

Telling Brooklyn Stories, part II: Building a Collaborative Walking Tour

an in-archives exercise by Jody R. Rosen

featured on [TeachArchives.org](http://www.teacharchives.org) at <http://www.teacharchives.org/exercises/collaborative-walking-tour/>

Inspired by research in the archives, students create a group walking tour, film themselves giving one stop on that tour, and embed the videos on a publicly-accessible Google map.

Introduction

In this project, students select a location near their college and develop an oral presentation about that location for a collaborative, class-led walking tour. Each student's "stop" is captured on video and shared on a publicly available, online map.

This extended, semester-long project builds upon [a previous visit](#) to the archives in which students give impromptu speeches comparing and contrasting historical maps. The class also goes on a walking tour led by archives staff. This offers useful information as well as a framework for thinking about the value of accessing and relaying information through storytelling.

The collaborative nature of the project generates a sense of community and camaraderie among the first-year students in the composition and public speaking courses in our "Telling Brooklyn Stories" learning community.

By employing a place-based approach to research, writing, and communication instruction, this exercise orients students to the college's vicinity. Expanding students' familiarity and comfort with the surrounding area can help them find a place — literally and figuratively — at college.

Objectives

Students should be able to:

- Select an appropriate location near their college to include in a class-led walking tour
- Conduct secondary source research for the walking tour stop using databases available through their college library
- Develop and deliver a walking tour stop based on cumulative work completed throughout the semester
- Create a video of the walking tour stop, post it to YouTube, embed it on a collaborative Google map, and share it on the class blog

Context

In English Composition, students read essays and articles that tell personal stories about life in New York (see Further Reading below).

Visit

Number of Visits: 2

Duration of Visit: 2 hours 15 minutes each

Visit 1 Agenda: Walking Tour

15 minutes	Introduction to walking tour (in classroom)
1.5 hours	Walking tour
15 minutes	<i>break</i>
15 minutes	Wrap up

A professional historian who works at the archives models the structure and content of a walking tour for students. Students gain context about the area surrounding their college. They learn that neighborhoods sometimes contain physical evidence of the past, and that new development often obscures the history of the area.

Stops include the Brooklyn Theater and the fire that destroyed it; the Henry Ward Beecher statue in Columbus Park; and the Brooklyn Historical Society building.

Wrap Up

The tour ends at Brooklyn Historical Society, the archives that students will later visit. Inside, students reflect on both the content and the structure of the walking tour.

Visit 2: Archives Visit

In a visit to the archives, students compare and contrast historical maps and deliver impromptu speeches. See the agenda and description of this exercise [here](#).

End Products

Essay

Students are instructed to take a 15- to 20-minute walk in any direction from the college and to look for two different New Yorks in juxtaposition. (This idea draws from course readings such as “City Limits” by Colson Whitehead and “The Tunnel Rats of Atlantic Avenue” by Yonette Joseph). They write about this experience in an 800 – 1100 word essay. See instructions [here](#).

Walking Tour Stop and Video

Students create and deliver a walking tour stop informed by course readings, the walking tour field trip, and the maps examined in the archives. See instructions for selecting a stop [here](#).

Google Map

In pairs, students film each other at their location delivering the oral presentation. Students upload their videos to Youtube and embed them in a [shared Google map](#) which creates a virtual walking tour of the area around the college (See a more recent map from fall 2013 [here](#)). On the final day of the semester, the class watches the videos and conducts a critique of the finished products.

Student contributions to the map are graded based on their adherence to the [instructions](#) provided. I use the following criteria:

- Did the student communicate effectively in the video?
- Did the student incorporate research effectively?
- Did the student meet the time expectations for the speech?
- Did the student consider audience in the development and delivery of the speech?
- Did the student convey creativity in the approach to and execution of the video?

Further Reading

But, Juanita and Mark J. Noonan, eds. *The Place Where We Dwell: Reading and Writing about New York City*. 3rd edition. New York: Kendall Hunt Publishing Company, 2007.

The below essays were used in this course:

- Nelson George, "Fort Greene Dreams"
- Willie Perdomo, "Where I'm From"
- Gloria Deák, "The People, Parks, and Ambience of Brooklyn"
- Colson Whitehead, "City Limits" from *The Colossus of New York*
- Jennifer Egan, "Reading Lucy"
- Lopate, "The Brooklyn Bridge"

Capote, Truman. *A House on the Heights*. 2nd edition. New York: New York Review of Books, 2002.

Joseph, Yonette. "[The Tunnel Rates of Atlantic Avenue.](#)" *New York Times*, 13 February 2009.

Mc Grath, Ben. “Who Knows Brooklyn?” *New Yorker*, 21 September 2009.

Steinberg, Saul. “View of the World from 9th Avenue.” *New Yorker*, 29 March 1976.

Trachtenberg, Alan. “Introduction.” In *The Brooklyn Bridge: Fact and Symbol*. 2nd edition. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979.

This Exercise Was Used In

ENG 1101: English Composition A A learning community in which first-year students enroll in the same English Composition and Effective Speaking courses. Both fulfill general education requirements.

Adaptability

This project can be adapted for any high school or college course using place-based learning.

Course Materials (included)

Essay
Walking Tour Stop
Google Map Instructions

Cite This Exercise

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“Overlapping New Yorks” Essay

by Jody R. Rosen

Part of an in-archives exercise at <http://www.teacharchives.org/exercises/collaborative-walking-tour>

Many of our texts this semester depict how New York can be viewed as an ever-changing global city, with relics from different eras and different communities co-existing or edging each other out.

To observe these overlapping New Yorks, walk for approximately 15 - 20 minutes away from City Tech. On your walk, look for places where you see different New Yorks overlapping in close proximity. Identify one instance in which you observe an overlapping of different New Yorks — such juxtapositions include old and new, residential and commercial, historic and replaceable, natural and man-made, constructed and under-construction, well maintained and in disrepair, celebrated and forgotten, one ethnic group and another, etc. On your walk, record your path, and photograph what you see so you can choose a photograph to include in your assignment. Choose one location and one overlap as the topic for your essay.

In a well-organized essay of approximately 800 - 1100 words, argue what the overlap you have chosen to write about shows or says about your location. To make your argument in your essay:

- Chart your course (tell your process for arriving there so that someone else can get there, too!)
- Describe what you see at your location in detail, and how your photograph frames or captures your juxtaposition—or how it can't capture the juxtaposition
- Compare and contrast the two elements of the juxtaposition, not only in terms of what you see but also what is significant about it
- Explain why have you chosen this subject in particular—what about it is striking to you? What story does it tell you?
- Incorporate two quotations or references to our texts from this semester either to support what you write or to engage their ideas with your subject and your interpretation of it
- Consider what you want to know more about (although your essay should not engage with this research!)

Due Dates

10/1: Location choice, walking process (do not simply use a maps program for directions! Write these directions with landmarks and other pieces of information so others can follow your path) and photograph with description due on blog by the start of class

10/3: Choose one quotation from our reading, and write a blog post about how it relates to what you're writing about in your essay

10/5: Draft due in Dropbox for peer-to-peer review

10/8: Complete peer-to-peer review

10/10: Essay due on dropbox.com by the start of class

Objectives

In writing this essay, you will:

- learn to use the word juxtaposition;
- learn to note similarities and differences between class readings and personal experiences;
- learn to write descriptively about your observations and opinions;
- learn to write comparatively about things you see and about differing viewpoints;
- further develop your ability to quote from and respond to our assigned readings;
- gain expertise in citing quotations parenthetically according to MLA format;
- express your ideas and style with clear, grammatically correct prose.

Assignment: Selecting a Walking Tour Stop

by Jody Rosen and Justin Davis



Part of an in-archives exercise at <http://www.teacharchives.org/exercises/collaborative-walking-tour>

In your last essay, you explored locations that represented overlapping New Yorks in close proximity to City Tech. Your exploration no doubt revealed locations worthy of further attention that should be seen and understood by others on a walking tour like the one we took earlier this semester.

For this assignment, you must choose a location, develop a research question to pursue, and develop a thesis-driven argument about what you learn that can be the information provided at a stop on our next walking tour.

Your well-developed essay of approximately 900 - 1200 words should interest your audience -- your classmates, Telling Brooklyn Stories professors, and BHS staff -- and should focus on a location within walking distance of City Tech (although it's up to you to decide what that means, keep in mind how far your classmates will be willing to walk!).

Using relevant, reliable sources from the library databases, the internet, and books that are available to you, as well as your observations, use your focused research to tell your location's story, and identify what in the location's story makes it a worthwhile addition to the tour.

Due Dates

Identify the location and research question in a blog post: **11/7**

Revised research question and draft of a thesis statement: **11/12**

Outline your essay on the OpenLab: **11/14**

Present your ideas to the class: **11/14**

Write a Works Cited list according to MLA format: **11/19**

Draft of essay due: **11/21**

Get feedback from your classmates: **11/21**

Submit the final version of your essay: **11/26** at 11:00 on Dropbox.com

Collaborative Map Assignment

by Jody Rosen and Justin Davis



Part of an in-archives exercise at <http://www.teacharchives.org/exercises/collaborative-walking-tour>

For SPE 1330, you will be preparing and presenting a persuasive speech. For ENG 1101, you are crafting an argument about a location within walking distance of City Tech and considering why it should be added to our next walking tour.

That next walking tour is going to be virtual—that is, it will replace your on-site process talk, so instead of us walking together as a class, you are going to create a video of the speech being delivered at the actual location to share with the rest of the class.

Your video should record a 4- to 6-minute persuasive speech—visual aids optional—that considers the questions “why does this stop belong on the tour?” and “who does it benefit?”

In addressing these points, your speech should present a value, fact, or policy proposition as discussed in SPE 1330 in preparation for your persuasive speeches. In fact, your speech for this project can be a revised version of your persuasive speech, keeping in mind that it needs to address those two questions specifically. You can work in groups to record your speeches, but all speeches must include one and only one speaker.

To prepare for this assignment, you will need to submit an outline of the speech. If you use the same topic as the persuasive speech, you will need to submit a revised outline based on the feedback you get from Prof. Davis.

We will use a shared Google map to pinpoint the locations of our tour stops. On the last day of class, we will view the videos together and provide final critiques.

Requirements and Schedule of Due Dates:

12/10: new outline or revised outline

12/12: visit site and record video

12/16: upload video to YouTube, and add the link to the pinned location on the Telling Brooklyn Stories Google map

12/17: Comment on your group-mates’ videos

12/19: write a response to the question: What would someone get from this video that they would not get from reading a Wikipedia entry on the location?

12/21: video review and awards ceremony