Lesson Title: How Our Cities Change  
Grades: K-5  
Time Required: 2-4 class periods  
Subject Areas: Social Studies, English, Visual Art

Lesson Overview: How do communities change over time? In this lesson, students take a trip through time to the past, present, and future of their town or city. They practice using their five senses to take a sensory inventory, then explore works of art that reveal how our world used to look, sound, feel, smell, and taste. Taking inspiration from Virginia Lee Burton’s “The Little House” students then create a work of art that imagines what their neighborhood might look like in the future.

Social Studies Framework  
D2.Geo.5-3.5. Explain how the cultural and environmental characteristics of places change over time.  
D2.His.2.K-2. Compare life in the past to life today

Common Core English Language Arts  
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.2.1  
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.2.7  
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.2.1  
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.2.3

National Core Arts Standards  
VA:Cr1.2.1a  
Use observation and investigation in preparation for making a work of art.  
VA:Cr2.3.Ka  
Create art that represents natural and constructed environments.  
VA:Cn10.1.3a  
Develop a work of art based on observations of surroundings

Learning Objectives:  
Students will be able to:  
• Carefully observe and describe their surroundings  
• Identify visual changes to a specific location over time  
• Use primary and secondary image sources to gather information  
• Imagine how their neighborhood may change in the future

Artworks in Focus:  
Click on the links below to access these images through the Wadsworth’s Public Portal. Once on the portal, click on the image to view the object information. Click on the image again to download a jpeg version of the work. NOTE: The works of art used in this lesson may not currently be on view at the museum.

• William Glackens, View of West Hartford, 1907. (West Hartford)  
• Ralph Earl, Oliver Ellsworth and Abigail Wolcott Ellsworth, 1792. (Windsor)  
• Ralph Earl, Houses Fronting New Milford Green, 1796. (New Milford)  
• Charles De Wolf Brownell, The Charter Oak, 1857. (Hartford)  
• Peter Blume, The Italian Straw Hat, 1952. (Sherman)

Materials  
• Access to the Artworks in Focus  
• Projector and screen/ SMART board, or equivalent  
• Access to the internet OR the Comparative Present-day images provided in the lesson plan  
• File folders  
• Paper (8 ½ x 11”)  
• Construction paper  
• Glue sticks  
• Markers (or other material)

TEACHER RESOURCE  
thewadsworth.org/teachers

Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, School and Teacher Programs  
teachers@wadsworthatheneum.org
Lesson Procedures

Part 1: Observe Your City (Classroom)

1. Bring students outdoors to conduct a brief sensory inventory of the neighborhood. Ask students to observe their surroundings. Lead a brief activity to engage students to take the time to observe closely; some options for activities include:
   - Challenge students to a game of “I Spy” to encourage close observation. Choose a variety of clues to challenge them, incorporating objects close by (school building, playground) and objects far away (clouds, city skyline). For an extra challenge, use clues that relate to other senses than sight alone: for example, “I spy something with a rough texture,” or “I hear a sound that a car might make.”
   - Explain that artists often use viewfinders (small frames made from paper) to help them focus on a single detail when they observe the world around them. Give students viewfinders and encourage them to look at specific details.

2. Record the experience and display it in the classroom to remind students of what they observed. Some options for recording students’ observations include:
   - List – A simple list of observations may help students to build literacy and vocabulary.
   - Photo Inventory – Take photos of what students notice in their neighborhood and display them in the classroom to remind students of their observations. Photos can be collected at different times of year to show changes over the course of a year.
   - Sensory Box – Collect objects as you go on a neighborhood nature walk; this collection can be kept in the classroom to remind students of how their neighborhood looked, smelled, and felt during their time outside. The collection may include pinecones, rocks, leaves, flowers, wood, and even crayon rubbings of different textures.
   - Sketching – Even the youngest students can practice sketching en plein air! Bring sketching materials outside and instruct students to draw something that they see. Students can draw full landscapes or focus on a single item (e.g. a swingset, a house).

3. Wrap up by asking students to imagine how the neighborhood will change over the course of the day, week, or year. When the buses arrive at the end of the day, will there be more traffic? In the next few months, will the air get warmer or colder?

4. Back inside (or outdoors if it’s a warm day), read Virginia Lee Burton’s The Little House aloud to the class. Encourage students to observe the pictures closely; point out any important details as you read. Use prompting questions such as the following to encourage students to consider how the story relates to themselves and their own city or town:
   - How do the The Little House’s surroundings change over time?
   - Which does The Little House like better: the city or the countryside? Why?
   - Which do you like better: the city or the countryside? Why?
   - What are some details that give us more information about country life/city life?
   - How do you think the countryside/city look, feel, sound, smell, or taste?
   - Think about where you live. Do you live in the country, a town, or in a city?
5. With older groups, use a map of your town to show how the local area includes countryside, towns, and cities. Point out where the school is located on the map, as well as other landmarks as appropriate: a river, a neighborhood, a transportation line, etc.

Lesson 2: Changing Views (Art Classroom)

1. Ask students if they remember anything they observed during their sensory inventory outside. Explain that today, students will think about the past, present, and future of their city or town.

2. Use a projector or SMART board to show students an artist’s depiction of a location in their town, state, or region. Examples of Connecticut scenes from the Wadsworth’s collection include:
   - William Glackens, *View of West Hartford*, 1907. (West Hartford)
   - Ralph Earl, *Oliver Ellsworth and Abigail Wolcott Ellsworth*, 1792. (Windsor)
   - Ralph Earl, *Houses Fronting New Milford Green*, 1796. (New Milford)
   - Peter Blume, *The Italian Straw Hat*, 1952. (Sherman)

3. Compare the image to a present-day image of the same general (or specific) location (some examples of Google Street View images are included in this lesson, but you may use other images, or take your own). Point out any landmarks that appear in both images. Ask students: What has changed? What has stayed the same? Some possible comparisons include:
   a. Modes of transportation (e.g. horses, trolleys, cars, roads etc.)
   b. Electricity or other technology (e.g. power lines, street lights, etc.)
   c. Building size and style as well as their distance from one another
   d. Nature (e.g. growth of trees and plants, change in season, etc.)
   e. People (e.g. population density, clothing of passersby, etc.)

4. As students compare, take note of items that they identify as “past” and those they identify as “present.” Display this list or review it aloud after students finish discussing. Explain that students will be using what they have observed to create a work of art depicting the past, present, and future of their town, city, or region.

5. Give students a file folder with a window cut out of one side. Students may spend time decorating their window using latticework, shutters, curtains, or other design details.

6. Distribute three pieces of 8 ½” by 11” paper, as well as drawing supplies. Markers, crayons, or colored pencils will allow for quicker sketching, although the lesson could expand to include paint, pastels, or other 2-dimensional media.

7. Use the list of student observations about the “past” and “present” to help students plan their illustrations. Encourage them to use their imaginations for the illustration of the “future;” use the themes above (modes of transportation, etc.) to prompt ideas. For example:
   - What modes of transportation will people use? How will they get from place to place?
   - Will there be more natural scenery (e.g. trees, plant life) in the future, or less?
   - Will new buildings be built? What will they look like? Where will they go?
8. If desired, use Jeannie Baker’s wordless books *Window* and/or *Home* as examples for the art activity. Both of these stories focus on changing landscapes through a window frame. There are clues on the windowsill that hint toward the passage of time, showing how the residents’ lives progress along with the community that surrounds them.

9. Wrap up by asking students whether the “future” looks like some place they would want to live. Does new technology make things easier or more pleasant for the residents? Will more people move to the area, or will people move away? If so, ask students what small projects they could do to help make the future of their location better (e.g. picking up trash, planting more trees and flowers, painting a mural, etc.)
BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

William Glackens, View of West Hartford

Glackens began his professional career as a newspaper illustrator in Philadelphia before moving to New York City. There he aligned himself with the artists who rebelled against the conservative art academies and exhibited independently as “The Eight.” This painting was included in their landmark exhibition at the Macbeth Gallery in 1908.

This view was painted when Glackens and his wife Edith Dimock—whose portrait hangs nearby—visited her family in West Hartford, Connecticut. In this seemingly bucolic setting, the billboard, telephone pole, and trolley car signal changes in modern life. The warm palette evidences a brightening in Glackens’s use of color around this time.

Ralph Earl, Oliver Ellsworth and Abigail Wolcott Ellsworth

Ralph Earl painted this monumental portrait of the Ellsworths in their house — visible in the distance — in Windsor, north of Hartford. They are seated on Federal shield-back chairs they had recently acquired from a local cabinetmaker, Aaron Chapin. Earl often chose to represent his sitters’ homes and possessions rather than placing them in fanciful settings.

Oliver Ellsworth was a powerful political and social leader during and after the American Revolution. In his hand is a copy of the U.S. Constitution, which he helped draft. While her husband was engaged in politics, Abigail managed a household of nine children as well as their multi-acre estate.

Ralph Earl, Houses Fronting New Milford Green

This view shows the home of Elijah Boardman, a successful shopkeeper, and one of New Milford’s major landowners. Adjacent to his newly built mansion at left (which is still standing on Town Street) are his mercantile shop and a neighboring residence, which he also owned. Boardman’s expanding real estate holdings, with their neatly tended grounds, convey not only his personal wealth, but also the prosperity of the town. Earl’s landscape painting is considered one of the earliest depictions of rural New England.

Charles De Wolf Brownell, The Charter Oak

In 1857 Daniel Wadsworth commissioned the earliest known portrait of the Charter Oak from artist Charles De Wolf Brownell. The painting is in a wood frame carved from the oak. The blue onion dome of the Colt firearms factory—another powerful Hartford symbol—is visible in the distance, to the right of the majestic tree.

Peter Blume, The Italian Straw Hat

Blume was one of many American realist painters who incorporated elements of fantasy into his compositions. Here he depicts his bedroom at home in Sherman, Connecticut. The ordinary objects, such as the flowers, the knitting needles, the large straw hat, and the mobile by his friend and fellow artist Alexander Calder, assume strange and slightly sinister shapes. He infuses this familiar setting with a disquieting feeling. Blume also rearranged the actual landscape so that a nearby cemetery is viewed through the window.
PRESENT-DAY WEST HARTFORD

To compare with William Glackens, *View of West Hartford*, 1907
PRESENT-DAY WINDSOR

To compare with Ralph Earl, *Oliver Ellsworth and Abigail Wolcott Ellsworth, 1792*  
(Google Street View Address: 778 Palisado Ave, Windsor, CT 06095)
PRESENT-DAY NEW MILFORD

To compare with Ralph Earl, *Houses Fronting New Milford Green*, 1796

(Google Street View Address: 51 Main Street, New Milford CT 06776)
PRESENT-DAY HARTFORD

To compare with Charles De Wolf Brownell, *The Charter Oak*, 1857
(Google Street View Address: 28 Charter Oak Avenue, Hartford)