BROOKLYN CONNECTIONS

SUNSET PARK
PRIMARY SOURCE PACKET

Student Name
INTRODUCTORY READING


ADAPTATION

Sunset Park is a neighborhood in southwestern Brooklyn. Until the 1960s the northern section was considered part of Gowanus and the southern section part of Bay Ridge; the area was renamed in the late 1960’s for a local park built by the city in the 1890’s.

Development of the neighborhood began in the 1830’s. Nearby Green-Wood Cemetery was built in 1839 and was one of the first rural cemeteries in the nation. Many Irish immigrants settled in the area during the 1840’s. Improvements in transportation led to the development of 36th Street, and more industrial growth. Around 1870, brick and brownstone houses were built instead of wood houses. Polish, Norwegian, and Finnish immigrants settled in the area during the 1880s and 1890s, followed at the turn of the century by Italian immigrants, many of whom worked along the docks.

Bush Terminal, a waterfront area of piers, warehouses, and factory lofts, was built by Irving T. Bush in 1890, and as a result Sunset Park industrialized very quickly in the early twentieth century. Then, the Brooklyn Army Terminal was built in 1919. By the 1930s and 1940s, however, Sunset Park’s growth slowed down because of the Great Depression, the closing of the Third Avenue elevated line, and the construction (in 1941) of the Gowanus Expressway, which separated the industrial sections of the neighborhood from people’s homes.

By the 1980s, businesses in Sunset Park started to grow again. A large number of new immigrants settled in the neighborhood; from China, the Dominican Republic, Guyana, Ecuador, India, Vietnam, Colombia, Jordan, and Poland. The Brooklyn Army Terminal reopened in 1987 to manufacture small goods, and Bush Terminal was converted into an industrial park. In the 1990s Eighth Avenue became known as “Brooklyn’s Chinatown,” as it was home to the city’s third largest Chinese community. Sunset Park is also the home of the Basilica of Our Lady of Perpetual Help, the largest church in Brooklyn.

“South Brooklyn: The Southwest area of the original city of Brooklyn, which ended at 60th street.”

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2. Find “South Brooklyn” on the map; that is where Sunset Park is located today. Using the introductory reading, how did Sunset Park get its name?

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3. List the neighborhoods that surround Sunset Park (South Brooklyn on the map).

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4. Sunset Park or South Brooklyn is located on the water. How do you think that would be useful for the people who live there?

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**Document 2a:** Our Lady of Perpetual Help. The Brooklyn Collection, Brooklyn Public Library.

1. Look at Document 2a. What is this building used for? How do you know?

2. List two similarities between Document 2a and Document 2b.

3. Name two differences between Photograph A and Photograph B:

4. The building in Document 2a used to be located at the same spot as the building in Document 2b. What do you think happened to the building in Document 2a? Why do you think that?
1. Describe the image in Document 3.

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2. Notice how much land is covered by the parkway. Do you think this land was always open? What might have been torn down to make way for these roads?

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3. Before the parkway was built, the Sunset Park community was connected to the waterfront. How do you think that changed with the parkway?

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4. What problems would people needed to deal with if they lived close to the parkway?

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Massive Network

NYPE is a massive network of rail lines, highways, waterways, piers and storage houses, linked and co-ordinated in use and activity so that not a moment is lost in the movement of troops and vital war supplies.

Brooklyn headquarters, including the Army Base and Bush Terminal, is located in the Sunset Park section of South Brooklyn. Installations extend from 39th to 65th Streets along 1st and 2d Avenues. Except for the area occupied by NYPE, Sunset Park is a residential section of one and two-family brick and brownstone houses. Fifth Avenue is its principal business street, but there are stores too along 3d, 4th and 5th Avenues. Between 41st and 44th Streets is the park from which the section takes its name. The population is made up of Scandinavians and families of Italian, Polish and Irish descent. Many from the immediate neighborhood were employed at NYPE. All worked in some phase of the war effort.

The Port Area

Included in the port as a whole are ten terminals and three staging areas. The ten terminals are these:

1. The Brooklyn Army Base at 1st Ave. and 56th St. Heart and headquarters of the NYPE and the unit around which NYPE was built. Here is the largest storage warehouse in the world, covering 48 acres of ground and having an interior “well” for the direct unloading of freight to any floor in the building. There are more than 3,800,000 square feet of storage space and room for 450 railroad cars.

2. Bush Terminal at 1st Ave. and 46th St. Here are a million and a half more square feet of storage space; trackage for 150 cars and eight piers.

NOTE: NYPE stands for New York Port of Embarkation. NYPE was used to refer to all of the official terminals that helped support the army during World War II.
1. Look at Document 4. What was the NYPE?

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2. The writer if Document 4 describes Sunset Park. What type of people lived in the neighborhood?

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3. What were the names of the two main terminals in Sunset Park that helped supply the war?

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Sunset Park Primary Source Packet
1. Look at Document 5. Describe the buildings you see in this picture.

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2. Based on the size of the terminal in Document 5, what can you guess about the number of people who worked there?

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3. The Army Terminal was very important in helping the USA be prepared to fight in World War II. What do you think happened to the Army Terminal after the war was over? Why do you think this?

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4. Based on your answer to number three, what do you think happened to many of the people in Sunset Park who worked at the Terminal after the war ended?

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1. Look at Document 6A and 6B. Make FIVE observations about these photographs.

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2. Based on your observations, make an inference about what the workers are doing in Document 6A and 6B.

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3. These pictures were taken at Bush Terminal. Knowing that, what do you think happened at Bush Terminal?

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4. Do you think the workers in Sunset Park needed special skills to get these jobs at Bush Terminal? If so, what skills do you think they needed?

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When operations at the Bush Terminal Buildings Co. got underway in 1905 along the South Brooklyn waterfront, only a handful of employees worked in a few unpretentious structures on the beach, manufacturing and processing products of two local business firms. Now completing its 50th year, Bush Terminal is an industrial city, world’s biggest warehouse and product processing center, which ships its wares by boat, train and truck from its very doors.

The vast terminal consists of 16 steel-glass industrial structures sprawling over an area of 36 acres, boasts some 6,000,000 square feet of leasable space and employs more than 25,000 workers who serve its 150 business tenants.

HEADING THE complex operations at the nationally-known terminal, which extends from 3d Ave. to lower New York Bay from 27th St. to 41st Sts., is Longlander Abner J. Grossman. The operating chief at the installation is Roland Cassidy, general superintendent.

Seated at his desk in the firm’s administrative offices at 30 Bridge St., Manhattan, Grossman, mayor of Plandome Manor, L. I., recalled his early days as an office clerk at the terminal 28 years ago.

“Then, as now,” he stated, “the emphasis was on leasing space only to reputable businesses. More than 10 percent of our present tenants have been here 40 years or more—and only 22 percent have been tenants less than 10 years.” How big is 6,000,000 square feet of leasable working area? Grossman was ready with the answer. “Take 110 full-sized football fields and lay them end to end—there’s your answer. Big, isn’t it?”

ON EVERY FLOOR of every building, numerous products are manufactured, processed, stored and shipped. Among the many tenants are leading grocery chains; coffee, tea, wine and chewing gum producers; makers of women’s shoe heels and perfumes.

Finished goods flow down to platforms and into waiting freight trains on ramps leading directly to the ground floor of each building. The terminal’s privately-owned streets between each structure are wide enough for trucks and huge trailers either to load or unload their cargoes.

The terminal’s heat control system, Grossman said, is so governed that steam supply automatically compensates for vagaries of wind and weather on any side of any building.

Bush Terminal maintains its own police force—operating on round-the-clock patrols in each of the 16 structures, which range from 6 to 12 stories high. Besides a private restaurant for company executives, two large cafeterias, and mobile canteen-wagons, the terminal also maintains a bank, railway express and telegraph offices, and a hospital.

“What we are most proud of,” he concluded, “is that Bush Terminal has become as Brooklynese as Coney Island or Ebbets Field. Management is proud that our industrial city is oftentimes referred to as ‘the most impressive industrial address in America.’”
1. Read Document 7. When was Bush Terminal built?

2. What does Mr. Grossman compare the size of Bush Terminal to?

3. Why was Bush Terminal called an “Industrial City”? Aside from having space for businesses to rent, what other services did they provide?

4. The Bush Terminal was located in Sunset Park or South Brooklyn. How would the people of Sunset Park have benefited from being near Bush Terminal?
Awaiting Waterfront Rebirth
By Albert Davila

Like many other Brooklyn communities that face the port of New York or the Atlantic Ocean, Sunset Park measures its health by the heartbeat of its vast waterfront. If cargo vessels like its piers, Sunset Park thrives; if not, it crumbles.

In the good old days, from the turn of the century to World War II, boats from all over the nation and world unloaded their cargos at piers along Sunset Park.

The spillover from this freight traffic generated related industries such as warehouses and rail yards and with them came jobs and growth in the community.

During its heyday, people who lived in Sunset Park were likely to work there. If they went for food, clothing or entertainment, they were likely to find all of these services in Sunset Park.

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“My family has been here since 1906 and I can tell you that until World War II, they didn’t need to go to any other area for anything,” said Dennis Sedita, manager of Community Board 7, which also covers Windsor Terrace. “We had everything here.”

Things quickly changed when the cargo ships moved to the new container ports that dot the New Jersey side of the bay. The flight of its most basic industry marked a decline in Sunset Park that, officials hope, reached its peak in the 1970s.

And now, in the ‘80s, Sunset Park is going back to basics, going back to its roots in the waterfront.

“The waterfront is the lifeblood of Sunset Park,” Sedita said. “We can hope for a revitalization of the community only if the waterfront is put back in business.”

Currently, a number of projects along the waterfront promises to bring back jobs to Sunset Park. The most ambitious of these projects is the development of the now-abandoned Brooklyn Army Terminal.
1. According to DOCUMENT 8, what did boats from all over the nation do in Sunset Park from the turn of the century to World War II?

2. What was the result of the busy waterfront area in Sunset Park?

3. What kinds of services could people find in Sunset Park during this time?

4. According to DOCUMENT 8, why did things change quickly in Sunset Park after World War II?
### Racial & Ethnic Composition

#### Table 6: Racial & Ethnic Composition of Sunset Park 1970 - 1980

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>Hispanic</th>
<th>Asians &amp; American Indians</th>
<th>Others</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-Hispanic</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>63,458</td>
<td>2,243</td>
<td>21,695</td>
<td>1536</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>25,825</td>
<td>899</td>
<td>39,373</td>
<td>2795</td>
<td>1007</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Sources:**
- New York City Planning Commission, Community Board #7 Portfolio, 1977
- Community District Needs, FY 1988, op. cit., pg. 115
- U.S. Department of Commerce, op. cit., Table Pg. 7
- Calculations by Brooklyn In Touch Information Center

The white, non-Hispanic population dropped from 75% to 37%, while the Hispanic, mainly Puerto Rican population, doubled from 25% to 56%. The small Black population got smaller and the Asian population nearly doubled, but remained quite small. Hispanics were the majority in Sunset Park, but only 47% of the population of Community Board #7.
1. According to **DOCUMENT 9**, in 1970, what percentage of the Sunset Park population was white? What percentage was Hispanic?

2. In 1980, what percentage of the Sunset Park population was white? What percentage was Hispanic?

3. What might have been some of the reasons for this change in population? Make two guesses here:

4. How might the neighborhood have changed as new people moved to the area? Think about what types of services, businesses or organizations a new group of people might look for:

WHERE CHINA AND BROOKLYN OVE

By MINDY ALOFF

NEW YORK CITY has several Chinatowns. The oldest and most well known is Manhattan’s, on the Lower East Side. The second oldest is in Flushing, Queens. The relative newcomer — having sprung up mainly over the last decade — is in the Sunset Park neighborhood of Brooklyn. My family and I, Brooklyn residents since 1984, first heard about the Chinese neighborhood a few years ago, when several of its restaurants were recommended to us. The cooking and range of offerings rivaled those of restaurants we frequented in Manhattan, and I was quickly enthralled by the neighborhood, whose modest homes and stores conveyed solid warmth and a sense of aspiration, like the Brooklyn of the 1930’s and 40’s I have read about.

The main shopping corridor of this Chinatown is on Eighth Avenue, between 39th and 65th Streets. If you walk southward along the avenue, you will see, as the crow flies, the vista of the Verrazano Narrows, its twinkling waters crisscrossed by the ghostly traceries of the bridge that bears its name. At the heart of the Chinese-American passage, you will find restaurants, markets, bakeries, flower shops and a number of unprepossessing toy and clothing stores for children.

The signs bear Chinese characters (English, too, sometimes), when there are signs. Yet one is constant-
1. Read Document 10. Name where three of New York City’s Chinatowns are located.

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2. Describe some of the characteristics of the Chinese area of Sunset Park.

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3. Where do the majority of Chinese immigrants living in Sunset Park work?

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4. In the third paragraph, the writer lists other immigrant populations that call Sunset Park home. Name some of them here:

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**GLOSSARY**

**Benefit:** to make better

**Characteristic:** a quality or trait of a specific person, place, or thing

**Convert:** to change from one form into another

**Development:** a growth or a change

**Industrialize:** to develop new jobs that use machines and factories

**Inference:** an educated guess

**Majority:** the most

**Manufacture:** to make items using a machine

**Rural:** a countryside area, not a town or city

**Similarity:** things that are alike or the same

**The Great Depression:** a historical period in America in the 1920’s and 1930’s when the economy crashed and people had a lot of trouble finding jobs and earning money

**Third Avenue Elevated Line:** one of the earliest train lines ever in New York City, it opened in 1878 and ran above the street level on an “elevated” track

**World War II:** a global war that lasted from 1939 to 1945