

# WHAT MAKES WASHINGTON UNIQUE? UNIT 1: OLMSTED PARK AND BOULEVARD SYSTEM



Volunteer Park, circa 1912. [Courtesy Museum of History & Industry.](#)

**What are the special geographic characteristics of the different regions of Washington State?**

**What are the special geographic characteristics of the SR 520 corridor region?**

**Which characteristics of the natural environment of Washington did Olmsted identify as most unique and important to emphasize when creating a park and boulevard system for Seattle?**

## UNIT 1: OLMSTED PARK AND BOULEVARD SYSTEM

### PRIMARY OBJECTIVES OF THIS UNIT

To provide reliable non-fiction materials, educational resources, and primary and secondary resources that will help students to:

- understand the difference between natural resources/attractions and man-made resources/attractions.
- identify unique natural and human-made resources in Washington State and King County.
- learn about the development of Seattle's Olmsted Parks.

### STUDENT ACTIVITIES

- Students will read (or listen to) recommended HistoryLink.org essays and SR520 History web pages and participate in directed class discussions.
- Students will identify the difference between natural and human-made resources and attractions, using photos as primary sources.
- Students will identify the natural resources that John C. Olmsted felt were special and unique – those he wanted to build Seattle's parks system around. Students will use letters, reports, and newspaper articles as primary sources.
- Students will identify human-made attractions of this area.
- Students will be encouraged to plan a future city park, to identify both natural and human-made attractions (built since 1915) that should be visible from the new park, and to defend their selections.

### MATERIALS INCLUDED

- PHOTOS #1 (Set of photos that include both natural and man-made resources/attractions of Washington State and King County)
- PHOTOS #2 (Set of photos showing views from selected Olmsted Parks in early 1900's and also current views)
- DOCUMENTS #1: OLMSTED DOCUMENTS (letters, reports, and newspaper articles).
- WORKSHEET #2
- ELEMENTARY ESSAY #1

### MATERIALS/EQUIPMENT NEEDED

- Computer, Internet access, and overhead projector, or copied sets of primary sources from this lesson.
- Copies of worksheet for each student or small group of students.

### TIME MANAGEMENT

- 2-5 class periods

### RECOMMENDED GRADE LEVELS:

- Grades 4 and 7

## UNIT 1: OLMSTED PARK AND BOULEVARD SYSTEM



This map identifies the parks, playfields, and boulevards laid out by landscape designer John Charles Olmsted in his 1903 and 1908 plans for the Seattle Parks Board.

The Olmsted Brothers landscape architecture firm designed parks and boulevards for Seattle. The firm’s principal designer in Seattle was John Charles Olmsted, nephew and stepson of the well-known Frederick Law Olmsted, who designed New York City’s Central Park.

Olmsted’s 1903 master plan laid out a 20-mile-long greensward of parks and boulevards that ran from Seward Park along Lake Washington and across the city via Woodland Park to Discovery Park. Olmsted also designed the grounds of the Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition (on the University of Washington campus) in 1909 and the Highlands subdivision. (The Highlands is a “gated community” on Puget Sound immediately north of the Seattle city limits.) He also is credited with introducing the playground concept to the city.

From *Seattle Parks and Recreation’s Historic Resources Plan* (April 2005).  
 Courtesy Seattle Parks and Recreation.

## UNIT 1: OLMSTED PARK AND BOULEVARD SYSTEM

**Arboretum:** a place where trees and plants are grown for scientific and educational purposes

**Architect:** a person who designs buildings and advises in their construction

**Boulevard:** a wide avenue often having grass strips with trees along its center or sides

**Campus:** the grounds and buildings of a university, college, or school

**Distinctive:** clearly marking a person or a thing as different from others

**Exposition:** a public exhibition

**Human-made:** something that has been constructed or built by a human

**Intersection:** the place or point where two or more things, especially streets, intersect

**Landscape:** the land that can be seen from one viewpoint

**Legacy:** something left to a community through someone's work or other activities

**Location:** a place fit for or having some particular use

**Native plant:** a plant that lives or grows naturally in a particular region

**Perennial:** a plant that lives for several years

**Rhododendron:** a bush that has evergreen leaves and clusters of yellow, white, pink, red, or purple flowers

**Scenery:** a view or landscape resembling a beautiful painting

**Shrub:** a plant that has several woody stems and is smaller than most trees

**Transportation:** the movement of people or goods

**Unique:** one of a kind

## UNIT 1: OLMSTED PARK AND BOULEVARD SYSTEM

### SUGGESTED CLASSROOM BASED ASSESSMENT (CBA)

**Dig Deep:** To be an effective citizen, you need to know how to use evidence from different sources. Using artifacts and primary sources as evidence, you will draw conclusions about a historical question you have been studying in your classroom.

### SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

- Discuss the difference between a natural resource and a human-made resource. Ask students to identify examples of each type of resource or attraction. Use the set of photographs (PHOTOS #1) included in this unit to identify differences.
- Have students read the Elementary Level #1: “Olmsted Parks in Seattle.”
- Using the information found in the packet of primary and secondary sources included in this unit (see below), ask students to use WORKSHEET #2 to identify the natural resources that Olmsted felt were most special about this region – those he wanted to build the city parks around. This worksheet also has an activity in which students use a map of Olmsted parks and boulevards (MAP #1) to determine which bodies of water border specific parks, as planned by Olmsted.

### RESOURCES:

- Documents: Students will list which specific natural resources Olmsted was referring to in his letters to his wife, in newspaper articles, and in reports (DOCUMENTS #1: OLMSTED DOCUMENTS)
- Photos – Students will look at a group of photos from early Washington and list those natural resources that Olmsted referred to that they see in these photos (PHOTOS #3)
- Maps – Students will use the map showing Olmsted parks and boulevards (MAP #1) to identify which parks border on specific bodies of water in Seattle.
- Look at the map showing the Olmsted park and boulevard system (MAP #1). Is there one located near your school or neighborhood? Ask students if they have visited it or another Olmsted park. Ask them to list the special things that they remember seeing. Ask them to identify which features they think were here in 1903 when Olmsted began his parks project and what they think Olmsted wanted visitors to see and appreciate?
- Discuss what special vistas or scenery students would want to capitalize on if they could pick a site today for a new city park in, including both natural and human-made attractions that make Seattle and Washington unique. Have students write a letter to a friend or relative that describes some of the special sights that would like them to see if they came to visit. Where is one location where they could see most of these natural or human-made attractions? What would be a good name for this park?

## UNIT 1: OLMSTED PARK AND BOULEVARD SYSTEM

### SUGGESTED CLASSROOM BASED ASSESSMENT (CBA)

**Dig Deep: Analyzing Sources:** To be an effective citizen, one needs to know the difference between an account based on evidence and an outrageous story. After selecting and exploring a historical question from multiple perspectives, you will take and support a position on the question using primary sources as your evidence.

### SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

- Have students read 520History.org website pages (Olmsted Plan for Parks and Boulevards, Washington Park, Lake Washington Boulevard, Montlake Boulevard, and UW Campus) and HistoryLink.org essays [1124](#) and [3290](#).
- Assign an Olmsted park to individual students or groups of students.
- Have students look at the map of Olmsted parks (MAP #1) and list the natural resources and attractions that could be seen from each park (WORKSHEET #2). Ask students to list the human-made sights and attractions that you might see from this park now. (Students can use PHOTOS #2) Have students determine if development has encroached on the views that Olmsted originally wanted visitors to enjoy from this park. If development has encroached upon it, does it add to or detract from the view from the park?
- Have students write a letter to their city or county representative and express their opinions about the parks they have been assigned. Are they being well-maintained? Are the parks safe? Do they have clean and usable playgrounds or facilities

for youth of your age? Can a visitor still appreciate the beautiful views and natural resources? Students should use two points that they have learned from the Olmsted articles to make their points in the letter. Students may find their representative contact information at the [League of Women Voter's website](#), [seattle.gov](#) or [About King County](#).

- Have students create a plan for a new city park. Discuss what special vistas or scenery students would want to capitalize on if they could pick a site for a new city park today? Include both natural and human-made attractions that make Seattle and Washington unique. Ask students to determine if the values that Olmsted used when he created his original plan would apply to their new park – and to the world today. (For example, will you be able to have unobstructed views and waterfront accessibility? Playground equipment installed without insurance? Free public access to park? Need for security?)
- Students can write a letter to a friend or relative that describes some of the special sights that they would like for them to see if they came to visit. Where is one location a visitor could go to see most of these natural or human-made attractions? What would be a good name for this park? Have students create a poster that would advertise or promote their park or create a web page for the new park.
- Prepare list of resources used to complete these assignments. Include title, author, type of source, date published, and publisher for each source.



## UNIT 1: OLMSTED PARK AND BOULEVARD SYSTEM

### PRIMARY SOURCES

#### PHOTOS

- PHOTOS #1– natural geographic characteristics and human-made resources/attractions of Washington State and Seattle area and set of photos
- PHOTOS #2–views from selected Olmsted Parks in early 1900's and also current views

#### DOCUMENTS

- DOCUMENTS #1: OLMSTED DOCUMENTS–quotes from Olmsted's letters to his wife, newspaper articles, and reports

#### MAPS

- MAP #1–map of Olmsted Parks

### SECONDARY SOURCES

#### WASHINGTON: OUR HOME

- Chapter 2 – Geography is the Stage

#### WASHINGTON: A STATE OF CONTRASTS

- Chapter 2 – The Natural Environment
- Chapter 9 – The Progressive Era and The Twenties 1889-1929

### RELEVANT HISTORYLINK.ORG ESSAYS

- **1124** Olmsted Parks in Seattle
- **3290** John Olmsted arrives in Seattle to design city parks on April 30, 1903.
- **3490** Seattle's Washington Park Arboretum is established on December 6, 1934
- **7054** Olmsted Park Plans for Seattle Cybertour
- **8873** Alaska-Yukon-Pacific-Exposition (1909)
- **8939** Regents of the University of Washington approve Olmsted's plan for the A-Y-P-E on May 17, 1907
- **8982** Grading crews finish work on the Rainier Vista on May 1, 1908.
- **10242** Seattle City Council approves establishing Washington Park Arboretum in 1934
- **8985** University Boulevard precursor to Seattle's Montlake Boulevard opens June 1, 1909

- **10186** King County Superior Court approves condemnation of land along proposed route of Lake Washington Ship Canal
- **10243** Washington Park
- **10244** Lake Washington Boulevard

### ELEMENTARY LEVEL ESSAY

- ELEMENTARY ESSAY #1: "Olmsted Parks in Seattle"

### RELEVANT 520HISTORY.ORG PAGES

- The Olmsted Plan
- Washington Park
- Lake Washington Boulevard
- Montlake Boulevard
- The University of Washington Campus
- Contact, Construction, and Change

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## ADDITIONAL ONLINE RESOURCES

- [OlmstedOnline.org](http://OlmstedOnline.org) is a resource website that includes documents, plans, and maps and secondary sources, including related publications and articles.
- [Seattle Parks and Recreation's Don Sherwood Files](#)
- [Celebrating our Olmsted Legacy Olmsted Park Centennial 3/31/2003](#)
- [History of Seward Park/Friends of Seward Park](#)
- [Friends of Seattle's Olmsted Parks](#)
- [About King County \(elected officials\)](#)
- [Seattle.gov \(elected officials\)](#)
- [Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition: Centennial 1909-2009: Curriculum developed by HistoryLink.org](#) that explores the A-Y-P and its impact on the region's development.



Intersection of Interlaken and Washington Park (later Lake Washington) boulevards, 1911. Photo by Webster & Stevens.

Courtesy Seattle Municipal Archives, Item No. 29378.



## UNIT 1: OLMSTED PARK AND BOULEVARD SYSTEM

### ENVIRONMENTAL AND SUSTAINABILITY STANDARD

- Standard 2/The Natural and Built Environment: Students engage in inquiry and systems thinking and use information gained through learning experiences in, about, and for the environment to understand the structure, components, and processes of natural and human-built environments.

### GEOGRAPHY EALRS

- **3.2.1** Understands human interaction with the environment. Understands and analyzes how the environment has affected people and how the people have affected the environment in the past or present.
- **3.4.3** Understands how technology and ideas have affected the way people lived and changed their values, beliefs, and attitudes.

### HISTORY EALR

- **4.2.1** Understands how individuals caused change in Washington State history.

### SOCIAL STUDIES SKILLS EALRS

- **5.1.2** Evaluates the accuracy of primary and secondary sources.
- **5.2.1** Uses inquiry-based research: Understands how essential questions define the significance of researching an issue or event. (4th) Creates and uses a research question to conduct research on an issue or event. (7th)
- **5.2.2** Understands the main ideas from an artifact, primary source, or secondary source describing an issue or event.
- **5.4.1** Draws clear, well-reasoned conclusions and provides explanations that are supported by artifacts and/or primary sources in a paper, presentation, or classroom discussion.

- **5.4.2** Prepares a list of resources, including the title, author, and type of source, date published, and publisher for each source.

### READING EALRS

- **1.3.2** Understand and apply content/academic vocabulary critical to the meaning of the text. Use new vocabulary in oral and written communication and content/academic text.
- **2.1.3** State the main idea of an informational/expository text passage and provide three or more text-based details that support it.
- **2.1.5** Use text and prior knowledge to make, confirm, or revise inferences and predictions.
- **2.1.6** Generate and answer questions before, during, and after reading.
- **2.1.7** Summarize the events, information, or ideas in an informational/expository text.
- **2.2.1** Explain ideas or events in sequential order.
- **2.3.1** Compare and contrast information written in different genres/formats.
- **2.4.1** Apply the skills of drawing a conclusion, providing a response, and expressing insights to informational text. Draw conclusions from text, citing text-based information to support conclusion. Give a personal response that demonstrates insights about text, using teacher-generated prompt.
- **2.4.3** Understand the difference between fact and opinion and provide evidence from text to support answer.
- **3.2.1** Understand information gained from reading to perform a specific task.