Is RIVER CITY Right for You?

Do you have students who believe they just can’t do science?

Would you like to engage students with technologies as sophisticated as those they use outside the classroom?

Are you looking for ways to add 21st century thinking skills into your curriculum?

RIVER CITY is an interactive computer simulation of a town in the 1800s, which uses Multi-User Virtual Environment (MUVE) technology to enhance student learning and motivation in science.

This guide is designed to help you determine if RIVER CITY is a good fit for you and your classroom. Take a few minutes to review its contents and decide if RIVER CITY is right for you!

In this document you will find:

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A Project of the Harvard Graduate School of Education

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Welcome to Our World!

River City is an exciting project designed to embed students in a technology-based learning experience for learning scientific inquiry and 21st century skills. River City is designed around topics that are:

- central to biological and epidemiological subject matter;
- accessible and interesting to all students; and
- situated in authentic learning environments in which students, through a computer game-like interface, take on the role of scientists.

River City is not a mindless video game or edutainment. Rather, it is an interactive computer simulation of an industrial river town, based in the late 1800s, that combines digitalized Smithsonian artifacts with an inquiry-centered curriculum.

Students in River City

As visitors to River City, students travel back in time, bringing their 21st century skills and technology to address 19th century problems. River City is a town beseiged with health problems. Students work together in small research teams to help the town understand why so many residents are becoming ill. Through the affordances of the technology, students:

- keep track of clues that hint at causes of illnesses;
- form and test hypotheses;
- develop controlled experiments to test their hypotheses; and
- make recommendations based on the data they collect.

Teachers in River City

Overall, teachers act as 21st century experts who do not travel back in time with students. They guide students through the scientific inquiry experience and encourage students to problem-solve how the illness is spreading. Day to day, teachers:

- orient the students to the day’s activities;
- help students prioritize the day’s activities based on class needs;
- check that students have achieved goals before progressing; and
- assess student progress.

Professional Development

Throughout River City Teacher Professional Development (RCTPD), participating teachers:

a) work through the curriculum as learners and instructors;

b) connect their content and instructional expertise with the River City interface and materials;

c) measure their own understanding by reflecting on activities; and

d) build confidence in themselves and the curriculum.

RCTPD focuses not only on the skills needed to implement River City, but also on skills of scientific inquiry and inquiry-based pedagogies that teachers can use after River City. RCTPD takes place in two phases. In Phase One, teachers work with local trainers in an approximately 8-hour session. In Phase Two, teachers receive ongoing support from trainers and online resources while implementing River City with their students.

Implementation: A 5-Step Process

- Determine if River City is Right for Your Classroom
  
  Complete our checklist on the next page to determine if River City fits in your classroom.

- Complete the River City Professional Development Training Course

- Prepare for River City Implementation
  
  Configure and reserve technology resources. Print and photocopy student materials to distribute. As part of our research, we also ask that you and your students complete a pre-survey and consent form.

- Implement River City in the Classroom
  
  This 17-hour curriculum can be modified to fit the needs of your students. The River City Research Team offers extensive support as you embark on this adventure!

- Post-Implementation Activities
  
  Following the River City experience, we ask you to return to us surveys and follow-up information.
Interested?

Below is a checklist you can complete to determine if River City is the right fit for your classroom, and if your school has the technology capacity to support it. You can learn more by exploring our project website. This link will bring you to the page that talks about our objectives and how they map onto the standards. [http://muve.gse.harvard.edu/rivercityproject/join/benefits.html](http://muve.gse.harvard.edu/rivercityproject/join/benefits.html)

### PHASE ONE: Determine if RIVER CITY is Right for Your Classroom

#### CHECKLIST

**Learning Objectives and Goals**

How do you know that RIVER CITY fits with your classroom needs and goals? Spend some time on the activities below to explore RIVER CITY and determine if it is right for you and your students.

- Explore the project’s website at [http://muve.gse.harvard.edu/rivercityproject/](http://muve.gse.harvard.edu/rivercityproject/)
- Watch the RIVER CITY Videos (found under the View menu option on the website).
- Read the RIVER CITY Curriculum (found under the Curriculum menu option on the website).

After reviewing these materials, respond to the following questions:

- Do some of the RIVER CITY Objectives fall in line with your curricular goals?
- Are the skills outlined in the RIVER CITY Objectives skills that you seek to further develop in your students?

*If you can say “YES” to these questions, then check-off this section and proceed to the “Technology Requirements.”*

**Technology Requirements**

There are specific technology requirements for running RIVER CITY. Review the documents below and compare them with the resources in your classroom/school.

- RIVER CITY Hardware Analysis document, which will walk you through the steps to determine if a computer can run the program. [http://muve.gse.harvard.edu/PD/private/directx.pdf](http://muve.gse.harvard.edu/PD/private/directx.pdf)

After reviewing these materials, respond to the following questions:

- Does your school have a sufficient number of computers to run RIVER CITY?
- Do the computers you will be using have the minimum specifications required for running RIVER CITY?

*If you can say “YES” to these questions, then check-off this section.*
Is your checklist complete?

If you have checked off both “Learning Objectives and Goals” and “Technology Requirements,” and have decided that you would like to use River City in your classroom, then please take a couple of minutes and complete our online Teacher Information Form.

This form lets us know a little bit more about you, where you teach, and when you would like to begin implementing RIVER CITY.

(https://www.surveymonkey.com/s.asp?u=426662085369)

Completing this survey will let us know your interested and that River City is right for you! Shortly after submitting the survey, a member of the Research Team will contact you to move forward with the implementation process. In the meantime, if you have any questions or concerns, feel free to contact us at rivercity.support@gmail.com.

Thanks for your interest in River City!

River City

RIVER CITY PROJECT, c/o TIE
321 LONGFELLOW HALL
13 APPIAN WAY
CAMBRIDGE, MA 02138

Other highlights of River City...

✶ In spring 2005, over 60 teachers and over 4,000 students successfully participated in the River City.
✶ Currently, schools in Florida, Wisconsin, Arkansas, North Carolina, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Ohio are implementing River City.
✶ We are very excited to work with schools across the country! Our curriculum objectives map onto the state frameworks for middle school science, technology, and engineering.