A city is a place where thousands or even millions of people live in a very small area. Cities are much larger and more important than towns or villages. Today, about half of the world’s population live in cities.

**PARTS OF A CITY**

Today’s modern cities often have three characteristic areas. The centre of the city is called downtown. It consists of stores, banks, government buildings and cultural attractions. Many people come to work in the downtown area. In large cities the downtown area is full of skyscrapers.

An industrial region with factories, warehouses, mills and other industries lies around the downtown area.

Suburbs are the places farthest away from the city centre. They are new residential areas where most people live. Suburbs have their own stores and shopping malls but people often have to travel an hour or longer to work downtown.

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**Words**

- **art exhibition** = room or building in which you can see paintings by artists
- **attraction** = something interesting to see
- **attractive** = liked by many people
- **characteristic** = very typical of something
- **consist of** = made up of
- **department store** = a large shop that is divided into many sections; each section sells something else
- **mill** = factory
- **offer** = give
- **pleasure** = happiness, satisfaction
- **population** = all the people that live in a place
- **public** = open to everybody
- **relax** = rest
- **residential area** = part of town where only people live; with no factories or offices
- **shopping mall** = shopping centre with many different kinds of stores
- **skyscraper** = a very tall and modern building
- **warehouse** = a large building where you keep many products

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**Life in Cities**

Cities have become very attractive places because they offer people not only jobs and work but also many things they can do in their free time. You can go to museums or art exhibitions, relax in public parks, listen to music at concerts or eat out at expensive restaurants that offer food from all over the world. Big department stores give you the pleasure of buying many things without leaving the building.
Cities offer their residents and the people who work there a variety of ways of getting around. Many people walk or ride a bike, which is often the fastest way to get around in a crowded city.

All cities offer at least some forms of public transport: buses, trains or trams. Large cities have subways that travel underground.

A city has its own government, called the city council. The head of a city is its mayor. City governments have many things to care for. They must organize their own police force to protect the citizens and fight crime. They must provide residents with drinking water, electricity, heating, hospitals and services to get rid of waste. The city council must decide in which parts of the city new factories or houses can be built.

**CITY DEFINITIONS**

The term metropolitan area is used to define the city itself and the surrounding suburbs or other urban areas. The city of New York, for example, has a population of 8 million, but its metropolitan area includes many other cities around it: a total of about 20 million people in all.

Megalopolis is a term used to describe large cities that are so close to each other that they start to grow together. Boswash, for example, is a megalopolis that reaches from Boston to Washington, D.C. New York, Philadelphia and Baltimore also belong to this region. Almost 50 million people live here.

Megacity is a word used to describe very large cities, mostly over 10 million people. Examples are Mexico City, Sao Paolo, Mumbai and others. Most of them are in developing countries where thousands of people migrate from the countryside to the cities every day.
In prehistoric times people were hunters and travelled around. They never lived in one place. As they started to grow crops and raise animals they settled in villages which later grew to larger towns.

**Ancient Cities**

The first real cities emerged in Mesopotamia about 5,000 years ago. In ancient cities people were not only farmers, they also were craftsmen. People lived together in larger houses or buildings. Many cities had walls around them that protected the inhabitants from enemies. The central part of the city included a temple or a place to pray.

The biggest ancient city was Rome. Up to one million people lived there, in many aspects Rome was a modern city with streets, market places, arenas, parks and even a sewage system.

The people in ancient cities were divided into classes. Government officials, soldiers and priests belonged to the upper classes. The middle and lower classes were made up of merchants, farmers and craft workers. Newcomers and slaves had to live outside the city and were seen as outcasts.

**Medieval cities**

After the fall of the Roman Empire the population of cities fell. Trading between cities, which the Romans started, stopped again.

Medieval cities were small in size. The centre was often occupied by a Gothic cathedral, the city’s main church. It was the most expensive building in the city and showed that religion was very important during the Middle Ages.

As in ancient cities, medieval ones were dirty and diseases spread quickly. Land in the city was very expensive. Cities could not expand because of the walls around them. In some cases, city governments tore down the walls and rebuilt them farther away from the city.

During the Middle Ages members of the family, servants and workers often lived in the same house. Craft workers and merchants were organized in guilds, a new economic class in the cities. There were guilds for bakers, goldsmiths, tailors and other groups.

Towards the end of the Middle Ages trade started to become important again. Venice, one of the biggest cities of the time, became a centre of trade in the Mediterranean region. Other trading centres included northern German cities, Hamburg and Lübeck, Antwerp in Belgium and London.
Industrial cities

The Industrial Revolution and the growth of factories changed the lives of many people. Many people started to leave their farms in the countryside and moved to the cities where they hoped to get jobs in new factories. Machines could do work much quicker than people. Many skilled craft workers lost their work.

The industrial city focused on factories, warehouses, railway lines and harbours. Workers lived in cheap terraced houses. The central parts of the city were very crowded; the air was polluted by the smoke coming out of the factories. Garbage and rusting metal was dumped everywhere. Factory workers had tiring jobs, in which they worked up to 16 hours a day.

Only few people became rich during the Industrial Revolution. Factory owners made big profits and built themselves houses outside the city.

Modern cities of the 20th century

In the 20th century cities grew more than ever before. Architects discovered a new way to get more space in the city. They built skyscrapers.

As time went on more and more people moved away from the inner parts of the city and settled down in the suburbs, which were places where it was quieter and where the quality of life was better. These suburbs became small towns with their own office buildings and shopping centres. Residents can work and live there without having to travel long distances to the centre. Poorer people, however, stayed in the centres and formed ghettos. They lacked the money to buy houses or flats in the more expensive suburbs.

Today’s cities are much larger than cities in previous times. With the help of cars and public transport people can get to all parts of a city very quickly.

City problems

Modern cities all over the world face the same problems. One of them is poor housing. People often live in old houses or huts that don’t have electricity or sanitation. As city population grows governments don’t have the money to build modern apartment buildings.

Cars and industries are polluting city air and rivers more and more. Waste that people throw away is burned or ends up in landfills. All of this makes modern cities an unhealthy place to live in.
Especially during morning and evening rush hours cities become packed with vehicles. Daily traffic jams make it impossible for people to get to work in time. City authorities are spending more and more money on public transportation and are talking other steps to reduce traffic in cities. A few years ago the London mayor made people pay to drive their cars into the city centre.

Cities of today face many social problems. Crime, alcoholism and drug addiction is especially high in cities. Many young people are unemployed.

Larger multiethnic cities face conflicts between groups with different cultural backgrounds. Blacks and whites in the USA and South Africa had a violent history in the 20th century.

Even though residents of cities have a higher standard of living there remain many poor people. Government organizations work hard to get rid of poverty. They try to give such people better education and jobs.

**FUTURE OF CITIES**

As the world’s population is constantly on the rise more and more people are moving to cities. Some local governments are trying to relieve cities of overpopulation by building new towns outside city areas.

Cities will have to become greener. Modern buildings will rely on new energy forms. Traffic will have to change drastically.