# Rethinking Affordable Housing and Homeownership (Grades 7–12)

**Objective:** To explore the roots of housing insecurity, the challenges of affordable homeownership, and the systemic barriers that communities face. Students will use interdisciplinary inquiry and community-driven projects to design real-world solutions that promote housing justice and financial empowerment, transforming learning into civic action.

## Round Table

- Opening Discussion:
  - > What does "home" mean to you?
  - > Why do you think housing is becoming more expensive in many places?
  - > What are some reasons people can't afford to buy or even rent a home?
- Purpose: Introduce students to housing as a basic human need and a social equity issue. Frame homeownership as both a personal dream and a community challenge. Students consider their own experiences, media narratives, and neighborhood dynamics.
- Materials: Articles on rising housing costs, interviews with housing advocates, infographics on homeownership disparities by race/income, and short videos on homelessness and housing policy.

## **Reflection Point**

- Discussion Questions:
  - Have you or someone you know experienced housing challenges?
  - > What does stable housing allow a person or family to do?
  - What would it look like to live in a neighborhood where everyone had a safe, affordable place to live?
- ✤ Materials:

Reflection journals, "Housing is a Human Right" case studies, photo essays from local communities.

Knowledge Setting	
Science (S): Sustainable Housing and the Environment	<ul> <li>Objective: Understand the environmental impact of traditional construction methods and eco-friendly alternatives.</li> <li>Activity: Compare conventional vs. green building materials (e.g., concrete vs. bamboo, steel vs. recycled plastic).</li> </ul>
Technology (T): Digital Tools for Housing Access	<ul> <li>Objective: Understand how technology is used in the housing sector.</li> <li>Activity: Explore apps for locating affordable housing, tools for credit repair, or online mortgage calculators.</li> </ul>
Engineering (E): Low-Cost Housing Design	<ul> <li>Objective: Understand alternative housing models that lower costs and increase access.</li> <li>Activity: Analyze and sketch modular homes, 3D-printed houses, or tiny homes adapted for urban living.</li> </ul>
Arts (A): Housing Justice Through Creative Expression	<ul> <li>Objective: Understand art to tell stories of displacement, resilience, and housing equity.</li> <li>Activity: Research photo essays, digital murals, or spoken word pieces around the affordable housing theme.</li> </ul>

Mathematics (M): Budgeting and Homeownership Costs	<ul> <li>Objective: Understand realistic budgets for buying and maintaining a home.</li> <li>Activity: Use sample incomes and loan calculators to map out a path to homeownership for a working family.</li> </ul>
Social Studies (SS): Housing Policy and History	<ul> <li>Objective: Understand the historical roots of housing inequality.</li> <li>Activity: Analyze redlining maps, zoning laws, and current eviction trends. Compare housing policies across states or countries.</li> </ul>

## Project Examples

Progress Map for Project Delivery	* Stop 1: Project Proposal
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	Students gather foundational knowledge through a collaborative knowledge-setting session to prepare for a project-based learning process. They meet with community partners (if possible) and create a written proposal outlining the project focus and intended community benefit.
	<ul> <li>Step 2: Initial Project Proposal and Community Engagement Plan</li> </ul>
	Students submit proposals and reflect on community input, refining their plans. They outline how the project addresses real-world needs and aligns with learning objectives.
	Step 3: Research Progress Update
	Students conduct research and gather data by consulting with community partners to guide their project development and ensure accuracy.
	Step 4: Draft of Final Project
	Students compile findings into a working draft of their final project proposal.
	<ul> <li>Step 5: Final Project Refinement and Approval for Implementation</li> </ul>
	Students apply final feedback to strengthen their project and submit it for approval. Approved projects move forward to the community involvement and assessment phases outlined in the SOP.

Science (S): Eco-Home Starter Kit	Project Example: Partner with local environmental organizations or green building advocates to research sustainable improvements for renters and homeowners. Develop an "Eco-Home Starter Kit" that explains affordable changes—such as insulation tips, solar-powered lighting, or energy-efficient appliances—and their impact on utility savings and the environment.
Technology (T): Housing Access App	Project Example: Work with a housing justice nonprofit or tech incubator to design a mobile-friendly feature that connects users with affordable housing listings, budgeting calculators, or local homeownership programs. The app should be tailored to the needs of low-income or first-time buyers, with simple UX and multilingual accessibility.
Engineering (E): Tiny Home Transitional Blueprint	Project Example: Collaborate with a local shelter, design firm, or public works department to draft a prototype of a transitional tiny home. Create blueprints, materials lists, and zoning considerations for a compact, low-cost housing unit. The design must account for weather conditions, accessibility, and ease of construction.

Arts (A): Displacement Diaries Storytelling Campaign	Project Example: Collect and interpret stories from individuals or families who have faced eviction, gentrification, or displacement. These narratives will be translated into a storytelling campaign through photography, digital illustrations, or short films. Build empathy and raise awareness about the emotional toll of housing instability.
Mathematics (M): Own It – The Real Cost of Homeownership	Project Example: Partner with a local accounting firm or bank to use local market data and loan calculators to simulate the financial journey of a first-time homebuyer. Design a math-based exhibit or brochure that breaks down monthly mortgage costs, down payments, property taxes, and repair expenses to demystify the economics of homeownership.
Social Justice (SS): Redlining Revisited – A Policy Reform Toolkit	Project Example: Study historic redlining maps and compare them with current demographic and housing data. Working with civic leaders or advocacy groups, draft a set of equitable housing policy recommendations and create a visual toolkit (infographics, civic guides, petitions) to support awareness and reform efforts in their local area.

## **Community Involvement**

 Objective: Collaborate with local organizations working on housing equity to bring student ideas into real-world spaces. Activity: Once final project approval is granted, students team up with selected partners to implement their initiatives. Community partners and educators co-evaluate each project's resonance, usefulness, and reach using customized rubrics and feedback forms. Reflections and outcomes captured during this phase shape both final assessments and future iterations of the project model.

## Assessment

- Objective: Evaluate how well students applied their knowledge to address community housing challenges.
- Methods: Use a rubric that measures content mastery, creativity, implementation, and community impact. Include self-assessments, peer reviews, and feedback from the community partner. Evaluation should reflect how well students applied interdisciplinary knowledge, engaged with real-world challenges, and produced solutions that are both practical and empathetic. Community feedback and educator insights help inform final grades and recommendations for future improvements.

## Feedback Loop

- Activity: Students hold a "reflection circle" and discuss changes they'd make and commitments they want to continue.
- Journal Prompt:
  - How has your perception of housing changed?
  - > What did your project reveal about local needs and systems?
  - > What barriers do you still see—and how might we continue the work?

## **Resume Integration**

 Host a resume workshop to help students refine language, highlight transferable skills, and connect their experience to future pathways such as urban planning, affordable housing policy, real estate, architecture, financial literacy, or engineering for community development.

For more 8-Step Project-Based Lesson Plans check out our website at <u>www.steamsinitiative.org</u>

For all inquiries, please email info@steamsinitiative.org

A STEAMS Central, Inc. Program STEAMS Central, Inc. | STEAMS Initiative 8605 Santa Monica Blvd #123617 West Hollywood, CA 90069-4109 info@steamsinitiative.org 833-379-6892