

AN ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS CURRICULUM GUIDE: WHAT CAN THE AUTHOR OF “A VISIT FROM ST. NICHOLAS” TEACH US ABOUT CHELSEA?

Grades 6 and 7

Materials:

Period 1:

- PowerPoint presentation
- Subway map
- Chelsea images
- Planning worksheet #1

Period 2:

- Planning worksheet #2
- Large paper (e.g., 11" X 17" for student-drawn map)

Period 3:

- Drawing paper
- Crayons/colored pencils

Extension:

- Miscellaneous art materials for model-building
- Cardboard
- Glue
- Construction paper
- Crayons
- Markers
- Colored pencils

NOTE: These lessons may be supplemented with a visit to Chelsea for an architectural walking tour. A suggested walking tour can be found in Joyce Mendelsohn's book *Touring the Flatiron: Walks in Four Historic Neighborhoods* published in 1998 by the New York Landmarks Conservancy. ISBN # 9780964706125. If a walking tour is not feasible, you may still conduct these lessons from your classroom.

LESSON GOALS

Students will:

- Learn that Chelsea is a neighborhood in Manhattan
- Learn that Chelsea is located on the west side, near the High Line
- Learn that the author of *A Visit from St. Nicholas* was named Clement Clarke Moore
- Learn that Clarke Moore was a philosopher, scholar, and wealthy landowner
- Learn that the Moore family owned land in Chelsea dating back to 1750
- Learn what a building lot is

- Learn what a real estate development is
- Learn that Chelsea used to be rural
- Learn that Clarke Moore developed Chelsea into a residential neighborhood in the 1830s
- Learn about the character of Chelsea before it became a shipping center
- Learn how the High Line complements the Chelsea neighborhood
- Learn to “read” a streetscape
- Learn some architectural terms
 - Row house
 - Lintel
 - Sill
 - Cornice
 - Stoop
- Learn some fundamentals of urban design

Duration: 3 periods

Period 1—PowerPoint presentation and planning worksheet #1

Periods 2 and 3—Planning worksheet #2, students design their own development

Extension—Students build a model of their development. This may take 2 or more periods.

PERIOD 1:

Ask students if they are familiar with the poem, “A Visit from St. Nicholas.” Ask if any of the students can recite any of the lines. Perhaps some students know the poem in its entirety and would be willing to recite it. Ask students if they know the name of the poem’s author, or anything about him.

Explain that the author was named Clement Clarke Moore, and aside from writing “A Visit from St. Nicholas,” he had an important role in the development of a neighborhood in New York City. Have a student locate Chelsea on the subway map.

Ask students if they are familiar with Chelsea. (Many students may have been to Chelsea Piers.) Elicit their experiences and impressions of Chelsea. If students are familiar with Chelsea, encourage them to share their observations about the houses and the blocks. Are there apartment buildings or smaller houses? (You may introduce the term ‘row house.’) How tall are the row houses? (Most are 4 stories high.) Do you think the row houses are very old, or new? (Many are in the neighborhood of 150 years old.) Does Chelsea look like a city neighborhood or the countryside? (A city neighborhood.) Are many of the houses similar to one another in their size and materials? (Yes—this was part of Clarke Moore’s plan.) Explain that Clement Clarke Moore belonged to a family that owned land in Chelsea long ago. In those days, Chelsea was not a city neighborhood yet. It was still the countryside. Say, “We are going to learn how Clement Clarke Moore changed that.”

If the students are unfamiliar with Chelsea, explain that they are going to learn about this neighborhood and perhaps visit it.

Set up the PowerPoint presentation.

Slide 1: Chelsea House, c. 1850s (West 23rd Street, between 9th and 10th Avenues).

Although the quality is a bit fuzzy, students should be able to make out the image. Ask students to share their impression of the image. What is it? (A house.) Does it look like many houses we see in NYC today? (No.) How is it different? (Its size, the fact that there appears to be a great deal of land surrounding the house, it is freestanding.) Ask if most houses or apartment buildings in NYC today have space in front of them, and to the sides of them? (Usually not.) Ask if this house looks like it belongs in an urban environment? (No.) Elicit that it is a country house. Ask if the family that owned this house might have had a lot of money? (Probably.) How can they tell? (It is an extremely large house.) Students might also observe that the image is old. Explain that this is a type of picture called a daguerreotype (an early form of photography) and was taken in the 1850s. Tell the students that this house is called “Chelsea House,” and it belonged to the Clarke Moore family. It was built in 1777. How long ago was that? (In 2008, it is 231 years ago.) The Clarke Moore family owned an estate (a large piece of land) in the part of Manhattan that would become Chelsea. Explain that in 1750, Captain Thomas Clarke bought a piece of land that went approximately from West 20th Street to West 28th Street, from 8th Avenue, west to the Hudson River. Ask student what they think happened to Chelsea House? (They might guess that it no longer stands.)

Slide 2: Royer-Wells House, 401 9th Avenue (NW corner of W. 21st Street).

Ask students to describe this house. (It also looks rural, and if it doesn’t really belong in an urban setting.) Explain that it was built in 1831, at a time when Chelsea was still the countryside. Ask, “If the part of Manhattan that became Chelsea was still rural in the 1830s, where was the urban part?” (Students should be familiar with the fact that New York City began at the Battery, and as time went on, urban development spread northward.) Explain that at the time this house was constructed, the “city” part of New York was further downtown, near the Wall Street area, but that it was beginning to spread northward. Ask if they think the original owners of this home had as much money as the Clarke Moore family? (Probably not.) Why? (It is not nearly as large or as substantial; it is small and appears rural.) Ask students if they know the name of the windows that protrude from the roof. Explain that those are called dormers. Tell students that this house is the second-oldest structure in Chelsea.

Slide 3: 185, 187, 189 9th Avenue, between West 21st and West 22nd Streets.

Reinforce the scale, size, and shape of these homes. These were built in the 1840s and they are rather small. What makes them different from most homes in New York City? (They are made of wood.)

Slide 4: Clement Clarke Moore, 1851.

Ask students if they can guess who this is, based upon the discussions. It is Clement Clarke Moore, a member of the Clarke Moore family. Tell the students that he was born in Chelsea House in 1779 and grew up there. After he got married in 1813, he inherited part of the family land, the southern part. He decided that he would develop this land. Explore the meaning of the word develop, and ask the students if they are familiar with any developers of today. (Most are probably aware of Donald Trump.) Explain that the idea of developing land is not new! Clement Clarke Moore developed his land (reiterate

that it was vacant) between the 1830s and the 1850s. He wrote “A Visit from St. Nicholas” for his children in 1822, and he died in 1863.

Slide 5: 473 – 465 West 21st Street (between 9th and 10th Avenues).

What did Clement Clarke Moore decide to do with his land? Explain that he wanted to turn it into a residential community. Explore the meaning of this word. To make sure that the neighborhood would remain residential, Clarke Moore developed certain rules. For example, there would be no stores or alleys allowed. There had to be a certain amount of open space. He also developed rules about the size of the houses and the types of materials that could be used. What materials can students observe in these houses? (Brick and brownstone.) How are these houses similar to one another? (They are the same height, and have the same pattern of door on the right, windows, etc.)

Slide 6: 471 West 21st Street.

(Part of the row from the previous slide.) Can the students identify the cornice? Explain that a cornice is an element that extends across the top of the building. It projects a bit to help protect the front of the house from rain. Can they identify the lintels? The lintels are horizontal beams that go across the top of the openings at the door or the windows. What shape are the lintels? (They are rectangular.) Can the students identify the sills? The sills are horizontal beams that go across the bottom of a window opening. They too are rectangular. Can the students identify the stoop? (The stairs leading to the doorway.)

Slide 7: 473 West 21st Street.

Ask students to describe their impressions of Clement Clarke Moore’s development. Explain that he set out to design and build an elegant residential neighborhood. Do students think he succeeded? (In actuality, the upper classes shunned Chelsea because it was too far west. The first inhabitants were members of the upper-middle class.) Ask, “Do you think Clement Clarke Moore left his mark on Chelsea?” (Yes, he did.) Do students like the development Clarke Moore created? Why or why not? (Answers will vary.)

Slide 8: Plaque, 420 West 23rd Street, site of Chelsea House.

Have a student read the plaque. In addition to building many row houses, what other buildings was Clement Clarke Moore responsible for? (St. Peter’s Church, and the General Theological Seminary.)

Slide 9: 420 West 23rd Street, site of Chelsea House.

Explain that this is the site of Chelsea House. Would people passing by have any idea that there was once a mansion on this site? (No, unless they stop to read the plaque.) Ask, “Has Chelsea changed since Clement Clarke Moore’s day?” (Yes and no.) Explore the idea that the houses he developed make up a good portion of homes we can see in Chelsea, although his family’s home is no longer there, and Chelsea’s rural character is gone.

Tell students that they are going to analyze Clarke Moore’s design for Chelsea. Divide the class into groups. Give each group copies of the images of other blocks within Chelsea for which Clarke Moore was responsible. Have the students working groups to

do the planning worksheet. Afterwards, students share their observations. Encourage students to understand the impact of the similarity in style, height, and materials had on Chelsea as a planned community.

DESIGN A RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT

PERIODS 2 & 3:

Tell students that they will work in groups (or pairs) to design a residential development of their own. Discuss that when Clement Clarke Moore developed Chelsea, he created a set of rules to ensure the quality and design of the neighborhood. There were height restrictions, and specifications about building materials. Alleys, stables, and commercial buildings were not allowed. Would students follow those rules? Explain that they will imagine that they will be the ones to design Chelsea, instead of Clement Clarke Moore.

Distribute the planning worksheet #2 and have students work through it. After students answer the questions, they may work together to devise a map and drawings. If desired, students may build a model of their planned community.

EXTENSION OR HOMEWORK:

Students may research current new developments that are planned for New York City. They may use either the Department of City Planning website, or they may use the newspaper. In 2008, big proposals include the Atlantic Yards project and the rezoning of Coney Island. Students may write about what they have learned about these proposals and reflect upon how they will change New York City.

PLANNING WORKSHEET #1

Grades 6 and 7

Group Member Names _____

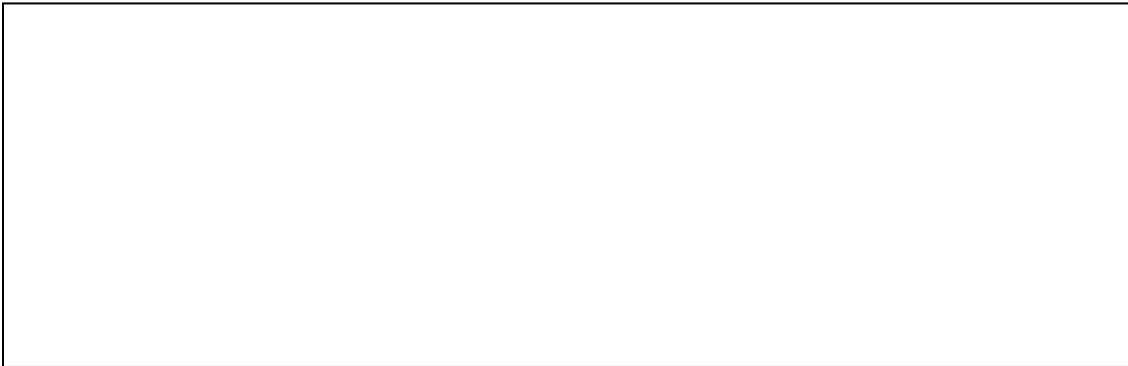
Date _____

Instructions: Study the images of buildings in Chelsea for which Clement Clarke Moore was responsible. Based on the pictures, answer the following questions.

1. Are the row houses uniform in height? _____
2. How many stories (floors) do the row houses have? _____
3. Of what materials are the row houses built?

4. Do any of the row houses have front gardens?

5. Draw a decorative detail from one of the houses.



6. Do you think these houses have changed a lot since Clement Clarke Moore's day? Why or why not? _____

7. How do you think Chelsea changed when the west side of Manhattan began becoming more industrial with piers, shipping, the railroad, and the High Line? _____

8. What impact do you think the High Line will have on Chelsea today and in the future? _____

PLANNING WORKSHEET #2

Grades 6 and 7

Group Member Names _____

Date _____

Instructions: Imagine that it is 1830. You and your group members have inherited a large piece of land that goes roughly from West 19th Street to West 24th Street and from 8th Avenue to the Hudson River. Use this map to help guide your decisions. Just like Clement Clarke Moore once developed this land, you will imagine that it is your group developing it. What will you do?

1. Will you keep the current street layout (the *grid*)?

2. Will you add new streets, e.g., alleys or new blocks between the existing blocks?

3. Will there be only houses, or a combination of houses, stores, and other types of buildings (example, stables)?

4. Will the buildings (whether they are houses or stores) be the same height? _____
5. If all the buildings will be the same size, how tall will they be? _____
6. Will the houses be meant for one family, two families, or more? _____
7. Will there be a front yard, back yard, or side yards? _____
8. Will only certain building materials be allowed? _____
9. Will there be a park or other special feature?

10. On a separate piece of paper, draw the map of your new development.
11. What will be the name of your development? _____