



HOLDEN
FORESTS &
GARDENS

TEACHER RESOURCES

Floodplain Forest, Farmland, Public Park: The Human and Non-human Lives of Washington Square Park

by Dr. Georgia Silvera Seamans (Washington Square Park Eco Projects)

These educational materials were designed to accompany the video seminar “Floodplain Forest, Farmland, Public Park: The Human and Non-human Lives of Washington Square Park” by Dr. Georgia Silvera Seamans, presented on May 12th, 2021 as part of a virtual Holden Forests & Gardens Scientist Lecture Series, Growing Black Roots: the Black Botanical Legacy.

Learn more about the lecture series here: <https://holdenfg.org/resource/series/growing-black-roots-the-black-botanical-legacy/>

Access the talk here: <https://holdenfg.org/resources/floodplain-forest-farmland-public-park-the-human-and-non-human-lives-of-washington-square-park/>

Comprehend and Connect: Get a clear view of what Washington Square Park looks like today.

1. What do you think Washington Square Park might look like? What would you see if you visited there today? Take an 8.5" x 14" sheet of paper and fold it in half. On the right-hand side, draw a picture or collect photos for a collage showing: What picture do you see in your mind when you think of a Park in New York City?
2. How does Washington Square Park actually look? Visit the Washington Square Park Eco Projects page <https://www.wspecoprojects.org/> to see photos of the park, then check out their pages on iNaturalist to see a listing of all the plants and animals observed in the park over the last few years. On the left-hand side of your drawing/collage, show the following: What non-human lives, i.e. what animals and plants, would you see if you visited Washington Square Park on the Island of Manhattan today?
 - a. <https://www.inaturalist.org/projects/washington-square-park-plants>
 - b. <https://www.inaturalist.org/projects/washington-square-park-wildlife>

To-Do: Learn about the history and interconnections between human and non-human lives before the land was known as Washington Square Park.

1. Learn about people who occupied the land now known as Washington Square Park, prior to Dutch settlement in 1624
 - a. History of the Lenape people on Manahatta [https://www.k12.wa.us/sites/default/files/public/indianed/tribal sovereignty/elementary/uselementary/uselementary-unit1/level2-materials/manahatta_to_manhattan.pdf](https://www.k12.wa.us/sites/default/files/public/indianed/tribal%20sovereignty/elementary/uselementary/uselementary-unit1/level2-materials/manahatta_to_manhattan.pdf)
 - b. More about the history and culture of the Lenape people, in their own words <http://delawaretribe.org/culture-and-language/>
2. Make a resource web, showing wild plant and animal resources that the Lenape depended on to make their livelihood.
 - a. Read about traditional foods of the Lenape <http://delawaretribe.org/blog/2013/06/27/foods-eaten-by-the-lenape-indians/>
 - b. Use PowerPoint or a poster board to build a resource web showing what plants and animals were used by the Lenape on Manahatta, and how these plants and animals in turn depended on other plants and animals for their own survival. Place humans at the center of your resource web, make sure to check your resources and only use a photo that is a documented depiction of a member of the Lenape tribe. Start your resource web by adding one animal on which the Lenape depended. Add a picture of the animal to your PowerPoint slide/poster and draw a line from the animal to the Lenape, to show that they are connected in a resource web.
 - c. Build a bigger picture of the resources that were present on the landscape of Manahatta, and how the plants, animals and humans interacted. Visit a website showing plants and animals that were present on the island of Manahatta in the early 1600's <https://welikia.org/download/flora-and-fauna/>.
 - i. On the list, find the animal food resource used by the Lenape, click on the link to see what food resources that animal needed to survive, and place a picture of that plant on your PowerPoint slide/poster, drawing a line to the animal that eats it. If the plant you picked was also directly consumed/used by the Lenape people, you can also

- draw a line from the plant to the Lenape.
- ii. Pick a few examples from each category (mammals, birds, plants, etc.) listed as being “likely” found in Manhattan to include in your resource web. Is there evidence that any of these were used by the Lenape? If so, draw a line to the Lenape. Were any of these predators on animals used by the Lenape? If so, draw a line from the predator to their prey. Were any of these food for animals used by the Lenape? If so, draw a line from the animal to its food.
 - iii. Pick one organism that is “remotely possible” of being present in the region in the early 1600’s. These organisms are not confirmed as being present in the past, in part because they no longer are found in the region today. Note it on your resource web as being a remote possibility, for example using a star or highlighting. Consider, how might this organism have interacted with the Lenape and the other organisms in your resource web? Click on the name to read about the biology of the “remotely possible” species, is there any evidence that other organisms in your resource web, including humans, may have interacted with this species, then draw DASHED LINES to show hypothesized relationships.
3. Share your resource web with your learning group. Considering the information you collected in “Comprehend and Connect”, how has the ecosystem of Washington Square Park changed from the 1600 to today, and what has changed in terms of resources that were used by the Lenape?

Excerpt from: The Village Beat, A look at Black History in the Village

1626 - The First Free Black Settlement in North America

Before Greenwich Village and Astor Place existed, there was Manhattan land farmed by the first free Black settlers in North America. In 1626, some of the very first Africans, brought to New Amsterdam by the Dutch West India Company, became landowners after successfully petitioning for their own freedom under the circumstances that a portion of their farming proceeds go back to the company. However, it can be suggested that black people were only granted “partial-freedom” because of the underlying reasons of the Dutch West India Company - the Council of New Amsterdam granted land parcels to free Blacks to have them serve as ‘middlemen’ between Native American zones and Dutch colonial settlers around 1644. Antony Portugies, Manuel Trumpeter and Simon Congo are just some of the freed Blacks who serviced the company for 18 years before owning land. Nearly 20 years later when the English captured New Amsterdam, naming it New York, landowning rights were taken away from Blacks and a majority of the previous settlements were taken by wealthy white landowners.

(Sources: GVSHP, NYTimes)

Follow-up Work: Learn how Black land loss first began at Washington Square Park, and how modern Black Farmers are reclaiming their relationship with the land.

1. Read an excerpt from The Village Beat, A look at Black History in the Village, then answer the following.
 - a. What were names of some of the Black settlers, and how did people in the settlement make their livelihood?
 - b. What motivated the white Dutch settlers to give the land to the Black settlers in 1626?
 - c. What eventually happened to the land owned by the Black settlers?
2. Learn about the ongoing problem of Black land loss, and the young Black farmers who are actively reclaiming their heritage. Watch a short video “The Young Black Farmers Defying a Legacy of Discrimination” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cxbdwsy88V4>. Then, answer the following:
 - a. What is the “popular” narrative of what a farmer looks like?
 - b. How has the number of Black farmers changed over the last century?
 - c. What are some of the causes noted as contributing to Black land loss?
 - d. What harms have Black Americans suffered due to loss of their family lands?
 - e. What are the “Young Black Farmers” doing to reclaim their heritage?
 - f. What struggles are the Young Black Farmers facing?
3. Learn about the diversity of Black Farming today and create a virtual tour of a Black-owned farm to share with your class. Visit “The Ultimate List of Black Owned Farms & Food Gardens” <https://shoppeblack.us/2019/04/black-owned-farms-food-gardens/>. Find a Black-owned farm near you

(or as close to you as possible). Plan a “virtual visit” for your classmates, help them to see how the farm you picked adds value to their community. Make sure to include:

- a. What is the business of the farm?
 - i. Pictures of the current farmers/staff members, if available.
 - ii. Pictures of plants/animals currently produced at the farm.
 - iii. A description of how the farm distributes their products.
- b. Have racial or environmental issues informed their farming or business practices?
 - i. What is the history of who occupied/owned the land in the past? NOTE to teachers, students may need to do additional research to determine the Native American land stewards (<https://native-land.ca/>)
 - ii. Are there aspects of the farm that are explicitly rooted in Black or African culture/history?
 - iii. Are there aspects of the farm that seek to address racial inequities in farming?
 - iv. Are there other racial or environmental justice aspects to the work of the farm, beyond addressing issues in the Black community?
- c. Share the information you learned about the farm with your classmates.

