

ACTIVITY 1.20**A short story by Hermann Hesse**

UNIT 1

A GEOGRAPHER . . .
ILLUSTRATES A
STORY

Textbook, pp. 76-77

1

Read the text.

The City

“Now we’re getting somewhere,” cried the engineer when the second train carrying people, coal, tools, and food arrived over the stretch of track that had been laid only the day before. The prairies glowed softly in the yellow sunlight, on the horizon the great wooded mountains were bathed in blue mist. Wild dogs and buffaloes looked on as work and bustle moved into the wilderness, as heaps of coal and ashes, paper and tin appeared on the green countryside... A tin-roofed shanty sprang up and next day a wooden house, and then others day after day, soon followed by stone buildings. The wild dogs and buffaloes kept their distance, the land was tilled and bore fruit. The very first spring the plains were covered with green grain; farms and stables and granaries were built; roads cut through the wilderness.

The railroad station was completed and inaugurated, soon followed by a government building, and a bank. Several sister cities, barely a few months younger, shot up nearby. Workers poured in from everywhere, peasants and city-dwellers; merchants and lawyers came, preachers and teachers. It was not long before the town could boast of a school, three religious congregations, and two newspapers. Oil was discovered in the west, prosperity came to the new city. Only a year later there were pickpockets, burglars, pimps, a department store, a temperance society, a tailor from Paris, a Bavarian beer hall. The competition of the neighbouring towns acted as a goad...

Little by little a culture grew up as well. The city, which had begun as a mere outpost, became a permanent dwelling place. There was a manner of greeting, of nodding to those one met, which differed ever so slightly from that prevailing in other towns. Men who had participated in founding the city came to be popular and respected; they were the nucleus of a small aristocracy...

The city had come to dominate the towns round about; it was now the capital of a large region. Where once the first shacks and shanties had bordered on ash heaps and puddles, now there were broad smiling avenues lined with imposing banks and public buildings, theaters and churches... The former prairies were now covered with fields, factories, and villages and traversed by a dozen railroad lines; thanks to the railroad the mountains had come closer. There, or far away by the seashore, the wealthy had their summer houses.

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A hundred years after its founding, the entire city was levelled by an earthquake. It rose again, but now wood gave way to stone, small buildings to larger ones; narrow streets were eliminated, and everything became more spacious. The railroad station and the stock exchange were the biggest on the whole continent. Architects and artists adorned the rejuvenated city with public buildings, parks, fountains, and monuments. In the course of the new century, the city came to be known as the richest and most beautiful in the whole country... The midtown section, whose buildings without exception were faced with a noble light-gray stone, was surrounded by a broad belt of splendid parks, beyond which long avenues, bordered by rows of houses, lost themselves in the open country. Much visited and admired was an immense museum, whose hundred rooms, courtyards, and halls were devoted to the history of the city from its founding. In the vast courtyard models of the first wretched shacks and streets were shown in their prairie setting, complete with vegetation and animal life. There the young people strolled about, contemplating the course of their history from tent and shanty, from the first struggling trail to the radiant metropolis...

Hermann HESSE, "The City," in *Stories of Five Decades*, translated by Ralph Manheim (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1972), pp. 194-196.

2

Reread the text and highlight the key words that you will use to sketch the following landscapes. Use a different colour for each set of key words.

- Landscape a: the city at its founding (1st paragraph)
- Landscape b: the city just before the earthquake (4th paragraph)
- Landscape c: the city after reconstruction (last paragraph)