

# This Place Matters: The Impact of Neighborhood on Health

## AIM

To raise students' awareness of the effects a neighborhood has on the health of its residents.

## OBJECTIVES

At the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

- Describe the features of “healthy” and “unhealthy” neighborhoods.
- Analyze the causes and implications for the health of residents of “healthy” and “unhealthy” neighborhoods.
- Summarize their findings in writing.
- Present their findings orally.
- Assess oral presentations.
- Prepare questions for an interview.

## TARGET GROUP

Intermediate to high-level ESL students (levels 4–8)  
 (For the purpose of this lesson, the target group levels range from 1 through 8, with the following guidelines: 1 = beginning, 5 = intermediate, 8 = advanced.)  
 Lessons can also be adapted for 8<sup>th</sup>-through 12<sup>th</sup>-grade students on health and health education programs.

## LENGTH

Four 50-minute sessions

## MATERIALS

Optional materials include photos of neighborhoods, drawing materials and a copy of the DVD *Unnatural Causes: Is Inequality Making Us Sick?* [www.unnaturalcauses.org](http://www.unnaturalcauses.org), Episode 5: “Place Matters” (video excerpts on neighborhood and health can be streamed at [www.unnaturalcauses.org/video\\_clips.php?vid\\_filter=Episode%205%20-%20Place%20Matters](http://www.unnaturalcauses.org/video_clips.php?vid_filter=Episode%205%20-%20Place%20Matters))

## OVERVIEW

In this lesson, students analyze why some neighborhoods are seen to be “attractive and healthy” and why others are seen to be “undesirable.” The lesson continues by having students analyze the effects of neighborhoods on the health of those who reside in them. Why is it that place matters?

## DAY ONE

Invite students to think of a neighborhood that could be described as “healthy,” “attractive” and “desirable.”

Have students gather in groups of four or five, then ask them to compile a list of descriptors and features of such a neighborhood. Possible answers include:

- Trees
- Shops
- Schools
- Open spaces, such as parks and plazas

Invite the student groups to share what they came up with. Write their list on the board.

Encourage students to think of a neighborhood that could be described as “in decline,” “unattractive” and “undesirable.”

With students in their same groups, ask them to compile a list of descriptors and features of such a neighborhood. Possible answers include:

- Numerous liquor stores
- Few shops
- Boarded-up buildings
- Criminal activity

Again have the groups share their lists, writing them on the board.

To compare neighborhoods, draw on the following options.  
 Option #1: Have students bring in pictures of neighborhoods.

Option #2: Have students draw pictures of neighborhoods.

Option #3: Show a clip(s) from *Unnatural Causes: Is Inequality Making Us Sick?* Episode 5: “Place Matters.” You can find excerpts at [www.unnaturalcauses.org/video\\_clips.php?vidfilter=Episode%205%20-%20Place%20Matters](http://www.unnaturalcauses.org/video_clips.php?vidfilter=Episode%205%20-%20Place%20Matters)

**DAY TWO**

Pose the following questions to the class:

- Why are some neighborhoods attractive and healthy? What are the reasons or causes?
- Why are some neighborhoods in decline and unattractive? What are the reasons or causes?

(The discussions prompted by these questions are not meant to be exhaustive and complete, but rather are meant to build schema for the subsequent activity.) Have each student group complete the following chart to help the students explore the reasons some neighborhoods are characterized as attractive and others are seen to be in decline.

Unattractive neighborhood features	Reasons/causes	Attractive neighborhood features	Reasons/causes
Boarded-up buildings	Foreclosures	Parks	Wealthy inhabitants

Distribute this second chart so that student groups can explore the effects that positive and negative features have on neighborhood residents. You might ask students to focus on the effects these factors have on health.

Unattractive neighborhood features	Effects	Attractive neighborhood features	Effects
No grocery stores	Poor diet for residents	Recreation areas	Exercise opportunities

**DAY THREE**

Have student groups choose a neighborhood in decline, real or imagined. Utilizing their charts from the previous activity, ask the groups to brainstorm the features of the neighborhood and the health effects these features have on the residents. In addition, have each group work on a proposal to improve the conditions of the neighborhood and the health of the residents.

**Homework:** Each group writes a summary of its findings, including the proposal for improving the neighborhood, to be presented to the class in an oral report.

## DAY FOUR

### Oral Reports

Student groups present their findings to the class.

Invite the class to assess the presentations using the following guidelines:

Presenting group members \_\_\_\_\_

Neighborhood \_\_\_\_\_

Features of neighborhood	Effects on residents	Clarity and completeness of presentation

Share student assessments of the oral reports and decide on the strongest presentations.

### Contact Assignment

Have students interview local government officials for primary research about neighborhoods in their area. Allow students to determine an area of focus for their interview and formulate appropriate questions.

Possible Areas of Focus:

- Are there any plans to improve the neighborhood? If so, what are they?
- Why do some neighborhoods have more resources and services than others have?

Students report back on their findings and compile a class report.

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