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A Short History *of the* Highrise

• A Six-Part Educator's Guide •

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Part I: Introduction and Student Activities

About A Short History of the Highrise

Produced by the National Film Board of Canada and the *New York Times*, **A Short History of the Highrise** is an interactive documentary that explores the 2,500-year global history of vertical living and the issue of social equality in an increasingly urbanized world.

The centrepiece of the project is four short films. The first three (**Mud**, **Concrete** and **Glass**) draw on the *New York Times*' extraordinary visual archives, a repository of millions of photographs that, for the most part, have not been seen in decades. Each film is intended to evoke a chapter in a storybook, with rhyming narration and photos brought to life through intricate animation. The fourth chapter (**Home**) comprises images submitted by the public and set to music. The interactive experience incorporates the films and, like a visual accordion, allows viewers to dig deeper into the project's themes through additional archival materials, text and microgames.

A Short History of the Highrise, which premiered at the 2013 New York Film Festival, is part of the larger **HIGHRISE** project, a multi-year, many-media, collaborative documentary experiment at the NFB, developed and directed by award-winning filmmaker Katerina Cizek. The **HIGHRISE** project includes the Emmy® Award-winning **Highrise: Out My Window** (2010), one of the world's first 360-degree interactive documentaries.

A Short History of the Highrise can be found online at [NFB.ca](http://nfb.ca), at highrise.nfb.ca/shorhistory or on the *New York Times* website, nytimes.com/highrise—or you can explore it, along with the rest of the ongoing **HIGHRISE** project, at nfb.ca/highrise.

The *NY Times Learning Network* has also produced online supplementary educational material for **A Short History of the Highrise**. It can be found at learning.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/10/29/vertical-living-exploring-identity-social-class-and-global-change-through-the-highrise.

Why an Interactive Rather Than a Traditional Documentary?

When viewing the four short films that make up the interactive documentary **A Short History of the Highrise**, users have multiple viewing options: they can watch the four shorts straight through, or they can interact with the documentary's hotspots. To dig deeper into the narrative, users simply need to pull up the screen every time they see little lines and arrows inviting them to interact. In these instances, users will be invited to explore spaces and places more intimately, to flip over archival photographs or to play mini-games, meant to inspire an immersive exploration of the content.

Teacher Preparation: About This Guide

This is a six-part educator's guide, written to facilitate a meaningful discussion and debate in the classroom surrounding the various topics and concepts presented in **A Short History of the Highrise**. The interactive documentary and four individual short films raise many issues that will challenge students to think about their communities, urban living, and highrise buildings, past and present. In each section of the guide, educators will find information relating to a particular section of the interactive production, or to student and media-literacy activities. A full table of contents relating to the six sections is available on page 2 of the introduction to the guide.

The guide can be used to further inform educators about the various topics discussed in the films and the interactive documentary and to mediate and support classroom discussions. The activities are designed to encourage students to think and speak critically about their daily choices and actions, and to take the discussion outside of the classroom and into their everyday lives.

Recommended Age Levels

While it is always recommended that educators preview media content before presenting it to their students, **A Short History of the Highrise** is specifically intended for junior, secondary and post-secondary students. Within this guide, activities and content will appeal to students aged 13+. There is enough flexibility within each of the activities to modify them and their learning outcomes, so that they are meaningful to all students.

Related Subject Areas

- Urban Studies
- History
- Geography
- Culture and Identity
- Media Studies
- Architectural Studies
- Environmental Studies
- Human Geography
- Population Studies
- Business and Economy

Key Themes and Concepts

Following the screening of *A Short History of the Highrise* and the application of this educator's guide, students will be able to:

- Communicate about the highrise building, from geographical, historical, economic and environmental perspectives;
- Understand the evolution of cities and urban centres over time;
- Explore the multimedia application of interactive documentaries;
- Identify differences between various forms of archival materials, including digital versus analogue photography;
- Apply their learning through various group and individual learning activities.

Suggested Student Activities

The short films *Mud*, *Concrete* and *Glass* provide important opportunities for students to explore concepts of belonging, sustainability, community and responsibility. Through these films' particular urban historical lens, students can develop critical skills to articulate ideas about their experiences, identities, cultures and responsibilities.

These activities ask students to situate the highrise in artistic, cultural and political communities, being mindful of larger themes and international movements. Students will refine a variety of communication abilities as they read, research, write, organize and present their ideas. The following activities promote reading, writing and interpretive work in the framework of examining *A Short History of the Highrise* and its thematic concerns. These activities can be adjusted to be oral or written, group or individual, and teacher-guided or independent. The target audiences for these activities are grades 9–12 through to CÉGEP- and university-level students.

The assignments can serve multiple purposes and take many forms, across several platforms. Students can share with other classes engaged in similar material via social networking. While the work can be enhanced in classrooms equipped with access to digital technology, it does not depend upon it for execution. Many of these activities can also be used to prompt a research project for an essay or for an oral presentation, with or without visual support.

Upon completion of any of these activities, whether orally or in writing, students will be able to:

- Organize and brainstorm an essay or presentation from topic to thesis to draft, revision and final submission stages;
- Prioritize important details regarding the material;
- Integrate secondary source material;
- Write and use proper citation and formatting to present an essay in either written or verbal form;
- Produce a bibliography of primary and secondary source material;
- Design relevant and effective visual support;
- Participate in a community of academic workers;

- Understand the implications of digital communication as it pertains to academic research;
- Deepen understanding and experience with online research tools;
- Practise written and oral communication skills;
- Learn successful group work and collaborative techniques;
- Navigate a library website or physical space for academic research;
- Use a writing guide or online guide to illustrate proper citation and essay format;
- Use Keynote or PowerPoint software to create visual slides or PDF documents to accompany and enhance the presentation of ideas;
- Access social networks to post findings and/or create a blog or Facebook presence to share the class conference proceedings;
- Network among a variety of schools across Canada/the world—possibly via the NYT online project.

Activity 1: Learning Through Discussion Questions

There is a set of study questions that can be used as a companion to screening the films in *A Short History of the Highrise*. Students can group together to discuss the implications of some of the topics raised by the questions and then view the films. The research and learning activities would then promote a deeper application of some of the facts expressed in the films. Through analysis, students can apply the knowledge in order to shape their individual experience of urban environments. The learning may also facilitate student engagement at both local and global levels in terms of engaging with larger concepts, such as: sustainability and social responsibility as well as issues pertaining to equity and justice, as highlighted in the films.

Activity 2: Student Conference on Cities and Urban Themes

The following research project takes the form of an academic conference and can span the entire term with weekly modules. The conference itself can be small-scale, with students in one class exchanging findings with each other, or it may also be shared digitally, with other classroom participation from the same school and/or networking among other schools and participants. The research areas can also be broken down to smaller units as appropriate if the scope of a conference is not feasible.

Students may present findings in groups and submit a written text, following academic guidelines. The teacher could edit the texts or select students to work as an editorial committee to prepare a document that would reflect the conference proceedings. This document could be shared electronically with the class, school and other schools partaking in such a project. The conference proceedings could also be made available to students. This would give the writing and presentations a real-world application. Students could also contribute parts of the proceedings to a school newspaper, newsletter or website.

Suggested Approaches and Materials

- Students will need a notebook to brainstorm, journal and create ideas for researching;
- The classroom will need tools to facilitate student research: resource materials as necessary;
- The research component may be undertaken in a computer lab or in a classroom with computers and Internet access;
- Cameras and/or access to the Creative Commons (creativecommons.org) image base will help for the visual component of the presentations;
- Teachers may wish to invite: librarians, municipal politicians, architects, urban designers, etc. They may also elect to have a class visit to the city archives;
- The research can be conducted across several weeks, culminating in an academic-style conference;
- The class may break into smaller presentation tables to share information in the form of pamphlets, essays and/or other visual materials;
- The material may also be shared digitally. Assign students to cover the conference, to tweet and share the material using social networks;
- Teachers may also choose to have students present to the entire class;
- Teachers may collaborate with other classes to enlarge the scope of the conference.

Possible Conference Themes

- Creation myths and origin stories around the world
- Cities and the environment
- Housing developments around the world
- The suburbs and the mall
- Building innovations from mud to glass
- Global approaches to housing
- Homelessness
- Capitalism and socialism in cities
- Safety in structures
- Social equity and housing
- Canadian cities and urban living
- Urban sustainability
- Graffiti and urban expression
- Future cities: What's next?
- Innovations in urban design
- Issues in public housing
- Stories of buildings

- Controversies in the city
- Cities and youth
- Culture in the city
- Urban responsibility and neighbourhoods
- Public transit issues
- City crime and solutions
- Global cities
- Canadian perspectives on urban development
- Where people live
- Urban or rural living
- Contemporary concerns in the city
- Important trends in city design
- Significant people in the city
- Solutions for the 21st-century city

Social Networking Component

Teachers may create a private Facebook page, Twitter feed and hashtag for their classes, or a blog with a Twitter component offering shared access for students to post visuals and commentary. Here are a few useful links to get started: [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [WordPress](#), [Blogger](#), [Tumblr](#).

Conference findings may also be shared across social networks. Schools may locate other schools and classrooms partaking in this activity and share information and experiences. Using Twitter and hashtagging postings of visuals and short texts will facilitate this process. Students could use Google Chat or Meetups for global discussions. Of course, the digital component is not essential; these are tools meant to enhance the sharing of information.

Activity 3: Introducing Students to Research

The following research topics can be incorporated within group activities, oral presentations, essays and photography projects or can be linked with your conference development activity. Students can determine the overall theme together or it can be preselected to coincide with school activities or other pedagogical projects. The topics may also shift, so that they can reflect and respond to community needs and public affairs developments within the local context.

Materials Needed

Internet connection, computer or WiFi-connected devices, encyclopedias and/or paper reference materials, library materials (online or in library), writing guides (online or hard copies).

Topics can be pre-assigned or independently researched. Students may also find it interesting to research the origins of buildings in their communities.

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Getting Started with Online Research

Some useful and comprehensive online research tools:

[Statistics Canada](#) – for information regarding Canada

[Spacing](#) – a digital magazine of Canadian urban issues featuring links to cities across Canada

[Canadian National Archives](#) – a guide to national collections

[National Research Council Canada](#) – additional national resources

[Trail Canada](#) – a list of towns and cities in Canada

[UN Habitat](#) – an international organization for global urban concerns

[Global Urban Development](#) – an organization tackling urban challenges

Consult with a librarian for student instruction on research techniques and citation methodology.

Visit this link for ideas on [the tallest structures worldwide](#).

This resource (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_architects) lists architects from their earliest origins in Western and Eastern cultures as well as from the 13th to 21st centuries. It also lists architects by nation.

Possible Research Topics

- Building origins
- Creation myth origins
- Architectural contributions across time
- Global approaches to housing
 - Technological innovations pertaining to highrise development
 - The origins of particular cities
 - The representation of cities and the urban experience in art
 - Issues that emerge out of urban experience, such as homelessness
 - Approaches to urban problems
 - Your city archives
 - Your street and its buildings
 - Innovations in design and trends in building technology
 - The origins of public transit
 - The origins of public housing

Teachers can either assign topics and research projects or have students complete their own brainstorming and group work to select them.

Expanded Examples for Research Topics

A) Research and share how city architecture and the urban experience are depicted visually.

Students can be pre-assigned works of art or can find the representations independently. They may use *NYT* archived photographs.

Student Activity: In groups or individually, students can produce their own photographic, literary, auditory or other artistic representations of urban experiences. The materials for this project can be locally produced or researched. Students will present their creations to the rest of their class (and/or upload to share digitally across a variety of social networks). Students will also explain the context of the creation and discuss how it reflects urban living. In doing so, students will articulate concepts about particular urban experiences and situate themselves in a broader global framework.

B) Research the development of a particular city and its neighbourhoods

This topic can be used to produce an essay with a clear thesis and body paragraph development. The area of research can also be used as a tool for students to discuss the relationship between culture and living spaces and the history of this development. The student activity can be used to develop a number of academic skills—writing and critical thinking chief among them. The topic can also be adapted for group-related work, oral presentations and slideshows.

Activity 4: Maintain an urban journal and/or blog

The journal is intended as a pedagogical tool to provide a context in which students can articulate and explore ideas prompted by the viewing of *A Short History of the Highrise*. The journal is less a personal exploration and more of a tool to teach students clarity of expression. It can also be used to comment on anything in the urban environment, including: advertising, photographs, art, graffiti, readings, traffic, public transit and city maintenance. Students may also write entries on films or works of fiction that present urban issues, or they could use the city as inspiration for creative expression.

The purpose of this activity is to focus student reading and note-taking and to practise writing. The activity can be used in almost any pedagogical context from courses in English Literature to Media Studies to Geography, the Humanities or History. It is also intended as a creative vehicle for engaging with the larger topic of cities in a variety of frameworks. The journal will be of particular use when writing essays and/or preparing any other assignments in class. It can take digital or paper form, and the choice will determine the kinds of materials that students will need on hand. Depending on available resources, teachers can engage in promoting digital technology use (using a blog or other social networking feature for students to share materials). Journals may also take visual forms, as students could choose to make short videos with some narration to interact with the themes assigned.

The activity is targeted towards students aged 14–20, and the approach taken by the teacher can reflect the needs and composition of the class. Depending on the nature of each entry, the work could take between one and three hours. This activity could be used throughout the term as a means of applying learned material. Alternatively, it could be assignment-specific to the viewing of the films—with one blog entry for each film, as determined by the teacher and the course curriculum.

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The blog component can be designed by the teacher, using student contributions on a number of urban-related themes. Students may also keep an electronic journal in which photos and other visual material can be plugged in and expanded upon. Teachers can share images and assign critical responses and interpretive work. Likewise, students may contribute images and have others provide critical commentary.

Teachers can determine the length and scope of various entries and determine submission guidelines that suit the nature of other areas covered in the classroom context.

Sample Journal Entry

In one paragraph, write a question you have about the issues raised in one of the short films. Brainstorm responses. Include one visual component and respond to it.

In entries, educators can also ask students to comment on:

- The overall purpose of the writing/ad/photo/piece of art;
- What the piece is saying about urban life or cities in general;
- Initial reactions to a piece;
- The use of literary devices (prominent symbols/language/vocabulary, etc.);
- What students liked/disliked;
- Of what or whom the text reminds them;
- How they would treat the same material;
- Possible audience;
- How building material relays historical information;
- How building material relays emotional information;
- How building material relays private/public details;
- How building material presents a point of view;
- How building material may or may not represent truth;
- How the themes in ***A Short History of the Highrise*** link to where the students live. What is significant to the students as they watch the films;
- Topics in Urban Studies: buildings and design, suburbia, mall culture, environment, the city in literature, the city in film and media, iconic buildings.

The journal/blog can also facilitate brainstorming for any of the ideas listed in the Conference Activity. Brainstorm with students to create a list of possible themes that emerge from ***A Short History of the Highrise***.

Credits

The six-part ***A Short History of the Highrise*** educator's guide was written by Leah Sherry, a Toronto teacher, who uses media literacy in her classrooms to teach traditional subjects; Merrienne Couture, a member of the English Department of Dawson College in Montreal, who teaches "The City in Literature" and other courses; and Claudia Sicondolfo, NFB Education Team Leader and Education Specialist.

Part II: A Short History of *Mud*

In the 21st century, city living is a common experience for billions of people, but it hasn't always been this way. Thousands of years ago, before the inventions of electricity, mass transportation, widespread industry and even the flush toilet, communities gathered throughout the world in areas near sources of food and water. As populations began to grow, accommodating this growth had to be part of an emerging society's plan. Populations needed adequate housing, and cultures and communities drew from their geographic, environmental and socio-economic contexts to create urban systems. During this time, class divisions developed as societies became increasingly regulated by lawmakers and landlords.

In any community, the population must become organized to meet their needs of shelter and access to basic services. To communicate and interact with other villages, there have to be communication systems and transportation. There also have to be ways of cultivating, growing and sharing food sources. These developments begin to shape the municipal, state and national means of governing citizens, as Lewis Mumford highlights in his seminal work on city development entitled "What Is a City?" He also illustrates how the structures to house a culture's self-documentation need to be in place, in the form of museums, galleries, libraries and cultural institutions.

As societies across the world continued to develop, even resource-challenged areas were called upon to serve their populations. Trading with other communities became important, resulting in a variety of communication systems. Financial concerns also became key to regulation, as self-sufficient hunting and gathering gave way to complex interdependent systems of industrial manufacturing and supply of goods. Over the course of thousands of years, in fact, humanity has witnessed a corresponding growth in building technology: We went from constructing with *mud*, to *concrete*, to *glass*, as the films in *A Short History of the Highrise* illustrate.

Many theories attempt to account for the development of cities and their structures. The highrise is a relatively modern architectural example of the development of cities and their structures. The highrise as a structure emerged to meet a variety of intersecting needs: primary among these was housing. Over several thousand years, this particular type of structure evolved due to innovations in materials and technological advancements, such as electricity and the elevator. As *Mud* shows us, the highrise has a similar purpose to the housing structures of the ancient cities of Rome, Mesopotamia and Yemen, as well as to the cliff dwellings of Arizona. In each architectural example, local materials and techniques were used to create shelter and support community building and communication. These local practices would directly reflect a growing community's specific needs, as the resulting structures were also adapted to geographic factors.

A few thousand years later, in the 21st century, we see that the reverse is the case: We've built cities in deserts, swamps and other inhospitable locations. As urban cultures continue to evolve, we begin to see tensions between social classes, often illustrated in types and locations of housing. The highrise grows out of intersecting demands for both social responsibility and corporate profit. These are concerns that are addressed in the short films.

Mud: Study and Discussion Questions

- How would you define a city?
- List three absolute requirements for a city to be a good place to live.
- What are some of the problems of urban living, according to *Mud*?
- What do you think makes a city successful?
- What do you think makes a city a home?
- What kind of house/apartment/building do you live in? Describe your neighbourhood.
- What is a creation myth? Do you know of any examples?
- As a fictional highrise, what does the Tower of Babel signify in *Mud*?
- How do you get around in a city? What do you think this was like 200 years ago?

Understanding *Mud*: References and Definitions

Creation Myths

Global cultures tell stories to enhance and preserve understanding as well as to create a context of sharing. Mythology is at the root of many ancient cultures and themes of survival and community are central. See also: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_creation_myths [Creation Stories from Around the World](#).

Babylon

The title, *Mud*, references the mud remains of Babylon, an ancient city of ancient Mesopotamia. All that remains of Babylon is a mound of broken mud-brick buildings and debris. It is located in the Mesopotamian plain between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. The city itself was built upon the Euphrates and divided in equal parts along its left and right banks, with steep embankments created to contain the river's seasonal floods. The natural environment shapes the structure and building. The materials used correspond to the building technology of that time.

The Tower of Babel

This is a biblical story that has been depicted in many art pieces. A creation myth is a form of storytelling that articulates ideas about socio-historical origins and contemporary concerns. It is interesting to note that the story of Babylon and the Tower of Babel are linked with the development of a growing society and its need for housing and communication. We also see in the origins of this story the seeds of human responsibility and an early eco-awareness regarding sustainability. Storytelling is one of the most powerful means through which any culture expresses itself and its origins. It is one form of knowing the world on both global and local levels. In fact, how we get to where we are is a central theme in many stories. In the West, some of the most prominent sources of storytelling and information about the past are religious texts, such as the Bible.

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[Shibam – The Manhattan of the Desert](#)

This is a structure built of mud located in Shibam, a town in Yemen, now a UNESCO World Heritage site. It illustrates the kinds of structures that can be built from mud. Additional examples can be found at touroopia.com (“10 Amazing Mud Brick Buildings”).

[The Roman Insula](#)

The Romans built hundreds of towns and cities, which laid out the streets at right angles, in the form of a grid. Remains indicate that roads were equal in width and length, except for two, which were slightly wider than the others. One of these ran east-to-west, the other, north-to-south, and they intersected in the middle to form the centre of the grid. All roads were made of carefully fitted flagstones and filled in with smaller, hard-packed rocks and pebbles. Each square marked by four roads was called an insula, the Roman equivalent of a city block. The [Pompeii Insula Project](#) illustrates the remains uncovered in the 1950s, which continue to be a significant historical resource. Each insula was 80 yards (73 m) squared, with the land within divided. As the city developed, each insula would eventually be filled with buildings of various shapes and sizes and crisscrossed with back roads and alleys. Most of these were given to the first settlers of a Roman city, but people had to pay to construct their own house.

[Arizona Cliff Dwelling](#)

These structures illustrate the [Ancient Arizona Ruins](#), now considered historically important to Arizona. Today the site remains a popular tourism destination. To learn more about the Arizona Cliff's Sinagua people visit en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sinagua. In many ways, the site of the [Arizona Cliff Structures](#) also provides details regarding the ways of life of an ancient civilization, one which has continued to have an impact.

[Arizona Montezuma Castle](#)

pggp.com/well_document/A%20History%20of%20Montezuma%20Well.pdf

This document details the history of the [Montezuma Well](#), dating back to 600 BC.

[Tulou – Fujian Province Structures](#)

A Tulou, or “earthen building,” is a traditional communal residence in the Fujian province of southern China, usually of a circular configuration, surrounding a central shrine. These vernacular structures were occupied by clan groups.

[Inventing the Elevator](#)

Click on the following link, science.howstuffworks.com/innovation/inventions/who-invented-the-elevator.htm, to explore Louis XV's connection to the invention of the elevator.

[The Industrial Revolution](#)

This was a period of intense technological innovation, resulting in changes in labour divisions and resource acquisition. The following link, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Industrial_Revolution, provides exhaustive information on the historical context and relevance of this period to contemporary society. The era was characterized by massive labour and resources innovations.

[The New York City Tenement](#)

As inequities in housing emerged in urban centres such as New York City, numerous historical studies were carried out to identify contemporary solutions. [Tenement Houses and Progressive Solutions](#) outlines some of the background and contextual treatment of the issue.

For additional resources on the NYC tenements, please see the following:

[New York City Tenement Museum](#)

A museum dedicated to preserving the history of the Lower East Side and its contribution to New York City.

[Lower East Side New York City Neighbourhood](#)

A neighbourhood located in Manhattan that has witnessed enormous change in the last hundred years.

[New York City Tenement Housing Act 1901](#)

One of the first laws to ban the construction of dark, poorly ventilated tenement buildings in the state of New York.

[The Labour Movement in North America](#)

After a certain point, it became increasingly apparent that the industry and mechanization of working conditions required an acknowledgment of the individuals behind the work. In Canada, [the emergence of the labour movement](#) and workers' rights has a relevant history.

[Vertical Living as a Possible Solution](#)

Rapid increase in population growth has an impact in living arrangements, particularly as class, affordability and available space intersect.

[The Osborne Apartments, New York City](#)

The Osborne Apartments are located at 205 West 57th Street in New York City. Construction on the Osborne began in 1883 and was completed in 1885.

[Central Park History](#)

The website for Central Park outlines the history and design of the park and its importance in Manhattan. Many of the apartment complexes discussed in *A Short History of the Highrise*, and that appear in the films, are located near the park.

Getting to Know *Mud*: Key Figures

Feist

The narrator of *Mud*, Feist, is a Canadian singer-songwriter, who performs both as a solo artist and as a member of the indie rock group Broken Social Scene. To learn more about Feist, visit her official site at listentofeist.com.

Jacob Riis (May 3, 1849 – May 26, 1914)

A photographer who documented the plight of inner-city living conditions. This link: xroads.virginia.edu/~ma01/davis/photography/riis/riis.html presents an overview of his contributions to recording social history through the medium of photography. Riis was an early proponent of adequate and accessible housing.

Louis XV of France (February 15, 1710 – May 10, 1774)

Known as Louis the Well Beloved (*Louis le bien aimé*), he was a monarch who ruled as King of France and Navarre from September 1, 1715, until his death. The first home elevator was built for King Louis XV, for his personal chambers in Versailles in the 18th century. The link science.howstuffworks.com/innovation/inventions/who-invented-the-elevator.htm highlights that mansions in the US in the early 1900s used these types of elevators. In the 1980s, public buildings were legally required to have elevators to accommodate people with disabilities.

Professor Miles Glendinning

One of the experts consulted in *Mud*, Miles Glendinning, is a professor of Architectural Conservation at Edinburgh College. For more information on his work, please visit ed.ac.uk/schools-departments/edinburgh-college-art/architecture-landscape-architecture/about/people?person_id=203&cw_xml=profile.php.

Additional Reading and Resource Materials for *Mud*

- [Highrise building definition](#) – a basic, building-block definition of the highrise.
- [List of cities with the most highrise buildings](#)
- [Babylon – TATE Gallery](#) – this link provides access to the TATE, which houses many images relevant to a discussion of Babylon and its artistic representations.
- [How building techniques have changed over the ages](#) – a timeline of the technologies used for building.
- [Brief History of Building Materials](#) – outlines the use of a variety of materials and how innovations affected architecture.
- [Making the Modern World – Resource for historical context](#) – a British project that highlights the evolution of urban development and contemporary concerns.
- [How Food Shapes Our Cities – TED Talk by Carolyn Steel](#)
- [Lewis Mumford's article: "What Is a City?"](#)
- [Views of cities from around the world](#) – a site that features images of global cities from multiple perspectives.
- [The Mythic Imagination](#) – a journal of creation myths and origin stories.
- [Child labour in Britain's Industrial Revolution](#) – an article that highlights how child labour in the 19th century is responsible for some of Britain's success.

PART III: A Short History of Concrete

As we see in *Mud*, the Assyrians and Babylonians used clay as the bonding substance for cement. This type of building substance required maintenance to reverse or slow down the impact of rain and erosion. The century of the highrise, from about 1800 to 1900, explored in *Concrete*, also saw additional innovations in terms of materials, which resulted in increased production. In 1756, British engineer John Smeaton made the first modern concrete (hydraulic cement) by adding pebbles as a coarse aggregate and mixing powdered brick into the cement. By 1824, English inventor Joseph Aspdin had created Portland cement, which has remained the dominant cement since then. This artificial and strongly resistant cement was formed by burning ground limestone and clay together. This process changed the chemical properties to produce stronger cement that could be used in the buildings developed to house the growing populations in urban areas. Industry was drawing more people to cities, creating the need to provide adequate housing.

Following the industrial revolution, as societies moved into larger, municipally organized and heavily populated areas, political concerns began to dictate housing and social needs provisions. The types of housing that emerged within the 20th century began to illustrate the division of class within particular societies. These ideas and concerns continue to be depicted across a variety of art forms. As *Concrete* indicates, in this century of urban development, public perception of the highrise shifted from the solution for to the primary cause of many of society's social problems. The 20th century saw a rise in concern for public housing and social equity, particularly as corporate interests took hold of previously affordable housing. Although the primary goal of public housing was to provide affordable places for people to live, the details, terminology, definitions of poverty and other criteria for allocation varied within different contexts.

The design, capacity and broad purpose of the highrise in the mid-20th century, however, were developed as a result of the convergence of technological advancement and perceived social need. Concrete became a readily available and durable building material. The resulting increase in housing was directly correlated to the population's growing needs. As we will see in *Glass*, however, this idea shifted again, from development to demolition, to make way for privately funded, commercial real-estate ventures.

Concrete: Study and Discussion Questions

- Who is responsible for providing accessible and affordable housing?
- What is the role of government in terms of affordable housing?
- What is the relationship between accessible housing and urban development?
- What is the role of technology, with regards to urban development and housing?
- Discuss the shift in perception of the highrise from a solution to social problems to a cause of them.

- What do you think is the current perception of highrises?
- What is at play in your community in the attempt to address social problems through housing? In your opinion, are current solutions working or not?
- What do you think is at stake for housing now?
- Compare socialism and capitalism. How does each system address the issue of housing?

Understanding Concrete: References and Definitions

Socialism: A theory or system of social organization in which the means of production and distribution of goods are owned and controlled collectively or by the government (as defined by the Merriam-Webster dictionary).

Capitalism: An economic and political system in which private owners control a country's trade and industry for profit.

Market Capitalism: An economy that operates by voluntary exchange in a free market and is not planned or controlled by a central authority; a capitalistic economy.

The Great Depression – According to *Encyclopedia Britannica Academic*: A worldwide economic downturn that began in 1929 and lasted until about 1939. It was the longest and most severe depression ever experienced by the industrialized Western world, sparking fundamental changes in economic institutions, macroeconomic policy, and economic theory. Although it originated in the US, the Great Depression caused drastic declines in output, severe unemployment, and acute deflation globally. Its social and cultural effects were no less staggering, especially in the US, where the Great Depression represented the harshest adversity faced by Americans since the Civil War.

Public Housing – A form of housing tenure in which the property is owned by a government authority, which may be central or local. Social housing is an umbrella term referring to rental housing, which may be owned and managed by the state, by non-profit organizations, or by a combination of the two, usually with the aim of providing affordable housing. According to this [Wikipedia entry](#) this type of housing can also be seen as a potential remedy to housing inequality. In application, however, numerous issues are clear in terms of accessibility, quality control, maintenance and sustainability. The solution becomes the problem toward the end of the 20th century as *Concrete* suggests, and the problems are international in scope.

The New Deal – The New Deal was a series of domestic economic programs enacted in the United States between 1933 and 1936 in response to the Great Depression, and focused on what historians call the "3 Rs": Relief, Recovery, and Reform.

The Berlin Wall

The wall was a barrier constructed by the German Democratic Republic (GDR, East Germany) starting on August 13, 1961, that completely cut off (by land) West Berlin from surrounding East Germany. It was demolished in 1989. As a structure of division, the wall was considered a powerful symbol of communism. With its fall, the Berlin Wall also became a powerful symbol of communism's weaknesses.

A Short History of the Highrise

• A Six-Part Educator's Guide •

[The Dakota](#)

The Dakota was constructed between October 25, 1880, and October 27, 1884. The building is known as the home of former Beatle John Lennon (from 1973 to 1980) and the site of his murder. The Dakota is considered to be one of Manhattan's most prestigious and exclusive cooperative residential buildings, with apartments generally selling for between \$4 million and \$30 million, as of 2013.

[Pruitt-Igoe Housing Project](#)

Pruitt-Igoe was a large urban housing project first occupied in 1955 in St. Louis, Missouri. Living conditions in Pruitt-Igoe began to decline soon after the project's completion in 1956. Ten years later, the complex had become a site known for poverty, crime, and segregation. Its 33 buildings were torn down in the mid-1970s, and the project has become an icon of urban design and housing failure. The complex was designed by architect Minoru Yamasaki, who also designed the World Trade Center towers and the Lambert-St. Louis International Airport main terminal.

[Ronan Point](#)

Ronan Point was a 22-storey tower block in Newham, East London, which partly collapsed on May 16, 1968, when a gas explosion demolished a load-bearing wall, bringing down one entire corner of the building. Four people were killed and 17 injured. The building was named after Harry Louis Ronan (a former Chairman of the Housing Committee of the London Borough of Newham), and was part of the wave of tower blocks built in the 1960s as cheap, affordable prefabricated housing for inhabitants of the West Ham region of London. The site represents the eventual decline of the highrise as a solution for housing issues. Click on this link to [ambient music](#), which uses the problems of Ronan Point as a source inspiration.

[The Condominium Developments in Hong Kong](#)

Completed in 1965, Mei Foo Sun Chuen is the earliest and largest private housing estate to be built in Hong Kong.

[Getting to Know Concrete: Key Figures](#)

[Le Corbusier](#) (October 6, 1887 – August 27, 1965)

According to this [Wikipedia link](#): “Charles-Édouard Jeanneret-Gris, better known as Le Corbusier, was an architect, designer, painter, urban planner, writer and one of the pioneers of what is now called modern architecture. He was born in Switzerland and became a French citizen in 1930. His career spanned five decades, with his buildings constructed throughout Europe, India, and America. He was a pioneer in studies of modern high design and was dedicated to providing better living conditions for the residents of crowded cities.” A resource with a list of buildings created by this influential and key architect is [greatbuildings.com/architects/le_corbusier.html](#).

[Robert Moses](#) (December 18, 1888 – July 29, 1981)

Moses's obituary in the *New York Times* highlights his life achievements and contributions to urban development. See below for a list of NYC websites that outline his contributions to the development of NYC. [The American Experience – The World That Moses Built](#) is part I of a documentary that examines the legacy of Robert Moses and his work. Columbia University's “[Robert Moses and the Modern City](#)” also explores consequences of urban development. The [Wikipedia link](#) on Moses states that he was the “master builder of mid-20th-century New York City, Long Island, Rockland County and Westchester County, New York. His decisions favouring highways over public transit helped create the modern suburbs.” The role of highways has subsequently become a much-debated topic in the framework of urban development as well.

[Nikita Khrushchev](#)

The BBC link [bbc.co.uk/history/historic_figures/khrushchev_nikita_shtml](#) describes Khrushchev (April 15, 1894 – September 11, 1971) and his historical role. [The Wikipedia entry](#) for Khrushchev summarizes that he led the Soviet Union during part of the Cold War, and that he served as First Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union from 1953 to 1964, and as Chairman of the Council of Ministers, or Premier, from 1958 to 1964. It also outlines that Khrushchev was responsible for the partial de-Stalinization of the Soviet Union, for backing the progress of the early Soviet space program and for several relatively liberal reforms in areas of domestic policy, many of which were seen as ineffective.

[Fiorello Henry La Guardia](#) (December 11, 1882 – September 20, 1947)

La Guardia was the 99th Mayor of New York for three terms, from 1934 to 1945, as a Republican. Previously he had been elected to Congress in 1916 and 1918, and again from 1922 through 1930. He supported President Franklin D. Roosevelt, a Democrat, and in turn Roosevelt heavily funded the city and cut off patronage to La Guardia's foes. La Guardia revitalized New York City. See also [La Guardia Airport, named after the NYC mayor](#).

Additional Reading and Resource Material for *Concrete*

- [Early 20th-century America](#) – a link to the *History Learning Site* segment which outlines U.S. literary, economic and social culture in the 20th century.
- [History of New York City's Parkway System](#) – A New York City website that highlights the history of the parkway system in historical context.
- Biles, R. "Public Housing and the Postwar Urban Renaissance 1949–1973." From *Tenements to the Taylor Homes*. Eds. J.F. Bauman, R. Biles and K.M. Szylian. University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000. 143–162. Print.
- Carol Berkin et al. *Making America, Volume 2: A History of the United States: Since 1865*. Cengage Learning, 2011. 629–32.
- Monhollon, Rusty L. *Baby Boom: People And Perspectives*. Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2010. *eBook Academic Collection (EBSCOhost)*. Web.
- Ortega-Alcazar, Iliana. "[Mexico City: Housing and Neighbourhoods](#)." LSE Cities. Feb. 2006. Web.
- Wallace, Aurora. *Media Capital: Architecture And Communications In New York City*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2012. *eBook Academic Collection (EBSCOhost)*. Web.
- A [collection of nine Ted Talks](#) specifically dedicated to urban issues, ranging from access to affordable housing and international economic trends to sustainability and employment.
- [Stewart Brand: What Squatter Cities Can Teach Us](#) – TED Talks series that outlines the current shift to urban living worldwide. This is one of the featured TED talks.
- Stoloff, J.A. "[A Brief History of Public Housing](#)." US Department of Housing and Urban Development. reengageinc.org/research/brief_history_public_housing.pdf.

Part IV: A Short History of Glass

The continued development of the highrise structure in the late 20th century reflected ever-growing urban populations worldwide. As seen in Part I (*Mud*) and Part II (*Concrete*), the building of these structures was facilitated with the emergence of the elevator and a number of other inventions. In the late 20th and early 21st centuries, the combination of both residential and commercial spaces within these buildings also became common, resulting in increased market value of the properties. Part IV (*Glass*) outlines some of the concerns that developed in the late 20th century, with regard to adequate public housing in an increasingly commercializing real estate venture period. *Glass* highlights that while vertical development may seem to respond to the social need for housing, not all types of public housing are equal. By the middle of the 20th century, buildings using sheaths of glass and foundations of steel were commonplace in most cities of the world. In fact, the latter half of the 20th century saw highrise developments whose principal concerns were commercial. This is distinct from earlier incarnations of the highrise, as most buildings of this type were previously earmarked for residential use. The commercial purpose shifted the utility of these buildings and, as we see in *Glass*, the issues surrounding access to affordable housing increased at an alarming rate. The interdependent contexts of globalization and sustainability also had an impact on this type of architectural development.

Highrise buildings in the mid-to late 20th century required the implementation of safety measures, such as provisions for power failure and fire protection. These concerns created the conditions for an industry of insurance, one that paralleled the rise of real estate and investment speculation, increasing the value of these structures and simultaneously decreasing their affordability for anyone but the wealthy. Moreover, in terms of actual building materials and technological innovation, highrise structures needed to be strong enough to sustain environmental challenges, such as high winds, hurricanes, earthquakes and other uncontrollable weather patterns. These increasingly costly factors, along with the rise of globalization and insurance industries, resulted in further separation of social classes, particularly in terms of housing and economic power. As illustrated toward the end of *Concrete*, the highrise was in large part blamed for the social issues that emerged from the “warehousing” of individuals alongside retail outlets.

While the industrial revolution of the 19th century created a need for more housing, as citizens moved to the cities for work and other economic opportunities, the result was new development of a societal sector forming at the end of the 20th century. Populations increasingly sought to escape the demands of city living, creating urban sprawl, which became known as suburbia. The types of multi-story structures built as a result of urban renewal policies reflected the contrast between those who could afford luxury highrise apartments and those who could barely afford to remain in the city. *Glass* also explores how the squat and housing projects co-existed with the continued development of sky-scraping condominiums in the West. The chapter notes that the trend of developing more skyscrapers in the form of privately owned highrise housing continued unabated in the East. As we learn in *Glass*, the 20th century's urban planning field would take on the task of coordinating the sustainability and implications of privately owned condominiums with varied results. As we see in *Concrete*, public housing shifts from issues of accessibility and equality to the commercially driven concerns of real-estate speculation, market investment and economics. The move away from the core of the cities to avoid urban crime, pollution and congestion helped create the suburbs and the strip malls we see today, along with what has become known as the commute. Increasing awareness of the environmental impact of traffic and congestion is central to the larger issue of urban sustainability.

Glass: Study and Discussion Questions

- Why do you think urban real estate is so valuable? What is the human cost?
- Discuss the contrasts between luxury condos and micro apartments in the city.
- Evaluate how successful vertical living is for the general population.
- What are a city and/or government's roles in terms of providing for their citizens?
- What kinds of local initiatives are there in your neighbourhood to raise awareness about the environment?
- Discuss how urban living can be sustainable. What is necessary?
- What kinds of buildings are there in your city?
- What do you think is next for the highrise? What is the future of cities?

Understanding Glass: References and Definitions

Globalization

The site globalpolicy.org/globalization.html discusses the idea that “unprecedented changes in communications, transportation, and computer technology” have made “the world more interdependent than ever.”

Mega City

See newrepublic.com/article/books-and-arts/magazine/103329/highrise-skyscraper-woha-gehry-pritzker-architecture-megalopolis?page=0.1, an article that helps contextualize the century of urban highrise development and increased population densities worldwide.

Urban Slum

The article at geography.about.com/od/urbaneconomicgeography/a/Urban-Slums.htm outlines some of the characteristics of hyper-dense living conditions and the housing requirements of developing nations.

Urban Sprawl

The site ei.lehigh.edu/envirosci/enviroissue/sprawl/whatissprawl.html outlines the definition and potential solutions for widely spread urban populations, noting the heavy impact this trend has on the environment.

Urban Renewal

The Free Dictionary defines this term as: “rehabilitation of impoverished urban neighborhoods by large-scale renovation or reconstruction of housing and public works.” Interpretations of the term vary, depending on the context and purpose of its application.

Speculation

A practice of investment that has immense social consequences, as witnessed in the early 21st-century economic downturn in the US and Europe. The ripple effect of failed investment practices has been bailouts, bankruptcy, economic bubbles, volatility—and even sustainable food practices and limits on foreign investment policy.

Sustainability

A Merriam-Webster dictionary definition: Able to be used without being completely used up or destroyed; involving methods that do not completely use up or destroy natural resources; able to last or continue for a long time.

Torres de David (Tower of David) in Caracas, Venezuela

This 45-storey skyscraper has become a symbol for inadequate housing in Venezuela. It is the highest such building used as a squat in the world.

1520 Sedgwick Avenue – the birthplace of hip hop

The Web page cincystreetdesign.com/1520_Sedgwick outlines the cultural significance of this Bronx apartment building complex and illustrates the cultural outgrowth of the highrise context.

Additional Reading and Resource Materials for Glass

- [City Mayors Foundation](#) – about a foundation established to promote the sustainability of cities across the world.
- [Maps of World Cities Resource](#) – links to global cities and maps with stats and info.
- [Toronto Highrise Development](#) – *CBC News* story on the problems with some of the city’s most recently built condominium towers.
- [Urban Farmers Go Vertical](#) – *Huffington Post* video on sustainability efforts in the city. The space for food growing is also becoming limited and going vertical is being explored.
- [UN Habitat Link](#) – information on global efforts to obtain equitable and accessible housing. This site offers invaluable resources for the environment, future directions and historical context of urban development issues.
- Campion, Vikki. “[Vertical Living is the Answer to the World’s Population Growth](#).” *The Daily Telegraph*. May 2012. Web.
- Conversi, Daniele. “[The Limits of Cultural Globalisation?](#)” *Journal of Critical Globalisation Studies*. Issue 3 (2010). Web.
- Foroohar, Rana. “[The Economy’s New Rules: Go Glocal](#).” *Time Magazine Online*. 20 Aug. 2012. Web.
- Torres, Raymond (Ed.) “[Global Employment Trends 2013](#).” Geneva; International Labour Organization: International Institute for Labour Studies. 2013. Web.
- Zaw, HayMann. “[Globalization and Unemployment](#).” The Council on Foreign Affairs.

Part V: A Short History of Home

As we see in Part I (*Mud*), Part II (*Concrete*) and Part III (*Glass*), a common element that links the history of the highrise is the idea that these structures provide homes for millions of people across the world. *Home* explores these ideas through interactive media. The experience of the highrise as home is formative, powerful, and visually arresting. The highrise is a place where families, friends and other individuals gather. In fact, the notion of home holds an important symbolic place as well, particularly in the context of growing divisions between the wealthiest and the poorest members of a society. Increasingly, we are seeing disenfranchised individuals and groups, and homelessness is becoming a significant urban reality. The concept of home not only denotes a physical place for some; it also suggests belonging and community. Underlying these elements is the larger concern of global sustainability.

Home: Study and Discussion Questions

- Why do you think *Home* was constructed without dialogue, and with only one audio track?
- If you were going to make a video montage of your home, what images would you include?
- Define what home means to you. List some things that are essential for you to feel at home. What is important to you about these things?
- Who are the people associated with your home?
- Discuss a moment or period of time when you came to understand the significance of home.
- What are some of your concerns about your future homes?
- What do you imagine your home will be like 20, 30 or 40 years from now?
- How do you think your grandparents feel about home? What does it mean for them? How about your parents?
- Describe your neighborhood. What is your sense of place? Where do you think it comes from?
- Discuss the opposite of home. What are the implications here? What does it mean to be homeless? What is the solution?

Additional Reading and Resource Materials for Home

- [5 Days for the Homeless](#) – an initiative designed to support youth at risk. Includes social networking and lists of participating schools. Encourages participation. Canadian.
- [Canadian Perspectives on Homelessness](#) – a CBC story presenting a study on the dire statistics on the increasing numbers of homeless people.
- [Senses of Place: Urban Narratives as Public Secrets](#) – a short article that explores the experience of place in urban studies.
- Barak, Gregg. *Gimme Shelter: A Social History of Homelessness in Contemporary America*. New York: Praeger, 1991. Print.
- O'Reilly-Fleming. *Down and Out in Canada: Homeless Canadians*. Toronto: Canadian Scholar's Press, 1993.
- Seiden, Henry M. "On the Longing for Home." *Psychoanalytic Psychology* 26.2 (2009): 191-205. *PsycARTICLES*. Web. 22 Oct. 2013. Print.

Creating Home: Possible Student Activities

- Research housing issues in your area.
- Write a letter to a city councillor to address a housing need in your area.
- Visit your city's central office, City Hall. How does it work?
- Find out how your community is managed. Who is in charge of what? What are some of the most important issues in your city or town? What are locals doing to help?
- Research public-housing initiatives in your neighbourhood, city, province, or even nation.

Part VI: The Multi-Media Highrise: Media-Literacy Applications

While watching a film or interactive project with your students, it is important to examine not only its content but also how it is constructed. The following provides a brief background on media literacy:

Media literacy is concerned with the process of understanding and using the mass media. It is also concerned with helping students develop an informed and critical understanding of the nature of the mass media, the techniques used by them, and the impact of these techniques. More specifically, it is education that aims to increase students' understanding and enjoyment of how the media work, how they produce meaning, how they are organized and how they construct reality... Media literacy is a life skill.

— Ontario Association for Media Literacy, Ontario Media Literacy Resource Guide

As per the Ontario Association for Media Literacy, media-literacy education in Canada incorporates the following key concepts:

- 1 All media are constructions. The media present carefully crafted constructions that reflect many decisions and are the result of many determining factors.
- 2 The media construct versions of reality. Much of our view of reality is based on media messages that have been pre-constructed and have attitudes, interpretations and conclusions already built in.
- 3 Audiences negotiate meaning in media. Each of us finds or negotiates meaning according to individual factors.
- 4 Media messages have commercial implications. Much media production is a business, and so must be profitable. Questions of ownership and control are central.
- 5 Media artifacts contain ideological and value messages. All media products are advertising in some sense, proclaiming values and ways of life.
- 6 Media messages contain social and political implications. The media have great influence in politics and in forming social change.
- 7 Form and content are closely related in media messages. Each medium has its own grammar and codifies reality in its own particular way.
- 8 Each medium has a unique aesthetic form.¹

¹ See aml.ca.

Things to Consider

Building knowledge and experience in the field of interactive media requires an unstructured and exploratory style of discovery—an interactive journey. The following links are meant to be a resource that can get the learning journey started, but students and teachers are encouraged to use the Internet to discover these concepts on their own terms. You can get started by using some of the links below or by simply entering the relevant terms into a Google search. This article describes how to use Google search effectively: lifthack.org/articles/technology/how-google-like-boss-become-master-google-search-with-these-little-known-tips-2.html.

Prior Learning for Activities 1 and 2

The following activities are suitable for students aged 13+, but can be adapted for younger groups. Students and teachers will need some introduction to the concepts listed below.

For more information on useful terms and concepts:

Digital Storytelling

en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Digital_storytelling_storycenter.org
digitalstorytelling.coe.uh.edu/page.cfm?id=27&cid=27

Web 2.0

en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Web_2.0

Web 2.0 Applications

livebinders.com/play/play/131923

In the Classroom

web2012.discoveryeducation.com/web20tools.cfm
youtube.com/watch?v=NLIgopyXT_g&feature=channel

Democratic Media

en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Democratic_media_independentmedia.ca
pbs.org/idealab/2009/12/democratizing-the-geography-of-information339

Participatory Media

en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Participatory_media
theagenda.tv.org/blog/agenda-blogs/pull-henry-jenkins-participatory-media
newlearningonline.com/literacies/chapter-2-literacies-purposes/jenkins-on-participatory-media-culture-and-youth/

Information Age

en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Information_age
fluency21.com/fluencies.html
youtube.com/watch?v=4CV05HyAbM

Teachers can conduct mini-lessons on each concept, beginning with the suggested links above, or students can do their own independent research for the discussion.

A Short History of the Highrise

• A Six-Part Educator's Guide •

Discussion Questions About Interactive Documentaries

Use the resources above to review the discussion questions below and prepare for viewing. The teacher can facilitate discussion questions with the entire class or in small, student-led groups. If using small discussion groups, ask a student from each group to share and present their conclusions and discussion points with the larger group.

- What is digital storytelling?
- What is the difference between a traditional documentary and an interactive documentary? Think about concepts like audience, author and content.
- How is interactive documentary a product of Web 2.0? (Read-only stories versus read-write stories.)
- Who is the storyteller in an interactive documentary? Why does it matter?
- Describe how interactive documentary is an example of participatory media and an icon of the Information Age.

Experiencing Interactive Docs: Viewing and Discussion

As an introduction to interactive media, choose two or three interactive works from the NFB website nfb.ca/interactive to view with your students.

Suggested works:

Out My Window: interactive.nfb.ca/#/outmywindow

My Tribe Is My Life: mytribe.nfb.ca/#/mytribe

Ask students to define and explain what an interactive documentary is based on what they experience. They can use a comparison chart or a Venn diagram to identify the similarities and differences between a linear documentary and an interactive documentary.

louisianoices.org/unit8/edu_unit8_venn_diagrams.html

Introduction of A Short History of the Highrise

To visit highrises in almost every country on the planet, explore the [NFB WORLD OF HIGHRISES](#) database.

Introduce students to the background information on the making of *A Short History of the Highrise* found in this director's statement: highrise.nfb.ca/blog.

Viewing and Discussion

View each of the films—*Mud*, *Concrete*, *Glass*, and *Home*.

- Discuss the story of the highrise;
- Invite students to share their personal experience and knowledge as related to information in the films;
- Examine how the photos tell the story;
- Identify the various narrative techniques;
- Discuss what roles narration plays in telling this story;
- Explore the idea that photographs influence history and how we interpret a time and a place.

View the interactive material for *A Short History of the Highrise*.

In *A Short History of the Highrise*, the photos are animated, and the films have a musical soundtrack.

- How does this affect the story?
- How would it be different if you were watching a simple slideshow of the photos?
- Identify the HOTSPOTS along the narrative. Why are they there?

Activity 1: Part A

THE STORY IN THE FRAME: Using Archival Photography

Description of Activity: Students find an archival photograph and analyze the items in the photo as elements of a story.

Students create the story of their chosen photo. Stories can be told in a variety of formats: written story; a cut-and-paste story map with text and additional photos; a digital slideshow, etc.

Materials Required

One archival photograph; the photo should contain information on elements of a story (who, what, where, when and why). Students can search online for historic photos or they can ask their family for old photos.

If students are searching for photographs online, introduce them to **Creative Commons** (creativecommons.org), a resource for legally obtaining creative materials.

This article describes how to search for material that has a Creative Commons licence: freetech4teachers.com/2011/06/9-places-to-find-creative-commons.html#.UINQdbyE5rg.

Other materials needed for presenting a photo story:

Poster board, markers, rulers, scissors, sticky-paper notes, coloured card stock paper, etc.

Computer, digital camera, colour printer, projector

Preparing the Activity

1 To demonstrate the activity, choose a photograph from one of the videos in the *Short History of the Highrise* series and display it to the class. This sample will help demonstrate that sometimes it is not just the subject of the photo that tells the story, but also the items or the scenery in the background of the photo, the frame of the shot and the context. For example, when you look at photos from your childhood, you may enjoy seeing the people, but also the toys in the background, the food on the table, the type of juice bottles on the counter, the wallpaper in the kitchen, etc. They all evoke memories and tell stories (and often, these memories and stories depend on the viewer's personal experience with the subject of the photo).

2 Analyze the photograph with students.

- What is the subject?
- How do we know this is an old photo?
- What do the items in the background tell us?
- How does the frame of the photo inform what we know?
- What do we think is outside the frame?
- How did the photo come to be? Was it staged? Was it candid?
- What do you think was its historical purpose?

Ask students to find two or three archival photos. They can search online or bring photos in from home. Instruct them to choose photos that contain enough information to answer the 5 Ws of a story: who, what, where, when and why.

In class, with the teacher's guidance, students will select one photo for the activity. Print the photo (scan and print originals) and make two or three colour copies. Five by seven inches is a good working size. This photo should be used in the story development. Ask students to glue it to a larger sheet of paper so they can make notes with leader text pointing to different aspects of it. This piece can be assessed as the rough copy. If students are using digital files, they can display their photograph on a tablet rather than printing it out.

Instruct students to write a short factual description of their photo. The description needs to include the source of the photo, the subject, the location where it was taken, what kind of shot it is (extreme close-up; close-up; medium shot; long shot; extreme long shot) and the context. This information may need to be researched if using archive photos from the Internet.

Students will construct a story that goes with their photo. It can be a text-based creative writing piece or a visual essay, using additional photos, organized in a digital slideshow. Students can use other methods of storytelling with which they are familiar.

Guiding Questions for the Story

- What are the items in the background of the subject? What do they tell us about the subject or the time and place?
- Why was the photo taken? Who is the photo for?
- When was the photo taken: day/night, year/era?
- Who took the photo?
- Who does the photo represent?
- Who is not in the photo, but is a part of the story?
- What title would you give the photo and why?
- Where was the photo taken?
- What is the setting of the photo? How has the setting changed?
- What do you think the people in the photo (if any) are doing now?

Something to Consider

Photos are a snapshot of a time and a place—a moment. They are constructed by the person staging or shooting the photograph. Even in the case of a candid photo or a “selfie,” the photo is constructed by the decisions the photographer makes. Photographers choose the angles of the shot, lighting and framing. Photos are often considered factual documents, but using the five core concepts of media literacy we learn to see them as representations or icons. Icons represent something larger. Ask your students to ask themselves: What is that larger thing (meaning) that their photograph represents?

Activity 1: Part B – Bringing Our Photos to Life

Description of Activity: Students will swap their photos from Activity 1 with a partner before sharing their constructed story. Each student will trade the factual description of their photo and their photo with a partner. After examining the photos, partners will present to each other their interpretation of the story behind the photo.

After the partners share, the teacher will facilitate a larger class discussion and debrief. The exchange and the class debrief will result in a larger student understanding of the often unconscious storytelling behind visual photographs.

Suggested Questions for Discussion:

- How was your partner's story different from yours?
- Did your partner see anything in the photo that you did not?
- What informs your partner's version of the story?

Think about what your partner brings to the interpretation of the photo, such as experiences and knowledge. An architect, for example, will interpret archival photos of highrise buildings differently than someone who lives in highrise buildings.

A Short History of the Highrise

• A Six-Part Educator's Guide •

- How does the interpretation of old photographs affect history and story?
- When do photographers use stereotypes to tell a story? Think about advertisements, photojournalism and digital manipulation of photos to influence your answers.

Teachers can facilitate a class activity to explore the Internet, looking at various archival photos and advertisements from the past to demonstrate stereotypes and constructed messages. Students can also view photos in social media (Instagram, Facebook, etc.) as constructions.

As an introductory or a concluding activity, explore the *NYT Op-Docs* gallery page, **The Stories in Your Life**: nytimes.com/projects/2013/highrise/your-stories.

The photographs in this gallery were submitted to the *New York Times* by people who live in and among highrise buildings around the world. Some of their contributions were then featured in the **Home** section of **A Short History of the Highrise**. The photographs are arranged by region and theme and could provide interesting starting or exit points for discussions surrounding storytelling and photographer.

Students are also invited to contribute their own photographs to this gallery.

The class can also explore contemporary social media photos in the context of the future.

- What will students in 50 years think of these photos?
- What conclusions can they draw about youth culture based on photos in social media?

Activity 2

Interactive Media in the Rabbit Hole

Description of Activity: Under the theme **Down the Rabbit Hole**, students will explore the definition and use of interactive media in contemporary culture and give an interactive presentation on the meaning of the term. If educators wish to explore this activity further, questions for facilitating a discussion are suggested below.

Materials Required

Projector, computer, white wall or screen, Internet connection

Preparing the Activity

1 Review the following definition of interactive media:

Interactive media normally refers to products and services on digital, computer-based systems that respond to the user's actions by presenting content such as text, graphics, animation, video, audio, games, etc.

en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Interactive_media

2 Using the Internet and a Web browser projected for the class, review the concepts of interactive media, as described in Wikipedia:

Interactive media is related to the concepts [interaction design](#), [new media](#), [interactivity](#), [human computer interaction](#), [cyberculture](#) and [digital culture](#), and includes specific cases, such as, interactive television, interactive narrative, [interactive advertising](#), [algorithmic art](#), [video games](#), [social media](#), ambient intelligence, [virtual reality](#) and [augmented reality](#).

Adapted from en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Interactive_media.

Explore different examples of interactive media with the students and discuss why they are considered interactive as opposed to linear works. Some examples to explore:

Interactive Advertisement: vimeo.com/46662753

Augmented Reality: youtu.be/st3jzTAaY9w

Interactive Design: psfk.com/2012/03/best-interaction-design.html

New Media Technology: slideshare.net/danilian/new-media-technology-examples

Cyberculture: Blogs, discussion forums, social networking, chats, peer-to-peer file sharing, video games, etc.

3 Following your demonstration of learning “through the rabbit hole,” invite students to describe their own experiences of interactive media. Educators can project their computer screen and search for their students’ examples online, as they describe them. While the educator facilitates a Web exploration, a group Web-based surf can be conducted. Students will develop their collective intelligence as they share and discover together. Limit this activity to 15 minutes and make sure your Google Safe Search is turned on.

Activity Breakdown

- Students will select one example of an interactive media concept from the Wikipedia description (video games, digital culture, etc.) and explore it in an Internet search. This research can be demonstrated in point form notes and/or a chart, which can be used as a reference later on while the student is facilitating a live “Rabbit Hole” discussion. It is important to have the student prepare for the discussion by rehearsing the search path, so that they can see where the interactive aspects of a website will take them.
- Students will prepare a constellation of points that should be covered in a lesson on their concept.
- Individual students will take the class **Down the Rabbit Hole** in a freestyle Internet search of their concept, using a projector and a Web browser. They must maintain a focus on their concept as interactive, and they must ensure that each of the points in their constellation is covered, to avoid straying too far from the main idea (although some straying is a part of this activity). Teachers can choose a few students or ask for volunteers to facilitate this part of the activity, rather than having every student in the class do it. Please make sure the Google Safe Search is on before students begin.

Suggested Questions for Further Reflection

- How is the Internet better suited to learning than a textbook? How is it worse?
- Why do you think traditional institutions, such as schools, restrict or censor Internet use and the integration of technology in school for the purpose of learning?
- How are traditional forms of learning outdated in 2013 (reading textbooks; lecture-based lessons, etc.)? How are they valuable?
- What are some unplugged examples of interactive media? (Pop-up books, Choose Your Own Adventure books, flip books.)

When discussing interactive media, it is important for students to understand they are primarily and continually interacting with the medium's user interface. As with photographs, films and video games, this interface has been methodically planned and designed by a digital designer for narrative outcomes to unfold.

Wikipedia defines the user interface in this way:

The user interface, in the [industrial design](#) field of human-machine interaction, is the space where interaction between humans and machines occurs. en.wikipedia.org/wiki/User_interface

Have students discuss the concept of the user interface, using these suggested discussion questions:

- How does a user interact with a machine?
- Can you list some examples of user interfaces offline and online? (Examples include: driver with car, user with website, banker with a bank machine.)
- What are some elements of design in building a user interface? (Examples include: sound, colour, graphics, animation, hotspots, voiceovers, games, text, overall layout, tabs.)
- What makes for a good interface?
- How do you know when you like a website?
- Do you take note of the design elements of a user interface? Why or why not?
- What happens when Web designers change the interface of a website you use frequently?

Related NFB Films and Interactive Productions

Clicking on the links below will bring you to the film's collection page. You can also find educator guides associated with the films, when available. Many of these films are available for viewing online with your [CAMPUS](#) subscription.

Architecture

	Title	Production Year	Running Time
1	The Museum	2008	90 min, 45 s
2	Citizen Lambert: Joan of Architecture	2007	52 min, 30 s
3	Infiltrator	2005	6 min, 44 s
4	Tower Bawher	2005	3 min, 46 s
5	Aboriginal Architecture: Living Architecture	2005	92 min, 47 s
6	Arthur Erickson	1981	28 min, 40 s
7	Log House/ Cabane de rondins	1976	27 min, 37 s
8	A Is for Architecture	1960	14 min, 23 s

Public Housing

	Title	Production Year	Running Time
1	The Downtown Project	2011	52 min, 3 s
2	Invisible City	2009	75 min, 47 s
3	9 Months, 6 Blocks	2005	28 min, 36 s
4	Flemingdon Park: The Global Village	2002	47 min, 30 s
5	Return to Regent Park	1994	55 min, 46 s

Gentrification

	Title	Production Year	Running Time
1	Citizen Lambert: Joan of Architecture	2007	52 min, 30 s
2	Our Town Faro	2004	8 min, 31 s
3	645 Wellington	2002	54 min, 9 s
4	East Side Showdown	1999	46 min, 1 s

NFB Interactive Productions

- 1 **Main Street:** mainstreet.nfb.ca/#/mainstreet
- 2 **Hyperlocal:** hyperlocal.nfb.ca/#/hyperlocal
- 3 **Territories:** territories.nfb.ca/#/territories