

Challenge #5: Back of the Yards

This week's challenge explores the rich history of the neighborhood of Back of the Yards. When European and Eastern Europeans immigrants came to Chicago, they faced many challenges. In response, they made choices that shaped the neighbor of Back of the Yards making it an essential part of the city's identity.

Step 1

Visual Exploration: BEFORE reading the short article, *An Urban Jungle* for our *Hood by Hood:*

Discovering Chicago's Neighborhoods Challenge take a moment to explore the images in the article. When looking at the images ask yourself the following questions:

1. What's going on in this picture?
2. What do you see that makes you say that?
3. What more can you find?

Step 2

Reading: Read the article *An Urban Jungle*

Step 3

Read Along with the Museum Audio: After reading the article read it AGAIN but this time you can read along with a member of the museum. They have some fun insights about the article!

Step 4

Video Discovery: Watch these short clip

<https://youtu.be/ReuNaWPGEOm>

Step 5

Chicago Flag Neighborhood Star Activity:

The Chicago flag has 4 stars that signify important events to the city. However, the city is now 183 years old and many events have taken place since the flag was designed. As a large diverse city, different immigrants that came to the city changed the city. What if each neighborhood would add a 6th star to the flag to represent their neighborhood? Using the graphic organizer provided help design a neighborhood star for **Back of the Yards!**

Back of the Yards: An Urban Jungle

Back of the Yards is a special neighborhood in Chicago. It is special because it was home to many different immigrants. In 1889, Irish and German immigrants lived there. Then in the 1900s, immigrants from Poland, Lithuania, and Czechoslovakia arrived. By the 1970s, African Americans and Mexican immigrants moved into the Southwest Side neighborhood.



Chicago History Museum, ICHI-004082
Entrance to Union Stock Yard with sheep being herded through gate, Chicago, 1902. CHM, ICHI-004082

The name of Back of the Yards is very special. The neighborhood was given this name because it was behind the Union Stock Yard & Transit Co. The Union Stock Yard was the meatpacking district in Chicago starting in 1865. Chicago was known as the “Hog Butcher for the World.” It was given this nickname by the famous poet Carl Sandburg. Sandburg was born in Illinois, and he wrote poems about the city of Chicago.

Between 1852 and 1865, five railroad lines were constructed in Chicago. Trains made it easy to transport things across the United States. This is why railroad companies decided to construct the Union Stock Yard. It was called the Union Stock Yard because nine railroad companies came together in union to create them. The stockyards had 2,300 pens where the animals were kept. They were big enough to hold 75,000 pigs, 21,000 cows, and 22,000 sheep. By 1900, most meat eaten in the United States came from Chicago’s Union Stock Yard.

The Union Stock Yard employed 40,000 people. Irish and German immigrants came to Chicago to work in the stockyards. One of the challenges that stockyard workers faced was that the stockyards were very unsafe. Workers would get hurt a lot because there were no safety regulations.

The stockyards were also very dirty. There was so much animal waste that it left a terrible smell. The Union Stock Yard did not have a designated place to throw away all their garbage. They made a choice to throw away their garbage into the Chicago River. This is one of the reasons the Chicago River was very polluted. The workers in the stockyards worked very hard, but they were not treated fairly. Another challenge that workers faced was that they were paid very little.

In 1906, writer Upton Sinclair wrote a book called *The Jungle*. The book tells the story of a Lithuanian immigrant family who moved to Chicago to work in the stockyards. The story shows the different challenges that immigrant workers faced and the hard choices they had to make, choices like to continue working even if they were hurt or to live in houses with too many people because they did not make enough money to have their own home. Some workers decided to create **labor unions** to fight for their labor rights. Sinclair wanted everyone to see how badly the workers were treated by the owners of the Union Stock Yard. That is why he wrote the book.

The creation of the Union Stock Yard changed the city of Chicago. It expanded the city. It made Chicago an important place for commerce. The labor unions inspired other workers to stand up for themselves. During this time, Theodore Roosevelt was president of the United States. After he read *The Jungle*, he wanted the Union Stock Yard investigated. Investigators confirmed that the stockyards were unsafe and dirty. Things were so bad in the stockyards that Roosevelt created the Food and Drug Administration, sometimes called the FDA. They make sure that all workplaces and stores that sell food are clean.

The Union Stock Yard was open for 106 years. On August 1, 1971, it closed forever after handling more than one billion animals. However, the challenges that European immigrant workers faced in the stockyards changed Chicago into a city known for its labor unions. Writers like Carl Sandburg and Upton Sinclair helped honor the lives of these Chicagoans.

 **What are labor unions?**

Labor unions are organizations created by workers to protect them. Labor unions make sure that their employers pay them a fair wage, that they are paid enough, and that they do not lose their job. Labor unions are responsible for passing many safety laws. For example, did you know that before 1938, children as young as you could work in factories? When the Fair Labor Standard Act passed in 1938, it stated that children younger than 16 could not work because they had to go to school. This applied to all children except for children who work picking fruits and vegetables. Today, many Mexican and Central American children as young as 6 work picking fruits and vegetables across the United States.

Designing The Fifth Star on the Chicago Flag

What if each neighborhood added a fifth star to the Chicago flag to represent its neighborhood? For this activity you will design a star to represent the neighborhood you explored. Using what you learned about the neighborhood to help you design this star think about the following questions:

| Questions | Draw a picture to represent your answer! |
|---|--|
| What was ONE challenge facing community members? | |
| What was ONE decision community members made about the challenges they faced? | |
| What was a change this community made to the city of Chicago? | |

After exploring the challenges, decisions, and changes, choose ONE you want to represent neighborhood history and design your star. You can use markers, crayons, pencils, pens, and paints.

