A Ticket to Philly—In 1769: Thinking about Cities, Then and Now

Today, 15 out of 20 Americans live in urban areas. Back in 1769, the figure was more like 1 in 20. But, though colonial cities held only a small fraction of the population, they played a disproportionately important role in the years that preceded revolution— as centers of commerce, of economic and social tensions, of evolving ideologies, and of political action.

This ART TO ZOO will not go into the sequence of events that occurred as discontent evolved into revolution. What it will do is to present Philadelphia in 1769 as a living city, providing all the materials you need to take your students for a “walk” there, so they can experience the sights and sounds and smells of the colonial city, and hear the voices of a few of its inhabitants.

The Lesson Plan described in this issue can serve several teaching ends. It involves the children in intensive map reading. It encourages them to look at their own community in terms of the processes that maintain it . . . and to think about the needs of urban areas in general. And it offers a jumping-off place for a unit on the American Revolution: the issues that led Americans to declare their independence will seem more real to students who have experienced “first hand” conditions in the largest pre-Revolutionary American city.

A Walk Through Philadelphia in 1769

You are standing near the river, at the foot of Vine Street*—more than 200 years before you were born. Nearby, at West’s shipyard, a vessel is being built. Hammerstones, saws, scrape, voice shouts. You smell sawdust, tar, and garbage.

West’s is just one of the dozen or so shipyards strung out along the waterfront at this end of town. More ships are now being built at Philadelphia than anywhere else in the North American colonies—some for out-of-towners, but many for our Philadelphia merchants.

These merchants will use their ships to carry the goods they trade. The ships may wait for weeks as their merchant-owners advertise for cargo. Finally, laden with flour and grain from the rich farmlands to the west, with lumber, meat, skins, furs, and iron, they will sail.

Several hundred ships a year clear the port of Philadelphia. Some will cross the ocean to places like Europe. Far more will trade along the coast, as far north as Canada and as far south as the West Indies. These ships will bring cargo back to us too: molasses and rum from the West Indies, hardware and woolens from England, linens from Ireland, wines from Portugal, rice from the Carolinas.

All this buying and selling has made Philadelphia the largest city in the North American colonies. Directly or indirectly, sea-going trade provides jobs for many of the city’s people. Walk south along Front Street*. Look around you. Almost everything in this crowded waterfront area has something to do with sea-going commerce.

Here people fit out vessels. They make sails and ropes, masts and anchors. They build barrels to hold cargo. They load and unload ships. Here too the merchants have their warehouses and counting houses. Here they buy and sell. This waterfront area is a wholesale district. People from all over the city come to buy in bulk around here. They stock up on groceries, for example—shopkeepers, to resell in their stores; and prosperous families, to get better prices and higher quality than their neighborhood shops offer.

Most of those who work in this area live here too. We colonial Philadelphians usually live where we earn our living, often right in the same building. Some of the houses that crowd along Front Street have shops downstairs. They don’t have front yards, but must have gardens in back . . . sometimes with a kitchen in a separate building . . . and a “necessary,” or outhouse. There are no flush toilets. The wastes drop straight down into a cesspool many feet below the ground, sometimes contaminating neighboring wells. The smells you catch, sometimes stronger sometimes weaker, would be worse on a hot day.

But now it’s only the beginning of March, and the weather is pleasant. You pass two women on a bench in front of a house. One is sewing, the other folding a basket of clothes; and let out smoke and garbage.

To squeeze as many buildings as possible into crowded areas like this, we Philadelphians have, over the years, cut alleys into many of the original blocks. You are passing one now, Elfreth’s Alley. Your map doesn’t give its name, but it is the narrow unmarked street on your right between Race and Arch Streets*.

Lesson Plan

Step 1: Cities as Organisms

What is a city?
Your students will probably suggest that it is a place where lots of people live close together. Point out that although these people live together, they also depend on what is outside the city: a city cannot survive in isolation. (That’s why sieges were used in warfare. Cut off from the outside world, the inhabitants of a besieged city had eventually to break out, give up, or die.)

In fact, one way to think about cities is as giant organisms: an organism (or living creature) has to take in things it needs from its surroundings; use these things to carry out essential internal processes; and let other things out. For example, an animal has to breathe in air; use the oxygen in the air; and breathe out carbon dioxide.

Cities too have to take in things from outside; go through internal processes; and let things out. Examples will quickly make this clear: cities have to bring in clean air, food, and water, for instance; have to repair housing and provide protection from fire and disease; and have to let out smoke and garbage.

When the children have grasped the general idea, have them think more systematically about these categories of urban activity. To do so, each child should

*All places (streets, shops, etc.) named in the text are real. They did exist, at the locations described.

Continued on page 3
Tell your students that they are going to use these sheets to list some of the main intakes, internal processes, and outputs that their own community depends on. (Your school does not have to be located in a big city for this activity to be appropriate. Even small communities have these needs. If your school is in a rural area, focus on a nearby town.)

What items should go in the What? column? On the chalkboard, write the most essential items that the children identify with and ask the students to also write the items on their own sheets. Then ask the children, as homework, to fill in the How? columns for these lists they have created. Say that there are many possible answers. They may describe where an item comes from, for example; what carries it in; or who arranges the transfer. They might say, "Food comes from all over the United States and from other countries." Or, "Food is brought in on trains and trucks and planes," or "they might give some altogether different answers. The point of this activity is not to compare the roster of answers, but to help your students become more aware of the far-flung network of interdependencies in which their community exists.

Encourage the kids to answer flexibly and to feel free to ask adults at home for help. Emphasize that some answers will be easy to figure out, some harder, and some perhaps impossible.

In class the next day, give the children a chance to compare and discuss their answers. There will be a lot of variety. There may also be questions that no one, including you, can answer without further research. These can just be left blank (unless you want the children to do follow-up research later).

Step 2: The Time-Travelers Get Ready

Tell the children that they are now going to be time-travelers. They are going to travel into the past and visit a city there, to see how it compares with their own community.

Just as careful tourists prepare ahead for a trip, so your students become more aware of the far-flung network of interdependencies in which their community exists.

In class the next day, give the kids a chance to compare and discuss their answers. Then ask the children to measure the distance they walked. "You may have them repeat the walk three times, to establish an average. Have the kids each pace out their 25 steps again, but this time turn their back and see exactly where they 'walked.'"

Finally, have the children make lists similar to the ones they made in Step 1, but now for colonial Philadelphia. Because bits of answers are embedded throughout the reading, the children should work in small groups in class. This way they can pool their observations.

Step 4: Now It's Their Turn!

As a concluding activity, have your students carry out the following writing assignment: Imagine that two colonial Philadelphians are taking a time trip to your community. Write a short play giving in dialogue form, their conversation as they see the sights. Think of what they are used to and try to imagine what their reactions might be. What surprises them? What are they confused by? What do they like? What do they hate? How do they rate different aspects of your community compared with life back home?

Your dialogue will be more fun to write (and to read) if you create two people with different personalities—and different opinions about what they encounter.

Here is the view of Philadelphia you would have had as you approached the city by ship. The spire with a " over it, to the left of the tallest spire, is the Court House on Market Street.
In this picture, you are standing at the end of the High Street Market, looking west. Perhaps it’s early in the morning and the market is just opening... it’s certainly not busy! Notice the covered wagons, which were common for transporting goods into the city. The building with the sign is probably a tavern.

Walking Tour continued from page 1

Go in and take a look.

It is darker and smellier in this more enclosed area than on the wider street. But the small rowhouses in here are neat brick with white trim. A red-headed boy is throwing a ball against the wall of one, where he lives with his mother, a dressmaker. Her shop is on the ground floor and their home is upstairs. This is a common arrangement all over Philadelphia. Most of the artisans who rent houses on Elfreth’s Alley divide them up this way.

Come back out to Front Street and continue south in the same direction you were going before. At the corner of Front and Market*, you come to the Old London Coffeehouse...
have the best market in the colonies, so you wouldn’t want to miss it. We buy our fresh foods here: our meat, dairy products, fruits, and vegetables. They are started in from farms to the west.

Of course, you have the best choices early in the day. Shoppers start arriving before the sun comes up. Walk around. Take a look: beets, radishes, green peas, strawberries—in baskets, piled high. Many of the shoppers are women, some followed by a servant carrying a basket. One woman decides on some green peas; the farmer’s wives measure them out and tuck them into the basket.

The vendors don’t advertise their wares by calling out, but some offer tastes. A woman selling butter has set out a pyramid of it and stuck a scoop in so shoppers can sample. One lad happily spooned out and passed a jeweler’s, a knife-maker’s, a circulating library, several dry-goods stores, a locksmith’s, a brushmaker’s, and a shop where suits of clothes are sold.

At Arch Street, the stores end. Take a left and walk west on Arch for a block, then double back south again on Third Street.

This whole area at the center of town is heavily built up. All kinds of people, rich and poor, live and work here. Artisans who don’t need a lot of space and want to be close to customers cluster around here in especially crowded alleys—ironmongers and silversmiths, haters, tailors, and shoemakers.

If you had time to walk on to the outskirts of town, you would find it less densely packed with people than they were just a few years ago. There are now three regular deliveries a week between Philadelphia and New York, and one a week to Boston. Letters and newspapers travel so fast that it seems we are getting to know almost as much about what’s going on in other colonies. Some of us feel more connected to other colonies. Some of us feel we are getting to know almost as much about what’s going on in other colonies.

Our criminal codes are harsher than those of other places. Some parts of town are worse than others.

The Sun fire company, for instance, has three regular deliveries a week between Philadelphia and New York, and one a week to Boston. Letters and newspapers travel so fast that it seems we are getting to know almost as much about what’s going on in other colonies. Some of us feel more connected to other colonies. Some of us feel we are getting to know almost as much about what’s going on in other colonies.

Our criminal codes are harsher than those of other places. Some parts of town are worse than others.

The Sun fire company, for instance, has three regular deliveries a week between Philadelphia and New York, and one a week to Boston. Letters and newspapers travel so fast that it seems we are getting to know almost as much about what’s going on in other colonies. Some of us feel more connected to other colonies. Some of us feel we are getting to know almost as much about what’s going on in other colonies.

Our criminal codes are harsher than those of other places. Some parts of town are worse than others.

The Sun fire company, for instance, has three regular deliveries a week between Philadelphia and New York, and one a week to Boston. Letters and newspapers travel so fast that it seems we are getting to know almost as much about what’s going on in other colonies. Some of us feel more connected to other colonies. Some of us feel we are getting to know almost as much about what’s going on in other colonies.

Our criminal codes are harsher than those of other places. Some parts of town are worse than others.

The Sun fire company, for instance, has three regular deliveries a week between Philadelphia and New York, and one a week to Boston. Letters and newspapers travel so fast that it seems we are getting to know almost as much about what’s going on in other colonies. Some of us feel more connected to other colonies. Some of us feel we are getting to know almost as much about what’s going on in other colonies.

Our criminal codes are harsher than those of other places. Some parts of town are worse than others.

The Sun fire company, for instance, has three regular deliveries a week between Philadelphia and New York, and one a week to Boston. Letters and newspapers travel so fast that it seems we are getting to know almost as much about what’s going on in other colonies. Some of us feel more connected to other colonies. Some of us feel we are getting to know almost as much about what’s going on in other colonies.

Our criminal codes are harsher than those of other places. Some parts of town are worse than others.

The Sun fire company, for instance, has three regular deliveries a week between Philadelphia and New York, and one a week to Boston. Letters and newspapers travel so fast that it seems we are getting to know almost as much about what’s going on in other colonies. Some of us feel more connected to other colonies. Some of us feel we are getting to know almost as much about what’s going on in other colonies.

Our criminal codes are harsher than those of other places. Some parts of town are worse than others.

The Sun fire company, for instance, has three regular deliveries a week between Philadelphia and New York, and one a week to Boston. Letters and newspapers travel so fast that it seems we are getting to know almost as much about what’s going on in other colonies. Some of us feel more connected to other colonies. Some of us feel we are getting to know almost as much about what’s going on in other colonies.

Our criminal codes are harsher than those of other places. Some parts of town are worse than others.

The Sun fire company, for instance, has three regular deliveries a week between Philadelphia and New York, and one a week to Boston. Letters and newspapers travel so fast that it seems we are getting to know almost as much about what’s going on in other colonies. Some of us feel more connected to other colonies. Some of us feel we are getting to know almost as much about what’s going on in other colonies.

Our criminal codes are harsher than those of other places. Some parts of town are worse than others.

The Sun fire company, for instance, has three regular deliveries a week between Philadelphia and New York, and one a week to Boston. Letters and newspapers travel so fast that it seems we are getting to know almost as much about what’s going on in other colonies. Some of us feel more connected to other colonies. Some of us feel we are getting to know almost as much about what’s going on in other colonies.

Our criminal codes are harsher than those of other places. Some parts of town are worse than others.

The Sun fire company, for instance, has three regular deliveries a week between Philadelphia and New York, and one a week to Boston. Letters and newspapers travel so fast that it seems we are getting to know almost as much about what’s going on in other colonies. Some of us feel more connected to other colonies. Some of us feel we are getting to know almost as much about what’s going on in other colonies.

Our criminal codes are harsher than those of other places. Some parts of town are worse than others.

The Sun fire company, for instance, has three regular deliveries a week between Philadelphia and New York, and one a week to Boston. Letters and newspapers travel so fast that it seems we are getting to know almost as much about what’s going on in other colonies. Some of us feel more connected to other colonies. Some of us feel we are getting to know almost as much about what’s going on in other colonies.

Our criminal codes are harsher than those of other places. Some parts of town are worse than others.

The Sun fire company, for instance, has three regular deliveries a week between Philadelphia and New York, and one a week to Boston. Letters and newspapers travel so fast that it seems we are getting to know almost as much about what’s going on in other colonies. Some of us feel more connected to other colonies. Some of us feel we are getting to know almost as much about what’s going on in other colonies.

Our criminal codes are harsher than those of other places. Some parts of town are worse than others.

The Sun fire company, for instance, has three regular deliveries a week between Philadelphia and New York, and one a week to Boston. Letters and newspapers travel so fast that it seems we are getting to know almost as much about what’s going on in other colonies. Some of us feel more connected to other colonies. Some of us feel we are getting to know almost as much about what’s going on in other colonies.

Our criminal codes are harsher than those of other places. Some parts of town are worse than others.

The Sun fire company, for instance, has three regular deliveries a week between Philadelphia and New York, and one a week to Boston. Letters and newspapers travel so fast that it seems we are getting to know almost as much about what’s going on in other colonies. Some of us feel more connected to other colonies. Some of us feel we are getting to know almost as much about what’s going on in other colonies.

Our criminal codes are harsher than those of other places. Some parts of town are worse than others.

The Sun fire company, for instance, has three regular deliveries a week between Philadelphia and New York, and one a week to Boston. Letters and newspapers travel so fast that it seems we are getting to know almost as much about what’s going on in other colonies. Some of us feel more connected to other colonies. Some of us feel we are getting to know almost as much about what’s going on in other colonies.

Our criminal codes are harsher than those of other places. Some parts of town are worse than others.

The Sun fire company, for instance, has three regular deliveries a week between Philadelphia and New York, and one a week to Boston. Letters and newspapers travel so fast that it seems we are getting to know almost as much about what’s going on in other colonies. Some of us feel more connected to other colonies. Some of us feel we are getting to know almost as much about what’s going on in other colonies.

Our criminal codes are harsher than those of other places. Some parts of town are worse than others.

The Sun fire company, for instance, has three regular deliveries a week between Philadelphia and New York, and one a week to Boston. Letters and newspapers travel so fast that it seems we are getting to know almost as much about what’s going on in other colonies. Some of us feel more connected to other colonies. Some of us feel we are getting to know almost as much about what’s going on in other colonies.

Our criminal codes are harsher than those of other places. Some parts of town are worse than others.

The Sun fire company, for instance, has three regular deliveries a week between Philadelphia and New York, and one a week to Boston. Letters and newspapers travel so fast that it seems we are getting to know almost as much about what’s going on in other colonies. Some of us feel more connected to other colonies. Some of us feel we are getting to know almost as much about what’s going on in other colonies.
A few colonial Philadelphians talk about their lives in 1769:

- **A Carpenter**
  Well, I'm just a plain fellow, but I've done quite well. With all the construction under way here, I get plenty of work. I have a good wife, five fine children, and a servant. I play billiards twice a week, and on other evenings go to the Horse and Groom, relax, and discuss the latest. I'm lucky I'm in a building trade, where business is brisk. I know plenty of small shopkeepers who have lost their store or even gone to debtors' prison. When some new act was passed in England, and credit tightened here, the merchants called in their bills and my neighbors couldn't pay.

- **A Doctor**
  I am a doctor, trained in Edinburgh, Scotland. I treat here, the merchants called in their bills and my neighbors couldn't pay. This is a time when the wealthy should be aping English aristocrats—gadding about in coaches and building country estates? I don't hold with this. In my parents' time, plain but comfortable was enough. We'll see what happens. Who knows how our disputes with England may be resolved. All I know is that so far, when my friends have wanted me to take to the streets, I've said no. Next time, I may go ahead.

- **A Free Black Man**
  For years I was a slave. I belonged to a wealthy merchant. I worked for him as a gardener. He fed and clothed me decently and allowed me to marry, but I longed for my freedom. Then one day, I saved his son from a dog that attacked him. In thanks, my master gave me my freedom. My wife and I found rooms on Race Street. I continued hiring myself out as a gardener. I am happy to have my freedom, but it is not the same freedom that white people enjoy. Blacks here are not supposed to go out in the streets after 9 in the evening. We have no right to trial by jury. And it is forbidden for more than four of us to meet together, because whites are afraid that we free blacks may encourage the slaves to revolt.

- **A Seven-Year-Old Girl**
  Though my medical practice takes up much of my time, I have also written an article on the smallpox and was involved in the founding of the Pennsylvania Hospital, which now does so much to help the sick poor. I perform experiments in electricity and correspond with others in the colonies and abroad who share this interest. I have served on a number of city boards. I am deeply disturbed by the events of the past few years. I recognize the right of Parliament to set our laws, yet many recent trade policies have been made in England without a clear grasp of our situation here. Of course, you can't work all the time. Sometimes the weather is bad or you get sick. But in the last few years I've worked less than half the time. I helped dig a basement for a house on Fourth Street last month, but that's the only job I've had since fall. At least food prices have gotten better ... but I'm afraid they'll go up again. And in just a few months, winter will be here again. That means firewood to buy. I tell you, it scares me. You see a family on the corner, selling their furniture, and you know that when the money from that is gone, they'll be stealing to eat—that or the workhouse ... And you think: am I next?

- **A Rich Merchant's Wife**
  Our life is so jolly these days, especially with all the visitors from England. It seems we flit from one entertainment to another—from concert to picnic to Dancing Assembly. I've had to have so many new dresses made. Our new house on Fifth Street is almost finished. It is three floors high, set on a large lot. We are to have a hothouse, where we shall grow pineapples. Our English visitors often comment on how elegant life here has become. The newspapers discuss the growing numbers of poor people and how we can best provide for them. I think we should not go too far in offering charity, or we shall find ourselves encouraging idleness. I am disturbed to see some who should know better kowtowing to the mob. I say, let those whose understanding has been refined make the decisions for our city.

The family of painter Charles Willson Peale, who moved to Philadelphia in 1777. The family nurse and dog are included. The artist has painted in a visual pun: the apple peel forms the name Peale.
Algunos filadelfianos hablan sobre sus vidas en 1769:

- Un carpintero
  Bueno, yo soy un tipo sencillo, pero me ha ido bastante bien. Con toda la construcción que se está realizando aquí, comigo suficiente trabajo. Tengo una esposa buena, cinco niños excelentes y una criada. Juego billar dos veces a la semana y durante otras noches voy al "Horse y Groom", donde me divierto y discuto los últimos acontecimientos.

  Tengo mucha suerte de estar en el ramo de la construcciónde donde los negocios son activos. Conozco mu­chos tenderos que han perdido sus tiendas y aún más, han ido a prisión por deudas. Cuando alguna nueva ley o disposición ha sido aprobada en Inglaterra y el crédito se ha hecho difícil aquí, los comerciantes han cobrado sus facturas y mis vecinos no han podido pagar.

  ¿Es esta la época para que los ricos quieran pare­cerse a los ingleses aristocratas—vagando por los al­rededores en vehículos y construyendo haciendas? Yo

- Un doctor
  Soy un doctor educado en Edimburgo, Escocia. Atiendo a la mayoría de mis pacientes en sus casas.

  Aunque mi práctica de la medicina toma gran parte de mi tiempo, he escrito un artículo sobre la viruela y estoy involucrado en la fundación del hospital de Pennsylvania, el cual ayuda mucho a los enfermos pobres. Realizo experimentos sobre electricidad y mantengo correspondencia con otras personas en las colonias y en el extranjero—que comparten este in­terés. He servido además, en una serie de directivas y juntas de la ciudad.

- Una esposa de un comerciante rico
  Nuestra vida es tan diversa estos días, especialmente con todos los visitantes que han venido de Inglaterra. Pareciera que volamos de una diversión a otra—de un concierto a un picnic o a un baile. Me trae que hacer tantos vestidos nuevos.

  Nuestra nueva casa en la calle Fifth está casi ter­minada. Tiene tres pisos y está ubicada en un gran terreno. Vamos a tener un invernadero donde culti­varemos piñas. Nuestros visitantes ingleses a menudo comen lo que se han vuelto nuestras costumbres aquí.

  Los periódicos discuten la cantidad creciente de pobres y cómo podríamos hacer para mejorar sus vi­das. Yo pienso que no deberíamos ir muy lejos en nuestras ofertas de caridad o nos encontraríamos es­timulando el ocio.

  Me siento perturbada observando como muchos se doblan ante la multitud. Yo digo, permitas a aquellos que han sido educados establecer las deci­siones para nuestra ciudad.

- Un hombre negro libre
  Durante años fui un esclavo. Pertenecí a un rico co­mercic Peace, se mudó a Philadelphia en 1777. La enfermera de la familia y el perro están incluídos. El artista pintó un juego visual: la cáscara de la manzana (en inglés, "apple peel") forma la P del apellido Peace.

  Charles Willson Peace, la Sociedad Histórica de New York

- Una niña de siete años
  ¡Oigaseme a mí también! Mi nombre es Deborah y tengo siete años. Aprendí las letras con la señora Baxter, y ahora me quedo en la casa y ayudo a mi mamá. Yo quiero ser una marinera como mi hermano Tom, pero mis papás dicen que no puedo serlo. Cuando sea un poco mayor sin embargo, mi mamá dice que puedo ayudar en la tienda. Ella todavía no me lo permite porque tiene miedo que rompa algo. Pero yo sé que no lo haría.

La familia del pintor Charles Wilson Peale, quien se mudó a Philadelphia en 1777. La enfermera de la familia y el perro están incluídos. El artista pintó un juego visual: la cáscara de la manzana (en inglés, "apple peel") forma la P del apellido Peace.

Charles Willson Peace, la Sociedad Histórica de New York

DEL ARTE AL ZOOLOGICO, Mayo 1990
Noticias para las escuelas del Instituto Smithsonian

Traducido por Teresa L. Mora
This Plan
of the improved part of the City, surveying and that
laid by the late Mr. Holmes, City Surveyor,
under the Ordinance of the Province of Pennsylvania, is read
by
The Editors.