



ENVIRONMENTAL ADVOCACY

LOVE YOUR LANE:

Bicycle Advocacy 1965-2011



OVERVIEW

Students will explore New York City's history of bicycle advocacy by analyzing quotations, images, and initiatives to change street plans.

STUDENT GOALS

- Students will become informed about the contemporary debate over bicycle lanes in New York City.
- Students will understand the variety of tactics used by bicycle activists in the past 40 years.
- Students will learn urban planning principles by analyzing streets in their communities by designing their own "complete streets."

COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

Grade 4:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.4.2

Determine the main idea of a text and explain how it is supported by key details; summarize the text.

Grade 6:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.6.7

Integrate information presented in different media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively) as well as in words to develop a coherent understanding of a topic or issue.

Grades 11-12:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.8

Evaluate an author's premises, claims, and evidence by corroborating or challenging them with other information.

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## KEY TERMS/VOCABULARY

- Alternative
  - Cyclist
  - Debate
  - Lane
  - Pedestrian
  - Symbol
  - Transportation
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## ACTIVISTS

- Janette Sadik-Khan
  - Mayor John Lindsay
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## ORGANIZATIONS

- Times Up!
  - Transportation Alternatives
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## INTRODUCING RESOURCE 1

*Der Yid*, “Do We Need So Many Bike Lanes,” *Transportation Alternatives*, January 29, 2010.

For over 40 years, the topic of bike lanes in New York City has sparked controversy. Bicycle activists want the city’s infrastructure to support cycling, which they view as a healthy, environmentally-conscious, and inexpensive mode of transportation. They argue that bicycle lanes will make the streets safer for cars, pedestrians, and cyclists as well as benefit local businesses. Meanwhile, others suggest that cyclists make the streets more dangerous and that bicycle lanes would only add more traffic to an already crowded city. Introduce your students to the contemporary debate over bike lanes by examining the following excerpt from an interview with bicycle advocacy organization *Transportation Alternatives* and Yiddish Newspaper *Der Yid*:

*Der Yid*: Your organization was founded in 1973. What was the goal?

*Transportation Alternatives*: To encourage bicycling, more walking, more public transportation use. We believe that cities work better for everybody when use of cars is reduced and when the other modes of transportation are expanded.

D.Y.: Was the environment an issue then?

T.A.: Actually, it was. The first Earth Day was in 1971 [ed. note: in fact it was 1970].

D.Y.: I thought that we believed at that time that there was global cooling, not global warming.

T.A.: True. Global warming was not a hot controversy. But people were already working to improve the environment. Also, the oil crisis was going on and people were trying to conserve.

D.Y.: Did you come by bike?

T.A.: Yes!

D.Y.: You don’t have a car?

Paul Steely White (executive director of *Transportation Alternatives*): No!

D.Y.: You can run an organization like that?

Paul: It’s in my contract...

D.Y.: How did the city change in the last years under the Bloomberg administration for bikes?

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*T.A.: Mayor Bloomberg's plaNYC has brought a new epoch not only to transportation but also to water quality, green building. Transportation is only a part of it. Cycling is the fastest growing transportation mode in New York. It is up 36% from '07 to '08 and 29% from '08 to '09. In the last five years it has almost doubled. Two neighborhoods that are growing the fastest are Williamsburg and Bedford-Stuyvesant, therefore you will see a lot of cycles in the street. Bicycles are no different from taking the bus or the train. It works as a network or as a part of a network. If it is cut off or fragmented, people can't get where they want to go...*

*D.Y.: Are you satisfied with how the city has installed the bike lanes? How they have decided where to lay them and how they coordinated it with the neighborhoods?*

*T.A.: I think that the short answer is yes! I also believe that the city has the right to lay bike lanes on any street where there's [a] safety issue. The Department of Health has published a study that bike lanes save lives. Saving lives doesn't need negotiation. I believe that it's important for the city to discuss and to cooperate with the communities but I don't believe that the communities should have veto power over a clear safety issue.*

*Der Yid, "Do We Need So Many Bike Lanes," Transportation Alternatives, January 29, 2010.*

### DOCUMENT BASED QUESTIONS

- What is the mission of the organization *Transportation Alternatives*?
- Do you think biking is a significant transportation alternative?
- What would need to change about the design of our streets and policies to allow for cycling in city streets?
- Why might cities want to invest in creating space for bicycles?
- Why do you think the number of cyclists in New York City has increased in recent years?
- Why might some people be against new city initiatives to create space for cyclists? What new problems might this give rise to?

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## INTRODUCING RESOURCE 2

*Time's Up! Clowns*, ca. 2005. Collection of Time's Up! Environmental Organization

Since the 1970s, bicycle activists have used a variety of tactics to make New York a more bike-friendly city, including "Bike-Ins," protests, and political lobbying. This picture captures *Times Up!*'s Bike Clown Brigade, which is made up of cyclists dressed like clowns and policemen, riding through Manhattan's bike lanes to find cars illegally parked in the bike lanes. The Bike Clown Brigade gives fake orange tickets to these cars, demonstrating that the laws that protect cyclists are not being enforced.



*Time's Up! Clowns*, ca. 2005. Collection of Time's Up! Environmental Organization

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**DOCUMENT BASED QUESTIONS**

- Why do you think these activists are dressed like clowns? Why do you think they are wearing traffic cones on their heads?
- Why is it significant that the activists are giving fake tickets to cars parked illegally in the bike lanes?
- Do you think this is an effective tactic for raising awareness about bicycle safety? Why or why not?
- What other tactics can bicycle activists use in order to demonstrate that laws protecting cyclists are not being enforced?

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## ACTIVITY 1A

Bicycle activists urge people to examine their roads. Use the following chart to investigate a local street. After collecting data, have the students discuss their findings. Questions for discussion include: What activities are encouraged on this street? How does the physical structure of the street determine how it is used? How can the street be altered to best serve those that use it?

On Your Street	How Many? <i>(In five minutes)</i>
Cars	
Trucks	
Bicycles	
Pedestrians – Walking	
Pedestrians – Running	
Pedestrians – Sitting	
Traffic Lights	
Stop Signs	
Other observations:	

My street is built mostly for (circle one):

- 1) Cars to drive quickly
- 2) Cars to drive slowly
- 3) People to sit down and relax
- 4) People to walk from place to place
- 5) Bikers to ride safely
- 6) Other: \_\_\_\_\_

What would you change about your street? Why?

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## ACTIVITY 1B

Bicycle activists advocate for complete streets, which are roads that include a separate bike lane. Use the following models and guidelines to design your own complete streets.

Using the model on page 10 of Commissioner Janette Sadik-Khan's "Columbus Avenue, Bicycle Path and Mobility Enhancements, Community Board 7" <http://www.nyc.gov/html/dot/downloads/pdf/2012-12-columbus-ave-extension.pdf>, challenge your students to transform the existing road into a complete street using the following guidelines:

- 1) A one-way road is typically 60 ft wide
- 2) A parking lane must be at least 7 ft wide
- 3) A moving lane must be at least 10 ft wide
- 4) A bike lane must be at least 5 ft wide

Have your students create proportional models of their designed complete streets using construction paper. Discuss which of their designs would be the safest plan for commuting New Yorkers.

For more information, see "Urban Bikeway Design Guide" by the National Association of City Transportation Officials <http://nacto.org/publication/urban-bikeway-design-guide>



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**ADDITIONAL READING**

## THE NEW YORK TIMES ARTICLES

“At a Bike-In Down Broadway, It’s Ride On’ Despite Motorists” by Judy Klemesrud, May 20, 1974, describes an early Bike-In demonstration organized by activist group Transportation Alternatives.

<http://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1974/05/20/91440959.html?pageNumber=27>

“Unfair to New York Bikers” by Michele Herman, August 8, 1987, responds to Mayor Koch’s controversial midtown bike ban and defends cycling as an important mode of safe, inexpensive, and efficient transportation.

<http://www.nytimes.com/1987/08/08/opinion/unfair-to-new-york-bikers.html>

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**CONTEMPORARY CONNECTIONS**

“Expansion of Bike Lanes in City Brings Backlash” by J. David Goodman, November 22, 2010, covers the recent debate over the construction of bike lanes at Prospect Park West.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/11/23/nyregion/23bicycle.html>

“A Mission for Citi Bike: Recruiting More Female Cyclists” by Emma C. Fitzsimmons, July 7, 2015, describes why fewer women use Citi Bike compared to men.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/08/nyregion/a-mission-for-citi-bike-recruiting-more-female-cyclists.html>

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## SOURCES

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*Time's Up! Clowns*. ca. 2005. Collection of Time's Up! Environmental Organization.

*Der Yid*, "Do We Need So Many Bike Lanes," *Transportation Alternatives*,  
January 29, 2010.

<http://transalt.org/news/media/4205>

*Proposed Roadway Configuration*, 2013. From: *Columbus Avenue, Bicycle Path and Mobility Enhancements, Community Board 7*. NYC Department of Transportation.

<http://www.nyc.gov/html/dot/downloads/pdf/2012-12-columbus-ave-extension.pdf>

*Urban Bikeway Design Guide*. New York: National Association of City Transportation Officials, 2014.

<http://nacto.org/publication/urban-bikeway-design-guide/>