



Overview

In this activity, students will study changes in their local environment over short and long periods and will identify patterns of change.

LEVELS

Part A: Grades K-4

Part B: Grades 3-8

SUBJECTS

Social Studies, Language Arts,
Visual Arts

CONCEPTS

- Ecosystems change over time through patterns of growth and succession. They are also affected by other phenomena such as disease, insects, fire, weather, and human intervention. (13.4)
- Governments change and evolve over the years. Such changes affect the lives of the citizens, as well as resource management and environmental policies. (15.1)
- Increased public knowledge of the environment and the need for conservation of natural resources have resulted in lifestyle changes in many cultures. (15.5)

SKILLS

Researching, Comparing and Contrasting, Identifying Relationships and Patterns, Concluding

OBJECTIVES

Students will (a) identify changes in their local environment over the course of time, and (b) create a timeline to illustrate patterns of change over time.

MATERIALS

roll of paper such as butcher paper or newsprint for timeline, colored markers, copies of "Timeline Plan" on student page 368

TIME CONSIDERATIONS

Preparation: 30 minutes

Activity: One to five 50-minute periods

Background

It has been said that change is really the only constant in the universe.

Change is all around us—sometimes we notice it, and sometimes we do not. One pattern of change is the 24-hour day. The Earth rotates on its axis, causing the cycle we know as day and night. Small changes in the rotation and the tilt of the Earth cause changes in the length of day and night throughout the seasons, but these, too, are predictable.

Some changes happen fast, such as a tree falling in a storm. Others happen so slowly, like the slow washing of mountains into the sea, that we are hardly aware of them. Some changes are noticeable through patient observation, like the movement of the tide. Some systems are so complex, like a forest, that we hardly notice when changes take place.

History is a record of changes, be it the history of a tree, forest, society, or nation. Humans have been recording the history of people, places, and things for thousands of years; much of this information can be found in libraries and museums. Historians, people who study and record history, can be a great help in tracing the changes over time.

Historical information may be stored in books, photographs, movies, computer records, government documents, or a person's memory.

One example of change in your community could be transportation systems. Today you move around in cars, trains, buses, on bicycles, and on foot. Just 50 or 60 years ago, you probably would have observed a lot more people riding bikes and walking, and not as many cars. A hundred years ago, people probably walked, rode on horses, or drove in horse-drawn carriages—things we seldom see today!

The challenge is to be aware and notice changes as they happen, and then to look back to identify patterns.

Getting Ready

Contact your local library or historical society for historic photos, books, and information about your community. Cut butcher paper into five 4-6-foot (1.2-1.8-m) sections, or prepare similar-sized pieces of paper.

(Optional) Try the activity "Then and Now" on page 131. Schedule a visit to the local museum. Invite a local historian or elderly person to talk about changes that have taken place in the local community.

PART A CHANGES IN YOU

Doing the Activity

1. Ask students what major changes happened in their lives between their birth and age four. Encourage them to brainstorm ideas, and record their answers on the chalkboard under the heading "Changes From Birth to Four." (grew taller, learned to eat real food, toilet trained, learned to walk, learned to talk) Then ask them how they know these things—can they remember? Did someone tell them? Did they see pictures?

2. Now ask students to brainstorm about how they have changed since they started school. Record answers under the heading "Changes Since Starting School." (go to school every day, play with friends, learned to read, etc.)

3. Now ask students to think about how they have changed just since they woke up this morning. Record answers under the heading "Changes Since This Morning." (hair changed from messy to neat after brushing, stomach changed from hungry to full after eating breakfast, etc.)

4. Discuss how some of these changes are obvious (such as learning to walk). Other changes are harder to see—such as gaining knowledge. Point out how changes can sometimes be linked to a time or date. Demonstrate how students can make a timeline of their life changes from birth to the present.

PART B MAKING A TIMELINE

Doing the Activity

1. Ask students to gather information about the history of their community by visiting a museum, listening to a historian invited to talk to the group, or visiting a library.

Share with students any information you've already gathered.

2. Tell students that they are going to create a timeline of the history of the local community. Divide the class into five groups, and make each responsible for chronicling a particular time period, either one decade of the past 50 years or one of the periods listed below.

- Ancient Times (native peoples)
- Early Years (early settlers or community development)
- Olden Days (grandparents' lifetimes and earlier)
- Recent History (parents' lifetimes)
- Modern Times (today)

Students should compile information about their time period from interviews, museums, and libraries.

3. Give each group ample time to collect information. Before beginning their timeline, each group should complete a "Timeline Plan" on student page 368, describing at least five events students plan to include. Tell them to consider changes in landscape, wildlife, and human lifestyle over their time period. Ask what might have been the causes of some of these changes, and then have them incorporate changes into their timeline period.

4. They should then draw or paint the events of their decade or time period on the timeline mural. Students can use poster paints or markers on butcher paper to make their section of the mural. Five separate mural pieces—one for each team—are easiest to manage; these can later be joined by masking tape when all are finished and dry.

Enrichment

1. If you're working with older students, you might consider getting permission to paint your timeline mural on a blank outdoor or indoor wall—making a permanent artistic expression of the local history.

2. Have students become cultural archaeologists and go searching with a parent through the attic, basement, closets, shelves, and drawers for "really old stuff." Have students ask the parent if he or she knows the history of the items found. Who was the original owner? Where did it come from? What was it used for? Have students write a real or imaginary story about one of the items that interests them.

END NOTES...

ASSESSMENT OPPORTUNITY

Ask each team to explain the history of the changes they recorded in their section of the mural. After reviewing the entire mural, discuss the following:

- What are changes in the environment, wildlife, and human lifestyle?
- What caused some of these changes?
- Do you think these changes have made your community a better or worse place to live, or have they made no difference?
- Did any changes that were considered good at some time turn out to be bad?
- Can you identify any trends and what implications they might have for the future?

RELATED ACTIVITIES

Then and Now: In the Good Old Days, People, Places, and Things; Planning the Ideal Community

TIMELINE PLAN FOR YOUR LOCAL AREA

Team members:

Describe at least five events from your time period and the dates when they happened. Include this information in your part of the timeline:

Option 1

A decade of the past 50 years

- ___ 1950s
- ___ 1960s
- ___ 1970s
- ___ 1980s
- ___ 1990s

In your community, what changes have taken place in:

- vegetation: _____
- wildlife: _____
- human environment and lifestyle:
(homes, transportation, work, schools)

Option 2

A time period:

- ___ Ancient Times (native peoples)
- ___ Early Years (pioneers and settlers)
- ___ Olden Days (grandparents' or great-grand parents' lifetimes)
- ___ Recent Times (parents' lifetimes)
- ___ Modern Times (today)

What are some of the causes of these changes?

Explain whether you think these changes have made your community a better or worse place in which to live, or have made no difference.