



Primary Source Unit

Visual Analysis and Creating Sustainable Communities

LEVEL: GRADES 3–5

CREATED BY

Andrea Coza | BA, MS Ed

Educator

Pocantico Hills Central School

Marina Pisto | BA, MS Ed

Educator

Pocantico Hills Central School

Marissa Vassari | MA, MLIS

Education Program Manager

Rockefeller Archive Center

CONTENTS

3	About This Unit
4	Lessons
12	Supporting Documents
13	Primary Source Document Guide
14	Primary Source Documents
19	Additional Resources
20	About Us

ABOUT THIS UNIT

Working with the Rockefeller Archive Center on the Sustainable Communities unit was an incredibly rewarding experience. Our students had the unique opportunity to explore the history of a local landmark through primary sources, which brought the past to life in ways that textbooks simply cannot.

The students were invited to think deeply about how this landmark contributes to community sustainability and why documenting is critical to telling the full story of a place. This process not only strengthened their historical understanding but also helped them see themselves as active participants in shaping the future.

By the end of the project, students had grown more confident in their sense of place and developed the skills to advocate for the kinds of communities they believe should exist in the future. The collaboration with the Rockefeller Archive Center empowered them to connect history, sustainability, and civic responsibility in meaningful ways that will stay with them long after the unit ended.

Marina Pisto

3rd grade teacher
Pocantico Hills Central School

The following unit engages students with archival documents related to the Union Church of Pocantico Hills as an example of placed based learning, sustainability, and visual material analysis. The unit framework and primary sources can be integrated into classrooms of grades 3–5. Each lesson has student objectives that can be accomplished within 40-minute periods over the course of several weeks.

Students will learn about archives and primary sources through the lens of building sustainable communities. They will think through places in their school or local community that have importance to them and connect that experience to a sustainable community they create that includes places they would want people to engage with in the future. They are encouraged to connect with local institutions that have photographs or visual materials of their school or local community. Resources such as local arts programs, historical societies, University art museums, and local history books can be a help for providing examples of sustainable artworks.

Using the Union Church of Pocantico Hills as a case study, students will complete visual analysis of photographic documents to build primary source literacy and critical thinking skills. The church was built by John D. Rockefeller Jr. in 1921 in Pocantico Hills, New York. The stained-glass windows were created by European masters, Henri Matisse and Marc Chagall.

The students will then create their own communities and think strategically about what story their imaginary sustainable community will tell. The students are learning from the past and present to build a community for the future.

Included in this unit are read alouds on artists, so that the students are further encouraged to commission works of art that beautify public spaces. The final product will be communities described in a speech and represented in picture form. Support materials are integrated into the lessons, and the selected primary source documents can be found at the end of the unit.

LESSONS

Lesson 1

Introduction and personal connections to primary sources



Students will begin the unit by tapping into their background knowledge of primary sources and archives (can compare to libraries).

View the [RAC Preservation Lab video](#) to get an inside look at the Rockefeller Archive Center.

Students should then write the primary sources they personally create on individual index cards or using a graphic organizer. The students will share out and make a class list of the primary sources they create on a daily basis.

Lesson 2



The classroom educator will want to reinforce the previous learning. The following activity will build the conversation that the story of what someone creates, and the creation's journey may someday end up in an archive.

The educator should ask questions to recall the initial lesson on primary sources and archives with their learners.

This could include:

What is a primary source?
Why do we study them?
What is an archive?

Following this conversation, the educator will read *What Do You Do With an Idea?* by Kobi Yamada.

After reading, ask:

- “What happened to the idea in the story?”
- “Why do you think the idea felt small at first?”
- “How did it grow?”
- “What if your idea could change the way a community looks or feels?”
- “How could it grow into a space that brings people together?”

After reading and discussion, the educator will introduce the activity:

Draw or write one idea that's important to you right now. It could be something you want to do, make, or see in your community.

This will become a baseline primary source that students can return back to as the lesson series continue to see how their ideas for sustainable communities evolve the more, they learn about their local communities and sustainability.

Give students time to share their ideas with one another.

Use a shoebox or small container to create a class archive box and place all the student created primary sources in the box.

Refer to the storage system that is used in an archive and how it is similar. Remind students that now their ideas are stored and could be looked back on in the future.

Lesson 3

Document Guide and Visual Analysis



“Look Back Before We Jump Ahead”—the students will tap into background knowledge and what they have learned about archives and sources.

Introduce the students to the document guide for the materials for which they will be conducting a visual analysis.

Introduce students to the Union Church of Pocantico Hills documents or selected images from local historical society or archive pertaining to school community.

Start visual analysis using template, Analyzing Photographs

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS

- Analyzing Documents: Photographs
- Document Guide: Union Church

Lesson 4



After the archival lesson that focuses on the difference between primary and secondary sources and learning how to analyze photographs, the students will be able to further internalize this difference and the vocabulary by working with a personal photograph. This may require family support and will need to be initiated before the lesson.

To start the lesson, the educator should activate prior learning by recalling the primary source and secondary source sorts. The teacher should frame the vocabulary terms in a similar way to:

A primary source is the original.

A secondary source is the story or explanation that we tell from the primary source.

Students should have their photograph out at this time. The teacher will explain that the photograph is a primary source and is evidence of a moment in their life. The photo tells a story.

The educator will ask some guiding questions for students to think about or converse with a partner or group about.

The questions are:

- Who is in the photo?
- Where was the photo taken?
- When was the photo taken?
- What does the photo show about me?

After this activity, the educator will tell the students, “When you share the story about a primary source, you are beginning to create a secondary source.”

Students can be invited to create the secondary source in a variety of ways. They could create a comic of the moment, audio or video record themselves sharing the story, or work in another mode that they are familiar with.

A final reflection question to the lesson would be to ask the learners, “Why do archivists need both primary and secondary sources?”

Lesson 5

5

“Look Back Before We Jump Ahead”—as a whole group, the students will tap into background knowledge and what they have learned about archives, sources, and visual analysis.

Students will complete their visual analysis of the archival photographs.

After modeling, students work in teams and rotate other photographs, recording their thinking on the same template provided by the archivist.

As students, the educator should circulate and ask questions like:

- “What else do you notice?”
- “What clues make you think that?”
- “What questions are still unanswered?”

When students are finished analyzing the documents, ask the students to return to the whole group and reflect on the experience by asking questions such as

- What was something new you noticed in a photo today that you might have missed at first glance?
- What did the photo make you wonder about?
- How can photographs help us understand how people built community in the past?
- If someone looked at a photo of our community today, what might they observe, think, and wonder about us?
- How do archivists use photos to tell the story of a community?

Lesson 6

Practicing Visual Analysis with Photos from Local Site (Teacher Reinforcement)

6

After the introduction of visual analysis with one or two visual documents from your local site, you will want to have a few more photographs to reinforce the work.

Re-introduce the visual analysis strategy. With the class, model how to use the protocol with another photograph. Have students contribute ideas.

Lesson 7

7

This lesson will offer a chance to take a broader look at the surrounding community of your local site. You may need to go and take photographs before this lesson. Consider places, spaces, and events that offer social and environmental sustainability to use for visual analysis exercises.

You can model one example or if your learners are ready, you can let your students work in stations to complete the visual analysis. As students work, circulate and ask questions such as:

- “What details do you notice?”
- “What clues help you make that inference?”
- “What questions are still unanswered?”

After station time is over, review each photograph as a class encouraging students to use the following language: “This photo shows _____, which tells us _____ about community.”

To close out the lesson, have students reflect using the following question:

“If someone took a photo of our community today, what space would they choose to show how we connect?”

Lesson 8

8

“Look Back Before We Jump Ahead”—as a whole group, the students will tap into background knowledge and what they have learned about archives, sources, and visual analysis.

Students will independently work on their Creating a Sustainable Community Brainstorming Paper and think through what their designed community would look like and why.

Lesson 9

9

“Look Back Before We Jump Ahead”—students will share out what their sustainable community would include.

Students will continue to independently work on their sustainable communities by taking their brainstorming and translating it to a map/picture with landmarks.

Lesson 10

Designing and Documenting Spaces for Community

This is a pivotal shift in the unit. Students will now consider the needs of their community, design a solution, and create primary sources that will tell the story. This is the reciprocal of the first four lessons, where they learn about the history of a local site through primary sources. Now, they ideate and make the process real.

The teacher will share that community spaces are designed with the community's needs in mind. This can include connection, rest, food, learning, play, and sustainability. The teacher will have students recall the local site that they studied and ask them to think about why that space might have been established. What needs did it fill for the community?

At this point, the teacher may want to consider the students in their class and move forward with the brainstorming process in ways that are familiar to their learners or provide the best access to the design process.

One example is to use a literacy/narrative approach. An educator may use the summary strategy – Somebody, Wanted, But, So, Then and invite their students to use empathy as a lens to look and think through when designing their community space.

An example might be:

a young girl wanted to read during recess
But, there were no quiet spaces to read.
So, she came up with an idea to create
a reading nook section so that any kid
could read outside. Then, she went to
her community leaders to pitch the idea.
These drafts would be placed in the
archive and serve as a primary source
document telling the story.

By the end of the lesson, your students will have another primary source and a topic to pursue for the remainder of the experience.

Lesson 11

Building a Speech: From Design to Story

This phase of the unit should happen across several lessons since students will be planning, drafting, revising, and editing a speech inspired by their primary sources and ideas for community sustainability.

Explain that their culminating project is to use their primary sources and thinking throughout the unit to develop a well-crafted speech advocating for a community's need. This can highlight essential spaces in a community, such as a firehouse or a school. It can also illustrate new ideas for bringing people together and supporting the environment, such as a community art center or a butterfly garden.

Before writing a speech, show a TED talk by a young person to your learners. Guide them through deconstructing the speech.

Teach students to notice the following elements:

HOOK: grabs the audience's attention

REASON: explains the importance of the idea

PERSONAL STORY: connects emotionally

CALL TO ACTION: invites others to care or act

After deconstructing a Ted Talk or other relevant speech, support students using the same elements listed above as they plan for their own speech.

There are some guiding questions that can help prompt students:

- Hook: What questions, images, or statements will make people listen?
- Reason: Why is this space important for our community?
- Personal story: What inspired this idea?
- Call to action: What do you want others to think, feel, or do?

After planning, support your learners as they move into the drafting phase. Remind them that all of the planning, drafts, and revisions are primary sources that they the story of their Speech's creation.

Encourage learners to share their talks with their peers for feedback.

Lesson 12

Sustainable Communities Showcase and Speeches

This lesson marks the beginning of the end of the unit. Students are ready to share their speeches with a larger audience. Invite families, individuals of your supporting archive, and community members to attend.

Students will also share their maps/pictures of their Sustainable Community with the class in a Gallery Walk structure.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS

- Analyzing Photographs
- Document Guide: Union Church
- Community Brainstorming Sheets

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS

Analyzing Documents: Photographs

Meet the photo

What do you notice first?

Is the photo black and white or color?

Is there a caption? What did you learn from the caption?

Observe the photo

Are there people? Objects? Both?

How would you describe the photo?

Try to understand the purpose of the photo

Where was the photo taken?

What clues are in the photo that helped you to know the location?

Why was the photo taken?

How does this photo compare to a photo taken today?

Use the photo for historical evidence

Where could we find more information about the photo?

DOCUMENT GUIDE

1

Contact Sheet

c. 1949

Prints | Pocantico Hills photographs - Series 1006

John D. Rockefeller, Jr. papers | Rockefeller Archive Center

2

Union Church Exterior

c. 1949

Prints | Pocantico Hills photographs - Series 1006

John D. Rockefeller, Jr. papers | Rockefeller Archive Center

3

John D. Rockefeller, Sr. Memorial Plaque

1941

Prints | Pocantico Hills photographs - Series 1006

John D. Rockefeller, Jr. papers | Rockefeller Archive Center

4

Chancel (Memorial Rose Window by Henri Matisse)

1965

Prints | Pocantico Hills photographs - Series 1006

John D. Rockefeller, Jr. papers | Rockefeller Archive Center

5

Stained Glass (Memorial Window by Marc Chagall)

1964

Prints | Pocantico Hills photographs - Series 1006

John D. Rockefeller, Jr. papers | Rockefeller Archive Center

PRIMARY SOURCE

Document 1



Contact Sheet
c. 1949

Union Church, 1922-1967

John D. Rockefeller, Jr. papers; Pocantico Hills
photographs - Series 1006; Prints;
Rockefeller Archive Center.

PRIMARY SOURCE

Document 2



Union Church Exterior
c. 1949

Union Church, 1922-1967

John D. Rockefeller, Jr. papers; Pocantico Hills
photographs - Series 1006; Prints;
Rockefeller Archive Center.

PRIMARY SOURCE

Document 3



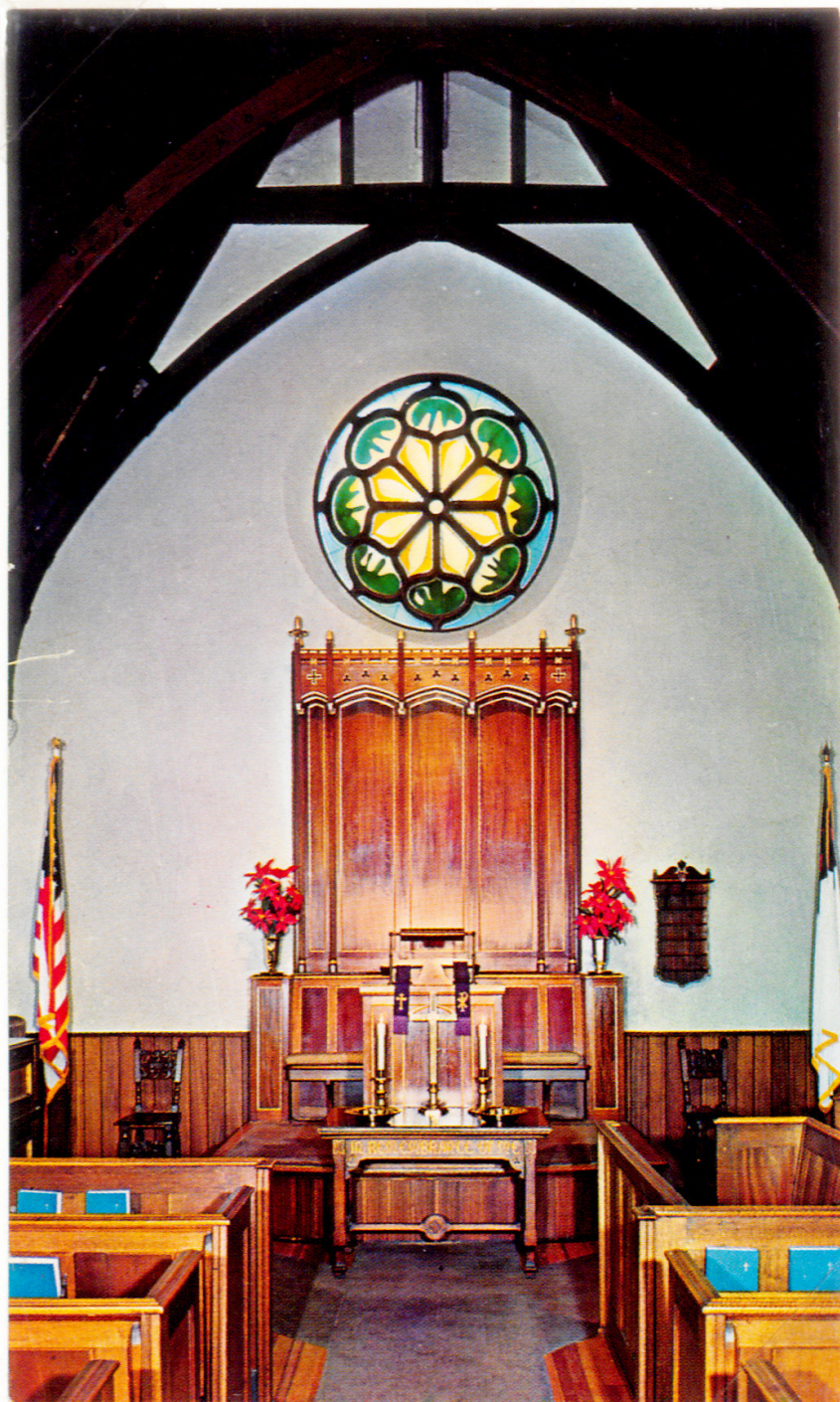
John D. Rockefeller, Sr.
Memorial Plaque
1941

Union Church, 1922-1967

John D. Rockefeller, Jr. papers; Pocantico Hills
photographs - Series 1006; Prints;
Rockefeller Archive Center.

PRIMARY SOURCE

Document 4



Chancel (Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Memorial
Rose Window by Henri Matisse)
1965

Union Church, 1922-1967

John D. Rockefeller, Jr. papers; Pocantico Hills
photographs - Series 1006; Prints;
Rockefeller Archive Center.

PRIMARY SOURCE

Document 5



Stained Glass (John D. Rockefeller, Jr.
Memorial Window by Marc Chagall)
1964

Union Church, 1922-1967

John D. Rockefeller, Jr. papers; Pocantico Hills
photographs - Series 1006; Prints;
Rockefeller Archive Center.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Hey, Wall: A Story of Art and Community
by Susan Verde

Maybe Something Beautiful
(How Art Transformed a Neighborhood)
by F. Isabel Campoy, Rafael Lopez,
Theresa Howell

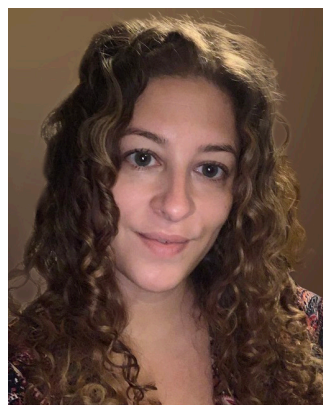
Matisse & Chagall at the Union Church
of Pocantico Hills
by H. McKelden Smith, Lorrain H. Barstow

[Union Church of Pocantico Hills](#)

ABOUT US



Andrea Coza has been teaching at Pocantico Hills since 2020, and prior to joining the Pocantico team she taught in the South Bronx. Andrea completed her undergraduate degree at Rochester Institute of Technology in Croatia and her master's degree at Relay Graduate School of Education. She is certified in Childhood Education and Special Education for grades one through six. Andrea has a passion for helping all students reach their potential, and challenges students to be curious while learning. As a former student of Pocantico Hills, she is fortunate to return as a teacher to help foster a joy of learning to the current students of Pocantico Hills.



Marina Pisto is an educator at the Pocantico Hills Central School district in Sleepy Hollow, New York. Prior to her work at Pocantico Hills, she worked in the New York City public schools and developed her love for inquiry-based work through her studies with the New York City Writing Project. Since 2017, Marina has collaborated with the Rockefeller Archive Center to design units using primary source documents for several grade levels. She holds degrees in history, childhood and special education, and literacy, and educational leadership. An ISTE-certified educator, Marina was honored with the 2024 Lee Bryant Outstanding Teacher of the Year Award by NYSCATE for her innovative contributions to education.



Marissa Vassari is Education Program Manager at the Rockefeller Archive Center. She coordinates the Archival Educators Roundtable to facilitate communication among professionals who use primary sources in public outreach and teaching. She holds a BA in Psychology and Special Education, an MA in Childhood Education, and an MLIS degree with an Archival Studies specialization.

ABOUT US

The Rockefeller Archive Center (RAC) is a major repository and research center dedicated to the study of philanthropy. The RAC's Research & Engagement Program develops and makes available archive-based interdisciplinary projects and curricula for levels ranging from elementary to graduate study. These materials support the development of information literacy and research skills, as well as deeper engagement with history and historical practice. The program also works to strengthen the bridge between education and archives through workshops and discussions facilitated by the RAC-hosted Archival Educators Roundtable.

CONTACT

15 Dayton Avenue
Sleepy Hollow, NY 10591

www.rockarch.org

education@rockarch.org

