

Documentation Examples > Examples of documentation that is shared more widely**For Children, By Children: The World Trade Center Memorial Park**

School: Corlears School, Chelsea, New York City

[project home](#)[see related projects](#)[back to documentation examples](#)**1. Initial Ideas**[» View larger version of photo](#)

Amy began a study of parks and playgrounds in her 6/7s classroom with these questions as the core of her planning for the unit:

What do people in cities need?

Why are parks and playgrounds important?

What are the different kinds of parks in our city and what functions do they serve?

In what ways are the parks and playgrounds in our city similar and different?

The study was organized around trips to parks and playgrounds around the city. Parents were asked to get involved. Each parent volunteer was assigned a small group--equipped with cameras, clipboards and questionnaires--and provided critical support to the children and teachers as they collected data about parks.

The first parks the children visited for their study happened to be memorial parks. During a social studies discussion following their visit to the Gertrude Kelly Park, Amy asked the children to reflect on what parks needed and why they were important in the city. The children began to call out the things they had observed during their visits to parks and playgrounds, "... water fountains, play equipment, sprinklers, sand, sandboxes, swings, basketball courts, monkey bars, climbers, slides, trees, flowers..."

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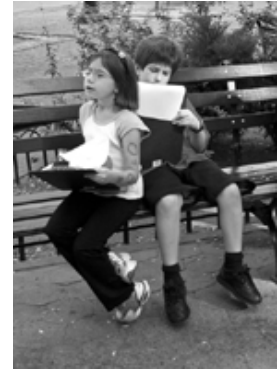
The children remembered seeing plaques at some of the parks and were intrigued to discover that parks are often named in memory of someone. The conversation shifted to what was needed in a memorial.

Jamila: *Peaceful places where people can sit down and rest...*

Maya: *Memorials... when you remember something like for Gertrude Kelly. You remember her in your mind when you go there.*

Zillian: *Company, people to be with...*

Joeline: *A memorial for the World Trade Center...*



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2. Shifting Perspective



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At this time, the New York City media, communities, and the children's homes were saturated with discussion about proposals for a September 11th memorial. Within the larger subject of parks and playgrounds that their teacher was introducing, the children shared what they knew of the adult conversations going on around them--about how to memorialize and heal from this tragic event.

Maya: *There was a competition to build a memorial. My dad was in it.*

Alex: *They said they wouldn't build anything where the towers were. It would be disrespectful.*

Joeline: *If they build it again, they could hijack planes and blow them up again. Why bother? More people would die.*

Alex: *Not more than twenty stories.*

Jamila: *They are not going to build because they feel sad, so they don't want to build anything.*

Joachim: *If it happens again it would be more deadlier.*

Michael: *They are going to build offices.*

Alex: *That would not be right, like not caring about the Twin Towers.*

Emmett: *If there's an office, nobody would want to work there. Then, if terrorists crash into it, no one would die because nobody would be working.*

Jamila: *It's okay to build an office because the Trade Towers already were an office. Like Alex said, just not too big.*

Joeline: *The Trade Towers were not just an office... [there was] a hotel, swimming pool, gym... They should have a special part so relatives or friends won't be offended that people don't care.*

Jamila: *That's very sad. You would never not care. My mom said, and I think, that they did it on purpose. I don't know why.*

Eleanor: *I went to a show about it. There was a museum with pictures and telescopes to look through to see what the buildings would look like.*

Alex: *They might not be able to build a memorial because thousands of relatives were voting. They didn't like the ideas in the newspaper.*



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3. Reflecting on Documentation



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Amy and Barbara Lieberman, the assistant teacher, had begun to incorporate documentation practices in their work with the children. While Amy asked the children to reflect, Barbara captured verbatim what the children said. Later, when Amy and Barbara revisited the transcript of this conversation they noticed how the children kept turning to the topic of building a memorial to the World Trade Center at Ground Zero. The children seemed more captivated by connections to the social, emotional, and political issues that were buzzing around their homes and communities than the more generic study of parks and playgrounds Amy had planned. The teachers wanted to find a way to support the children in exploring the topic further. They approached Brigid McGinn, the studio teacher, thinking that the art studio would be a good environment for the children to delve deeper. Amy shared her documentation of the conversations with Brigid.

Brigid noticed how the children's thoughts and feelings were being filtered through the adults in their world, perhaps in an effort to give their ideas more credibility. These adult concerns seemed less accessible to the children and Brigid wanted to help them find their own place in this civic dialog. The question that emerged for her upon reading the transcript was, *"What about the children? What do they think a World Trade Center Memorial should be like?"*

Brigid had been watching for an opportunity to engage the children's perceptions, feelings, and ideas around the 9/11 attacks. It was such a monumental and life-changing event, especially for New Yorkers, that it seemed appropriate to make room for it in their school. When the teachers approached her with their documentation, she saw an opening for such an inquiry.



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4. In The Studio



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The next day Brigid met with Amy's students in two groups of ten. She began these conversations by reminding the children of their conversations in the classroom.

Brigid: *I understand you went to a memorial park earlier this week. Memorials are very important and one memorial that is very important to us in the city is the World Trade Center Memorial. Some of you were talking about it at your last meeting. I noticed that you know a lot about what people are thinking about building. It seems like there are a lot of grown-ups trying to agree on what to build. So, I was wondering, what do you think a World Trade Center Memorial that is for children might be like?*

The first group seemed very confident and capable of brainstorming what a memorial could be and the elements it would include, which seemed influenced by the recent research they had done on parks and playgrounds.

Maya: *When you go there you might think of the World Trade Center... you would want to think about it. In the World Trade Center they had all kinds of shops. There might be a sandbox where you could rebuild the town that was there out of sand. You could have the real signs of the stores and shapes and tools for building the stores. If I made the bakery I could get the sign to put on it and then if another boy came to build the bookstore he could get that sign.*

Alex: *A memorial park could be more of a playground. There could be a different world, but I think that's impossible. Another idea would be to build two towers with stairs in them and chairs and windows and steering wheels. This is an impossible one:*



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two towers coming out of the sandbox. I have an idea about what Maya said. In the sandbox you could have a wet and dry sand machine. It would have buttons to press. You get the wet sand to build with.

Jamie: Two towers out of cardboard big enough for the class to go in. Put in a window and then put some wheels on it. And then put it in the sandbox and then push it into another sandbox.

River: I think the cardboard would collapse and then get soft and get soggy and then it would get all yucky and then plants would grow out of it.

Joachim: You could use metal steels (drawing large tall shapes with his hands). You could hold sand up on top.

Alex: Parents and caregivers would never let kids climb up there it wouldn't be safe.

Journey: How about a playground and a little bit of what Maya and Alex were saying. Stairs up and down and when you go down two different...

Alex: It wouldn't work. We'd hit trains and rocks or dirt or China. It would take a year or two to build.

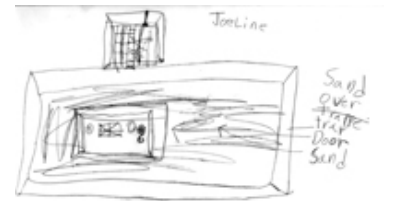


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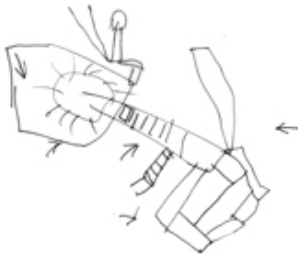
The children continued to offer suggestions and assess and build upon the ideas of others. After their conversation, Brigid asked the children to draw their ideas in response to her initial question and what they had talked about as a group. The drawings revealed complex feelings and a spectrum of needs not expressed verbally in the group conversation. The drawings--such as Maya's haunted house and Joeline's underground fortress--suggested inner fears not evident in their group discussion.

Maya: It is more like a haunted house with a skeleton chamber, make-your-own-potion room, and a secret step with an automatic rescue. There is a canoe on a path.

Joeline: There is a secret trap door in a sandbox and you can go into a tunnel and in a room and stay there. But it is only for kids. And there is a rocking chair, a fridge, a bed, a big screen TV and a coat rack. Only the kids have the secret combination. No grown-ups.



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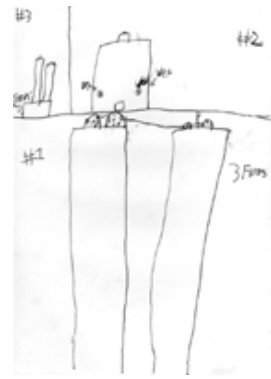


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Joachim's parachute jumps and Alex's drawing of tower climbers, intended to test the bravery of visitors to the park, communicated a sense of danger and the need to feel strong enough to face it.

Joachim: If you push the tower it goes round and round. These bars make the thing go around. There are elevators and stairs. When you go down the slide you land in the sandbox and in the tunnel. There is a place to jump. It's eight stories. There would be parachutes.

Alex: You go up in the towers. There are two places where there are chairs and steering wheels and there are four places to call from and you can call whoever is in the next tower.



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When the next group arrived later that morning, Brigid reframed her question to address the emotional realm more directly. Brigid asked this group, *"How would you want children to feel when they enter a World Trade Center Memorial Park?"*

Jamila: *People feel good if they have nice benches to sit and think about the parents that died. You want children to be happy because the people that died still have feelings. So, you want a place that their children will be happy so then their parents can feel happy in heaven.*

Henry: *Weird, sad, happy.*

Brigid: *What would be there to make you feel good?*

Henry: *A hotdog stand.*

Thamyr: *For grown-ups, a quiet place. There could be benches for peace.*

Brigid: *What would children do?*

Jamila: *If places were empty they would play tag. There could be bases and the missing people would be a base. They could make the missing people as memorials. They could be the bases, the fake people would be people that died and their children could run around and play tag. [The statues] could be time-out areas or home base.*

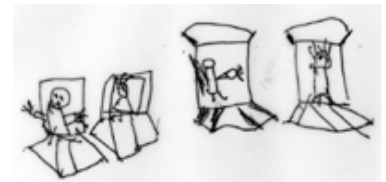
Rebecca: *Sometimes in the parks bands play music for grown-ups so they can rest. There could be a band to make people rest.*

Jamila: *But for children there could be dancing.*

Journey: *It could make you feel better if there was a baby park. Babies make you feel better when you hold them.*

Julia: *There is like a hand and there are steps for someone to walk up and stand in it. And the Trade Center would be right in the middle.*

Jake: *You know the dome that was in the courtyard? I saw it. I saw iron and steel and how there were holes in the dome and it showed how all this steel crashed into it. They could make a short review on the radio. There will be a show on TV to explain things. Like when you enter, after the plaques, there could be a video and movies to tell what happened.*



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5. The Evolution



The drawings that this group did after their conversation, while still revealing the children's emotions and sensitivities, offered more concrete ways of acknowledging and easing those needs. The children had designed playful spaces, nurturing spaces, joyful, bold, reflective, sad, relaxing, and hopeful spaces. All of the spaces that the children imagined were intended to address the varied and sometimes conflicting needs of children dealing with loss and all were to be brought together into one park created by the group.

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After these initial conversations, the children decided that the two groups would work collaboratively to create a design for one memorial park that combined everyone's ideas. They chose to make their park its own island in the Hudson River near Ground Zero. That way, they would not have to worry about meeting with neighbors to get approval for their design. Two children had the idea to shape the island like the reflection of the towers on the river.

Ideas were negotiated on the basis of two unanimously decided criteria--the park was to make children happy and to make them feel safe. With this shared goal always in mind, Joachim had no problem surrendering his ideas about parachute jumps when his classmates pointed out that they would be too dangerous. The groups wove together and mapped their ideas before beginning to draw specific sites in the park individually or in small groups.



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Over the next two months, while the children worked on their design, the walls of the school, particularly those between the classroom and studio, became more permeable. Discussions that began in the classroom continued in the studio. Amy and Barbara carved out time in the classroom for children to continue projects that had begun in the studio. Because the children wanted to preserve their studio time for actual drawing and building, the children's negotiations around ideas crept into other parts of the school day--lunchtime, block building time, and meeting times. The students met once a week in the studio and always arrived fueled with ideas and requests from their conversations and negotiations during the week.

The teachers offered the children every tool available to give them shared experiences within the design process. There were many visual explorations of scale and composition as the children used a Xerox machine and an old opaque projector to duplicate and enlarge the drawings on the wall and play with the placement and scale of the sites. The evidence of these explorations remained in the classroom during the weeks the children spent developing the design of their park. Maintaining the visibility of this design dialogue helped to support it by providing continuity and instant reference for the students each time they returned to the studio to work.



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There was an energy that bordered on the chaotic in the studio. Children were exploring ideas and materials individually and in small groups, a way of working that offered opportunities for the children to evaluate and assess the park design in progress and to build knowledge for the future of the whole group collaboration. While one group worked

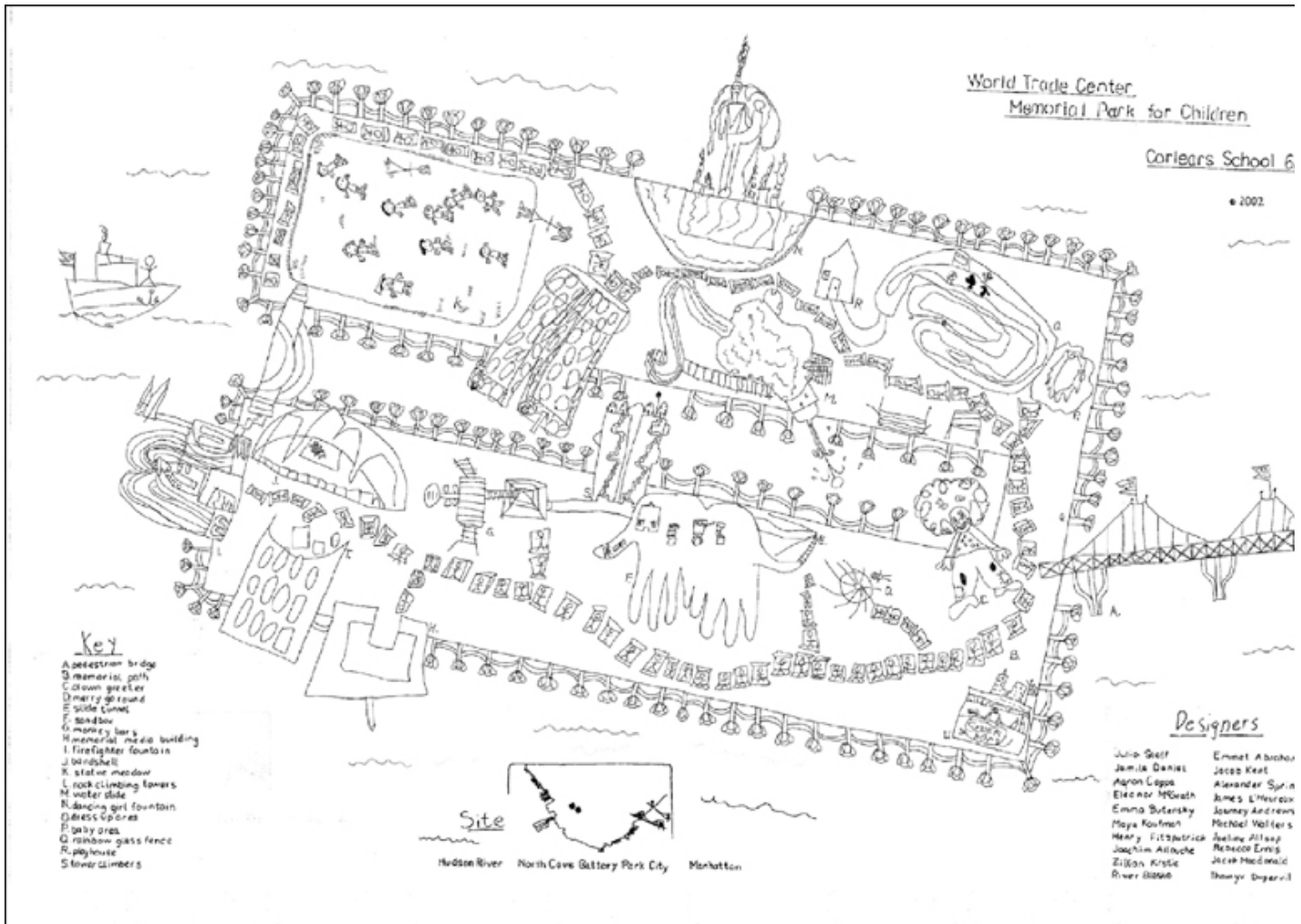


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on a miniature park model, they could simultaneously confer and negotiate with a group working on a map for the larger group design. All of this simultaneous activity in the studio provided an immediacy to the work that enabled adjustments to be made to the park layout within minutes of discoveries made elsewhere in the studio. The children tossed ideas and opinions out to the room, followed in rapid succession by appraisals and negotiated decisions.

Brigid: *Standing back revealed to me such extraordinary skill on the part of the children to negotiate this compelling work. I marveled at the way the children choreographed their minds, bodies, and imaginations during the studio sessions. It was chaotic at times, but more often poetic.*

6. Final Design



The final designs were traced onto the master plan with pencil. The children completed their first draft of the park blueprint in December, two months after the conversation that gave birth to the idea.

- A. The World Trade Center Memorial Park for Children is designed to be its own island in the Hudson River. The entrance to the park is a Pedestrian Bridge from the World Financial Center.
- B. The Memorial Path will be made of plaques with the names and pictures of every person who died. The path will lead to all the places in the park.
- C. The Clown Greeter will meet children at the bridge to make sure they are happy when they enter the park. The Clown is also a secret service person in disguise to keep everyone safe.
- D. The Merry-Go-Round is the kind you run around and spins after you jump on. The colors go around in a colorful way. It's

good for when you want to get dizzy.

E. The Slide Tunnel goes all the way under the sandbox to the Tower Climbers and Monkey Bars. This is a place where you need to be brave because the tunnel is dark and greased to be really fast.

F. The Sandbox is shaped like two hands that you can step up into and rebuild your favorite places from the town that was inside the World Trade Center. There is a wet and dry sand machine with molds of the facades of the stores. There are signs with the logos of the shops to put on the sand buildings.

G. The Monkey Bars have lots of climbing areas and a Lookout Tower to see the Hudson River and the city.

H. The Memorial Media Building is a place where children can see pictures and hear a radio review of what happened on September 11. There will be DVDs and videos of TV shows about rebuilding progress and how people can have peace together. A TV studio will be set up with chairs in a row for kids to have a talk show about how to have peace in the world. There will be a special room for children who are afraid of terrorists. There will be a special chair to sit and read stories about the people that died. The chair will have a secret button to press when you cry, a robot will come out and wipe your tears.

I. The Firefighter Fountain is a place to remember all the brave people who rescued every one at the World Trade Center. You go up stairs into a tunnel to enter the Firefighter statue without getting wet. The tunnel is dark and at the end are two towers of light that you walk through to get inside the gallery. The gallery will have all the stories about the rescues that happened on September 11th.

J. The Band Shell is there so that there will be music and dancing. Music makes grown-ups relax and dancing make children feel better. This is also a place to have memorial services for children to go to.

K. The Statue Meadow has a statue of every parent that died. The children can run around on the grass and play tag using the statues of their Mommies or Daddies as time-out areas or home base.

L. On the Rock Climbing Towers children can climb up and down the outside of the twin towers. There are chairs on the top where you can rest.

M. The Water Slide is 3 1/2 feet deep. There is a fountain to spray the slide and pool. The Water Slide is a place to just have fun on a hot day.

N. The Dancing Girl Fountain is a relaxing place to be happy. The sound of the water is peaceful.

O. The Dress-Up Area is important because children like to dress-up and pretend. There are hooks with all kinds of costumes and mirrors.

P. The Baby Area is there so babies can have a safe place to be and because holding babies always makes you feel better.

Q. The Rainbow Glass Fence will have colored glass at the top of each post to make rainbows in the park when the sun shines through them. The fence will keep children from falling into the Hudson River. The glass will also hide security cameras to make sure nobody does anything bad.

R. The Playhouse is fun. There is a path from the Dress-Up Area to the Playhouse. Children can go inside after they dress-up and play pretend games.

S. The Tower Climbers have stairs up the center. There are chairs and steering wheels at the top. The only way to get in the towers is through the Tunnel Slide.

T. The Family Building is a place for the children of victims to go. The lobby will have a memory area with a set-up of colored paper and ribbons. The children can write a memory of the person they are missing on the paper and hang it from the ceiling with the ribbon. Inside the building will be many special rooms. There will be a comfortable room with couches and chairs and pictures of all the families. There will be chocolate to eat because chocolate always makes you forget your sadness. The Emotional Room is for children who are upset, there is a real psychiatrist there for them to talk to. There is an E-Mail Chamber where kids can go to send messages to their family that died and the computer will send messages back that will help them feel better. That way kids can still feel like they can talk to the people they miss. There is a Video Room where kids can sit down in front of the camera and tell stories about the people that died. The videos can be shared in the Media Building on a special T.V. channel so all the visitors to the park can hear from the kids about how special each of their parents or grandparents or aunts and uncles were to them. The Music Room will be a place where children can go to sing songs, not just listen, but really learn the words and sing the songs. Songs like 'We Shall Overcome', 'America the Beautiful', 'Imagine' & Bruce Springsteen songs.

U. The Snack Bar will have hotdogs and lots of treats kids love to eat.

[A. Pedestrian bridge](#)
[B. Memorial path](#)
[C. Clown Greeter](#)



designed to be its own island in the Hudson River. The entrance to the park is a Pedestrian Bridge from the World Financial Center.

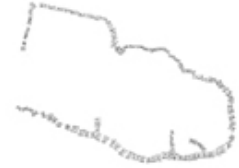
[Back to table of contents](#)

» [View larger version of photo](#)

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[Back to table of contents](#)



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C. The Clown Greeter will meet children at the bridge to make sure they are happy when they enter the park. The Clown is also a secret service person in disguise to keep everyone safe.

[Back to table of contents](#)

7. Continued Engagement



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The children had become a design team, identifying themselves as the "World Trade Center Memorial Park Designers" and, even after the completion of the blueprint, were engaging in creative thought about the possibility of having their park built.

Later in the year, the children attended the World Trade Center Memorial Exhibition. The following are some of the observations and discussions that the children had concerning different proposals for the memorial.

Kissing Towers

Joeline: *This is disrespectful because it looks like the twin towers but it isn't, it's sad.*

Alex: *It's too futuristic. There's no such building ever like this before. And it is too easy to hit, an airplane could just go into the curved part of the building and it would collapse immediately. It would be like the past is repeating. No, no, I hate this one. You know what you need in every building that is over 83 stories? You need a train where the people just hop onto an express elevator to take them down to the train and away. Lots of trains could be there. There would be ventilators and oxygen masks and maybe even more than one elevator.*

New York Garden

Alex: *Oh no! I don't believe this, it's a STADIUM! How disrespectful.*

Amy (teacher): *It's actually an amphitheater, and look there is one seat for every person that died, 2,797 seats.*



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Jacob: *That's just wrong. Imagine, watching movies you know, regular ones, like 007 James Bond, in a memorial park. No, that's wrong... action movies.*

Joeline: *That is just so wrong. I mean, people died and we are going to watch people blowing each other up (in movies) with bombs and fires? No, and sit on the seats? No that's awful! And ours is much lower to the ground, you don't want a huge theater, that's not safe, a plane could crash into it.*



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Richard Meier Design

Alex: *This one looks like a puzzle. If this one gets built we'll have to make sure Jacob's bridge curves or else it won't connect.*

Jacob: *The buildings look like a fence around our park.*

Sky Park

Alex: *I don't like it. It's ugly and the glass could break.*

Jacob: *It takes up too much space. They could all be built closer together.*

Alex: *This is just too much. I wish they could just build the exact same thing that was there in the first place. The entire center, all 7 buildings again, the same height, the*

exact same thing... you know?

Jacob: *You can't concentrate here. All these new futuristic, you know, they make you look at the cool buildings, but you can't concentrate on meditating. You can't rest. I want there to be two towers again.*

Jamila: *This is nice. If you are way up high it's good for a memorial because when people die they go up. So a memorial in the sky means you can be right there.*

Studio Daniel Libeskind

Joeline: *If they put a big hotel there it's just disrespectful.*

Alex: *This design is too into the future. They'd spend the whole money on welding. They'd have to weld the metal and it's too expensive. Our park is much simpler and easier to build.*

Jacob: *Right, but our park is not too simple.*

Alex: *No, this is too futuristic. People will be thinking it's 4003 not 2003.*

Vertical City

Alex: *It's good because terrorists will go into one and it won't make the other ones fall down too, because they are all spaced out.*

Joeline: *But what if nine terrorist planes came, then they would all be knocked down.*

Jacob: *It's a good structure because the towers are hidden behind each other so you can't knock them all down if you crash a plane into the site.*

Joeline: *Our design is much safer because it's all on one level.*

Alex: *Ours doesn't dent in, there are no creases to crumble or crack. It's closer to the ground.*

Joeline: *It's like a ship anchored, but it won't sink.*

United Architects

Alex: *WOW! This is the coolest one. Yes! I like the way it's shaped. It just looks good...I think it may even be better than ours!*

Jacob: *If two could win they would have to pick ours and this one.*

Alex: *Ours could be surrounding this on the water. That bridge there could be connected to ours.*

Jacob: *Amy, can we make our memorial park out of blocks in the block area?*

Alex: *We can start on Monday!*



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