
by Jen Masengarb, Kayce Bayer, Gabrielle Lyon and Allison Leake

Jesse, David and Cristina realize classroom exercises about zoning, fair housing, gentrification and displacement are real, urgent issues when they discover their friend Natalie is being evicted. Their backgrounds give each of them a unique point of view about neighborhood change. As they work to support Natalie they become involved with Chicago’s history of development, organizing and resistance, and they begin to understand that making change takes community involvement.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

• Why do you think it took Natalie so long to share her news with her friends? How do you think you would have responded to this kind of news from your friend?

• What does the photo album at Cristina’s house depict? What lessons do Cristina’s parents share with the group? How does Natalie respond to the information?

• What does Jesse take photos of at the beginning of the chapter? What about at the end of the chapter? What do you think the photos say about how Jesse is changing?

• What kinds of things does David observe as he walks through his neighborhood? What does he imagine? Have you ever imagined how your neighborhood could be different? What would you change or add? Who would those changes affect?

• Do you agree with the elderly woman gardening who says, “gotta participate”? Can you think of ways your neighborhood has changed? Who was affected by the changes?

• What do you think happened when David went into the alderman’s office at the end of the chapter?

Themes

Growth and change
Development
Displacement
Gentrification
Community organizing
Neighborhood identity
Equity
Parks and recreation
Transportation

Universal Questions

• What is the relationship between development and displacement?
• What does community involvement look like?
• How do neighborhoods change over time?
FEATURED COMMUNITY AREAS

22—Logan Square
Jesse’s home
basement punk show
Natalie’s home
The 606

23—West Town (Humboldt Park)
The 606

31—Lower West Side (Pilsen)
Christina’s home
Fisk Generating Plant

68—Englewood
David’s home
63rd/Halsted Green Line station
Englewood Garden
Logan Square, 2017

The community area of Logan Square has seen constant change since it officially became part of the city of Chicago in 1863. Located approximately 3 miles from downtown, the area is bordered by the Metra rail tracks (west), the North Branch of the Chicago River (east), Diversey Parkway (north), and Bloomingdale Avenue (south).

Open prairies became farmland in the 1850s and 1860s. The population quickly grew after the Great Chicago Fire of 1871 as developers divided up large tracts of land for housing along the newly established Chicago and Northwestern Railway and the elevated ‘L’ train line. Local manufacturing industries provided job opportunities. Since the area was beyond Chicago’s fire limits, which mandated fire-proof construction, new housing in Logan Square could be built quickly and cheaply from wood. Eventually by the 1880s, many grand two- and three-story Greystone apartments were constructed along the three boulevards and open squares for upper middle-class German and Scandinavian immigrants.

The area boomed after World War I and those original, upwardly mobile immigrants moved to less dense north and west neighborhoods along Milwaukee Avenue. With an influx of Polish, Russian, and Jewish immigrants, new brick two- and three-flats—along with churches, shopping districts, schools—were constructed on the neighborhood’s remaining empty parcels.

From the 1930s to the 1960s, the community area suffered a decline in population in part because the new 10-lane, elevated I-94 Kennedy Expressway ripped the neighborhood in two. Construction for the freeway demolished housing and eliminated easy access to industries along the Chicago River. Into the late 1960s and 1970s, the neighborhood saw a new influx of Puerto Rican, Cuban, Mexican, and South and Central American immigrants. Residents established the Logan Square Neighborhood Association, which remains an active voice in the community today.
Beginning in the 1990s, and now into the 21st century, Logan Square has become home to young urban professionals, often drawn by the neighborhood’s stock of historic housing. The 606—a new 3-mile linear city path/park adapted from abandoned train lines—has become a popular new public amenity which is driving up the cost of surrounding housing. The neighborhood is culturally, racially, and economically diverse and yet also one of the city’s fastest gentrifying areas. Hispanics and Latinos make up approximately 50% of the area’s population today, but the neighborhood has seen an overall 11% decline in population in the past 10 years.

Lower West Side, 2017

The Lower West Side community area includes the more locally-known neighborhoods of Pilsen, Heart of Chicago, and Little Italy. Since its beginning, the area has been a port of entry for working-class immigrants and migrants seeking jobs and homes. The area is bounded by the South Branch of the Chicago River (south and east) and the Burlington Northern railroad (north and west) and located approximately 3 miles from the city center. For more than a century, the river and surrounding infrastructure have proven hard boundaries, limiting development. Yet as The Encyclopedia of Chicago explains, “Though the area remained somewhat isolated for much of its history, its neighborhoods—especially Pilsen and Heart of Chicago—have been vibrant and dynamic enclaves for generations of Bohemians, Germans, Poles, and Mexicans.”

Displaced after the Great Chicago Fire on 1871, many Bohemian and Czech immigrants settled along 18th street. They joined German, Irish, Polish, Slovak, Slovene, and Italians in heavy industrial work at the nearby lumber yards, breweries, Union Stockyards, and McCormick Reaper Works plant. At one time, the Lower West Side had one of the densest populations in Chicago. These ethnic groups lived in two- and three-flat brick apartments, boarding houses, and one-and-a-half story worker’s cottages. Their hard-earned savings built massive ornate churches, schools, and social halls. Many social services agencies were developed to serve the poor.
As with many neighborhoods in Chicago, the years surrounding the Great Depression and post-World War II saw massive change. The I-55 Stevenson Expressway was constructed through the neighborhood and as factories and the Union Stockyards closed in the 1950s and 1960s, many Mexican-Americans and some African-Americans who had worked in those industries moved north into the Lower West Side. They were joined in the 1970s by new immigrants arriving from Southwest states and from Mexico, Puerto Rico, El Salvador, and Guatemala. While the architectural character stayed very similar to what had been built in the late 19th century, citizens also created cultural centers, social services, and legal aid societies to accommodate new residents. The Lower West Side has had a long history of vibrant culture, activism, and organizing, but the neighborhood is losing people. Between 2000 and 2018, the population decreased by 18%. Today, the Lower West Side is home to nearly 30,000 first, second, and third generation Hispanics and Latinos.

Englewood, 2017

The story of Englewood has been one of massive change and also great human resiliency. As The Encyclopedia of Chicago notes, “…few communities in Chicago have lost as much population or housing stock in the 20th century.” Englewood—located on the South Side of the city and approximately 10 miles south of downtown—is bordered by Garfield Boulevard (north), 75th Street (south), State Street (east), and Western Avenue (west). In the 1850s, the area was the site of several freight and passenger rail lines that crossed in the town of Junction Grove, which would eventually become Englewood. The population grew in the mid-19th century around those intersections as Irish, Scottish, and German immigrants were drawn to work on the railroad and in the Union Stock Yards. By the late 19th century, those original immigrant groups were joined by newcomers from Poland and Bohemia. The neighborhood became well connected to downtown through horsecar and trolley transit lines and the railroad. Two-story wooden and Greystone homes from the 1880s to the 1900s were tucked in between rapidly-built brick two-flats and four-story apartment buildings in the 1910s and 1920s. The population by 1940 was 92,000.
Into the 20th century, several factors led to a dramatic racial and economic shift in the neighborhood. As the income levels of the original white immigrants rose, they sought out new, less-crowded communities. At the same time, Bronzeville—the neighborhood to the north—reached a tipping point. African American residents living in overcrowded housing bound by redlined districts and covenants that restricted where they could buy property, began to challenge those imposed constraints, seeking more space and better living conditions. As white residents moved out to the first ring of suburbs, black residents moved in to Englewood. According to The Encyclopedia of Chicago, “In 1940 blacks constituted just 2 percent of the population, but this increased to 11 percent in 1950, 69 percent in 1960, and 96 percent by 1970. In 1960 the population peaked at over 97,000 people, despite the exodus of 50,000 whites.” Today, African Americans make up more than 97% of Englewood’s population.

Decades of economic disinvestment and a lack of job opportunities have led to a high crime rate and high unemployment. Today Englewood has a 28% home ownership rate. There are approximately 10,000 housing units but more than 40% stand vacant. At the same time, several strong new K–12 schools and after school programs have been established in the neighborhood, bringing new opportunities for young people. The local community college refocused its educational programs on the culinary arts and hospitality. Churches and social agencies continue to provide much-needed services and job training. In 2016, a new retail hub and a large new grocery store were constructed, bringing job opportunities and helping in some ways to relieve the ‘food desert’ in which many residents lack access to fresh food and/or food staples.
CHARACTER BACKGROUNDS

**Cristina Gonzalez** Cristina is the daughter of a large, extended Mexican-American family rooted deeply in the Pilsen neighborhood (within the Lower West Side community area). Her family originally hails from Durango, Mexico, and her relatives still live there. Cristina carries the legacy of her family’s community activism, and is familiar with her neighbors and other members of the community. When she was a baby, Cristina’s parents were active in the neighborhood’s fight to close a nearby coal-fired electric power plant and they often took her to rallies as a child. She attends a public arts magnet high school in Logan Square along with David, Jesse, and Natalie. She also has a strong interest in mural painting and performance art.

**David Green** David is being raised by his construction-worker father in the Englewood neighborhood. Their home—an 1890s Greystone three-flat apartment building commonly found in the area—has been in his family for several generations. David loves listening to and producing music and he can usually be found with headphones hanging around his shoulders. He also plays sports and has a strong love for video games. Having lived in Englewood his entire life, David understands his neighborhood well and actively observes it. As he walks the sidewalks around his home, he can frequently be seen calling out to neighbors and friends. He tries to make a difference in the lives of his neighbors by volunteering his free time at a community center. To get to school, David commutes about one hour each way by public transportation (bus/train). He attends the same public arts magnet high school in Logan Square, where he is friends with Jesse.

**Jesse Schoenherr** Jesse is the son of a two-parent middle-class family in the Logan Square neighborhood. He lives in an 1890s two-flat apartment that has recently been converted to a single-family home. Unlike Natalie who has lived in Logan Square her whole life, Jesse’s family just moved to the neighborhood at the start of the school year. Though curious and enthusiastic, unlike David and Cristina, he is unfamiliar with his neighborhood’s history, people, and culture. Jesse is a tech-savvy lover of the internet, meme culture, and the musical genre known as Vaporwave. He also loves photography and carries his camera everywhere to capture people in candid moments. Jesse met David, Cristina, and Natalie at the arts magnet high school at the beginning of this school year.

**Natalie Guerrero** Natalie has been raised in the same Logan Square apartment where her mother grew up. She has extended family in the neighborhood and deep roots in the community, where she attends the arts magnet high school. Until now, she’s been generally apolitical and unaware of the fast-rising rents and property taxes in Logan Square and Humboldt Park. Her own family is being evicted because their large apartment building has been sold for redevelopment. Natalie’s home is located near The 606—a 3-mile linear city path/park adapted from abandoned train lines. This popular new public amenity is driving up the cost of surrounding housing. While hesitant to say what’s wrong, she eventually shares news of the eviction with her friends, including Jesse who recently moved into the neighborhood. Through her friends’ support and encouragement, Natalie starts to connect her personal experience with the experiences of other communities as well as her very own neighbors.
PAGES 47–48
The story begins as we meet Jesse, Natalie, David, and Cristina in their 9th grade human geography course at a magnet arts high school. They will soon realize that classroom discussions about zoning, fair housing, gentrification, and displacement are real-life, urgent issues that they all have a role in.

PAGES 49–50
The classroom's white board hints that their teacher Mr. Ali has introduced the 1909 Plan of Chicago by Daniel Burnham and Edward Bennett. This groundbreaking regional vision for the future was one of the country's earliest and most important comprehensive urban plans. In addition, it's clear the class has discussed two of New York's most influential figures—writer and activist Jane Jacobs and urban planner Robert Moses. Jacobs was the author of the 1961 groundbreaking text The Death and Life of Great American Cities and advocated for streets that had a mix of uses; short blocks that fostered lots of human interaction; buildings from all eras; and density (more eyes on the street) which made cities safer. Jacobs battled Moses' plans for urban renewal—neighborhood demolition, highway construction, and the development of new residential skyscrapers that separated residents from each other and street life—for more than 10 years.

PAGE 50
One student mentions the Chicago 21 Plan. Released in 1973 by the Chicago Central Area Committee, it sought to revitalize the areas around Chicago's Loop (central business district), which had lost 21,000 residents between 1958 and 1971. Named to anticipate the 21st century, the Plan was prepared by the Chicago architectural and planning firm of Skidmore, Owings and Merrill (SOM).

Another student mentions a Planned Manufacturing District. PMDs are areas of land where the zoning laws prohibit residential development and other specific uses. Many cities have them, if not by quite the same name. Begun in Chicago the 1910s, zoning is the city's main system of controlling the function/type of each parcel of land.
PAGE 51, PANEL 2

David texts Jesse asking him about exploring The 606, a new linear city path/park adapted from abandoned train lines. It has become a popular place for Chicagoans of all ages, throughout the seasons and at various times of day.

PAGE 52

The students bring together their maps of Chicago’s community areas. In the late 1920s, the Social Science Research Committee at the University of Chicago divided the city into 75 community areas. O’Hare was added in the 1950s and Edgewater separated from the Uptown neighborhood in 1980 bringing the total to 77 community areas which have remained unchanged since. Unlike “neighborhoods”—which may have changing boundaries and are given multiple names over time by local residents—the 77 community areas are static and officially recognized by the city of Chicago. (For example: Pilsen is a neighborhood, while the community area is the Lower West Side.) Most residents don’t use the community area name, but they are used by the city for urban planning initiatives and some services.

PAGE 54

David, Jesse, Cristina, and Natalie explore The 606 at the bridge near North Leavitt Street and North Milwaukee Avenue. This linear park/path, reclaimed from an abandoned rail line, opened to the public on June 6, 2015.

In the late 19th century, accidents involving trains, horses, and pedestrians prompted Chicago to pass an ordinance requiring that all railroads elevate their tracks. The Bloomingdale Line finished construction in 1913, and freight trains rumbled through the neighborhood for the next 80+ years. After years of abandonment, nature took over. Local residents, along with the City of Chicago, began advocating for a new green space along the former industrial rail corridor. A public-private partnership finally made The 606 a reality in 2015.

Today, this linear park runs through three community areas—Humboldt Park, Logan Square, and West Town—and provides unique skyline views, as well as a glimpse at the tops of homes adjacent to the line. In this elevated green space, between the ‘L’ rumbling overhead and the street traffic zipping below, walkers and bikers experience the city from a completely new perspective.
Teens in the city are much more likely to explore their community on foot or bike and rely more heavily on public transportation such as bus and train. While earning a driver’s license is seen as a rite of passage for many US teens—especially those in rural or suburban areas—the percentage of urban teens with a permit is much lower. In 2013, only 38% of 16-year-old Chicagoans had a driver’s license, compared to a nationwide average of 76%.

Even in a city of 2.6 million people, it’s not uncommon to see people you know when exploring your neighborhood. Walking The 606, Natalie meets one of her mom’s friends and recognizes the man selling elotes from his cart.

The 606 opened with great fanfare on June 6, 2015. Landscape architecture firm Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates, Inc. worked together with the Trust for Public Land to design the project. It was hailed as a unique public-private partnership for a rails-to-trails conversion, adaptively reusing historic infrastructure for a new generation.
PAGE 59
This view from The 606 is looking south down California Avenue. Moos Elementary School can be seen on the left, with various businesses and residences on the opposite side. This includes the Nuevo Borinquen Restaurant, which claims to have invented the famous Jibarito plantain sandwich.\textsuperscript{17}

PAGE 60, PANEL 1
One of the graphics swirling around Natalie is a large red ‘X’ found on abandoned buildings throughout Chicago.\textsuperscript{18} WBEZ’s Curious City program explains: “...the sign is a visual cue that a structure is structurally unsound and that firefighters and other first responders should take precautions when responding to emergencies there. It’s also an extra reminder for anyone who might wander into a vacant building—which is illegal already—that they should stay out.”

PAGE 60, PANEL 2
Natalie sits near the Humboldt Avenue overpass on The 606.

PAGE 61
Jesse’s posts photos under the name “vapor_jessephoto” because he’s fascinated with Vaporwave, an electronic musical genre that combines and samples 1980s and 1990s lounge music, smooth jazz, and elevator music. It’s often a nostalgic and surreal comment on previous decades.

PAGE 62, PANEL 6
The letters of the fictitious band LASHER stand for: Logan Square Housing Equality and Rights. This punk scene is a reference to homegrown punk and DIY movements involved in community organizing and fundraising in the fight against displacement from gentrification.
PAGE 63, PANEL 3
The gentrification of the Northwest Side is a consequence of many factors, including the influence of the Chicago 21 plan from 1973. Like the expressways built throughout the city in the 1950s and 1960s, The 606 is an example of a well-intentioned project that benefits some residents, speeds the wave of neighborhood change, and likely leaves many others displaced.

PAGE 63, PANEL 6
Jesse was excited about the band and loves Logan Square. But as the band leader yells “Residents and renters are being priced out!” Jesse is beginning to understand that when his family moved into a rehabbed new condo he has become part of the neighborhood gentrification that is unfolding.

PAGE 64, PANEL 1
“Building a New Chicago” is the phrase commonly found on signs posted at construction or infrastructure project sites funded by city tax dollars.

PAGE 64, PANELS 2–4
The Spanish phrases “¡Vamos a luchar!” and “¡El barrio no se vende!” translates to “Let’s fight!” and “The neighborhood is not for sale!” in English. Both of these phrases are used by activists who are working to stop gentrification and raise awareness about the ways in which the changes in the neighborhood are affecting long time residents.

PAGE 66
David signs up to receive updates and get involved in the community group’s work. Jesse donates to the legal fund.

PAGE 69
David discusses Cristina’s situation and the development around The 606 with his dad and criticizes developers. David’s dad has a different perspective working in the construction industry. He recognizes that large long-term commercial investment in a neighborhood can strengthen the health and safety of its residents.
PAGE 70
The culturally-rich, civically-engaged, working-class neighborhood of Pilsen where Cristina lives has long been the site of struggles, strikes, and protests. In the 19th century, Pilsen residents and workers participated in strikes to fight for safer working conditions and better wages at nearby industrial plants. Today, some Pilsen residents have come together to fight against gentrification in the neighborhood, which is beginning to face challenges similar to those seen in Logan Square. The Pilsen Alliance has been active in this work.23

PAGES 73–75
Jesse pages through the scrapbook made by Cristina’s parents when she was a baby, labeled “2000: Memories and Struggles.” It documents their work with Pilsen Alliance and dozens of other community, faith, and environmental organizations who fought for more than 10 years to close the Fisk Generating Station and the nearby Crawford Generating Station, two coal plants in the heart of the city.24 By 2011, 35 city aldermen and Mayor Rahm Emanuel joined in the fight to shut the generating station down. Through research by the Clean Air Task force, Fisk and Crawford were blamed for premature deaths, heart attacks, and asthma attacks. Fisk closed in 2012 and Crawford closed in 2014.

PAGE 76
Cristina’s dad—familiar with many community groups outside his own neighborhood—mentions La Asociación del Barrio Logan Square (Neighborhood Association of Logan Square). NALS organized a march on The 606 in 2016 to raise awareness about gentrification.26
Drawn in a style similar to the dozens of hand-painted, large-scale murals found throughout Pilsen, this epic scene imagines the characters as community activists stopping the wrecking ball from destroying their homes and neighborhood. It is in honor of the many hard fought battles against displacement. Situated southwest of the Loop, Pilsen (which was slated for development in the Chicago 21 Plan of the early 1970s) has been a battleground for urban renewal for decades.

David's pose walking through his neighborhood of Englewood echoes Chapter 1 and the similar posture of Reggie Williams (page 11) and as the black soldier in the Victory Monument (page 10, panel 4). Englewood exemplifies Chicago’s equitable planning and renewal programs do not reach all of the city's neighborhoods. Its long stretches of vacant lots and properties are a stark contrast to the pristine streets and well-kept buildings downtown. Many factors have contributed to its decline into a community with high crime rates, concentrated poverty, and limited economic opportunity. They include the dramatic population increase in the 1950s during the Second Great Migration; “conservation efforts,” housing exploitation and discrimination; overcrowding and racial tensions; and White Flight.

After years of decay and depopulation, the city decided to demolish abandoned buildings in Englewood. The neighborhood lost 30% of its housing stock between 1980 and 2000, and 57,000 people left in a span of 40 years. City officials have proposed many planning ideas meant to improve the neighborhood over the decades, but those ideas faltered because of incomplete implementation and a lack of coordination.

Today, several strong new K–12 schools and after school programs have been established in the neighborhood, bringing new opportunities for young people. Corner stores serve as community anchors and fight for survival. The local community college has refocused its educational programs on the culinary arts and hospitality. Churches and social agencies continue to provide much-needed services and job training. In 2016, a retail hub and a Whole Foods—a large grocery store—were constructed, bringing job opportunities and helping in some ways to relieve the ‘food desert’ in which many residents lack access to fresh food and/or food staples.

David walks past other signs of recent changes in Englewood—a technology incubator space for new businesses; the City of Chicago’s Large Lots program which encourages neighborhood residents to be stewards of nearby empty lots and purchase them for $1; and community gardens such as the Englewood Heritage Station, which was created by residents who are working to create the neighborhood they want and deserve. The red, white, and blue “Building a New Chicago” sign can be found throughout the city at tax-funded building and infrastructure projects. But it begs the question: “For Whom? For What?”
PAGE 80
David says hello to Ms. B, who is working in her community garden. “Ms. B” was inspired by the real Aisha Butler—known around the neighborhood as Mrs. Englewood. She created the Resident Association of Greater Englewood (RAGE) to encourage residents to take a more active role in the community and transform it positively. She also owns a “large lot” used for urban farming. In cities with vacant land, urban farming programs like Growing Home, Inc. give the land a new use and promote job creation, healthy eating, sustainability, and community investment.

PAGE 82
As David walks home, he passes under the CTA Green Line ‘L’ train station at 63rd and Halsted. It is adjacent to the new Kennedy-King College, one of the city’s community colleges.

PAGE 83, PANELS 1–3
David passes by abandoned homes marked with a red ‘X’ (see also page 60, Panel 1), which signals that they are not safe to enter. A boarded up 1920s Chicago bungalow, one of the city’s 80,000, hints at a time of greater middle-class prosperity in the neighborhood. (See more in Chapter 1, Page 24.) In the empty lot, David begins to imagine a better future for his neighborhood, which includes a new skate park.

PAGE 83, PANELS 4–5
As David strolls past the offices of the 16th Ward alderman, he makes an important decision. Seeing that the “Englewood Quality of Life Plan” is available, he steps inside...
ADDITIONAL READING


20. “The 606 landscape grows, as do concerns about displacement” by Blair Kamin, chicagotribune.com, http://trib.in/2qXosbl
22. “Englewood Whole Foods A Thriving Community Hub 8 Months After Opening” by Andrea V. Watson, dnainfo.com http://dnain.fo/2uDhjyf

26. “Marchers take to the 606 trail to protest gentrification” by Leonor Vivanco, chicagotribune.com, http://trib.in/1U5sz7R

31. “In Englewood, Whole Foods opens to cheers, high hopes” by Greg Trotter, chicagotribune.com, http://trib.in/2cH08in

40. Street view: 6321 S. Halsted St. https://goo.gl/maps/TGrVxeU4u6x