SimCity: Impact Guide
For Teachers

Before Maxis created the well-known game The Sims, their most popular game was SimCity. First released in 1989, SimCity is geared towards ages 13 and up, putting the player in the role of a mayor and letting them determine the course of action of a city. Though the game doesn’t offer an end-game ‘win,’ the player is instead rewarded for playing the game successfully with the ability to continue playing, building more magnificent structures, increasing the population of their city and their annual income. This guide focuses on SimCity 4, released in 2003.

How to use this guide: Teachers – We’ve identified several interesting or important themes in the game. We recommend that you play through the game and reflect on it as a player first, then think about how to incorporate it into your class. How have you experienced these themes? Will students experience them as well? How do they align with how you might normally teach them? Are there other important ones present in the game? What kind of impact does your play allow in the larger world? Answer the questions we’ve provided – but feel free to add more at www.gamesandimpact.org.

We have also included potential lesson plans and classroom activities, as well as handouts for in-class student reflection or homework.

Warning: Questions contain some spoilers about the games.

Theme: Design

The goal of the game is to have a city which requires minimal intervention and is constantly increasing in population size and income. Therefore, the way in which the city is designed is crucial. By determining where roads go, where the best place to put a fire station in order to cover the most area, and knowing the best places to put schools, the choices that the player makes determines how well the city does.

We’ve provided a lesson plan to help students think about designing their city. We also have a worksheet to help students reflect on their play. Do you have other lessons you might use? Share them with other teachers and students at gamesandimpact.org.
Class Activity (30 minutes)

Grade Level: 6-8

Teacher Materials: Computer, projector (optional), SimCity 4

Teacher Pre-req: Play through the tutorials and create a functioning city

Student Materials: Computer (individual or group), SimCity 4

Summary of Goals: To understand what qualities a well-designed city has.

Lesson Plan:
Begin by having the students play through the “Terraforming Tutorial”. When the tutorial is over, briefly discuss how the layout of the land impacts the way a city is designed and ask the students what they think. After this discussion, have the students play the “Getting Started” module. This tutorial is designed to show students how to design a city so that it makes money. After this tutorial is over, have the students continue to design the city created in the “Getting Started” module until there are about ten minutes or twenty minutes left of class time. Use this remaining time for the students to talk about their experiences designing their city and watching it grow. Have them discuss what worked and what didn’t work. They are to turn in a brief paragraphs, just a few sentences long, about how they would change the design of their own city.

Discussion Prompts:
What worked when you were designing the “Getting Started” city on your own? What didn’t work? Did any students have good ideas which you should have done in your city?

Deliverables:
- Handout (attached)

Questions for Teachers
- Did the instructions in the tutorials make sense? How would you have changed how they presented their data, or their function?
- How would you design a tutorial to help teach students about city design in SimCity? What types of things would you have it focus on?
- Would this activity have been more enjoyable had the students work in groups? Why do you think this is, or is not, the case?
SimCity Design Activity

Instructions: You’ve just played through the “Terraforming” and the “Getting Started” in SimCity 4. After learning what you did about city design, write a paragraph answering the following prompt.

How would you change the design of your city, based on what you learned playing SimCity, in order to make it more successful?
Theme: City Management

City design and city management go hand-in-hand when one plays SimCity. If the player designs the city in such a way that potential citizens do not find it desirable, then managing that city will become much more difficult, due to the lack of taxable citizens. In order to continue playing the game, the player needs to be able to manage the city in such a way as to produce more income than expenses and encourage population growth.

We’ve provided a lesson plan to help students think about city management. We also have a worksheet to help students reflect on their play. Do you have other lessons you might use? Share them with other teachers and students at gamesandimpact.org.

Class Activity (30-40 Minutes)

Grade Level: 6-10

Teacher Materials: Computer, projector (optional), SimCity 4

Teacher Pre-req: Play through the tutorials and create a function city

Student Materials: Computer (individual or group), SimCity 4

Summary of Goals: To help students understand everything that is required in managing a successful city.

Lesson Plan:

Have students play the “Big City Tutorial”. Make sure the students focus on not only what the tutorial says but also on the “needs bar”. After the students finish the “Big City Tutorial”, have the students play the “Money-Making Tutorial”. After the students finish the “Money-Making Tutorial”, have them continue to manage the city until there are ten or twenty minutes left of class time. With your students, discuss what worked and what didn’t work in managing their city with each other, during which time they can fill out the provided worksheet and answer the questions.

Discussion Prompts:
What is the most important thing to remember when managing a city? What is an often overlooked aspect to city management that is important?

Deliverables:
• Handout/worksheet (attached)

Questions for Teachers

• Does the game accurately portray how funding for education works? If not, what would you change about how the game works? Will you discuss this in class with your students?
• What would be a good way to follow up with the students who are interested in city management?
SimCity City Management Activity

**Instructions:** You have managed a city in the “Big City Tutorial” and the “Money-Making Tutorial,” and you have also tried to manage your own cit. By taking what you have learned so far, answer the following questions:

**How did you perceptions change about city management after you played the tutorials?**

**How does the tax rate help, or hinder, city growth? When you were managing your city, what was the optimum tax rate?**

**If you were managing the city that you lived in, what would your highest priority be? What would your lowest priority be? Why?**

**What was the best way for the city to make money? Was there one way that produced profit, or did a number of things have to work in a certain way?**