

Project-Based Lesson to Supplement the Exhibition *The Changing Peninsula*

For advanced students of U.S. History, Urban Studies, Regional Studies

Central Question: What forces have changed the landscape of Portland over the centuries?

Possible areas of study this lesson may supplement:

- Local/regional studies
- History of Portland/Maine
- Urban studies/planning

Skills:

- Reading comprehension
- Analysis of primary and secondary source documents
- Analytical writing
- Oral debate
- Teamwork, cooperation and communication
- Synthesis and application of information

Objectives:

- To build group-work skills
- To foster unity within a class
- To develop higher-order thinking skills
- To develop writing and speaking skills
- To familiarize students (who live in Maine or in the Portland area) with their own local history
- To familiarize students with a current local issue

Materials:

- Students will need access to computers and research materials.

Instructions for Teachers:

1. Present students with the central question (above). You might also acquaint them with the project they will be completing in Step 8, so they begin with an idea of what they will accomplish by the time this unit is completed.
2. Have students view the exhibit *The Changing Peninsula* individually or as a class. Discuss the exhibit. Ask them to name a few important events in Portland history. This exhibit will act as a foundation for the assignments to come.
3. Now that the students have gained a little bit of knowledge about Portland, ask students, individually or in groups, to research one of the topics listed in Appendix #1. Each one of these topics relates to Portland history. In the end, the goal will be for students to pool their knowledge. Although each student will only have to do a little research, as a class they should have a pretty comprehensive knowledge of Portland history.

- NB: Students will be able to find more information about some of these topics than about others. You might offer topics to students based on difficulty and student ability, or you might give some students multiple small topics to research.
4. You can make the research as formal as you want. You might ask the students to take notes only, or to write up a page about what they learned. This is a good opportunity to teach or remind students about citations. Encourage or require students to use at least one primary source document in their research. That primary source might be a map from the exhibition, a document, or an engraving or photograph.
 5. Ask students to present what they have learned to the class. Students might give a brief talk on their subject and provide a visual aid to accompany their information. Make sure that students are aware that they should come away from this series of presentations with a pretty comprehensive knowledge of the history of the city. Ideally, they should start to make connections between what they have learned and the information the other students have presented to them. Encourage them to make these connections aloud. Encourage them to ask each other questions.
 6. At this point, it helps for the teacher to have some familiarity with the history of Portland to supplement what the students have learned or correct them if they have misunderstood something in their research.
 7. Give students plenty of time to learn from one another and create some aggregate of their knowledge. As a class, ask them to create a visual reflection of all that, as a group, they know about the history of Portland.
 - a. Activities:
 - i. As a class, create a timeline of important events in Portland history.
 - ii. As a class, create a map flipbook. Each map in the flipbook could show Portland at a different stage of its development. Ask the students to decide what range of years should be represented in each map. Make sure to include major landmarks and major changes in the physical shape of Portland. If you want, students could create these maps on transparencies so they could be layered one on top of another.
 8. Next, when you are satisfied that the students have thoroughly educated themselves and one another about the history of Portland, present them with a “problem” that they must solve as a class.
 - a. Here are a few options:
 - i. Pretend that the citizens of Portland have decided to change the name of the city. (Too much confusion with Portland, Oregon, perhaps.) What should the new name of the city be? *The city will be named after the person (or thing) that has most shaped the landscape of Portland.* Create a discussion or debate around the question: who has been the most influential in the history of Portland. This might be an opportunity for students to be creative and answer something like “Commercial Street” or “fire” and then develop a creative name based on this “out-of-the-box” answer. You can determine if you want the students to limit their

discussion to influential people, or expand it to include influential events, etc. This assignment could become a persuasive essay or a persuasive speech. Students could also create a campaign slogan and promotional materials to support their choice for Portland's new name.

- ii. Ask students to educate themselves about the debate over what to do about the Franklin Arterial in Portland. They could learn about this topic either individually, in small groups, or as a class. As of the time this lesson plan was created, there is a Franklin Arterial website at: portlandmaine.gov/franklinstreetarterial.htm. Currently, there are three different proposals for improvements to the Franklin Arterial. In groups, ask students to familiarize themselves with one of the proposals. They may gather their information from the Franklin Arterial Commission's final report, which can be found at the website listed above. (The report is long, but it is full of information and provides helpful diagrams. Have students read only the portions that pertain to the proposal that they are investigating.) In a debate, persuasive essay or persuasive speech, have students argue the merits of their proposal. Why should their proposal be implemented instead of the other two proposals? (If you want, you might allow students to combine aspects of the three proposals to create their own composite. Then they must argue the merits of their design.)
- iii. The second activity, based on the proposed improvements to the Franklin Arterial, deals with a current event. In tailoring this lesson plan to your class, you might choose another (perhaps more current) event in Portland. Since much of this lesson has to do with the landscape and built environment of Portland, it might make sense to find a current event that, like the Franklin Arterial project, also deals with these topics. Another possibility would be to discuss a contemporary influential person in Portland, and perhaps relate the influence of that person to some of the historic individuals the students have researched.

Appendix:

List of topics from the history of Portland for students to research:

1. Abenaki People/King Phillip's War
2. Fire of 1775
3. Alice Greele
4. City Hall and its many incarnations
5. Fire of 1866
6. Munjoy Hill
7. Lincoln Park

8. The Deering family
9. Thomas Brackett Reed
10. Back Cove
11. Portland Observatory and/or Portland Head Light
12. Union Station
13. Monument Square
14. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow
15. The Clapp family (esp. Asa Clapp)
16. Industrial on Commercial Street in Portland (For example the Portland Star Match Factory)
17. The different neighborhoods in Portland and their historical vs. modern identities
18. Portland Rum Riot