

U.S. City Quality of Life Analysis and Comparison

Jeremy Christiansen

Strand Identification: Geography, Essential Skills

Standard: The student will use maps, globes, geographic information systems, and other databases to answer geographic questions at a variety of scales from local to global.

Benchmark: 1. Students will demonstrate the ability to obtain geographic information from a variety of print and electronic resources.

Strand Identification: Geography, Essential Skills

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Grade Level: 7-12

Overview: Students will be introduced to the concept of creating and measuring the quality of life criteria for large cities.

Students will analyze U.S. census data to compare quality of life criteria for the fifty largest cities in the United States.

Time: Four fifty minute class periods

Subjects: Geography

Required Materials:

Internet Access:

<http://www.findyourspot.com> : Lesson opening and attention getter.

<http://factfinder.census.gov> : U.S. census data and city fact sheets.

<http://www.infoplease.com/ipa/A0763098.html> : Top fifty cities in U.S, by population.

http://www.citymayors.com/features/quality_survey.html : Commercial quality of life study from Mercer Human Resource Consulting.

Handout:

<http://www.gdrc.org/uem/qol-define.html> : Notes on quality of life, definitions and selecting criteria from the Global Development Research Center.

Objectives:

1. Students will be introduced to quality of life concepts including both the subjective and objective nature of using criteria to measure and compare data for different cities.
2. Students will create their own quality of life criteria and use census data to analyze, compare, and contrast U.S. cities from the list of the fifty largest.
3. Students will create and present their quality of life assignments in class.

Suggested Procedure:

Class Period #1

I would start the lesson by asking students to share with the class where they would live if they could live anywhere, and why they would choose that place. To engage them with an entertaining activity, have them take the online quiz at FindYourSpot.com. Students will be asked a series of questions about their ideal place to live, and this commercial real-estate website offers them a list of cities that supposedly best matches their preferences. A brief discussion on the results can include the student's opinions on the accuracy of the list, and the reasons why people use services like this one.

I would then lead students in brainstorming what criteria are important to them in determining a place to live. Activating their prior knowledge, I would divide them into small groups and have them spend 10 minutes comparing two different cities in, or near their community. For example: Minneapolis and St. Paul. What are the advantages and disadvantages to living in both cities? Students should briefly share in class and I would ask them which of their answers are subjective, and which are objective and based on criteria that could be measured? I would end the class by instructing students on the need for objective criteria that can be measured if we want to make useful comparisons between different places. Students should read the "Notes on Quality of Life" handout before the next class.

Class Period #2

Class should begin with a discussion on the assigned handout. What is quality of life? What are some of its various definitions? What are some of the different criteria listed in the handout? How does the city of Vancouver measure quality of life? According to the article, what is the difference between quality of life, and standard of living? What are some of the possible benefits of using objective criteria to measure quality of life in different U.S. cities?

Students should read the 2005 quality of life world report from Mercer Human Resource Consulting posted at:

http://www.citymayors.com/features/quality_survey.html, or hand out copies of the article. Mercer produces one of the business world's most recognized commercial reports on the quality of life in large cities throughout the world. They base their rankings on an evaluation of 39 quality of life criteria that are listed at the end of the article. They have clients in 45 different countries who are willing to pay hundreds of dollars for reports that compare the quality of life between different cities. After reading the article, briefly discuss the rankings for 2005, and the criteria used by this company to draw their quality of life conclusions.

Introduce the U.S. census website and the factfinder page at <http://factfinder.census.gov> I would spend a few minutes giving students a short overview / tour of some of the resources available here, including the population finder tools, fact sheet tools, and the maps and geography tools.

Class period #3

Back in the computer lab, students will create their own quality of life study using data from the factfinder page to compare three different U.S. cities chosen from a list of the top 50 cities in the U.S. by population and rank found at:

<http://www.infoplease.com/ipa/A0763098.html>

Requirements:

1. Students will measure the quality of life in three different cities, and since we are focusing on urban geography, they must be from the list mentioned below.
2. Students should return to the Factfinder site and get a "fact sheet" for their city by typing the name of the city and state at the top of the page. You may want to decide if you want students to use 2000 census data, or the other available option which is data from the 2003 American Community Survey. Students should print off the data for all three of their selected cities.
3. Students need to select the criteria from the census data that they believe is most indicative of quality of life as they now understand the concept. Students are required to select a minimum of three different characteristics from each of the following census categories: general, social, economic, and housing.
4. Students need to create their own scoring / ranking system to measure the results from their chosen criteria between the three cities. Suggested ideas would be ranking each category from #1-10, #1-5 stars, picking a baseline city and comparing selected cities to it, (like Mercer), or any other system of their design.
5. Students need to calculate their results and produce a visual of the results that can be shared in class (overhead, poster, etc.).
6. Students should be ready to make brief presentations in class tomorrow and be prepared to defend their choice of criteria, their ranking system, and their results.

Class period 4

I would suggest starting class by having students make brief 3-4 minute presentations to each other in small groups covering their rationale for the quality of life criteria they selected, their ranking system, and their results. I would then ask for a handful of students to share their assignment with the whole class.

Class discussion questions could include the following: Surprising results? Flaws in our methodology? What part of this process could be useful to you when you are deciding whether to move to another city? What other criteria would you want to compare? Where might we find additional information to help us? Additional questions to answer?

Suggested Assessment: Students should answer the following quiz questions by writing 3 paragraph responses for each question

1. Share three reasons that explain why your choice of census criteria were the best ones to measure the quality of life in the cities you compared.
2. What are three quality of life criteria that are important to you that might be difficult or impossible to measure in any given city? Explain.

Resources:

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National Geography Standards:

The World in Spatial Terms

Standard 1: How to use maps and other geographic representations, tools, and technologies to acquire, process, and report information.

Supplemental Web Links for Teachers and Students:

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Extension Activities:

1. Students could choose additional criteria for their quality of life studies other than the characteristics from the U.S. census data. For example, some of the 39 different criteria from the Mercer study could be selected for comparison.
2. Students could also research online databases that contained information that could be used to quantify and compare the newly selected criteria.
3. Students could also bring this assignment down in scale by getting city fact sheets for cities in their local community, region, or state.

Credits: Lesson created by Jeremy Christiansen
Social Studies Teacher at Henry Sibley High School
Mendota Heights, MN 55118
christij@isd197.k12.mn.us