

## What's the Big Idea?

**Question:** What dynamics and relationships are at play in this place?

**Outcomes:** Understanding and applying the [\*Big Ideas of Sustainability\*](#) to your place

**Materials:** Powerpoint of pictures that exemplify various big ideas (inside, outside, etc), Index-Sized Cards with each big Idea (Make enough sets so that each participant gets one card.)

### **Background Information:**

- Explain Purpose: This is an activity to be used as an introduction to each of the Big Ideas of Sustainability in real-world contexts. It is intended to be followed by a Big Idea Neighborhood Walk in which the students would identify and discuss the Big Ideas at play in a particular place. The Big Idea Neighborhood Walk is also a great way to connect students to a particular place.
- Getting ready to play: Introduce the 12 Big Ideas to the participants by distributing either a Big Idea Poster or the Big Ideas and Essential Questions handout. Explain that in both natural and social systems there are key concepts and dynamics at work. Recognizing and understanding these Big Ideas forms the foundation of understanding sustainability and systems thinking.

### **Activity:**

1. Each participant is given one Big Idea card. Allow the participants time to reflect on that idea, build a preliminary understanding of that concept and to ask any clarifying questions.
2. Instruct the participants: "As you see each picture displayed, think about which Big Ideas are at play in that context. If you think that the Big Idea on your card is relevant, raise your card in the air."
3. Immediately after viewing one image, participants who raised their Big Idea card share the connection of the idea to the picture.

### **Debrief and Next Steps:**

- Which Big Ideas were easy to identify?
- Are there any Big Ideas that were difficult to recognize or place in these pictures? (Often participants will have difficulty finding examples of Equity and Fairness, but should be given permission to identify inequity or a lack of fairness.)
- What surprised you about this activity?
- This activity should then be taken outside on the Big Idea Neighborhood Walk.
  1. Break a large group into smaller groups of no more than 12 participants with one teacher facilitator. (Groups of 6- 8 work well.)

2. Hand out an entire set of 12 Big Idea cards to each small group. (Depending on the size of the group some participants may have two cards, including the facilitator.)
3. Walk through your neighborhood, stopping every now and then to look around for the Big Ideas in action. If you know your neighborhood well, you should pre-select particularly rich spots to investigate. Tell the students to use their fingers to create either a circular *lens* or a rectangular *picture frame* to focus their mind on a smaller visual field.
4. Ask, “Who sees their Big Idea in action?” Students should raise their Big Idea cards to show what they see. Stop to hear the connections made between place and the Big Ideas. After a few stops, the students will likely have more to share as they get used to seeing the Big Ideas out in their neighborhood. At this point, you may want to discuss in small groups of 3 students or in pairs.