

# City and Country Life Contrast through Poetry

## Lesson Overview

Students will read and interpret poetry concerning the people and characteristics of the Chicago or any large Midwest city.

## Student Objectives

1. Interpret poetry.
2. Make connections with poetry.
3. Work with analogies.
4. Illustrate poetry.

## Grade Level: 4-8

## Materials

- ✓ City and Country Life Contrast Through Poetry information sheets and worksheet
- ✓ paper
- ✓ crayons/markers for student illustrations

## Vocabulary

- **skyscraper** – a very tall, continuously habitable building, at least 300 feet tall.
- **patchwork quilt** – blanket made of scraps of material sewn together

## Background Information

“The Skyscraper” by Carl Sandburg is given in its entirety for teacher reference as well as in brief form on student worksheet.

A brief synopsis of each of the author’s life is included at the bottom of each poem.

## Procedure

1. Have students read poetry either as a group or individually (one theory is that a poem must be read through three times and then begin the interpretation.)
2. Discuss the author’s abilities to contrast life in the city and life in rural areas. The Skyscraper poem has been included, as it talks about people coming from prairies and cities each day to work in the skyscrapers. The skyscrapers are referenced in each of the other poems.
3. Have students complete City and Country Life Contrast through Poetry worksheet as a team or individually.
4. Have a class discussion of their results. Also, allow students to post their illustrations of the poetry

## Additional Resources

- Discussion and images of The Skyscraper by Carl Sandburg:  
<https://www.pbslearningmedia.org/resource/pia18.ela.sandburgskyscraper/sandburg-skyscraper/>
- In depth lesson for the Skyscraper: <http://s3.amazonaws.com/architecture-org/files/resources/skyscraper-poem-8-la.pdf>
- Reading of *Heartland* book:  
<https://youtu.be/qArphOHFWGA>
- Photographs set to music showing farming for past 100 years:  
<https://youtu.be/bcezsvfUNT4>

## Standards

### ***Illinois English Language Arts Standards***

CCRA.R.1 Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.

CCRA.R.4 Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.

CCRA.SL.5 Make strategic use of digital media and visual displays of data to express information and enhance understanding of presentations.

### ***Illinois Social Science Standard***

SS.G.2.6-8.MdC. Compare and contrast the <sup>[[SEP]]</sup>cultural and environmental characteristics of different places or regions.

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These mAGic lessons are designed to bring agriculture to life in your classroom. They address the Illinois Learning Standards in math, science, English language arts and social studies.

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# Skyscrapers

By day the skyscraper looms in the smoke and sun and has a soul.

Prairie and valley, streets of the city, pour people into it and they mingle among its twenty floors and are poured out again back to the streets, prairies and valleys.

It is the men and women, boys and girls so poured in and out all day that give the building a soul of dreams and thoughts and memories.

(Dumped in the sea or fixed in a desert, who would care for the building or speak its name or ask a policeman the way to it?)

Elevators slide on their cables and tubes catch letters and parcels and iron pipes carry gas and water in and sewage out.

Wires climb with secrets, carry light and carry words, and tell terrors and profits and loves--curses of men grappling plans of business and questions of women in plots of love.

Hour by hour the caissons reach down to the rock of the earth and hold the building to a turning planet.

Hour by hour the girders play as ribs and reach out and hold together the stone walls and floors.

Hour by hour the hand of the mason and the stuff of the mortar clinch the pieces and parts to the shape an architect voted.

Hour by hour the sun and the rain, the air and the rust, and the press of time running into centuries, play on the building inside and out and use it.

Men who sunk the pilings and mixed the mortar are laid in graves where the wind whistles a wild song without words

And so are men who strung the wires and fixed the pipe and tubes and those who saw it rise floor by floor.

Souls of them all are here, even the hod carrier begging at back doors hundreds of miles away and the brick-layer who went to state's prison for shooting another man while drunk.

(One man fell from a girder and broke his neck at the end of a straight plunge--he is here--his soul has gone into the stones of the building.)

On the office doors from tier to tier--hundreds of names and each name standing for a face written across with a dead child, a passionate lover, a driving ambition for a million dollar business or a lobster's ease of life.

Behind the signs on the doors they work and the walls tell nothing from room to room.

Ten-dollar-a-week stenographers take letters from corporation officers, lawyers, efficiency engineers, and tons of letters go bundled from the building to all ends of the earth.

Smiles and tears of each office girl go into the soul of the building just the same as the master-men who rule the building.

Hands of clocks turn to noon hours and each floor empties its men and women who go away and eat and come back to work.

Toward the end of the afternoon all work slackens and all jobs go slower as the people feel day closing on them.

One by one the floors are emptied. . . The uniformed elevator men are gone. Pails clang. . . Scrubbers work, talking in foreign tongues. Broom and water and mop clean from the floors human dust and spit, and machine grime of the day.

Spelled in electric fire on the roof are words telling miles of houses and people where to buy a thing for money. The sign speaks till midnight.

Darkness on the hallways. Voices echo. Silence holds. . . Watchmen walk slow from floor to floor and try the doors. Revolvers bulge from their hip pockets. . . Steel safes stand in corners. Money is stacked in them.

A young watchman leans at a window and sees the lights of barges butting their way across a harbor, nets of red and white lanterns in a railroad yard, and a span of glooms splashed with lines of white and blurs of crosses and clusters over the sleeping city.

By night the skyscraper looms in the smoke and the stars and has a soul.

## Poets of Chicago Information Sheet 1

### Skyscraper (excerpts)

By day the skyscraper looms in the smoke and sun and has a soul. Prairie and valley, streets of the city, pour people into it and they mingle among its twenty floors and are poured out again back to the streets, prairies and valleys. It is the men and women, boys and girls so poured in and out all day that give the building a soul of dreams and thoughts and memories.

Hands of clocks turn to noon hours and each floor empties its men and women who go away and eat and come back to work. Toward the end of the afternoon all work slackens and all jobs go slower as the people feel day closing on them. One by one the floors are emptied. . . The uniformed elevator men are gone. Pails clang. . . Scrubbers work, talking in foreign tongues. Broom and water and mop clean from the floors human dust and spit, and machine grime of the day. Spelled in electric fire on the roof are words telling miles of houses and people where to buy a thing for money. The sign speaks till midnight. Darkness on the hallways. Voices echo. Silence holds. . . Watchmen walk slow from floor to floor and try the doors. Revolvers bulge from their hip pockets. . . Steel safes stand in corners. Money is stacked in them. A young watchman leans at a window and sees the lights of barges butting their way across a harbor, nets of red and white lanterns in a railroad yard, and a span of glooms splashed with lines of white and blurs of crosses and clusters over the sleeping city. By night the skyscraper looms in the smoke and the stars and has a soul.

**- Carl Sandburg**

*Carl Sandburg was born in 1878 in Galesburg, IL. He was a reporter for the Chicago Daily News. In 1916, he published Chicago Poems, which was the beginning of his success. He won two Pulitzer Prizes for his poetry. Died in 1967.*

## City and Country Life Contrast through Poetry Information Sheet 2

### **Heartland** (excerpts)

By Diane Siebert

I am the heartland, I can feel  
Machines of iron, tools of steel,  
Creating farmlands, square by square—  
A quilt of life I proudly wear;

A patchwork quilt laid gently down  
In hues of yellow, green, and brown.  
As tractors, plows, and planters go  
Across my fields and, row by row,  
Prepare the earth and plant the seeds  
That grow to meet a nation's needs.

A patchwork quilt whose seams are etched  
By miles of wood and wire stretched  
Around the barns and pastures where  
The smell of livestock fills the air.

I am the Heartland, on these plains  
Rise elevators filled with grains,  
They mark the towns where people walk  
To see their neighbors, just to talk;  
Where farmers go to get supplies  
And sit a spell to analyze  
The going price of corn and beans,  
The rising cost of new machines.  
Where steps are meant for shelling peas,  
And kids build houses in the trees.

I am the Heartland in my song  
Are cities beating, steady, strong, with footsteps from a million feet  
And sounds of traffic in the street;  
Where giant mills and stockyards sprawl,  
And neon-lighted shadows fall  
From windowed walls of brick that rise  
Toward the clouds, to scrape the skies;  
Where highways meet and rails converge;  
Where farm and city rhythms merge  
To form a vital bond between  
The concrete and the fields of green.

I am the Heartland. I survive, to keep America, my home, alive.

“Siebert, Diane, and Wendell Minor. *Heartland*. David R. Godine, Publisher, 2015.”

**Diane Siebert** and her husband left their jobs, sold their possessions, and set out on a ten-year journey around the United States. This experience inspired her many award-winning children's books including *Heartland*. **Wendell Minor**, the illustrator, was born and raised in Aurora, Illinois, right in the midst of the heartland. His work has won many awards.

## City and Country Life Contrast through Poetry

### Information Sheet 3

#### City Life, Country Life

By Meish Goldish

Sung to "Yankee Doodle"

Farmer Johnson has a home  
Way out in the country.  
There are fields and hills and lakes,  
And apples grow on one tree.

Farmer Johnson likes her home  
In the country quiet.  
Through the fields she'll often roam,  
And says that you should try it!

Mister Nitty has a home  
In the busy city.  
Streets and people all about,  
And buildings tall and pretty.

Mister Nitty likes his home  
Near the city's action.  
Going all about the town,  
It gives him satisfaction!

We can learn from Farmer Johnson  
And from Mister Nitty.  
Some folks like the country life,  
While others like the city!

**Meish Goldish** is an author of over 300 books for children. He was born in Tulsa, OK Goldish, Meish. "City Life, Country Life." *Thematic Poems, Songs, and Fingerplays: Book : 45 Irresistible Rhymes and Activities to Build Literacy*, Scholastic Professional Books, 1993.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

## City and Country Life Contrast through Poetry Worksheet

1. The "Skyscraper" poem discusses a typical day's activities that occur in and around the building. In your own words, describe what happens at each time of day listed below:  
In the morning:  
At lunchtime:  
Late afternoon:  
At the end of the day:  
During the night:
2. What words do the poems *Heartland* and "City Life, Country Life" use to describe skyscrapers?
3. In the *Heartland*, the author uses a lot of words to help the reader picture in their mind what she's talking about. A "patchwork quilt" refers to a blanket that used to be made from material that had been cut into squares and sewn together.  
What does the author compare the squares of fabric to?  
What does the author compare the seams of the quilt to?
4. In the *Heartland*, what differences do you see between the small towns and the big cities?
5. In the *Heartland*, what does "I am the heartland, I survive, to keep America, my home alive" mean to you?
6. Why do you think the author wrote "City Life, Country Life"?
7. What do all these poems have in common?
8. What "text to self" connections (how you relate to the poem) can you make with each of the poems?
9. Using the back of this paper, draw a Venn diagram comparing city and country life to each other, using thoughts and ideas from the poems as your guide.
10. Often the person who illustrates literary works is not the author. On a separate piece of paper, make your own illustration of one of the poems. Remember, the illustrator has the ability to help the reader understand the literary work. Once you have finished each illustration, explain why you chose to illustrate the work as you did.



## City and Country Life Contrast through Poetry ANSWER KEY

**Note:** Due to the interpretative quality of these questions, accept any reasonable answers.

1. The “Skyscraper” poem discusses a typical day’s activities that occur in and around the building. In your own words, describe what happens at each time of day listed below:  
In the morning: **People from all over come to the building and become its soul.**  
At lunchtime: **People leave to eat lunch and then return.**  
Late afternoon: **Work slacks and then people start to leave to go home.**  
At the end of the day: **Night watchmen and cleaners arrive**  
During the night: **The stars, city lights and neon lights shine in the smoke, the skyscraper has a soul.**
2. What words do the poems *Heartland* and “City Life, Country Life” us to describe skyscrapers? **And buildings tall and pretty. From windowed walls of brick that rise Toward the clouds, to scrape the skies;**
3. In the *Heartland*, the author uses a lot of words to help the reader picture in their mind what she’s talking about. A “patchwork quilt” refers to a blanket that used to be made from material that had been cut into squares and sewn together.  
What does the author compare the squares of fabric to? **Crops planted in squares**  
What does the author compare the seams of the quilt to? **Fences**
4. In the *Heartland*, what differences do you see between the small towns and the big cities? **Answers will vary, but should include the slower pace and farming aspects of the town versus the hustle and bustle of the cities.**
5. In the *Heartland*, what does “I am the heartland, I survive, to keep America, my home alive” mean to you? **Accept any reasonable answer that contains growing of food on the heartland.**
6. Why do you think the author wrote “City Life, Country Life”? **Comparison and to show that it is okay to like different things.**
7. What do all these poems have in common? **They are all describe life in our area/the Midwest with our cities, farms, and different people.**
8. What “text to self” connections (how you relate to the poem) can you make with each of the poems? **Accept any reasonable answers.**
9. Using the back of this paper, draw a Venn diagram comparing city and country life to each other, using thoughts and ideas from the poems as your guide. **The diagrams will vary, accept any that have given thought to the city/country aspect of poems.**
10. Often the person who illustrates literary works is not the author. On a separate piece of paper, make your own illustration of one of the poems. Remember, the illustrator has the ability to help the reader understand the literary work. Once you have finished each illustration, explain why you chose to illustrate the work as you did. **Accept any drawings that have attempted to illustrate parts, or the overall theme of the poems.**