



SDG 11 – Sustainable Cities & Communities

Inspiration pieces

‘Model City’

What would your ideal city or community look like? And how would people live and travel within it?

The title Model City has two meanings. A model can be a picture or representation of a place, but it can also mean an example for others to follow. Your Model City might be green, welcoming and imaginative, or it might warn us about what could happen if cities develop in the wrong way.

You can respond through art, poetry, short film, drama or another creative form. Your work must explore the SDG 11 – Sustainable Cities and Communities. Think about homes, public spaces, nature, equality and how people move around. How could we create places that are safer, cleaner, fairer and better for everyone.

Please note you do not have to engage with all or any of the inspiration pieces in order to make your own submission, these are bite-size pieces that can be used to inform and inspire your own creative piece :)

Poetry

- [Model City \[1\] \(Donna Stonecipher\)](#)

Questions a city increasingly shaped by hotels and temporary occupancy rather than permanent homes and communities. It explores development, ownership, and urban alienation, asking who the modern city is actually being built for.

- [The City Planners – Poetry Prof](#) Margaret Atwood

Questions artificial suburbs, uniform development and attempts to control nature. Particularly relevant to town planning.

- [The Peace of Wild Things by Wendell Berry - Scottish Poetry Library](#) Wendell Berry

Connects nature with mental health, calm and wellbeing, important elements of liveable cities.

- [A Brook in the City by Robert Frost - Poems | Academy of American Poets](#) Robert Frost

A natural stream is buried beneath an expanding city. Excellent for discussing urban development, waterways and restoring nature.

Film

Your film does not have to explain sustainable cities. It can tell a story set in one. Show us a journey, a problem, a warning or a moment of change that reveals what your Model City values.

- [PAPER CITY - An Urban Story](#)

UN-Habitat uses stop-motion and a cardboard city to explore overcrowding, pollution, urban growth and planning.

- [Alike short film](#)

A beautiful, wordless animation about a grey, repetitive city that drains people of creativity and joy. It asks whether an efficient city is necessarily a good place to live.

- [The Peaceful Pedestrian Plazas of Paris: Lessons for Your City](#)

Shows how streets can be reclaimed from cars and redesigned for walking, meeting, playing and community life.

- [Creating Sustainable Cities - YouTube](#)

A quick, accessible overview of the qualities that make cities cleaner, greener and more liveable.

- [24 Hours of Reality: "Earthrise" by Amanda Gorman](#)

An energetic spoken-word poem calling for collective climate action.

- [Failte Ireland : Dublin in Words - YouTube](#)

Over the years, Dublin has been the muse of many a talented wordsmith. But one poem in particular perfectly evokes the city's unique atmosphere, rich history and "seedy elegance". In this short online film, Dublin slam poet Stephen James Smith recites, Louis MacNeice's poem, 'Dublin' over a series of stunning, thought-provoking images of the city.

- [SDG11 Big Questions \(Sustainable development goals\) - YouTube](#)

Some background on SDG 11 – Sustainable Cities & Communities

- [Gort Cycling Campaign by YRE Ireland - Exposure](#)

Campaign by students in Gort Community School aiming to help solve the sustainable development goal 13 of climate action by making cycling safe for students and our community and to promote the use of cycling to commute. and therefore, reduce CO2 emissions by choosing "bike before car".

Photography

A strong Model City photograph does more than show an attractive skyline. It notices something about how a city works, or how it could work better. Photograph a journey, a contrast, a problem, a community or a hopeful sign of change. A phone camera is all you need!

- **Henri Cartier-Bresson – Hyères, France (1932):** A cyclist flashes through a carefully framed city scene. Students can explore walking, cycling, movement and the "decisive moment." [View the photograph](#)

- **Fan Ho – *Approaching Shadow* (1954):** Light, shadow, architecture and a single person transform an ordinary street into something dramatic. [View Fan Ho's work](#)
- **Eamonn Doyle – *i* (2014):** Doyle photographs people walking through Dublin from unusual angles. His images ask whether a city notices and supports people of every age. [Explore the series](#)
- **Michael Wolf – *Architecture of Density*:** Repeating windows and crowded apartment blocks make Hong Kong appear almost abstract. Students could investigate housing, privacy, population and access to space. [Explore the series](#)
- **Tuca Vieira – *Paraisópolis* (2004):** Wealthy apartments and a densely built neighbourhood stand side by side. It is a powerful starting point for exploring inequality and the question: *Who is the city designed for?* [View the photograph](#)
- **Edward Burtynsky – *Highway #1, Los Angeles* (2003):** An enormous road system reveals how much urban space is given to cars. Students could photograph the contrast between car-centred and people-centred places. [Explore the Oil series](#)
- **Joel Sternfeld – *Walking the High Line*:** Sternfeld photographed an abandoned railway being reclaimed by nature before it became a public park. It shows how neglected city spaces can be reimagined. [Explore the series](#)
- **Iwan Baan – *Bosco Verticale, Milan*:** Photographs of residential towers covered in trees explore how architecture and nature might share the same space. [See the photographs](#)
- **Carol Camilleri - St Thomas More College Zejtun Secondary School** - Photo campaign by a student in Malta. [Malta by YRE Competition - Exposure](#)

Theatre

A Model City is more than a collection of buildings. It is a place where people live, travel, work, meet and sometimes disagree. Theatre brings these different voices together, allowing us to imagine who designs a city, who feels welcome there and how it might respond to challenges such as climate change, pollution, housing and transport. Your performance could take place at a bus stop, inside a future council chamber or on the last street left above the floodwater. Through characters, dialogue, movement and sound, create your own Model City.

- [Nick Hern Books | The Trials, By Dawn King](#)

In the near future, young jurors judge adults for their part in the climate emergency.

Stage a trial of today's city: should its leaders be praised or prosecuted for the future they created?

- [The Birds by Aristophanes | Drama and Theater Arts | Research Starters | EBSCOhost](#)

Two citizens abandon Athens and help to build an apparently perfect city in the sky. Their utopia gradually becomes concerned with control and power.

Create a comic council meeting in which characters design their "perfect" sustainable city and discover the weaknesses in their plan.

- [In the Heights | Concord Theatricals](#)

A changing New York neighbourhood faces questions about home, tradition, opportunity and community.

Podcasts

- [The 15 Minute City Explained! 🌐 | Green Travel | Ecolution | RTÉ Kids](#)

An RTÉ panel of young people explores greener travel and the idea of a city where everyday needs can be reached within 15 minutes.

- [Our Sustainable Village - RTÉ Podcasts](#)

This Irish series follows students from six Dublin schools as they develop environmental projects. One episode examines how to establish a walking or cycling bus.

- [Forest 404 - Podcast - Apple Podcasts](#)

A beautifully produced BBC science-fiction drama set in a future where forests have disappeared from human memory. Each story chapter is accompanied by a factual discussion and an immersive soundscape.

- [How to build a climate-friendly city - The Climate Question podcast, BBC World Service](#)

Ideas about how a sustainable city comes to be.

If you would like some further ideas, context or 'ideas to borrow' please see below!

A Short History of the Model City in Art

For hundreds of years, artists have imagined what a perfect or “model” city might look like. However, the meaning of an ideal city has changed over time.

In the fourteenth century, Ambrogio Lorenzetti painted *The Effects of Good Government in the City*. His successful city is busy and sociable: people work, trade, travel, build and dance together. The painting suggests that a good city depends on peace, community and responsible government.

During the Renaissance in the fifteenth century, artists created paintings known as *Ideal Cities*. These cities contain symmetrical streets, classical buildings and carefully planned public squares. The artists used mathematical perspective to make everything appear balanced and controlled. Curiously, these supposedly perfect cities are almost completely empty.

In the nineteenth century, Thomas Cole’s *The Architect’s Dream* turned the city into a fantasy. He combined buildings from different periods of history to create an imaginary world that could never exist in reality.

In the early twentieth century, artists responded to rapidly expanding industrial cities. Umberto Boccioni’s *The City Rises* presents construction as exciting and energetic, while George Grosz’s *Metropolis* shows the modern city as crowded, frightening and chaotic. Piet Mondrian later transformed New York’s streets and traffic into the colourful abstract grid of *Broadway Boogie Woogie*.

From the late twentieth century onwards, environmental concerns began to shape artistic visions of the ideal city. Hundertwasser’s *Green Town* imagines buildings covered by trees, gardens and living forms.

- [Ambrogio Lorenzetti, The Effects of Good Government in the City](#)

Lorenzetti imagines a successful city as a living community. People work, meet, trade and travel between the city and countryside. Good government is made visible through ordinary life.

TRAVEL LENS – Movement happens at a human scale. Streets are shared by pedestrians, workers, animals and riders. Ask: who appears safe, welcome and able to participate?

IDEA TO BORROW - Fill your city with purposeful journeys - going to school, work, shops, parks and friends - rather than adding people only as decoration.

- [The Ideal City of Urbino](#)

The artist uses one-point perspective, symmetry and classical architecture to suggest reason and order. Yet the perfect streets contain almost no residents.

TRAVEL LENS - The open square looks easy to cross, but where are the walkers, cyclists, children, older people and people with disabilities? A street can be orderly without being inclusive.

IDEA TO BORROW - Begin with one-point perspective, then bring the empty square to life with safe crossings, cycle routes, seating, trees and public transport.

- [Thomas Cole, The Architect's Dream](#)

Cole combines buildings from different periods into one impossible landscape. The result is magnificent, but it feels more like a monument to architecture than a place for everyday life.

TRAVEL LENS - Grand buildings dominate while travelers appear tiny. Consider whether a future city should impress people from a distance or support their daily journeys.

IDEA TO BORROW - Mix architecture from different centuries, then add a modern sustainable transport system that connects the entire imagined city.

- [Umberto Boccioni, The City Rises](#)

Boccioni captures the excitement and upheaval of a rapidly growing industrial city. Diagonal lines and broken colour make the construction site appear to move.

TRAVEL LENS - The painting comes from a moment when older forms of movement met new urban technology. Ask what today's transport transition - from fossil fuels to cleaner travel - might look like.

IDEA TO BORROW - Use diagonals, repeated shapes and energetic brushstrokes to make buses, trams, cyclists and walkers appear to flow through your city.

- [George Grosz, Metropolis](#)

Grosz turns the city into a place of pressure and confusion. Red light, sharp angles, advertisements and overlapping figures make urban life feel frantic rather than connected.

TRAVEL LENS - Many people are moving, but the street does not feel safe, calm or welcoming. Notice the hotel signs: they offer an interesting connection with Donna Stonecipher's Model City.

IDEA TO BORROW - Create a warning version of a future city dominated by traffic, noise, advertising or unsafe streets - then identify what would need to change.

- [Piet Mondrian, Broadway Boogie Woogie](#)

Mondrian translates Manhattan's grid and the rhythm of boogie-woogie music into colour. The city is represented as a pattern of routes rather than as buildings.

TRAVEL LENS - Imagine each coloured block as a journey. Which routes are fast or slow? Which connect, stop or exclude? Could colour show walking, cycling and public transport?

IDEA TO BORROW - Draw a map-like city. Give each kind of travel its own colour and use repetition to create movement and rhythm.

- [Friedensreich Hundertwasser, Green Town](#)

Hundertwasser rejected the idea that cities must be rigid, grey and separated from nature. In Green Town, roofs and streets are covered with vegetation, while buildings and routes curve through the landscape. The city is still active, but it no longer dominates the natural world.

TRAVEL LENS - Pedestrians and vehicles move through green corridors rather than across a bare traffic landscape. Imagine tree-lined routes that provide shade, cleaner air, wildlife habitat and more enjoyable journeys.

IDEA TO BORROW - Cover roofs with gardens. Replace straight roads with flowing routes. Make walking and cycling paths part of the landscape, not narrow strips added after the city is built.

- [Luc Schuiten, Vegetal City](#)

Schuiten's images are architectural illustrations rather than traditional paintings. They imagine buildings, bridges and transport systems that grow from the logic of nature. Instead of inserting a few trees into a conventional city, the entire city becomes an ecosystem.

TRAVEL LENS - Movement is quiet, clean and integrated into the design. Pedestrian space, public transport and new low-impact vehicles are considered from the beginning.

IDEA TO BORROW - Invent one original form of sustainable transport. Show where it gets its energy, who can use it, where it stops and how it connects with walking and cycling.

Donna Stonecipher's Model City

In Model City [1], Stonecipher watches new hotels appear across a city and imagines their empty rooms. The buildings signal development and travel, but they also create unease. The poem asks us to notice the difference between a place designed for temporary visitors and one that supports permanent residents.

Visitors, hotels and tourism can contribute to a city. However, a sustainable city must balance visitor travel with homes, schools, local services and safe everyday journeys for the people who live and work there.

Questions to carry into your painting

- Who is your city built for: residents, visitors, commuters, businesses or everyone?
- Are the buildings occupied and useful, or are some of them empty symbols of growth?
- Can a child travel safely and independently?
- Can an older person or wheelchair user reach every important place?
- Does transport connect communities, or divide them?
- Where do people meet, rest and belong?

Explore what makes a neighbourhood feel like home and what might be lost when a city is redeveloped.

Some suggested original drama starting points:

The last bus leaves two very different residents stranded.

A building is called as a witness at the trial of the city.

Cyclists, drivers and pedestrians argue over one street.

A planner unveils a perfect city, but nobody can afford to live there.

Tourists arrive to see a “green city” while residents reveal what lies behind the advertising.

A neighbourhood must decide whether to replace a car park with housing, trees or a public square.

