

Introducing WhatRocksOnYourBlock: a virtual tour of building stones in NYC

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Populated urban areas aren't the first place you think of when geology is mentioned. Aside from some scattered designated areas reserved for nature and relaxation, geological sightings in a city setting are often difficult to come by. Despite that, there are still a wide variety of terrific examples of geology in which the everyday person can observe, simply by looking at the buildings and structures around them.

After several years of running in-person field trips centered on building stones and facades in New York City, we have developed a series of walking tours that are designed to get students of all ages engaged with both geology and their local neighborhoods. Rocks used in buildings you pass every day are an excellent starting point to engage students and to introduce them to geology.

To expand the use of building stones as education tools, we have created a digital version of two building stone field trips in New York City: along 5th Avenue and Midtown East. Thus, we are introducing What Rocks on Your Block?; a space dedicated to showcasing local, urban geology that is accessible to people of all ages and education levels. Using the Esri StoryMaps platform, we have created a way for people to share and experience short walking tours in which a variety of geological examples can be observed and analyzed. Educators will enjoy the curriculum connections and activities that are available with each tour as well. With the goal of bringing more people into the field of geology and the Earth sciences, we're hoping that What Rocks on Your Block fosters a new wave of curiosity and interest amongst people who would otherwise just walk past the stones on an old building.

What Rocks on Your Block walking tours will be hosted on the American Museum of Natural History's website along with materials for teachers and students who want to use them in their classrooms. We hope these tours serve as inspiration for the creation of walking tours in your own neighborhoods.