: \$200

Museum: \$200

Sports Stadium: \$350

Recycling Services: \$75

Court House: \$100

Other... decided by the City Planning and Permit Officer

Build a City Structures and Price List Worksheet for Group # 2

Budget: \$2,000

House: \$100

School: \$200

Apartment Building: \$200

College: \$350

Library: \$200

Park: \$100

Public Transportation: \$200

Police Station: \$150

Fire Station: \$150

Hospital: \$450

Grocery Store: \$100

Mall: \$200

Convenience Store: \$100

Health Clinic: \$100

Civic Center: \$300

Teen Center: \$250

Other... decided by the City Planning and Permit Officer

Build A City Structures and Price List Worksheet for Group # 3

Budget: \$900

House: \$100

School: \$150

Apartment Building: \$150

Dollar Store: \$50

Police Station: \$150

Public Transportation: \$200

Park: \$150

Jail: \$200

Liquor Store: \$75

Corner Market: \$150

Empty Lot: \$50

Other... decided by the City Planning and Permit Officer

\$500	 Five Hundred Peace Dollars	\$500	\$500	 Five Hundred Peace Dollars	\$500
\$500	 Five Hundred Peace Dollars	\$500	\$500	 Five Hundred Peace Dollars	\$500
\$500	 Five Hundred Peace Dollars	\$500	\$500	 Five Hundred Peace Dollars	\$500
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\$20	 Twenty Peace Dollars	\$20	\$20	 Twenty Peace Dollars	\$20
\$20	 Twenty Peace Dollars	\$20	\$20	 Twenty Peace Dollars	\$20
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\$5	 peacefirst	\$5	\$5	 peacefirst	\$5
\$5	Five Peace Dollars	\$5	\$5	Five Peace Dollars	\$5
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\$5	Five Peace Dollars	\$5	\$5	Five Peace Dollars	\$5
\$5	 peacefirst	\$5	\$5	 peacefirst	\$5
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