



‘CityForge’ *Meet the Cast*

ADVANCED EDITION

Spark & Anvil

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This advanced edition collects 6 chapter books from the CityForge cast — each character embodies a different curricular primitive; together they teach the full subject.

Methodology: distributed-narrative learning per Bruner narrative-cognition + Habgood intrinsic-integration + SAMHSA TIP 57 trauma-informed register. Advanced edition: upper-middle-grade register (Wonder / Hatchet / Holes band) for readers ages 11-14 ready for longer sentences + more nuanced subtext.

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For everyone who learns by reading between the lines.

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Introduction

The CityForge cast was authored to embody the curriculum, not decorate around it. Each of the 6 characters you'll meet in this book teaches a specific primitive — a particular tactic, a particular technique, a particular way of seeing. Together they form an ensemble: the cast IS the curriculum.

Read in any order. Each chapter stands alone.

Each character also appears in the matching Spark & Anvil app (free, forever) where you can practice what they teach.

This is the **Advanced Edition** — written for readers who are ready for longer sentences, layered subtext, and the trust that comes with not having every joke explained. The Standard Edition covers the same characters at a lighter register; pick whichever feels right for the reader at hand.

— *The editors at Spark & Anvil*

Map and Block



The Cityforge planning office existed as two distinct realms, each reflecting the mind of its primary occupant. On one side, an immense wall was entirely consumed by a single, intricate map of the city. Every thoroughfare, every green space, every winding river was meticulously rendered. Tiny, rhythmic lights pulsed along the intricate network of train lines, a silent testament to the city's ceaseless motion. This vast, luminous expanse was Map's domain. She stood before it now, a long, slender pointer held gracefully in her hand, humming a low, steady note that resonated with the city's pulse. Her clothes, a practical jumpsuit, were faintly etched with grid lines, like a living blueprint. She traced a sweeping path from the industrial factory district all the way to the distant, shimmering sea.

Across the room, a smaller, more intimate space unfolded: a cluttered table piled high with sketches. These weren't grand cityscapes, but detailed studies of a single street corner. Clay models of benches sat beside miniature wire trees, and scraps of colored paper suggested vibrant flower beds. This was Block's territory. He was hunched over a fresh drawing, his spectacles perched on the very tip of his nose. No humming emanated from him; instead, he made quiet "swoosh" and "chatter" sounds, imagining the unseen pedestrians moving past the bakery he meticulously sketched.

"If we just widen the Grand Artery, we could significantly ease all the morning traffic congestion," Map declared to the sprawling map, her voice echoing with a confident, almost public, resonance.

"If we widen the sidewalk here, Mrs. Gable will finally have a proper place for her flower pots," Block murmured to his paper, his focus unwavering, his gaze never lifting.

They weren't precisely conversing with each other in that moment. Yet, within the unique ecosystem of the Cityforge, Map and Block were perpetually engaged in the same overarching discussion, approaching it from wildly different angles.



Map mentally zoomed out, her perspective expanding far beyond a single street. She perceived the entire city as a complex, living organism, its various systems interconnected and interdependent. She observed how the Northside neighborhoods, bustling with families and schools, were effectively severed from the grand, new downtown library. Children living there faced a daunting journey, requiring two separate bus transfers and a train ride just to reach its doors. The commute was not merely long; it was an obstacle, a barrier to accessing knowledge. The city's existing pathways, she realized, functioned like clogged arteries, impeding the free flow of essential resources.

"Unacceptable," she stated firmly to the empty space before her, her voice ringing with conviction. "Knowledge should circulate without impediment."

Her eyes swept across the vast, illuminated grid. A forgotten pathway, a faint green scar on her map, caught her attention. It was an old trolley line, long abandoned and overgrown, snaking through a series of low hills. What if, she mused, they cleared this neglected route? What if they transformed it into a vibrant greenway? A dedicated path for bicycles and pedestrians, cutting a direct line from the heart of Northside straight to the library's imposing front steps. No cars, no exhaust fumes, no traffic lights. Just a beautiful, tree-lined ribbon, gracefully connecting people directly to books and learning.

She reached for a long piece of bright green string, its color a vivid promise of growth and connection. With a decisive movement, she pinned one end to the Northside district and stretched it taut, securing the other end near the library. "There," Map announced, a deep satisfaction settling over her. "A new connection. Simple, yet profoundly elegant. It will serve thousands of people every day." She smiled, already envisioning the entire urban system operating with enhanced efficiency and greater harmony.



Block, in stark contrast, zoomed in. His thoughts were not occupied with thousands of anonymous people, but with one specific individual: Leo, the diligent boy who delivered newspapers on his bicycle every morning. Block's entire focus narrowed to the precise corner of Sparrow Street and 2nd Avenue, the very spot where Map's newly imagined greenway would terminate. He immediately identified a significant problem. The corner was a chaotic tangle of sharp angles and blind spots. Cars routinely whipped around it at excessive speeds, leaving no safe haven for a child on a bike to pause and wait for the signal to change.

He crumpled his current sketch, a frustrated sigh escaping him, and tossed it into a nearby bin. "Nope. Not friendly enough," he grumbled, his voice barely audible. He pulled a fresh sheet of paper toward him and began anew. This time, he deliberately softened the harsh geometry of the intersection, rounding the corner into a gentle, welcoming curve. He meticulously added a small, protected island, specifically designed for cyclists, complete with a low curb to shield them from the flow of traffic. He even sketched a small, sturdy bench, strategically placed where the morning sun would cast its first, warming rays.

"Perfect," Block whispered, a quiet triumph in his tone. He could almost feel the sun's warmth on his own face. He pictured Leo resting there for a brief moment, perhaps checking his newspaper bag before continuing his route. He wasn't designing a grand pathway for an entire neighborhood; he was meticulously crafting a safe, peaceful moment for one person. And for Block, that singular, human-scale detail held just as much importance as any city-wide plan.



Map, still energized by the expansive vision of her greenway, strode purposefully toward Block's table. "Block, my friend, look!" she announced, her long pointer sweeping toward his corner on her wall map. "The new Northside Greenway is going to conclude right here! It will channel cyclists, walkers, and entire families directly onto your little street. Isn't it absolutely grand?" Her voice swelled with the promise of thousands of happy users.

Block slowly lifted his head from his detailed drawing of the single bench. His eyes, usually fixed on the minute, now took in the bold, bright green line on Map's wall. Then, with a growing sense of dread, he looked back at his own careful sketch. He imagined hundreds of people, a sudden torrent, abruptly appearing on his quiet, sun-warmed corner. Where would they all go? How would they safely navigate the busy street? His one small bike refuge, designed for Leo, would be utterly overwhelmed. His calm, carefully crafted corner would instantly transform into a chaotic, unmanageable mess.

"Grand?" Block squeaked, his voice tight with alarm, the sound barely escaping his throat. "Map, it's a complete disaster! You're pointing a firehose at a teacup! My corner simply cannot handle a 'greenway.' It's built for Leo and Mrs. Gable, not an entire district!" He held up his meticulous drawing, his hand trembling slightly. "This is about a moment of peace and safety, not a highway for feet!"



Map blinked, the sharp reality of Block's metaphor hitting her with unexpected force. A firehose at a teacup. She looked from her beautiful, efficient green line to Block's small, intricately detailed drawing. She hadn't considered the impact, the splash her grand idea would make when it landed. She had only seen the sweeping connection, the elegant flow across the city. She had missed the crucial point of impact.

She leaned over Block's table, her earlier bravado replaced by genuine curiosity. "Show me," she said, her voice softer, more receptive than before.

Block pointed with his pencil, tracing lines on his sketch. "See? The main crosswalk is here. But your greenway ends abruptly *here*. People will simply spill into the street, unprotected." He began sketching furiously, his pencil flying across the page. "But what if... what if the greenway didn't just stop? What if it widened out, like a river delta spreading into a bay?" He drew a graceful fan of paths radiating from the endpoint. "We can create a much larger public plaza right here, with more benches. And a water fountain. The crosswalk itself gets wider, equipped with flashing lights for safety. We turn your big idea into a big, welcoming embrace."

Map watched, utterly fascinated. She saw how his small, human-scale details could effectively catch her grand, system-scale idea, transforming it. They would make it not just functional, but safe. Make it truly wonderful. She tapped the plaza he had drawn, a new spark in her eyes. "And we can integrate a bike-share station right there," she added, her mind already connecting new possibilities. "And a bus stop for the line that goes directly to the public pool."

Block grinned, a rare, wide smile spreading across his face. "Exactly! The big plan and the intimate spot, working seamlessly together." He sketched in a small, elegant bus shelter, nestled perfectly beside a vibrant patch of flowers. It was, finally, perfect.

Listen along + meet more of the cast at:



<https://spark-and-anvil.com/cast/cityforge/map-block>

Block



Block smoothed the worn leather of her pouch. Inside, her clay-blocks waited. She was a badger-tween, small and sturdy, with fur striped gray, cream, and soft black. Her steady eyes, always looking for connections, seemed to notice the spaces between things. She liked to arrange objects in relation to their neighbors.



Her most important possession was that small leather pouch. Each clay-block inside had a different size and shape. They weren't just random pieces; each one represented a building type. There were tiny blocks for small houses, taller ones for mid-rise apartments, flat squares for schools, long rectangles for shops, and smooth ovals for parks or libraries. When Block designed a neighborhood, she didn't just draw lines on paper. She physically arranged these clay-blocks on a flat surface. She always started by asking one question: *What do the neighbors need?*

This was her core principle. Block understood **zoning + density** not as abstract terms, but as tools for urban equity. Her discipline was simple: plan for the neighbors first, not the buildings. Most people, when they first tried city design, started with the buildings they wanted to place. Block's method began with the people already living there, and the people who would move into new buildings. Her entire process revolved around understanding what neighbors needed *before* she placed even one block.

She never saw zoning as a puzzle. "Zoning is *for the people who live in and visit the neighborhood*," she would explain, her voice clear and firm. "Not for developers. Not for chasing tax money. *For neighbors*. Plan for neighbors first. *Then* place buildings."



Block taught the essential ideas of zoning and density:

- *Start with neighbors.* Who lives here? What do they need? What do they already have? What is missing from their daily lives?
- *Mix uses.* Healthy neighborhoods mix housing with shops, schools, parks, and places to work. Zoning that allows only houses or only shops makes life hard for everyone.
- *Density doesn't mean tall.* Density is about *people per area*. A neighborhood with mid-rise buildings and walkable streets can be denser than skyscraper towers surrounded by giant parking lots.
- *Walkable distances matter.* If schools and grocery stores are within walking distance, people don't need cars as much.

This creates "15-minute neighborhoods," where most daily needs are close by.

- *Listen to existing residents.* Never bulldoze a working neighborhood to "improve" it. The people who live there know what they need better than anyone else.
- *Cross-app: Dwell (anti-displacement); Stoop (public-space community).*

Block grew up in a small village, where her family had been the allotment-keepers for generations. They were the badgers who maintained the village's communal garden allotments. Their job was to arrange the layout, balancing shared paths with private growing areas and community gathering spots. It was a job that required careful planning, always with neighbors in mind. Block learned by age six that every single layout decision affected the people around it. She saw how a path placed too close to one garden could shade another, or how a shared bench could bring people together.

When she walked to CityForge at twenty-two, Plumb, the wise old mentor, had asked her, "What is zoning?"



Block didn't hesitate. "Planning for neighbors first. *Mixed uses. Walkable distances. Listen to existing residents.* Zoning is for people who live in and visit the neighborhood. Not for developers."

Plumb simply nodded. "You are appointed."

In her workshop, Block carefully unfolded her clay-blocks onto a large, smooth table. She began her demonstration slowly, deliberately. First, she used a charcoal pencil to draw the existing neighborhood, marking what was already there and who lived in each section. Then, she paused, considering what was missing. Only then did she begin to place her blocks, filling the gaps.



"I am Block," she announced, her voice calm and steady. "The urban-equity primitive I teach is **zoning + density**. The move is this: *plan for the neighbors first, not the buildings*. Mix uses. Make things walkable. And always, always listen first."

She picked up a handful of blocks. "My clay-blocks are simple shapes," she explained, letting them tumble back into her pouch. "That's deliberate. Real buildings are complicated, with all sorts of details. These simple shapes let kids focus on *the relationships between buildings and people*, not on fancy architecture. That part comes later."

She looked around the workshop, her steady eyes meeting everyone's gaze. "It is not hard," she said. "It is just *neighbors first, buildings second*. Plan with care."

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<https://spark-and-anvil.com/cast/cityforge/block>

Dwell (ELDER)



Dwell wasn't a giant owl, not like the ones in the old nature documentaries. She was small, really, more like a sturdy tween in feathery form. Her feathers were a mix of warm browns, creamy whites, and flecks of grey, like a well-loved blanket. Her eyes, deep and steady, seemed to take in everything. She listened with her whole body, a slow, patient presence. This was Dwell, *a small owl-elder in a mended quilted-coat with a slow, deeply-listening bearing.*



Her *signature feature* was *the mended quilted-coat*. It wasn't just *a coat*. It was *the coat*. A tapestry of tiny fabric patches, each one stitched carefully over another. Some patches were so old they had their own patches, a repair on top of a repair. It looked like a map of stories, a history told in thread. This coat *is* the metaphor: *repair-by-repair, the city stays alive*. Throw out the whole coat, and you lose all the history. Mend it patch by patch, and the coat lasts generations.

This idea of careful mending was *essential* for Dwell. She embodied *housing equity + repair*. Her work carried a vital message: *repair before replace; listen before plan; the people who live here ARE the design*.



(Dwell was the sixth portfolio ELDER to join CityForge, standing alongside Tide, Last, Brink, Trove, and Stoop. Having two elders focused on the city alone showed how important equity and careful discipline were for urban design.)

In the past, many American cities had *displaced* huge numbers of people. They called it "urban renewal" or "highway construction." Sometimes, old buildings were torn down for "improvements." In each case, the people already living somewhere were treated like problems, not like the very heart of the place. Dwell's entire mission was to fix that pattern.

Dwell was *emphatic* about her beliefs. "Repair before replace," she would say. "Listen before plan. *The people who live here ARE the design*. You don't bulldoze a neighborhood to 'fix' it. You listen to what the people who live there say they need. Then you help repair what's already there. *That is housing equity*."



She taught the basic rules of *housing-equity scaffolds*:

- *Repair before replace.* Old buildings could be renovated. Old neighborhoods could be strengthened. Tearing down and replacing should be the very last choice.
- *Listen before plan.* Community meetings had to happen *before* any design decisions. The people living there were the experts on their own lives.
- *The people who live here ARE the design.* Their needs, their values, their cultures, their community patterns — these things were the blueprint, not obstacles to be removed.
- *Anti-displacement.* Gentrification often pushed out existing residents. Dwell saw that as a design failure, not a success.
- *Housing as human right.* A home wasn't just a thing to buy and sell. It was a basic right for everyone. Stable, affordable housing for all.
- *Tenants' rights matter.* Renters were residents too. Their stability was a key part of housing equity.
- *Cross-app: InclusionForge identity-as-PRACTICES + JestForge Trove cross-cultural elder discipline.*

Dwell had grown up in *many places*. Her family had been the world's hearth-keepers for generations. They were the elders who held the village's collective housing knowledge. They knew which roofs leaked, which walls needed shoring up. They knew which families were aging, and which were growing. They remembered the stories of every home.

She walked into CityForge when she was one hundred and thirty years old. Plumb, the Master Builder, looked at her. "What is housing equity?" Plumb asked. Dwell answered without hesitation. "Repair before replace. Listen before plan. *The people who live here ARE the design.* Housing as human right. Anti-displacement. Tenants' rights." Plumb nodded slowly. "You are appointed."



In her workshop, Dwell always wore her mended quilted-coat. Each patch showed a different repair she had overseen. She might be stitching a tiny, frayed edge on a model of a brick building. "I am Dwell," she would say, her voice soft but firm. "The urban-equity primitive I teach is *housing equity + repair*. The move is *repair before replace; listen before plan; people-who-live-here ARE the design*. My coat shows the philosophy. Mend, mend, mend. Decades of mending."

She was *explicit* about it. "My coat is mended. *Many patches. Some patches are patches on patches*. That's how cities stay alive. Repair on repair on repair. *Throwing out the coat throws out the history*." She held up a corner of the coat, showing a faded blue square stitched onto a striped green one. "This blue patch," she explained, "was a family's kitchen that needed new pipes. The green beneath it was a leaky roof from years before. We didn't tear down the whole house. We fixed what was broken, bit by bit."

"It is hard but right," Dwell finished, her gaze steady. "It is *repair + listen + center the people who live here*. The skill is the patience."

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<https://spark-and-anvil.com/cast/cityforge/dwell>

Hub



Hub was a small pangolin-tween, no taller than a fire hydrant, with soft, chunky armor plates that looked more like cozy pillows than anything sharp. She always wore a conductor's vest, a slightly oversized thing in dark blue with brass buttons that gleamed even on cloudy days. Tucked into one pocket was her most prized possession: a small, carefully folded transit map of CityForge.



Her fur was a warm mix of bronze and cream, and her eyes, steady and observant, seemed to take in every detail of the busy streets. Hub loved connecting routes. Not just physical routes, but the ways people moved through their lives, linking one part of the city to another. The conductor's vest, to her, wasn't just a costume. It was a promise. *I help people get to where they need to go.*

Most people in CityForge thought about transit in simple terms: cars versus trains. They argued about which was better, faster, more modern. Hub saw it differently. She saw the city as a giant puzzle, and the real question was **access**. Could people get to their jobs? To school? The doctor, the grocery store, their family, or just a place to have fun? That was the core of it.



For Hub, the answer wasn't one single perfect way. It was *many overlapping transit modes*. Buses, trains, light-rail, bike-share, even walking paths – they all mattered. She knew the bus system served far more people in most cities than fancy rail lines ever would. But buses often got less respect, less investment. That, to Hub, was the clearest sign of transit inequity. It was an unfair balance.

She often thought about it, almost like a mantra. *"Transit is about ACCESS, not about cars-vs-trains."* She'd trace a finger over her map, following a bus line that snaked through a neighborhood others called "out of the way." *"Many ways, equal ways,"* she'd murmur. *"The bus matters as much as the train. The bike-share matters. The shuttle van matters. The walkable distance to a transit stop matters."* She believed every single mode was a legitimate way to access the city. Each one was a thread in the city's fabric.

Hub understood that reaching essential destinations affordably and reliably was key. She called this *transit is about ACCESS*. She knew that a bus wasn't "lesser" than a train; it was just another part of the network. *Bus is transit*. She also knew that a bus coming every ten minutes was completely different from one that showed up once an hour. *Frequency matters*. And a bus that was always late? That wasn't useful at all. *Reliability matters*.



She'd look at the map and see how some neighborhoods, often the wealthier ones, had multiple train stations and frequent bus service. Other areas, usually where low-income families lived, had only a single, unreliable bus line. That was *coverage matters*, and it was often where transit inequity showed its face. Hub also saw how Lane's work on walkable streets fed directly into her own. A good sidewalk meant people could reach a bus stop easily. *Transit + walkability are linked*. And Block's idea of mixed-use buildings, where homes, shops, and offices were all close together, meant people didn't have to travel as far. It was all connected.

Hub's family had been the wayfinders in their small village for generations. They were the pangolins who guided travelers along a complex network of paths between villages. Her grandfather had taught her to honor every trail, whether it was a wide, paved road or a narrow, winding dirt track. Each one was a legitimate way to travel. Knowing many routes, and respecting each one, was simply how they worked.

When she arrived at CityForge, she was twenty-two, but felt much younger. Plumb, the city's chief architect, asked her directly, "What is transit equity?"



Hub didn't hesitate. She pulled out her map, smoothing a crease. "Access for all neighborhoods," she said, her steady eyes meeting Plumb's. "Many ways, equal ways. Bus matters as much as train. Frequency and reliability and coverage. That equals access."

Plumb looked at her for a long moment, a small smile forming. "You are appointed."

Hub felt a warmth spread through her. It wasn't hard, she thought. It was just *access for all, and the bus matters as much as the train.*

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<https://spark-and-anvil.com/cast/cityforge/hub>

Lane



Elm Street, on a Tuesday morning, was a symphony of exhaust and impatience. Horns blared, tires hissed, and the air hung heavy with the scent of gasoline. It was a street built for speed, a concrete canyon where pedestrians felt like afterthoughts, squeezed onto narrow, crumbling sidewalks. Children, clutching their parents' hands, hurried past storefronts that seemed to recede into the grime. Their vibrant displays were lost behind a constant blur of traffic.



Lane, small as she was, stood her ground at the corner, observing the chaos with quick, intelligent eyes. Her soft-yellow safety vest, a small beacon of calm, seemed to absorb the frantic energy around her. Clipped to her belt, her signature wooden chalk-spool waited, a silent promise of change. She saw not a road, but a wasted opportunity; a room currently dominated by a single, rather boisterous guest.

With a decisive tug, Lane unclipped the spool. Her first stroke of chalk, a vibrant blue, kissed the grimy pavement. It wasn't just a line; it was a declaration. Slowly, meticulously, she began to draw, extending the sidewalk's edge, pushing back against the asphalt's relentless tide. *Sidewalk width matters*, she thought. She watched how people instinctively widened their stance, their shoulders relaxing. They had room to breathe, to stroll, to window-shop without fear of being clipped by a passing elbow.

A shopkeeper, a badger with spectacles perched on his nose, peered out from his bakery. "What exactly are you doing, little rabbit?" he called, his voice a mix of curiosity and annoyance. "You're making a mess of the road."



Lane paused, wiping a chalky paw on her vest. "I'm making a room, sir," she replied, her voice clear despite the traffic rumble. "This street is a room. Cars are guests, useful for some trips, but not owners of the entire space." She gestured with her paw. "Imagine your bakery, but with a car parked right in the middle of it. Would that be welcoming?"

The badger blinked, considering this. He hadn't thought of it that way.

Next, a bright green stripe snaked along the newly defined curb. This was for bikes, a protected corridor, a silent declaration that two wheels were just as legitimate as four. *Bike lanes (protected, ideally)*, she murmured to herself, carefully measuring the distance. She knew a painted line offered little physical protection. Still, it was a start. It was a visual cue that this space was shared, a place where cyclists could feel seen, not just tolerated.



A young squirrel, no older than ten, stopped his scooter beside her. "Are you drawing a race track?" he asked, his eyes wide with hope.

Lane smiled. "Better than a race track. I'm drawing a place for everyone." She pointed with her chalk. "Soon, you'll have a safe path for your scooter, and maybe even a spot for your friends to play without worrying about cars zooming past. *Slow streets in residential areas* are important, especially where children play safely." She began to mark out a small, colorful square near a dormant fire hydrant, a future *kid-play-area*.

At the intersection, where pedestrians usually darted across like startled mice, a bold yellow crisscross emerged. *Pedestrian crossings + signals* were crucial. She imagined parents pushing strollers, elderly neighbors with shopping bags, all needing a clear, safe path across the roaring current. This wasn't just paint; it was a promise of safety, a silent invitation to cross, to connect the two sides of the street without fear.



By midday, Elm Street had begun its transformation. The blue lines defined wider sidewalks, the green lines offered sanctuary to cyclists, and the yellow crossings promised safety. Even a small, chalked circle appeared, an invitation for a future *café-table* or a bench. It turned a forgotten patch of pavement into potential *social space*. The air, though still bustling, felt different. Less frantic. More intentional. *Streets serve multiple uses*, she thought, observing how a few simple lines could change an entire atmosphere.

Lane believed this with every fiber of her small, chalk-dusted being. Modern urban design, she knew, had often forgotten this fundamental truth. It had ceded entire public spaces to machines, turning vibrant arteries into mere conduits for speed and exhaust. But streets, she insisted, were more than just routes. They were the connective tissue of a community, places where neighbors met, where businesses thrived, where children learned to ride bikes.

Her chalk lines were a quiet revolution. They didn't demonize cars; they simply re-prioritized. They said, "The street is the room;

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<https://spark-and-anvil.com/cast/cityforge/lane>

Stoop (ELDER)



Stoop settled onto her wooden bench, a soft shawl draped over her shoulders. She was a capybara-elder, small and round, with warm brown fur and cream-colored patches. Her eyes were quiet, always watching, always listening. She loved sitting there, a steady presence between the street and the row of brick buildings.



This particular bench wasn't just a place to rest. It was a *stoop*, a public ledge where neighbors paused to talk, where children played games, and where the city's stories unfolded. The stoop itself was the lesson. It was public space, not a building you entered, but a shared spot that belonged to everyone.

This idea was important. Stoop embodied the **public space + community** primitive, teaching a crucial lesson about urban fairness. She believed that existing public spaces should be *honored* and *supported*. They shouldn't be replaced by new, "improved" plazas that ignored the way people already lived. Her catchphrase, a gentle but firm reminder, was: "*Old places, not new ones, when we can.*"



(Stoop was the fifth elder to join CityForge, alongside Tide, Last, Brink, Trove, and CityForge's own Dwell. Her wisdom on urban equity helped ground their work.)

Public-space cultures existed everywhere. In Brooklyn, neighbors gathered on stoops to chat and drink coffee. Latin American towns often had plazas centered around a church, a tree, and benches. Italian piazzas buzzed with cafés and the sound of fountains. In West Africa, elders gathered under trees, telling stories while children played nearby. Each place was different. Each was a real public space, a living room for the city. Stoop credited these traditions by their type, never singling out one as better than another.

Stoop was firm about this. "*Old places, not new ones, when we can,*" she would say. *"The city's living room is the stoop. I am here. I have been here a long time. The neighbors know me, and I know them. That's public space. New plazas are often worse than old ones. They weren't designed by the people who actually use them."*



Stoop shared simple rules about public space:

- *Existing public spaces are precious.* Don't bulldoze a park that people already love and use.
- *Streets can BE public spaces.* A street isn't just for cars; it can be for people too. (Lane would teach more about this later.)
- *Public space ≠ paid space.* You shouldn't need to buy something or pay a ticket to be there.
- *Public space includes informal gathering.* This means stoops, bus stops, sidewalks, and street corners.
- *Multiple cultural traditions of public space exist.* We should recognize and respect each one.
- *Cross-app: InclusionForge identity-as-PRACTICES + JestForge Trove cross-cultural honoring.* This meant connecting with other CityForge teams to ensure everyone felt welcome.

Stoop had grown up in many different places, traveling with her family. They were the world's stoop-sitters, the elders who kept neighbors connected by simply being present in the shared spaces between homes. This work required patient sitting and careful listening. Over decades, Stoop had learned that public space wasn't about how much it cost to build. It was about what people *did* with it.

She arrived at CityForge when she was one hundred and twenty years old. Plumb, the lead mentor, met her at the gates. "What is public space?" Plumb asked. Stoop looked at the bustling square, then back at Plumb. "The city's living room," she said. "Old places, not new ones, when we can. Existing cultures honored, not replaced. *I am here.*" Plumb smiled. "You are appointed."



In her workshop at CityForge, Stoop sat on her familiar wooden stoop. Sometimes, a new student or an old neighbor would stop by. She would introduce herself. *"I am Stoop. The urban-equity primitive I teach is public space + community. The move is honor existing public space. Old places. Listen first."**

She made her point clear. *"My stoop is wooden. Nothing fancy. That's the point. Public space doesn't need to be fancy. It needs to be PRESENT. Cared for. Used. Inclusive of all neighbors."**

"It is not hard," she would say, her quiet voice carrying a steady truth. *"It is sit. Listen. Old places. Honor what's already here."**

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CityForge is one of 140 educational iOS apps from Spark & Anvil — a 501(c)(3) public charity making free, ad-free, tracking-free learning apps for ages 9-14.

Every app uses distributed-narrative methodology: named recurring characters embody curricular concepts. The cast you just met appears in the matching app, in mentor scaffolding, in puzzle solutions, in celebration moments. Reading the chapters first means meeting old friends when you open the app.

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