

# Lesson Plan 3: The brawl over sprawl

**SUBJECT(S):** Economics, English, Social Studies

**GRADE LEVEL:** 7 - 10

**DURATION:** three class periods

## Objectives

Students will understand that:

- there are benefits and costs involved in land development
- development has social, economic and environmental consequences

Students will be able to:

- prepare for and participate in a formal debate
- analyze an issue and present a solution
- incorporate feedback to make impromptu modifications
- manage the use of note cards, graphic organizers, outlining and other visual aids in oral presentations
- use rehearsal of presentations to reduce “stage fright”
- demonstrate composure while confronting and rebutting opposing viewpoints

## Warm-up/Discussion

Have students count off by three, assigning each number a place: 1 = city, 2 = suburb, 3 = rural area. Give students five minutes to write a descriptive paragraph or list of impressions about the place they have been assigned. When time is up, ask for volunteers to share what they have written.

Ask whether students prefer one of these kinds of places to the others and why.

Ask students to describe what people mean when they talk about “suburban sprawl”. Does the term “sprawl” suggest a bias for or against suburban development?

## Materials Included:

- Benefits and Costs of Suburban Sprawl [pg. 170]
- Suburban Sprawl: On One Hand [pg. 171]
- Suburban Sprawl: On the Other Hand [pg. 172]
- Preparing for a Debate [pg. 174]
- Debate Evaluation [pg. 175]

## Additional Materials

### Needed:

- None

## Vocabulary

### urban:

*relating to a city; characteristic of city life*

### suburban:

*relating to a residential area or community outside a central city*

### rural:

*characteristic of the country; relating to agriculture*

### decentralization:

*the process in which people and jobs move from urban centers to outlying areas*

### pro/con:

*for and against; two sides of a debate*

## Warm-up/Discussion (cont'd)

Explain that some people believe that suburban development has been good for the region while others argue that suburban sprawl generally has negative effects on peoples' lives. Have students use the *Benefits and Costs of Suburban Sprawl* (pg.170) handout to take notes as you discuss the following characteristics with the class. You might ask students to give examples of real communities as you talk about the descriptions below.

### CHARACTERISTICS OF SUBURBAN SPRAWL

#### Low-density land use

Development in suburbs tends to take up more space than in urban places. Homes and commercial buildings usually have fewer stories and are further apart than buildings in the city. Suburban residential lots tend to be larger than those in the city and office buildings may be constructed in large, campus-like settings with expansive lawns and parking lots.

#### Single-use zoning

In suburbs, residential, commercial and industrial areas tend to be separated from one another by greater distances than in the city. As a result, people often need to drive to the places where they work, shop or go for entertainment.

#### Lack of diversity

Many developments are large-scale projects with housing of similar design, materials and price. This means that people who move into a subdivision are likely to have similar incomes and lifestyles and that other people are excluded.

## Learning Activities

Ask students to count off by as 1 or 2. Create debate teams of six students who were assigned the same number.

Distribute the *Suburban Sprawl: On the One Hand* (pg. 171) and *Suburban Sprawl: On the Other Hand* (pg. 172) handouts to all students. Having both handouts will allow students to anticipate arguments the other side is likely to make and prepare to defend their own. The handouts list some common assertions about the effects of suburban sprawl. Ask students to review these issues and then to use the *Preparing for a Debate* (pg. 174) handout to prepare for the debate as a team. Emphasize that these statements may not be accurate and encourage them to think of exceptions.

Explain that the two sides of the issue are:

- 1) Suburban development is good for the region. We shouldn't change policies that encourage suburban growth
- 2) There are reasons for serious concern about the impact of suburban development on the region as a whole; we should enact policies that direct new growth to areas where people already live and discourage new development from occurring on farmland at the edge of the region.

#### Homework

Encourage students to talk to family members to get their perspective on the issues.

## Learning Activities (cont'd)

If your class has access to the internet, you can direct students to the following websites and suggest that they do a web search for other resources.

### Pro-sprawl

[www.urbanchoice.org/reference.htm](http://www.urbanchoice.org/reference.htm) **Urban Choice**, <http://www.americandreamcoalition.org> **American Dream Coalition**

### Anti-sprawl

[www.growing\\_sensibly.org](http://www.growing_sensibly.org) **Campaign for Sensible Growth**, [www.uli.org](http://www.uli.org) **Urban Land Institute**  
[www.smartgrowth.org](http://www.smartgrowth.org) **Smart Growth Network**, [www.smartgrowthamerica.org](http://www.smartgrowthamerica.org) **Smart Growth America**  
[www.cnu.org](http://www.cnu.org) **Congress for New Urbanism**

## Period 2

Students continue to work with the others in their group to prepare for the debate, writing a proposition either for or against development of suburban land at the current rate and with existing policies. They should prepare outlines and index cards with key points and begin rehearsing for the debate. Have students hand in all materials they have prepared before the debate so that you can evaluate the work that each group did independently of the others. You may need to copy the materials to return to students if your evaluation has not been completed before the debate.

## Homework

Students rehearse for the debate at home in front of a mirror, or by asking someone to listen and comment on their presentation. A family member or friend might also play the role of an opponent so that students can practice rebuttal of arguments.

## Period 3

Create a place in the front of the classroom where teams can face each other and hold the debates with teams representing opposite sides of the argument. Conduct the debates according to the format in the *Preparing for a Debate* (pg. 174) handout. If you have a large class, you may want to have teams choose one or two members to represent their group and hold only one debate with the teams of representatives.

## Assessment

Use the *Debate Evaluation* (pg. 175) rubric to assess students' contributions to the debate.

## Wrap-up/Reflection

Ask students to choose the two most convincing arguments made by the other side and write a paragraph explaining why they found them persuasive.

## Ideas for Additional Activities

Have students write a letter to the editor of the Chicago Tribune, Chicago Sun-Times or a community newspaper to make their case about the issue of suburban sprawl. Students can also identify an actual dispute over land use that has been covered in the newspaper to write about.

# Benefits and Costs of Suburban Sprawl

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

As you listen to your teacher's description of the characteristics of suburban sprawl, take notes on the benefits and costs:

	Benefits (why it is good)	Costs (why it is a problem)
Low-density land use		
Single-use zoning		
Lack of diversity		
Other issues		

## Suburban Sprawl: On the One Hand

Some people call the type of land use that we see in the counties around Chicago “suburban sprawl.” They use this phrase to describe the decentralization of development away from the city. They argue that this trend has negative effects:

- People live further from the places where they work than people in the city. This contributes to traffic congestion as people have to commute longer distances.
- Businesses are moving from the city to the suburbs. The typical commute is no longer from city to suburb, but from one suburb to another. This makes it more difficult to use public transit to get to work and creates traffic congestion that costs residents many hours of wasted time each year.
- Lower-density land use in suburbs means that governments have to provide infrastructure such as water and sewer lines in places far from existing development. This is expensive for taxpayers and less efficient than the higher density development in places like Chicago.
- Longer commutes by people in cars means that we are too dependent on oil. This is expensive, contributes to air pollution and means that we rely too much on foreign countries to meet our energy needs.
- Low-density suburban land use causes flooding of roads, homes and businesses by reducing the amount of land where rain water can soak into the ground.
- The desire to have a large, green lawn in the suburbs means that more fertilizer and weed-control chemicals run into lakes and rivers. This contributes to poor water quality and can have negative effects on fish and other aquatic life.
- Suburban shopping malls and “big box” stores drive smaller, independent stores out of business. This limits the choices consumers have and means that some people will lose their jobs.
- Driving instead of walking means that people get less exercise and become overweight, which can lead to health problems such as heart disease and diabetes.
- The conversion of farmland to suburban development drives up the cost of land and makes it difficult for families to continue farming.

## Suburban Sprawl: On the One Hand (continued)

- Because homebuilders tend to build subdivisions with houses in the same price range, suburban development leads to communities that are segregated by income. Because school districts rely on the taxes on people's homes, there is an incentive for suburbs to try to attract the wealthiest people they can because their homes will be more expensive (and generate more money for the school district). Suburbs with large expensive houses have more money to spend on education than suburbs with less expensive houses. This contributes to inequality among communities, which is bad for the region as a whole.
- Suburban sprawl is fueled by federal and state tax policies such as subsidies for expressways and tax benefits for people who own their own homes. People who don't live or work in the suburbs are paying taxes to support suburban growth.

## Suburban Sprawl: On the Other Hand

- People like the suburban lifestyle and enjoy having a large yard where they can relax and their children can play.
- People should be able to make choices about the type of community where they live. If suburban sprawl is so bad, why do so many people choose to live in suburbs?
- People believe that there is less crime in suburbs than in the city.
- The growth of the suburbs is a manifestation of the free market, reflecting people's freedom to act on their preferences.
- Some people don't want to live where there's a lot going on. They like the quiet atmosphere of a residential suburban neighborhood.
- Suburban shopping malls offer a safe, climate-controlled place to shop, particularly for mothers with young children and elderly people.
- Many suburban school districts have more money to spend than in the city, so people move to the suburbs because more money is spent per pupil and they believe that their children will receive a better education than students in places where there is less money for education.
- Some people want to live in communities where everyone is similar in race and income. This is more likely to be true in the suburbs than in the city.
- Sprawl is the result of economic expansion that has allowed a record number of Americans to buy homes for the first time. Sprawl is a reflection of upward mobility among people in the lower middle class.

# Preparing for a Debate

Follow these steps in preparation for your debate:

Research the issues	Identify facts and collect data to use as evidence in support of your proposition
Choose key points	Organize your arguments into 4-6 important points and define your terms
Consider counter arguments	What might your opponents say to support their arguments? How will you counter these?
Compose proposition	Write a clear, concise, and convincing statement of your sprawl argument
Prepare note cards	Write your proposition and the main points you want to cover on one card

## Debate Format:

Affirmative (pro)	Negative (con)	Minutes
<b>First statement</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• State PRO proposition</li> <li>• Define issues</li> <li>• Introduce arguments</li> </ul>		<b>2:00</b>
	<b>First statement</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• State CON proposition</li> <li>• Reject or redefine issues</li> <li>• Introduce arguments</li> </ul>	<b>2:00</b>
<b>Second statement</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reiterate proposition</li> <li>• Make arguments</li> <li>• Support with evidence</li> </ul>		<b>4:00</b>
	<b>Second statement</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reiterate proposition</li> <li>• Make arguments</li> <li>• Support with evidence</li> </ul>	<b>4:00</b>
<b>Rebuttal</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Counter opposing arguments</li> <li>• Conclude/summarize</li> </ul>		<b>2:00</b>
	<b>Rebuttal</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Counter opposing arguments</li> <li>• Wrap-up</li> </ul>	<b>2:00</b>

# Debate Evaluation

**Student's Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Debate Role:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

<b>Element</b>	<b>Descriptors</b>	<b>Score</b>
<b>Preparation</b>	Student demonstrated understanding of the topic and rehearsed prior to debate.	
Comments		
<b>Organization</b>	Student was well organized, with index cards that facilitated the clear and effective presentation of ideas. Proposition, arguments and support were delivered clearly and in the proper order.	
Comments		
<b>Delivery</b>	Student spoke clearly and emphasized the main points, presenting a convincing argument. Student faced and addressed the audience and made it easy for the audience to follow along.	
Comments		
<b>Totals</b>	Key: 4 = excellent, 3 = good, 2 = fair, 1 = poor	
	<b>Combined Total Score</b>	

