

LEARNING RESOURCE MATERIAL



Hadley Dyer + Marc Ngui

WATCH THIS SPACE

DESIGNING, DEFENDING AND SHARING PUBLIC SPACES





About *Watch This Space: Designing, Defending and Sharing Public Spaces*

As urban density grows around the world, public space wars have leapt to the forefront of city planning. And kids have the most to lose in the shrinking of public spaces. Most youth don't own private spaces, and they rarely control them.

Watch This Space is a groundbreaking book that will help readers discover and stand up for their rights in public space. It shows them what public spaces are and how kids around the world have helped to create, design, share and protect it. At the same time, this unique resource covers a variety of subjects from art, design and urban planning, to social justice, community building and the environment.

About the Author

Hadley Dyer is a regular contributor to magazines such as *Toronto Life*, *Canadian Family* and *Owl*. She teaches in the publishing program at Ryerson University and has been active in the book industry as an editor, bookseller, publicist, library coordinator and past president of IBBY Canada. Hadley lives, writes and makes much use of the public spaces in Toronto, Canada.

About the Illustrator

Marc Ngui caught the book-making bug at seven years old when he was shown how by the school librarian. He has been writing, drawing and making zines and comics ever since. Marc works in a variety of media: ink, graphite, watercolor, gouache and pixels. Over the past three years, he has traveled through Central America, South East Asia, Europe and India. Marc's hometown is Windsor, Canada.

Discussion Topics and Activities

The following discussion questions and activities support primary curricula in social studies, language and literature and visual arts, grades 5–9. This learning resource can be reproduced for home or classroom use only. For more learning resource materials please visit www.kidscanpress.com.

Activities

1. Public or Private?

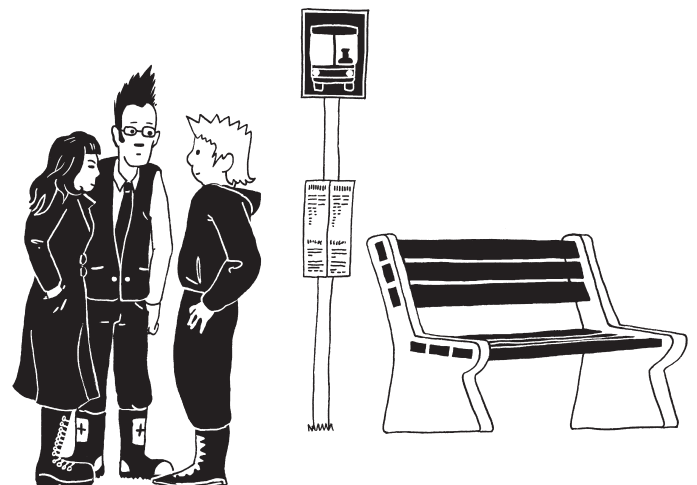
In *Watch This Space*, author Hadley Dyer offers two ways in which public spaces can be identified:

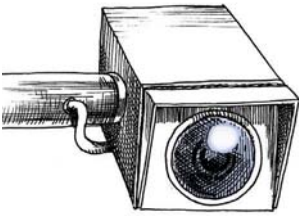
1. that public spaces are owned by the government, which means that they belong to the people of a city, province, state or country;
2. that true public spaces are open to all people. Ideally there are no fees for admission so that everyone can use the space.

However, many places inhabit a “gray zone” between public and private. For example, some museums and galleries receive government funding but also charge for admission. And malls do not charge a fee for entry, but does that make them public spaces?

As a class, create a list of favorite places to hang out. These can range from malls to coffee shops to websites. Then go through the list as a group and discuss whether or not these places qualify as public spaces based on the criteria above.

When you come across a social space that seems to fall into the “gray zone” between public and private, guide your students into a closer look at that space's policies of inclusivity — one of the hallmarks of a true public space. For example, museums and galleries often schedule admission-free days to welcome those who can't pay full price. On the other hand, malls often actively discourage those who use the space to loiter instead of shop.





2. Who's Watching Your Space?

Divide your class into three groups. Two of the groups will debate the pros and cons of surveillance in public spaces. They must present

their arguments and defend their positions to the third group who must judge the debate with objectivity.

Ask students to consider themes such as crime, safety, privacy and prejudices. Encourage them to anticipate the other side's arguments. Give the first two groups time to research newspapers and magazines for articles that help support their position. To help them structure their argument, have them answer the following questions:

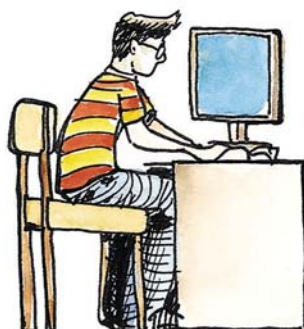
- What is my group's main argument?
- What is my supporting point?
- How does my news source support my point?

In the meantime, you can coach the third group on how the debate should be judged: Were the main arguments clear? Were all supporting points relevant to the debate? Were the news sources persuasive?

Students can also be judged on debate behavior: Did all team members participate equally? Did students speak loudly enough to be heard? Did each team both speak and listen with respect?

On the day of the debate, the two teams will have five minutes to present their main arguments without interruption. After this, they will take turns presenting their individual points, attempting to both persuade the audience and give rebuttals to the opposing team's points. Once the debate is over, the audience will vote on which team proved the most persuasive about surveillance in public spaces.

This activity can be applied to other topics in *Watch This Space*. For example: Is graffiti street art or street crime? Should governments sell advertising space in public spaces?



3. City Planning

Great public spaces successfully meet the needs of their communities — and that includes the needs of youth. As a class, brainstorm public spaces that the students would like to see in their neighborhood or city. For example, they might want a safe place to skateboard, an off-leash park for their dogs or simply a place where they can hang out without having to buy anything.

Have the students vote on the idea that most appeals to their needs. Then divide the class into six committees. Each committee must address one of the following qualities of great public spaces:



Beauty: How can this space be designed so that it is both beautiful and functional?



Sociability: How will this space encourage a variety of people to come together and interact?



Comfort: How can this space be made comfortable to encourage public use?



Flexibility: How many ways can the community make use of this space?



Accessibility: How will people reach this space, and how can it accommodate special needs?



Safety: How can you make people feel safe and secure in this space?

Each committee will create a collage to represent their “vision” for this new public space in relation to their assigned topic. Committees should be encouraged to share information and resources. Students can research examples of how real city planners have overcome the challenges of creating successful public spaces.

4. Advertising Treasure Hunt

a) Ask students to find three examples of advertising in public spaces over the course of a weekend. Have them take note of what kind of ad they saw (i.e., what was the medium? Print, television, fake graffiti, etc.); where they found it (on the side of a building, in a bus shelter); and what was being advertised.



In class, encourage students to further analyze their ads by thinking about the following questions:

- Who created these ads? What is the purpose of the ads?
- Who is the target audience for this ad? How is the ad tailored to this audience?
- How do you feel after seeing this ad? How does it appeal to your emotions?

As a class, discuss the issues that arise when public spaces are rented by advertisers. For example, does the income from advertising justify the visual pollution of public spaces? Should we as a society reserve spaces in which we are not being targeted as consumers? Can advertisers looking for a profit also have the public good in mind?

b) Companies are finding increased ways of reaching children in public schools, from in-school advertising to company-sponsored educational materials and contests. Have students write a position paper on advertising in primary schools.

5. "Tweet" Your Neighborhood

A neighborhood's public spaces provide places for people to get together, explore common interests and share news. Create an annotated map of your neighborhood's public spaces to show how community and knowledge grow from common grounds.

This activity is a riff on the Internet micro-blogging service, Twitter. Users send and receive messages called "tweets," which can be no longer than 140 characters.

1. Blow up a basic map of your school's neighborhood with the school or another important public space at the center. (This could also be a town square, a library, a

park, etc.) Have your students fill in details such as the names of nearby rivers and parks. Add local landmarks, bike paths and public buildings.

2. Now it's time to "tweet" the neighborhood! Ask students to contribute stories or tips about their community that can be linked to a location on the map. For example, does the public library hold a weekly teen night? Is there an intersection that is particularly dangerous for pedestrians? Where can you get the best hot dogs in the park? The twist is that students can only use 140 characters per entry.

3. Number each student's "tweet" in a list beside the map. Have students affix a sticky note with corresponding numbers to the map. Display your class's map in a prominent area and encourage students from other classes to participate by adding their own "tweets" to the map.

6. Rant This!

Nonfiction can be a great springboard for writing exercises. And nothing gets a reluctant writer going like an old fashioned rant. Ask your students, "If you were mayor of this town, what would you change about the way it's designed or about how people behave around each other in public spaces?" Set the timer for five minutes and watch the pencils fly.

Rants are fun to read aloud and they're often hilarious. It helps to start students off with a few complaints of your own. For example, "I hate getting whacked in the face with a backpack on the bus!" or, "What's up with those 'sidewalk weavers' who drift from side to side and make it impossible to get around them?" Prompt students to end their rants with ideas on how they would change things for the better.

