

# A Lesson Plan from the National Park Service for Middle and High School Levels

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National Park Service



2016 marks the 50th anniversary of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA). One of the key provisions of the Act created the National Register of Historic Places, the nation's official list of cultural resources worthy of preservation. Listings in the National Register represent the tangible legacy of our history—from archeological sites to commercial districts and from grand landmarks to modest roadside diners. These places define what it means to be an American and provide a wonderful educational resource for teachers and students.

The National Register—administered by the National Park Service, an agency within the United States Department of the Interior—is the foundation of a national preservation partnership established by the NHPA. National recognition can focus attention on a historic place that may have been taken for granted or ignored for decades and act as a catalyst for community revitalization. Preserving these places can bring new investment to old neighborhoods, promote economic development and attract tourists. Learning from them can instill pride in the community and its history.

Today more than 84,000 historic places around the country are listed in the National Register. Since many listings are neighborhoods or other “historic districts,” these listings include more than 1.4 million individual historic properties important to their communities, states, or the nation as a whole. Each week more historic places are nominated for listing. **You may be surprised to learn that people at the grassroots level (including teachers and students) can launch the process of listing a site in the National Register!**

## INTRODUCTION TO THE EDUCATOR

As students complete the activities below, they will build background knowledge through interactive experiences designed to help them examine their local history in thoughtful and engaging ways. Activities are appropriate for social studies, U.S., state, and local history classes and courses on government, civics, art/architecture, and English. Students will practice a range of skills by:

- Analyzing primary sources
- Accessing the online resources of the National Park Service
- Identifying historic places in their communities, state, or region listed in the National Register
- Investigating why these places were considered worthy of preservation
- Exploring what roles these places play in their communities today

- Considering if and how preserving these places has helped achieve the goals of the NHPA and benefited their communities

Students will have a chance to complete a final project to share what they've learned with classmates and, perhaps, with their local community.

### TIME REQUIRED

Time to complete the lesson will depend on the depth to which teachers wish to pursue each step. Steps 1, 2 and the first part of 3 can be completed in one or two class periods. Visiting and researching sites will work best as out of class assignments. Inviting a guest expert will affect the length of follow-up class discussions. Final project options also may vary in complexity.



## CORRELATION TO NATIONAL STANDARDS

### UNITED STATES HISTORY STANDARDS FOR GRADES 5-12:

**Era 9:** Postwar United States (1945–early 1970s)

**Standard 3:** Domestic policies after World War II

### NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR THE SOCIAL STUDIES (NCSS) CURRICULUM STANDARDS FOR THE MIDDLE GRADES:

#### Theme III: People, Places and Environments

**Standard G:** The student describes how people create places that reflect cultural values and ideals.

**Standard I:** The student describes ways that historical events have been influenced by, and have influenced, physical and human geographic factors.

**Standard K:** The student proposes, compares and evaluates alternative uses of land and resources.

#### Theme IV: Individual Development and Identity

**Standard B:** The student describes personal connections to places.

#### Theme VI: Power, Authority and Governance

**Standard C:** The student analyzes and explains ideas and governmental mechanisms to meet wants and needs of citizens, regulate territory, manage conflict and establish order and security.

#### Theme X: Civic Ideals and Practices

**Standard E:** The student explains and analyzes various forms of citizen action that influence public policy decisions.

## BEFORE BEGINNING ACTIVITY 1, THE TEACHER WILL:

- Use the online research tools at the National Register website to find properties in your community that are listed in the National Register of Historic Places.
  - On the web page “National Register of Historic Places Program: Research” (<http://www.nps.gov/nr/research/>), download the “Spreadsheet of NRHP List” file (MS Excel 2010 spreadsheet) with links to the scanned nominations. Search the document for your state, county, or city and print out the lines containing information about your local historic properties.
- If there are no local properties listed in the National Register or you do not wish to request and obtain National Register documentation, use Alternative Activity 2.
- Obtain copies of selected National Register nominations to assign to students (or you might decide to make this step part of the activity by involving your students in the selection of nomination documentation to request).
  - Nomination documentation includes a detailed description of the property, a statement of significance, a bibliography, at least one map and one photograph, and other information.
  - Ideally include in your selection at least one historic district—such as a historic commercial area or a residential neighborhood—and as much of a variety of other kinds of places as possible.
- You can involve your students in the selection of historic places they would like to study. One way to do this is to have students review curriculum standards for the class year and pick a place that corresponds to one or more of those standards.
- Copies of nominations are available from State Historic Preservation Officers (SHPOs). Contact them by phone or email well ahead of time to explain exactly when and why the copies are needed. You can find a list of SHPOs, with contact information at <http://www.nps.gov/nr/shpolist.htm>. You can also find out more about locating nominations at <http://www.nps.gov/nr/research/>.



A historic lighthouse in Lime Kiln Point  
State Park on San Juan Island, Washington  
Credit: National Park Service photo by Beth Boland



## ACTIVITY 1

### Step 1

#### Why Should We Preserve Historic Places?

Divide the class into two groups.

**GROUP 1:** Give each student in Group 1 a copy of the first section of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended (see page 6) and ask them to read it carefully.

- Ask the students to answer the following questions: **Who created this document, when and for what purpose?**
- Ask the students to work together to rewrite each of the paragraphs in their own words to explain why it is important to preserve historic places.

**GROUP 2:** Ask students in Group 2 to go to the <http://www.nps.gov/nr/> website to learn more about the National Register of Historic Places. Ask them to write short explanations about:

1. what types of places qualify for listing
2. how properties are listed
3. the results of listing

Have each group of students give an oral report of their findings to the other half of the class. Then have the class as a whole work to combine their information into a single list of benefits of preserving historic places. Post the list in the classroom for use later.

### Step 2

#### What Are the Special Places in Our Community?

Give each student a copy of the list of National Register properties in their community or county. Ask them to study the list and lead them in a class discussion of the following questions:

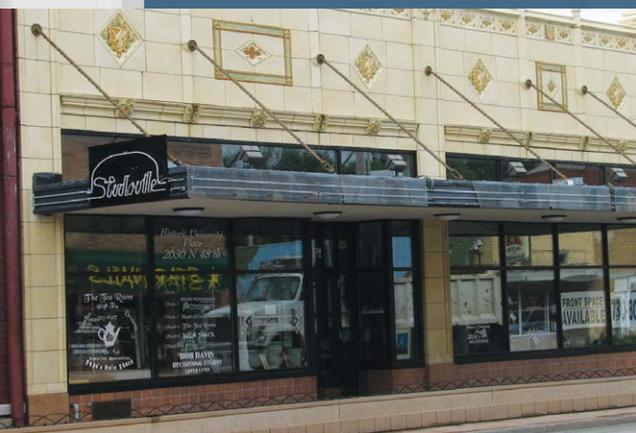
- According to the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, “the Register is composed of districts, sites, buildings, structures and objects.” What type or types of historic properties do you think are in your community?
- Chronologically, when was the first place listed? What kind of place do you think it is? Why do you think that particular place was the first one in your area to be listed?
- Do you already know any information about any of these places?
- Are there other places in the community you think should be listed in the National Register?

### Step 3

#### What Can We Learn About/From Historic Places?

Divide the class into small groups. Give each group a copy of the National Register nomination for one property or district.

- Ask students to read the nominations carefully and to fill out the Nomination Worksheet (see page 7).
- Ask students to visit the properties they are investigating, either individually or together and to fill out the Observation Worksheet (see page 8).
- If possible, students should take photographs, including one with them in the picture.
- Local history sections of public libraries, local historical societies, local preservation commissions, state historic preservation offices and the internet can be good sources for information to use in completing the worksheets.
- Consider asking a representative from a local history organization to come to the class to answer students’ questions.



Storefront in the historic University Place community in Lincoln, Nebraska

Credit: National Park Service photo by Beth Boland



## ACTIVITY 1 CONT'D

### Step 4

#### How Has Preservation Affected Our Community?

Ask each group of students to look again at the list the whole class created at the end of Step 1. Have them work together to determine how the preservation of the properties they have studied is related to the goals and benefits Congress identified in each paragraph of the section of the National Historic Preservation Act they read. Have each group report their conclusions to the class.

Have a general discussion about how successful historic preservation activities in their community have been in achieving the purposes of the NHPA.

- How has preservation benefitted the community?
- How might the destruction of these places affect the appearance of the community?
- What stories about the history of the community and its residents would be lost?
- How has preservation contributed to economic growth in the community (i.e. by providing jobs, enabling businesses to stay downtown, creating homes for new companies, encouraging tourism, etc.)?
- How does the history of these places and the stories they tell contribute to community pride?
- Why is it important that many of these properties are still “living parts of community life”?

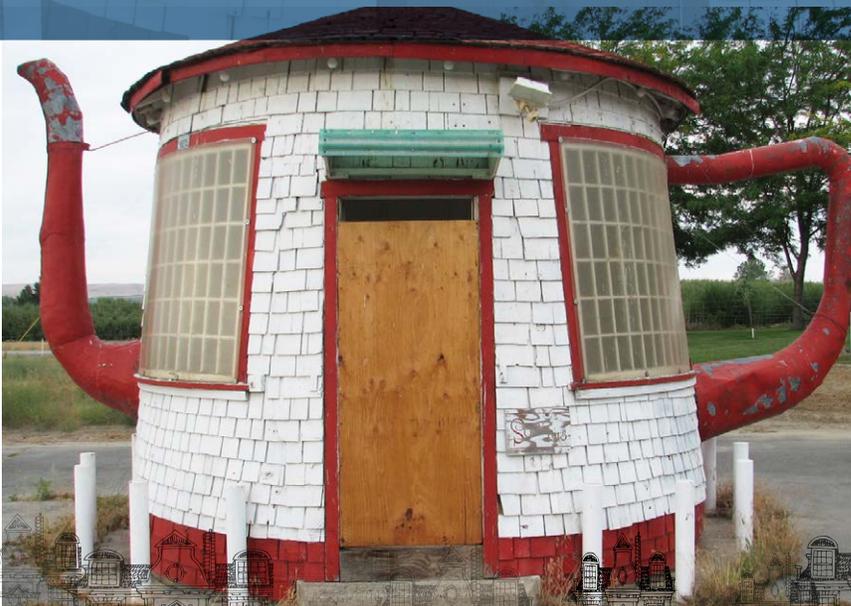
### Step 5

#### How Can We Share With the Community?

Have the class work together on a project to share what they have learned with other students and, perhaps, the wider community.

Projects students could consider would include:

- A PowerPoint presentation to other classes in their school, the PTA or the local historical society.
- A walking or driving tour of the historic places they have studied, perhaps working with the local Chamber of Commerce or Visitors and Convention Bureau to create a brochure for distribution to both residents and out-of-town visitors.
- A collection of exhibits on each historic place or an exhibit on the impact of preservation in their community. Arrange to have the exhibit(s) displayed in the school corridors, the school library, the local historical society, the town library, or other places in the community. These exhibits might be either posters or three-dimensional displays.
- A web-based travel itinerary linking text and photos to a local map. They can find examples of more elaborate itineraries on the National Register’s “Discover Our Shared Heritage” website at <http://www.nps.gov/nr/travel/>. Students’ finished itineraries could be posted on or linked to school or community websites.



The Teapot Dome Gas Station building is a National Historic Landmark in Zillah, Washington

Credit: National Park Service photo by Beth Boland



## ALTERNATIVE ACTIVITY 2

### Step 1

Same as Step 1 in Activity 1

### Step 2

Lead a brainstorming exercise to identify

1. older places that help make the students' community unique
2. local places that may be historically significant
3. places that should be protected

Encourage students to think about a variety of places in addition to houses. Many communities have mobilized to protect parks, bridges, barns, schools, commercial districts, residential neighborhoods, archeological sites and many other kinds of properties that they value and don't want to lose.

### Step 3

Ask the students to go online to download and search the "Spreadsheet of NRHP List" file to determine whether any of these places are listed (<http://www.nps.gov/nr/research/>).

### Step 4

Divide the class into small groups or ask students individually to visit one of the places they have identified. Ask students to fill out the Observation Worksheet for this place and (if possible) take photographs, one with them in the picture. According to the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, "the Register is composed of districts, sites, buildings, structures, and objects significant in American history, architecture, archeology, engineering and culture." Ask students to identify what resource type their place is. Ask students, based on the information they have so far, to decide whether they think the property meets the criteria required for listing in the National Register. What kind of significance do they think it is likely to have?

The historic  
Wyuka Cemetery in  
Lincoln, Nebraska  
Credit: National Park Service  
photo by Beth Boland



### Step 5

Ask students to conduct research in the local library, the local historical society or on the Internet to see if they can find any more information on the importance of their properties. Then ask them to prepare a written description and statement of the historical significance. They may also be able to find information from their state historic preservation offices, which maintain inventories of historic properties. They can find contact information for these offices at <http://www.nps.gov/nr/shpolist.htm>. You may want to ask a representative from the local historical society or the local preservation commission or the state historic preservation office to visit the class to answer the students' questions.

### Step 6

After they have completed their research, ask the students to look again at the list of preservation benefits they created in Step 1. Lead a class discussion about how preserving the properties they have studied would help achieve the goals and benefits Congress identified in each of the paragraphs of the section of the National Historic Preservation Act they read. How do they think people in the community would react if they learned that these places were going to be demolished? How would they themselves react? How would the destruction of these places affect how the community looks? What stories about community history would be lost? How might preserving them contribute to economic growth in the community, county, or region? How do these places contribute to community pride in its history? Why is it important that these properties continue to be "living parts of community life"?

**EXTENSION PROJECT** For a more ambitious project, the class may wish to consider preparing a draft nomination form for one or more of the properties they investigated for the state inventory or a National Register nomination. More information on preparing National Register nominations is available on the National Register website, <http://www.nps.gov/Nr/publications/bulletins/nhl/index.htm>. Information on preparing nominations is also available from state historic preservation offices. Alternatively, the class might consider writing letters to local planners or working with local preservation organizations to preserve the properties they have identified.



## THE NATIONAL HISTORIC PRESERVATION ACT OF 1966

Public Law 89-665, as amended

Section 1 (16 U.S.C. 470)

(a) This Act may be cited as the “National Historic Preservation Act.”

(b) The Congress finds and declares that-

- (1) the spirit and direction of the Nation are founded upon and reflected in its historic heritage;
- (2) the historical and cultural foundations of the Nation should be preserved as a living part of our community life and development in order to give a sense of orientation to the American people;
- (3) historic properties significant to the Nation's heritage are being lost or substantially altered, often inadvertently, with increasing frequency;
- (4) the preservation of this irreplaceable heritage is in the public interest so that its vital legacy of cultural, educational, aesthetic, inspirational, economic and energy benefits will be maintained and enriched for future generations of Americans;
- (5) in the face of ever-increasing extensions of urban centers, highways and residential, commercial and industrial developments, the present governmental and nongovernmental historic preservation programs and activities are inadequate to insure future generations a genuine opportunity to appreciate and enjoy the rich heritage of our Nation;
- (6) the increased knowledge of our historic resources, the establishment of better means of identifying and administering them and the encouragement of their preservation will improve the planning and execution of federal and federally assisted projects and will assist economic growth and development; and
- (7) although the major burdens of historic preservation have been borne and major efforts initiated by private agencies and individuals and both should continue to play a vital role, it is nevertheless necessary and appropriate for the Federal Government to accelerate its historic preservation programs and activities, to give maximum encouragement to agencies and individuals undertaking preservation by private means and to assist State and local governments and the National Trust for Historic Preservation in the United States to expand and accelerate their historic preservation programs and activities.



## NATIONAL REGISTER NOMINATION WORKSHEET

1. What is the name of the historic place, as shown on the National Register Nomination Form?

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2. Where is the place located?

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3. When was it built or created?

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4. When was it nominated?

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5. According to the nomination, how was it used originally?

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6. Using information in Section 8 of the nomination, explain in your own words why people thought this property was significant enough to be listed in the National Register.

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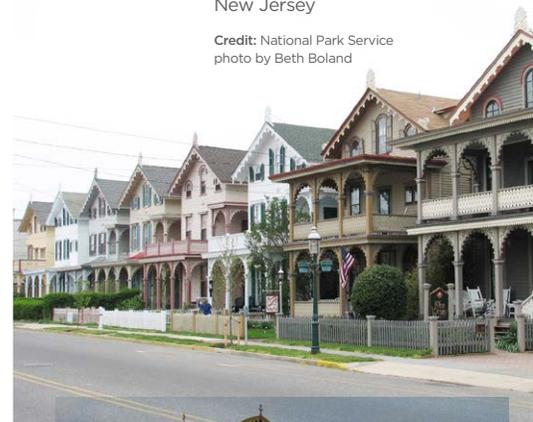
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Victorian row houses in the Cape May Historic District, New Jersey

Credit: National Park Service photo by Beth Boland



The historic "Lucy" building in Margate, New Jersey

Credit: National Park Service photo by Beth Boland



## OBSERVATION WORKSHEET: HISTORIC PLACES

1. Look carefully at the historic place. How would you describe it in general terms, such as size, shape, appearance, setting, condition and other characteristics?

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2. What kind of clues can you find about its age or evolution over time?

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3. How is it being used today? Do you think the current use is different from the original use? How can you tell?

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4. What hypotheses can you make about what people, events, or ways of life this place might have been associated with historically, based on what you can see? What kinds of information would you need to confirm or deny your hypotheses?

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5. If the place is vacant, can you think of any way it might be adapted for a new use?

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6. If it has been restored, who restored it and why?

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7. If it is open to the public as a historic site, what do visitors learn about why it is important?

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8. What does this place mean to you?

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9. How do you think the community would be affected if it were destroyed or substantially altered? What might replace it? How might the character and appearance of the community or neighborhood change?

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