

Take A Deep Breath: Re-Building Our City

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Background: As New York City works to recover and rebuild from the tragedy of 9/11, many communities are taking steps to address complicated issues such as health, safety, and economic recovery. Downtown residents, businesses, schools and community organizations are all engaged in figuring out what should be done.

Scenario: You are the assistant director of a neighborhood community center in the Lower East Side, below Canal St. Your director has asked you to conduct research on issues of downtown air quality and develop a large informative flyer on the issues for the members of the community. Your task is to a) research to familiarize yourself with the issues; b) decide what issues should be addressed, and c) sketch the outlines of your flyer.

Objectives:

- To develop critical thinking skills.
- To develop skills in web-based research, writing, and presenting information to a public audience.
- To gather, analyze and evaluate information about downtown air quality, and to assess appropriate response by public officials.

Resources

EPA World Trade Center Clean-Up site

<http://www.epa.gov/wtc/>

“Ground Zero Cancer Fears,” BBC News 4.26.02

<http://www.nyenvirolaw.org/PDF/BBC-4-26-02-GroundZeroCancerFears-Dr.Levin%20study.pdf>

“Smoke Screen” article in the British newspaper The Guardian, 6.5.02

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/Archive/Article/0,4273,4427040,00.html>

“WTC Aid Eludes the Poor,” NY Daily News 6.6.02

<http://www.nyenvirolaw.org/PDF/DailyNews-6-6-02-Sept11AidSeemsToEludeThePoor.pdf>

Activity. (55 Minutes Total)

Step 1. Researching the Situation. (30 min) Choose a partner. After reviewing these instructions, work with your partner to select and examine some of the sites listed above to gather information about the Downtown air quality, the clean up efforts, and related public health issues. Use the attached note-taking form--or create your own.

Step 2. Sorting, evaluating, and analyzing information. (10 min). **Stop gathering and start analyzing.** With your partner, reflect on the data you gathered. What sites were most helpful to you? What information did you find on different sites? How would you describe their biases? How would you rate their reliability? (NOTE: If you want help evaluating web site reliability, go to: <http://milton.mse.jhu.edu:8001/research/education/net.html>.)

Step 3. Outlining key points of a presentation. (10 min) Sketch the key points of your flyer. Consider these questions: What information is important? How should that information be presented (order, emphasis, illustration, layout)? How would you handle the more controversial issues? How would you make these decisions?

Step 4. Questions for further inquiry. (5 min) What else would you want or need to know to create your flyer? Brainstorm a list of questions and possible sources for additional information.

Small Group Discussion (40 minutes):

Gather with others who did this activity. Take turns briefly sharing your outlines for a one-page flyer and your list of questions for further inquiry. Then reflect on and discuss this activity with your small group, using the following sequence of questions as prompts. At the end of this time, prepare one member of the group to share key points of your discussion with the larger group.

What did you learn from this activity? What could students learn from a classroom version of it (including the sharing and exchange of presentations)? What other kinds of writing or presentation outcomes could this activity support?

What are the strengths and weaknesses of this activity? Is it a good vehicle for developing student skills in inquiry, critical thinking, and writing? How could it be improved?

How would you describe the pedagogy that informs this activity? What skills and modes of thinking does this activity support? Do the electronic materials being engaged suit the assignment's pedagogy and methodological goals? What can we learn from this activity about the kinds of inquiry assignments that work best when using new media resources?

How does the inquiry approach used in this activity compare with inquiry approaches you have used in your classes? What is similar? Different? What are the advantages and disadvantages of inquiry learning, in your experience? Where does it fit in the repertoire of teaching in your field?