

In 2013, the city of Philadelphia voted to close 23 schools for the 2013-14 school year. The schools ranged from elementary schools to high schools and were located across the city. The city cited under enrollment and budgetary restrictions as the reasons for these closures. As a result, thousands of students and teachers around the city were displaced, the buildings left abandoned, their fates unknown. [BLANK SPACE, LET THIS HANG]

On this audio tour, we will explore the fate of West Philadelphia High School. We will reflect on the history of this space and think about the broader theme of what we choose to memorialize. In a few moments, we will begin the audio tour. You may now pause the podcast until you have arrived at the front steps of West Philadelphia High School on 47th Street.

Now that you've arrived, take a moment to reflect. Be present with both your mind and body. Ask yourself some questions as you look around and take in your setting:

Who was this space made for? Who occupies it now? What communities were most affected by the school closure?

What might the building have looked like when it was first built?

What were the uses of this building, and how is it being used now?

Pay attention to the physicality of the space. What does it look like? Smell like? Sound like?

Close your eyes. Think about the history of this space and the communities that interacted with it. As you complete this tour, imagine what it would be like to be a student in this space. Reflect on your memories of high school, thinking about your personal experiences as a student. (a few moments of school sounds)

You may now open your eyes. The audio tour will begin shortly. This tour has four stops, with an optional fifth stop which involves entering the building. If you are interested in the fifth stop, continue listening after the conclusion. Otherwise, you may end your tour after the conclusion and reflection.

We also would like to give a disclaimer that this building is at an active construction site. Some things may have changed by the time you take this tour, making your experience different. Your unique observations can shape your understanding of this space. We will now begin this tour.

Stop 1: Front of the Building

As you look up, you will see the entrance to the building. Take a moment to observe the entrance, signage, and the building. What are your first impressions and initial thoughts?
[PAUSE]

West Philadelphia High School opened in 1912. In 2016, it was announced that the historic building was going to be converted into lofts. This project is ongoing, with a budget of 24 million dollars.

Look at the top of the building, below the windows. The words "West Philadelphia High School" are still clearly engraved in the building. You'll see signs about renting lofts and leasing property

around the front of the building. Look at all of the signs and structures, both permanent and temporary.

You'll notice, everything permanent about this building speaks high school. This was one of our first impressions. Even through the signage you'll notice permanent signs about school hours and security, and temporary signs about renting a loft. Keep this theme in mind throughout the tour.

Continue walking to the end of the block on 47th and Walnut. This corner will be the second stop of the audio tour. You may now hit pause until you reach the corner.

Stop 2: Walnut and 47th Street

Have you reached the corner of 47th and Walnut? You should now look left towards the West Lofts building across the parking lot. Please take a moment to make some observations about the space. [PAUSE]

Notice the West Philadelphia High School announcement board that stands above one of the entrances on this side of this building. One thing you may want to think about during this tour is how many aspects of West Philadelphia high school still remain. Are keeping remnants of the high school an effort to preserve this historical place, or is it a way to make the West Lofts space more "trendy"? [PAUSE]

You may also notice that there are "Girls" and "Boys" signs over the entrances of the building. West Philadelphia High School originally was composed of two separate buildings for boys and girls. However, the schools were combined in the 1930s in order to ease administration and streamline education.

If you look up you can see graffiti covering most of the windows. Looking at this side of the building, how do you compare it to what you saw at the front of the building in stop 1? Does the front looked more polished? More presentable? In what ways are so many parts of this building unfinished?

Continue down Walnut walking beside the building. You will then take a left at 48th Street. You can stop walking once you reach the back entrance of the building. This will be the third stop of the audio tour. You may now hit pause until you reach the back entrance of the building.

Stop 3: Back of the building (Back Entrance + Mural/Construction) on 48th Street

You've now arrived at the back of the building. As you begin walking, you'll see the words "West Philadelphia High School" engraved, similar to the front. What similarities and differences do you see between the front of the building and the back?

Continue walking along the back of the building. You will see that it is surrounded by fencing. Slowly walk towards the corner on 48th and Locust, taking in all of your surroundings. As you walk along the fencing, look through it and see what you are able to.

Some of our observations were signage, a large amount of construction, an area that seems like a courtyard, and a mural that seems to be created for the school. Take it all in. [pause]

How do these conflicting elements, such as the mural and the construction site, make you feel? What are your thoughts? What other conflicting elements have you seen during this audio tour? [pause]

Looking at the mural, think about the students of West Philadelphia High School. Like any school, this high school faced its challenges. In 2009, the school introduced restorative practices, and the campus was seen as a symbol for hope. These practices helped the school show immense improvement, bringing growth and positive change.

Think about this as you walk. Once you arrive at 48th and Locust, you may hit pause.

Stop 4: Side of the Building on Locust St

Continue walking down Locust Street towards 47th Street. As you walk along the side of the building, take in your surroundings. As we looked to the left, we noticed fencing, construction, and metal bars.

If you are able to, look into the space behind the bars. What do you see? [PAUSE]
You may notice abandoned furniture in this space. In what ways does this space feel abandoned and haunted by the memories of the school?

In thinking about this, it is important to remember that West Philly High School is still alive at another location. In 2011, West Philadelphia High School began its transition into a Promise Academy, relocating itself to 49th and Chestnut. Promise Academies are part of the Renaissance School Initiative that the School District developed to transform struggling neighborhood schools. These academies have longer school days, Saturday classes, longer school years, and a research-based curriculum. The goal of these academies is to provide students attending neighborhood schools a similar experience to students attending independent or charter schools. Early implementation of these academies proved to improve student academic achievement in neighborhood schools. However, severe budget cuts between the years of 2010 to 2014 have decreased the effectiveness of Promise Academies. Studies have shown that changes in leadership and unstable funding have contributed to recent failure of Promise Academies. These trends along with the impact of relocating students are important factors to consider when thinking about the West Philadelphia High School students.

Look along the building to your left as you walk. You can stop walking once you see the sign on the building that says Floyd L Logan Gymnasium. You may now hit pause until you reach this spot.

Look into the gated space underneath the sign. Make observations comparing this space and the previous space behind the bars [PAUSE].

If you turn around and look across Locust Street you should see a building with blue doors. [PAUSE] Looking at the top of the building you should see Henry C Lea Public School engraved

at the top. Henry C Lea is an elementary school that has stood next to West Philadelphia High School for 105 years. Based on what you have seen so far in the tour how do you think that the closing of West Philadelphia high school has impacted surrounding schools and the surrounding community?

Continue walking down Locust Street towards 47th Street. Take a left at 47th Street and continue walking until you reach the front of West Lofts where we started the tour. You may now hit pause until you reach the front of West Lofts.

Conclusion:

On the morning of November 17th, 1967 students from West Philadelphia High School came down these steps to participate in a walk-out to demand equality. Because these students chose to speak up, they were able to create tangible change within their school system. This act of courage has inspired youth activist to this day.

As you stand on these same steps, take a moment to reflect on your visit to this space. Think about the things you've seen and learned, and ask yourself:

- How should we memorialize this space?
- What do we choose to memorialize?
- Who should decide what we memorialize?
- What constitutes a memorial?
 - Can we use our bodies? Our actions?

[a few seconds of silence for thinking, maybe quiet school sounds again?]

Now, walk out.

Stop 5: (Optional) Inside the building, lobby area

This is an optional stop in the audio tour, which involves entering the building. When you enter, you will be greeted by the lobby manager. We recommend stating that you are a potential tenant, interested in a tour and interested in seeing the common areas.

Depending on the time that you arrive, tours may be unavailable. In this case, observe what you can of the inside of the building.

When you feel ready to enter, pause the audio tour. You may resume the audio tour after you leave the inside of the building.

Now that you were able to observe the inside of the building, take a moment to reflect on this experience.

What were your first impressions? What details did you notice? When you walked in, did you feel like you were in a school or an apartment complex? How did you feel walking in? What parts of the buildings did you get to see, and what unique things did you noticed about them?
(Pause)

Think back to our overall reflection questions as you finish this audio tour.

- How should we memorialize this space?
- What do we choose to memorialize?
- Who should decide what we memorialize?
- What constitutes a memorial?
 - Can we use our bodies? Our actions?

Thank you for listening. We hope this was an impactful experience for you.