OUT MY WINDOW

PARTICIPATE

EDUCATOR'S GUIDE

NFB ONF

BACKGROUND

OUT MY WINDOW <outmywindow.nfb.ca> is one of the world's first interactive, 360° documentaries. It's all about urban living from the perspectives of people who look out on the world from the windows of highrise buildings—the most commonly built form of the last century. It takes us on a journey around the globe from one concrete-slab residential tower to another. With more than 90 minutes of material to explore, **OUT MY WINDOW** features 49 stories from 13 cities, told in 13 languages. On the site you will also find the sub-site **Inside Out My Window: Global Education Lab**. This section serves as an interactive classroom companion site, where students can deepen their exploration of **OUT MY WINDOW** content and the issues of global education and urbanization that it raises.

WHAT'S OUT YOUR WINDOW?

Out My Window PARTICIPATE <interactive.nfb.ca/outmywindow/ participate/php/#/outmywindow participate> is a companion piece to **OUT MY WINDOW**, in which people from around the world can share their own photographs and stories about where they live or have spent time. You can participate by submitting your photos with a short accompanying story or caption to the site. **The Out My Window PARTICIPATE** Educator's Guide provides tips on taking great pictures, hands-on and participatory learning activities, and more information on the ways students can contribute to **Out My Window PARTICIPATE**.

OUT MY WINDOW is one of many projects born out of the National Film Board of Canada's cross-media project **HIGHRISE <highrise.nfb.ca>**, which explores vertical living in suburbs around the world. **HIGHRISE** is an NFB multimedia collaborative documentary experiment running over several years, directed by Katerina Cizek and produced by Gerry Flahive. Collectively, the projects are intended to realize the **HIGHRISE** vision: to see how the documentary process can drive and influence social innovation and help to reinvent what it means to be an urban dweller in the 21st century.

HIGHRISE's early projects are receiving international acclaim: the 2011 International Digital Emmy for Non-Fiction, the 2010 Inaugural IDFA DocLab Award for Digital Storytelling, the 2011 BaKaFORUM Cross-Media Prize for Youth and Schools, and the 2011 Merit Award at the CNIE—Canadian Network for Innovation in Education.

CREDITS

PHOTOGRAPHY 101

TAKING GREAT PICTURES | PLACEMENT, POINT OF VIEW, POSITION AND PASSION

Out My Window PARTICIPATE allows your students to share images and texts that reflect their own living situations and show who they are as individuals and members of a community. To express their creative ideas effectively, it's important they understand some basics on how to communicate effectively through images and text.

Here are some tips on how to take great pictures; but remember, these are meant to be guidelines—the most important things are to have fun and let the imagination go wild!

WHERE TO BEGIN | TIPS FOR EFFECTIVE STORYTELLING THROUGH IMAGES AND TEXT

1. IDENTIFY THE SUBJECT

We often take pictures of family and friends, forgetting that there are many other interesting things in our environment to photograph—objects, animals, buildings and landscapes can also make interesting subjects.

If taking photographs of people, try to capture images of them during candid moments—when they are doing something, rather then posing for the camera. This will help to give photos a more genuine, natural appearance.

2. ESTABLISH A VISUAL "POINT OF VIEW"

The photographer's relationship to the subject is very important and something to experiment with. Instinctively, we tend to take pictures at eye level, but to create a more interesting picture, one can try taking it from above or below. Students should consider which angle (the direction in which the camera points toward the subject) best summarizes what their subject is doing.

3. COMPOSE THE SHOT

Composition is one of the most important elements in making a good picture great. Below are three basic compositions— each creates an interesting visual effect.

A) CLOSE-UP SHOT | Builds a more intimate relationship with the subject. A close-up shot highlights textures and small details.

B) MEDIUM SHOT | This is a standard shot that focuses on the entire subject. Medium shots are effective for portraying facial expressions, hand gestures and physical setting.

C) LONG SHOT (WIDE SHOT) | Long shots provide more information about the entire subject, whether it's a shot of a landscape, buildings or large objects. Long shots illustrate the relationship between the subject and their environment.

HOW TO FRAME A PHOTOGRAPH | THE RULE OF THIRDS

One well-known principle of photographic composition is the rule of thirds. Understanding this rule can help students create well-balanced and interesting photographs. The basic principle behind the rule of thirds is to imagine breaking an image down into thirds (both horizontally and vertically) so that there are nine parts as illustrated below:

Instruct participants to imagine these lines when they're taking photos, as they look through the viewfinder. The goal is to place the point of interest in one of the four "hot spots" of the frame. These spots are identified in a different colour in the diagram.

To maximize the use of the frame, encourage participants to compose the photograph so that the subject touches as many of the hot spots as possible. Remember that the subject also includes the landscape, objects or natural surroundings. It is possible to have multiple subjects in one photograph.

BRIGHTNESS OR NIGHT-NESS | LIGHTING

Traditional photography involves selecting the correct amount of light. Even with digital photography, light is very important.

TIPS FOR INDOOR LIGHTING

• When possible use a natural light source, such as a window, doorway or skylight.
• Avoid fluorescent light. When taking pictures with fluorescent lighting, it's important to adjust the white balance on the camera. There is more information about white balance (automatic, manual ISO adjustment, manual f-stop adjustment, etc.) on the Internet and in a camera's manual.
• With access to a dimmer, it's possible to use light to communicate a specific mood. Coloured light bulbs also create mood.
• Indoors and away from sunlight, a flash might be required.
• Photos should not be taken, if possible, in poorly lit locations. Subjects can be moved to another location or a light source brought to their original location.

TIPS FOR OUTDOOR LIGHTING

• Flash photography should be avoided in outdoor settings.
• Outside, the photographer's back should be to the sun and the flash should be turned off.
• Outdoors on a sunny day, the direction of the sun and shadows need to be considered.
• Sunset and sunrise are the most interesting times of day for creating a soft romantic mood for photographs.
• Fun and spontaneous photographs can be achieved through experimentation.
• Playing with some basic effects can result in interesting and unique photographs.
• If a camera allows manual focus, it's worth spending some time learning how to use it.
• Objects and subjects should be positioned together; the photographer can experiment with having the foreground in focus and the background out of focus.
• It's interesting to play with contrast, balancing light and dark, or to try taking photographs in black and white (some digital cameras have a black and white option).

Once your students are familiar with the basics of photography, they'll be ready for the learning activities outlined in the following section.

LEARNING ACTIVITIES
LEARNING OUTCOMES

Using the **OUT MY WINDOW** website as a point of reference, the following activities have been designed to teach Media Arts using photography and mapping skills, enabling students to apply these competencies to form visual and textual narratives on the subject of "Place." These hands-on activities encourage students to analyze and reflect on their relationship to their environments–both built and natural environments, community spaces and personal space–to help define their storytelling abilities and deepen their knowledge of their urban and suburban surroundings.

The following general outcomes are relevant to both Learning Activities 1 and 2. Students will gain knowledge and practice through the following objectives:

- Identify, analyze and describe their everyday geography and community landscapes;

- Employ newly acquired Media Arts skills (photography and Internet mapping tools) to tell the stories of their urban communities and how their lives are connected, or not connected, to the places where they live and go to school;

- Build relationships through collaboration with peers and within their families to articulate the stories of their day-to-day use of space;

- Understand and analyze the language of "place" and "home," as informed by their personal experiences and the experiences of the people around them in their everyday lives;

- Create a media arts project for the purpose of communicating a personal story;

- Discover the tools of mapping and photography to conduct an inquiry of their neighbourhoods;

- Apply knowledge of written communication with a purpose to the task of image-based storytelling;

- Acquire the planning skills required to prepare and create a digital image-based, media arts project.

LEARNING ACTIVITIES | ACTIVITY 1

OUT MY OWN WINDOW—THIS IS MY AREA

Grade Level: 9 to 12
(This activity can be adapted for younger grades with adjustments to prior learning and themes identified.)

Time Frame: Five lessons over five days
(This activity can be broken down into three or four smaller activities according to time limitations and student needs.)

PRIOR LEARNING

Before beginning the activity, students will have had:

- introductory learning and practice with the **Photography 101 guidelines: "Taking Great Pictures"**;
- an introduction to the **OUT MY WINDOW** site;
- a teacher-facilitated group discussion and exploration of the site;
- the opportunity to identify themes in, such as constructed space, home, safety, threat, cultural difference and cultural similarity, as they relate to built environments;
- the chance to build a vocabulary to describe everyday images—the things around us that we see every day—as meaning-makers in our lives;
- lessons and practice in writing a five-sentence paragraph or a five-paragraph essay (most students will have learned this by grade 7).

ACTIVITY BREAKDOWN

Students will shoot photographs from their own point of view looking out of windows at home and within their neighbourhoods.

Students will create photo essays to tell the story of their own neighbourhoods and built environments.

Their photo essays will consist of between five and eight photos.

Students will choose one key photo as their "thesis statement"—their **Out My OWN Window** shot.

Please note that text must be photographed rather than added to the images using photo software. (Students can draw or write words on paper, walls, sidewalks etc. and then photograph the words to use in their essay sequence).

MATERIALS

- Digital Cameras of any kind: built-in cell phone cameras, department store point-and-shoots, cameras borrowed from neighbours, etc. You can also provide disposable cameras, if you are willing to work with this medium (having photos developed and scanning them to digital format). There should be one camera per student.
- Cords, cables and card readers for photos to be transferred onto computers
- Photo printer and paper or access to photo print shop
- Scanner
- USB memory keys (not necessary but handy)
- Art materials and creative supplies for displaying the photo essays (construction paper, colourful card stock, pre-cut photo mats, paper clip mobiles—whatever the students come up with for presenting their photo essay)
- Computer with slideshow creation software for students who choose to do a digital/audio representation of their work.

migration residents
justice winter i am home
edmonton night
slide film windows ontario
urbanism water housing hong kong
cityscapes new apartments
public space our school
demolished shanghai
street storytelling

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CLASS WORK

1. Find out which students have access to a digital camera. Ask students to select and commit to a camera that they will be able to use. If students do not have access to cameras they can borrow one from the school or the teacher can facilitate an agreement between classmates to share the cameras, if appropriate.

* Encourage students to embrace cell-phone photography. In the context of social media, students are already very familiar with capturing images of their immediate surroundings. Their experience with impulsive cell-phone photography will be helpful in this activity.

2. Explain the task to the students. Teach them how to create a photo essay.

Compare a five-sentence paragraph or a five-paragraph essay, to a five-photo essay composition.

First photo: introduction
Second, third and fourth photos: details that support the intro and connect the storyline
Fifth photo: conclusion

Show students examples of photo essays that tell a story. Remind them of the principles of photo composition and how these can be used in storytelling. (Long shots will provide lots of information about your area; close-ups will create intimacy, etc). In your examples, teach the students how to pace the story with a variety of shot compositions (Don't use too many long shots or too many close-ups). Make sure students understand how to frame the shot so it does not include too much or too little information.

3. Independent Brainstorming: Provide students with a quiet opportunity to reflect on their neighbourhoods, their windows and the views outside of their windows. Revisit the **OMW** photos and encourage students to take notes on their own ideas for the story they will tell about their own areas.

4. Students will take photos from one or more of their windows at home. If they already have a story of their neighbourhood in mind, they can go ahead and photograph it. If not, they can bring in the photos from their "windowscapes" and share their stories orally with the teacher or the class. This will help them develop ideas for additional photos and a complete storyline.

5. When students have photos taken, they can store them on a computer in an individual folder. Students will then tell a story with images connected thematically, by selecting five to eight photos that can be placed in a sequence.

ACTIVITY 1 — EXAMPLE
PHOTO ESSAY | BY MORGAN, AGE 15

For this photo shoot, students were encouraged to point the camera at everyday things they don't normally stop to consider. The teacher discussed what it means to take our spaces for granted and how to find treasure, wonder and joy by framing these spaces and considering them important to our lives, in terms of what we value and how we feel.

Morgan was inspired by **OUT MY WINDOW**'s Chicago story. She felt that the family in this story was abandoned by the city. As she took photos of things around her, a series of themes emerged: Mom, home, construction, friends. These photos are samples from the initial stages in the project, when students worked with their collection of photos to expand on one theme for their chosen photo essay, such as **Out My Own Window** or **My Area.**

0004

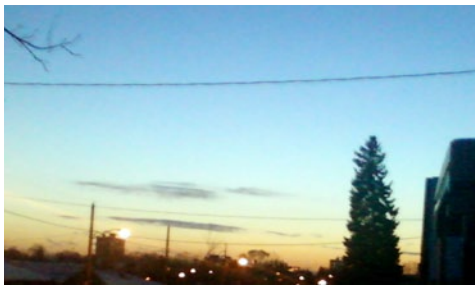Watching out my front window for my mom's van. It's dinnertime.
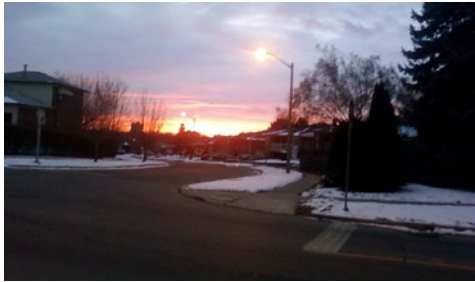
0051

Looking out my bedroom window above the garage at the empty driveway. Where is my mom?

0060

The horizon from my bedroom

006

The view from my bus stop. Every. Single. Day.

0071

This building is where all of my friends grew up in this area. The property was sold and you can see the balconies are ripped off. I used to play on those balconies. They are building a condo here. I don't know where my friends moved to.

0074

They have been doing this construction forever. It is for the new condos—they get their own road. Except this is where the bus comes. So now we have to walk way farther to get the bus. Everyone is so mad.

0075
More construction
shots

0076
More construction
shots

0079
Pathway home
from school—
I walk this every
single day.

0084
My boring safe life

0086 This is
how I know I am
home.

LEARNING ACTIVITIES | ACTIVITY 2
OUT MY WINDOW—A BIRD'S EYE VIEW: STORYTELLING CUT & PASTE

Grade Level: 9 to 12
(This activity can be adapted for younger grades with adjustments to prior learning and to the themes that students identify and analyze.)

Time Frame: Three to five lessons over five days

PRIOR LEARNING
Before beginning this activity, students will need to have had:

• an introduction to the **OUT MY WINDOW** project;
• a teacher-facilitated group discussion and exploration of the **OMW** site;
• the opportunity to identify themes in **OMW**, such as constructed space, home, safety, threat, cultural difference and cultural similarity, as they relate to built environments;
• experience using the search and view features of Google Maps.

ACTIVITY BREAKDOWN
Students will use the process of creating this hard-copy, cut-and-paste version of their own **OMW** portal to understand, re-imagine and share a story about their living environments.

Students will choose a street address or geographic location that is meaningful to them (childhood home or where they live now, extended family home that they visit often, etc.).

Students will input their special address into the Google Maps search engine and explore, using the different applications (Street view, Satellite, Terrain, etc.).

Students will select and print a **Bird's Eye View** of the area around their special address.

Students will create a visual concept map/collage of images and text that represent themes and stories they have identified in their chosen geography. **The Bird's Eye View** printout will function as the base of the collage.

MATERIALS
• Computer with Internet connection
• Projector and screen
• Large computer monitor (not necessary, but useful)
• Whiteboard markers (not necessary, but useful)
• Google Chrome
• Colour printer and extra ink cartridges
• Large roll of white or neutral mural paper
• White printer paper
• Glue, scissors, colour markers

CLASS WORK

1. Introduction
Assemble students for a class discussion around the large screen. Using the projector and computer with Internet access, open Google Chrome.

Go to this site: **thewildernessdowntown.com.**

Type in the school address when prompted to insert "address where you grew up."

The video is an HTML5 experiment by Google. It is explained in more detail here: **chromeexperiments.com/arcadefire.**

Make sure you have a speedy Internet set up, with good bandwidth, or the video will be interrupted and students may become impatient.

2. Facilitate a discussion about "place" and "representation of place" using technology and images, as inspired by the introductory activity.

3. Ask a student to perform a Google Map search of their street address on the projected screen. (In some classes this may not be appropriate; students can use any other address that is important to them if they wish to for privacy.)

Use this projected map to model for the students how to use each of the Google Maps basic viewing tools: Satellite, Earth, Street View, etc.

4. Demonstrate how to select a map view for printing. Print a hard copy of the map and demonstrate how students can create a collage of images and text using this map of their chosen location as the visual home base or the touchstone of the project.
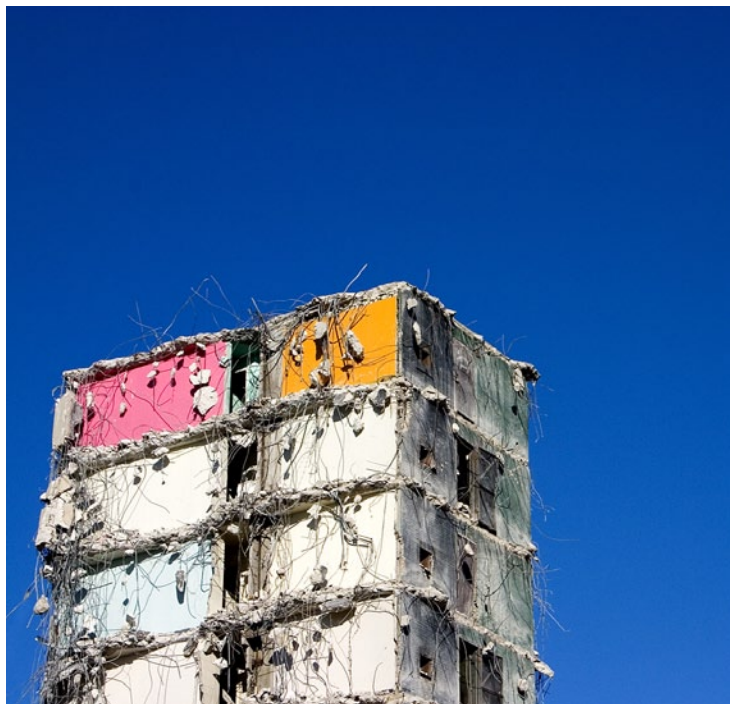
5. Refer to the **OMW** project to demonstrate to students how the images were highlighted and became icons that you can click on to access the stories connected to them.

6. Students can sit with their own **Bird's Eye View** maps and quietly reflect on areas or buildings or parking lots, etc., that represent certain themes. For example:

• Areas that make me feel safe—outlined in green
• Areas where I feel scared—outlined in red
• Places we visit routinely to get things done—blue
• Places where friends can be found—orange
• Places of play and joy—purple

7. Provide examples of maps that indicate economic or cultural land use patterns or migration patterns, or maps that visually organize the different cultural or economic representations of people in a certain area. These can be found using an Internet search engine or often within any intermediate-level Geography textbook. Show this as an example of how maps can be tools for visualizing information.

8. Invite students to identify areas in their community or city that are known as poor, dangerous, wealthy etc. Also, ask them to identify areas that are known for a concentration of specific religious or cultural representation. Students can write text on their maps to indicate such themes.

* Teachers will need to consider their relationship with students as well as the relationships between members of the classroom community, to ensure the information shared connects participants rather than separating them into categories. The purpose is to inspire students to tell stories about their areas, but teachers need to facilitate this discussion with discretion and maintain focus on the core goal of identifying stories and their connection to place.

Students can also develop their own themes and represent them in unique ways. For example, a student may use a pencil crayon to densely colour buildings in the neighbour-hood where lots of people live to show the buildings that are overcrowded in contrast to the single-family homes on the next block. The student might lightly shade the single-family homes to show that fewer people live there.

9. Instruct students to print out a second copy of a **Bird's Eye View** of their chosen area. Demonstrate how they will glue that map onto a larger mural paper. Next students will use cut-out images from a Google Image search (or from their own photographs of their area) to create a visual topic web or concept map that depicts some of the themes discussed. Their satellite image map will be used as the base or the core of the concept map.

MAP-BUILDING IDEAS

Students can print Google Image photos of public spaces (church, Hindu temple, library). Then use cut-out branches glued to the base Bird's Eye Map to indicate where these things are located. Students can write a story about each place in a conversation bubble that they draw above the cut-and-pasted image. All of these parts will be glued onto the large mural paper.

See **<en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Concept_map>** or do a Google Image search of "Concept Maps" for examples of visual storytelling on a theme.

Students can use coloured markers to outline or fill in certain images on the maps. They can also refer to their previous activity in colour-coding their themes, and they can build on that work in this final collage.

Another fun thing to do is print out several copies of the satellite map image in black and white and colour. Then magnify and cut out different parts of the map and re-assemble the map in abstract shapes and sizes and colours.

The goal is for students to use found images to create a collage that tells the community story or the Bird's Eye story of their chosen area (race, economic status, urban migration patterns, urban land use patterns). This Bird's Eye story does not have to relate to their personal story, but it can if they are comfortable to include that information.

Basically, the final product will replicate the **OUT MY WINDOW** piece, but rather than the stories being embedded within an interactive digital media environment they will be laid out as a hard-copy, linear piece. Students and teachers are encouraged to be as creative as possible in their mapping and image collections.

ADDITIONAL IDEAS

A) Students can use their photos from the **This is My Area** photo essay to be included in the cut-and-paste concept map.

B) Students can prepare their maps and image collages on the same, collective mural paper space so that everyone's story is on a visual continuum that can be posted in a long hall or on a gym wall for others to experience.

C) Students can impose and position (or geo-locate) their maps onto/around a larger map of Planet Earth or of their city.

D) If the student group is small, or if there is access to a large computer monitor, it can be fun for students to use fine-tipped whiteboard markers to draw right on the computer screen during their story-telling, while the Google Map Image is up on the screen.

RATIONALE

Asking students to identify a special place from their childhood will often inspire an open sharing of sentimental memories. This encourages healthy vulnerability, which is key for relationship-building and breaks down the usual defences that go up in a classroom environment.

Creating a hard-copy version of the **OMW** piece gives students an opportunity to apply what has inspired them in the project. They can take in the stories of the website and then relate them back to their own experiences. This teaches storytelling skills.

Students often love an opportunity to share what they know—and they most certainly know something of interest about the geographic areas in which they live. Many students also love to build things. Manipulating images and text to convey meaning in this manner is an alternative to the usual linear, written product that is expected of students for school evaluation. This is often non-threatening to students who experience anxiety over traditional academic expectations.

ACTIVITY MODIFICATION

Students can brainstorm their own themes related to their built environments (after they have seen **OMW** as the example). With the ideas they brainstorm, they can do an Internet image search to find images that will represent their chosen themes. For example, if safety is a theme, students can do a Google Image search on "safety," and then select an image. Students can use these images to tell their story, if time is limited or if students are not able to take photos in their neighbourhood at street level.

ACTIVITY 2 — EXAMPLE
A BIRD'S EYE VIEW | STORYTELLING CUT & PASTE

MAP 1— 360

3601

This is part of a **Bird's Eye** Google Map; the students printed a Screen Shoot. We focused on the school neighbourhood so everyone could participate. "CICO" is our version of the 360 from the **OMW** Interactive Site. We had a student photograph through the classroom window, pivoting 360 degrees, so she could include the classroom. Her photos were printed and pasted onto the map. Next, the students sat around the map with markers and card stock to record stories about each photo, either as text, drawings or symbols, which were then pasted onto the map in a collage.
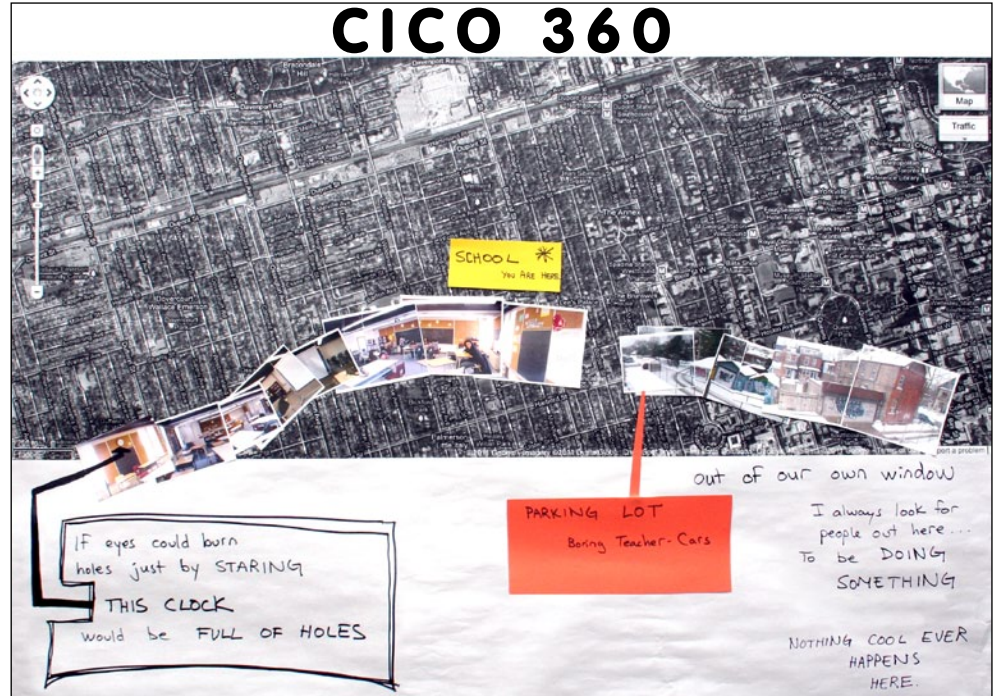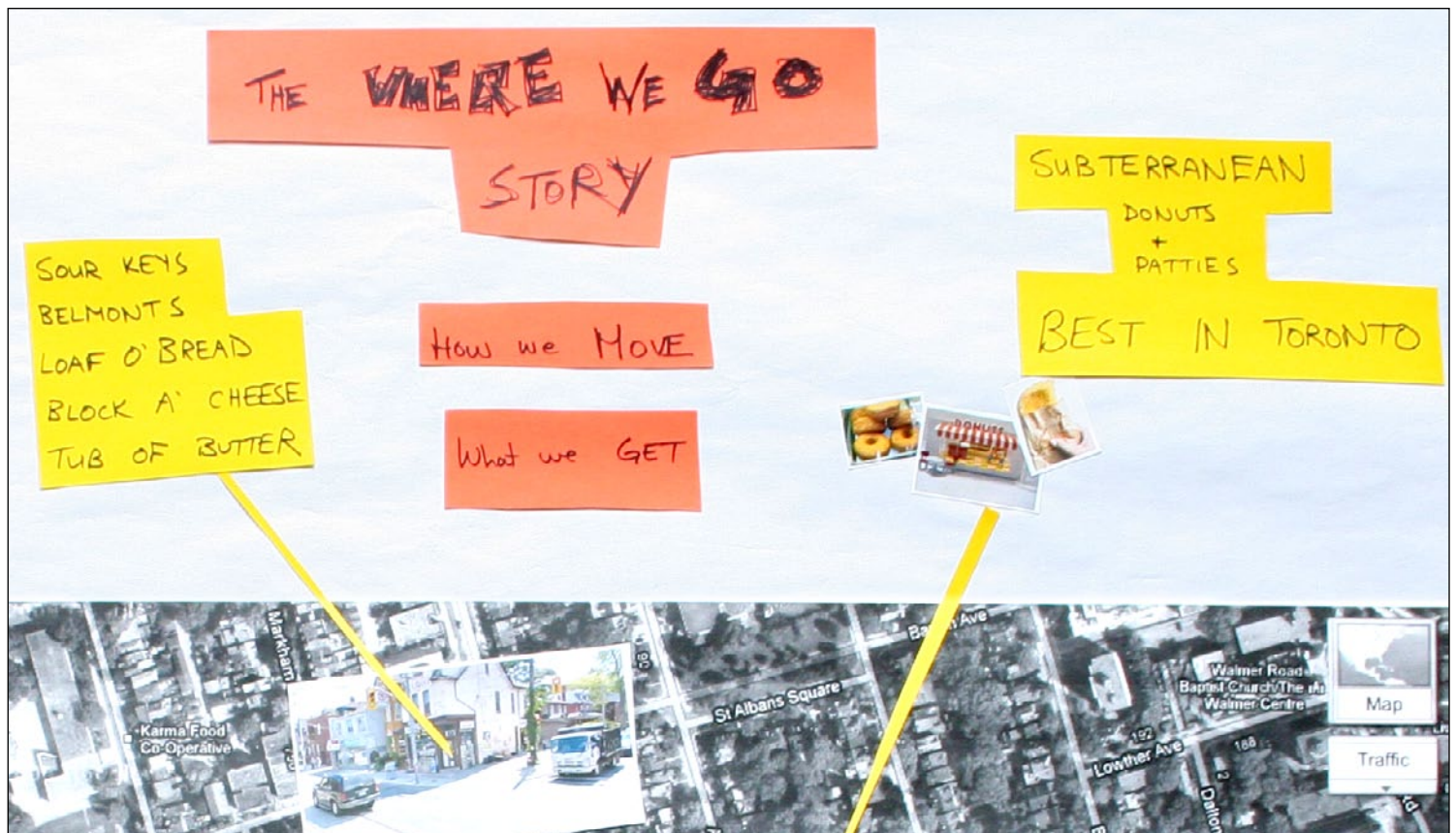

MAP 2— WHERE WE GO

The students identified that the location of our school affected what they had for lunch and whom they met. Our downtown Toronto school is surrounded by commercial and retail properties as well as other high schools.

WWG1

This is the top half of the initial stage in our storytelling process for this map. Students shared stories and used Google Images to find pictures to use as icons on the map to represent parts of the stories.

13.

This is the bottom half of the **Where We Go** map. Students discussed their "well-worn grooves" and reflected on associations they have with familiar pathways. One spoke of a song he listens to daily on his iPod as he runs up the stairs from the subway. It "charges" his run. He'd go on to depict that on the map.
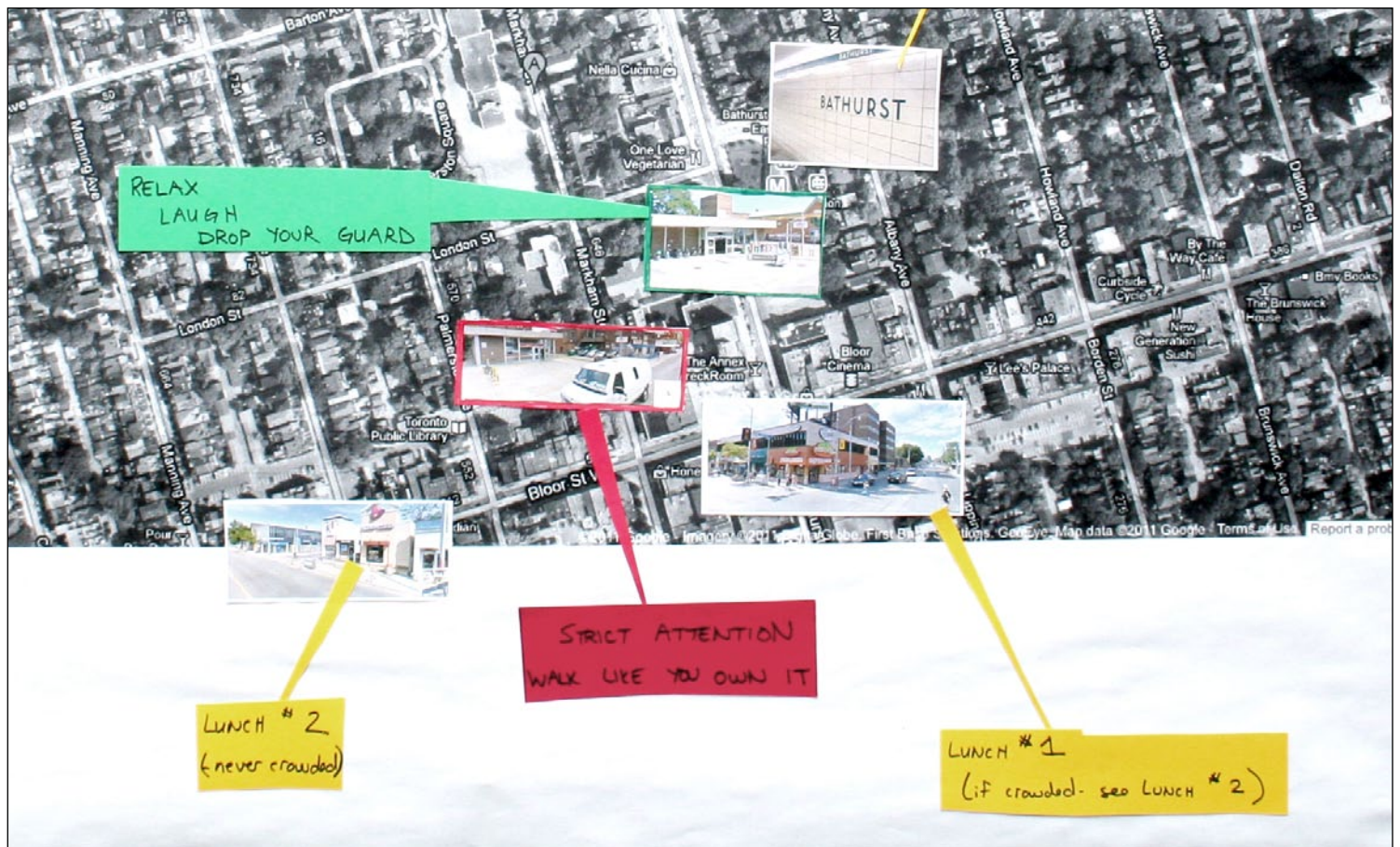
A few girls shared their preference for the busy, well-populated Bathurst Subway exit, rather than the Markham Street one. The Bathurst exit has more people and more TTC staff around. The Markham Exit is quiet and no one works the booth, so you're often alone and on guard for danger. It was interesting to hear the girls discuss how they move in the world according to safety—often unaware of their own motives.

NOW IT'S YOUR STUDENTS' TURN

Once students are comfortable with their cameras, they can visit **Out My Window PARTICIPATE** to learn how to get involved in a unique web experience. This is their chance to share their stories with others around the world.

Before students submit to **Out My Window PARTICIPATE**, here are some things to think about: The **OUT MY WINDOW** team is interested in photos that show the view out of participants' windows, preferably if they live in a high-rise building (five floors and above). If they are submitting photographs from school, they should try and take photographs of people or unique objects that are visible through the classroom window—they should be sure to refer to the previous section on rules for respectful photography. We are interested in participants' perspectives from their windows. In addition to their photographs, we would like students to write short stories to share their experiences of the views from their windows. Participants should be sure to connect their school to the story in some way and use good tag words.

TAGGED PHOTOGRAPHS

Once participants have uploaded their photographs and written their descriptions, they will be able to tag different words in their paragraphs that can help connect them with those of other users on the **Out My Window PARTICIPATE** site.

Tagging is a way of highlighting specific words that help draw attention to individual posts when other users search our story database. For example, if one of the photographs outside of a participant's school window showed students playing foot hockey in the schoolyard, the word "schoolyard" could be tagged. When other users or schools post pictures of their schoolyard, it's possible to see these other posts with the same tagged word. In this case, one could see what other schoolyards from around the globe look like.

growth refugee highrise land use urbanism activity day essay cityscapes global area storytelling my school demolition pathway block story neighbours local built environment place community night safe life

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