

My Safe Route to School

Subject: History and Social Studies



OBJECTIVES:

- To analyze the safest route to school using the Google Map tool.
- To assess the neighborhood using a tool that analyzes safety and traffic concerns.



MATERIALS:

- Internet connection
- Handout: Safe Routes checklist
- Yellow highlighter or light-colored pen



SETTING: indoors for mapping activity; outdoors (with parents) for checklist activity



ESTIMATED TIME:

45 minutes for the class session



VOCABULARY:

- Route, hazards



ACTIVITY SOURCE:

Marin County Safe Routes to Schools; online lesson plans

OVERVIEW: Students will use Google Maps to map out the safest route from their house to the school, and will then confirm if this route is safe through a survey they will complete on their way to school.

BACKGROUND: Why do so many children get driven to school? In many areas it is estimated that 20 to 30% of peak morning traffic is school-related. The reasons are obvious: The journey between home and school has become longer and more treacherous because of decades of auto-oriented suburbanization. Parents are concerned that their children will be exposed to dangerous strangers. Sidewalks, crosswalks, and bike paths are scarce.

Forty percent of parents polled in a 1999 national survey by the Centers for Disease Control cited traffic danger as a major barrier to allowing children to walk to school. And in 9,000 "walkability" audits conducted across the country, the National Safe Kids Campaign found that nearly 60 percent of parents and children encountered at least one serious hazard on their way to school.

LESSON SET-UP:

1. Set up a time to use the school's Computer Lab, if necessary (for access to the Internet).
2. Photocopy the Safe Routes Check List.

STATE STANDARDS

Language Arts:

- 2.4: Write a persuasive letter or composition.
- A. State a clear position in support of a proposal.
 - B. Support a position with relevant evidence.

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SET-UP SUGGESTIONS:

For this lesson you will need a map of the neighborhood around the school. A few options:

- Arrange a time for all students to have access to the computers with Internet access. Teach the students how to use Google Maps. Then print out a map that shows the student's home as well as neighborhood around the school.

If computers with Internet access are not possible for all the students, you can do one of the following:

- Use Google maps and photocopy a map of the school neighborhood; OR
- Acquire a map of the city your school is located in and photocopy it for all students.

BUILDING BACKGROUND/

DISCUSSION:

1. Ask the class how many people usually walk or ride (or scooter, skateboard, etc.) to school.
2. Ask how many people regularly carpool (carpool means more than one family sharing a ride).
3. Ask students who don't walk or bike to school what kinds of barriers there are to not walking or bicycling.
4. Discuss what makes a route safe. Some things to consider are roads with fewer cars, roads with bike lanes and streets that have crossing guard
5. Ask students who do walk or bike how safe they think their routes are.

ACTIVITY:

Once all students have a acquired a map, have students do the following:

1. Find the school on the map and mark it.
2. Find their house on the map and mark it.
3. Trace the safest route to school (based on the criteria from the previous discussion) using a colored pen or pencil (yellow highlighter pen works the best).

** Many students will have more than one route because they rely on different modes of transportation. Instruct them to use different colors for each route and create a key. For example

yellow = driving route

Red = biking route

•If students take the bus or live too far to walk or bike, they can alternatively map out a route from their house to a nearby location that they often drive to. OR they could map out the last 1/4 to 1/2 mile of the route to school.

4. Discuss some of the safety concerns that students have along their route.
 - Brainstorm about how to solve these safety concerns.
 - Discuss how many students who regularly drive could commit to walking or riding at least one day per week.
 - If students live too far to walk or ride or take the bus, brainstorm where they could walk or ride on the weekends.
5. Conclude with a discussion of how cities could be more pedestrian and bicycle-friendly. Examples include: Wider sidewalks, more crossing guards, more bike lanes, better and cheaper public transit, ways for traffic to slow down, more stop lights or stop signs.
6. Have students write a letter to the City Council telling them about the safety barriers and hazards around the school. For example, if there is a need for a crossing guard or crosswalk, they could write a letter requesting one. Letters to the PTA president (if your school has one) might be helpful as well for certain issues.

PART II (OPTIONAL)

1. Hand out the homework assignment Safe Routes Check List, which ask them to fill out a survey with questions about their route to school. Give students a week to complete the Check List.
2. After students have filled out the checklist discuss the following:
 - Did you have a place to walk or bike?
 - Was it easy to cross streets?
 - Was your walk or ride safe and fun?
 - Did the drivers behave well?

EXTENSION IDEAS

1. Ask students to design a town that is bike and pedestrian friendly, writing a paragraph explaining their town's design.
2. Have students take pictures of their route and safety concerns, and use them as part of their presentations.