

If Not the Police, Then What? Designing Systems for Community Safety

Project Context

After listening to all episodes of *Empire City*, you have learned how policing developed in New York City, what problems it was meant to solve, and how it often functioned to manage labor, poverty, and race.

Now you will take on a new role: **You are a systems designer.**

Your task is to design a **community safety system** that keeps people safe **without relying on traditional policing**, using historical evidence and research.

This project is about **rethinking safety**.

Essential Question: How can communities be kept safe without relying on police, and what systems would be needed to do so?

Project Goal

- ★ Research common reasons people are arrested
- ★ Identify community needs behind those arrests
- ★ Design a non-police system to address those needs
- ★ Support your design with historical evidence from *Empire City*
- ★ Make a clear claim about public safety

Step 1—Research the Problem

A. Common Arrest Categories

Choose **at least THREE** categories to research:

- Poverty-related offenses (theft, vagrancy)
- Substance use
- Mental health crises
- Youth conflict
- Labor protests / public disorder
- Housing insecurity
- Domestic disputes
- Immigration-related enforcement

B. Research Questions

Answer these for each category you choose:

1. Why were people arrested for this issue?
2. What problem was the arrest *trying* to solve?
3. Who benefited from arrests?
4. Who was harmed by arrests?

Research Notes:

C. Historical Connection to *Empire City*

Explain how policing historically responded to this issue:

- What strategies were used?
- What worked?
- What failed?
- How did power, race, labor or economics shape the response?

Notes:

Step 2: Design a Community Safety System

You will now design a non-police system to address the problems you researched.

1. Core Purpose

- What problem does your system address?
- Who is it meant to protect?

Explanation:

2. Services & Supports

Describe the services your system provides. Examples include:

- Mental health crisis teams
- Conflict mediation
- Housing-first programs
- Youth intervention and mentorship
- Labor dispute mediation
- Community emergency response

Your system's services:

3. How the System Works

Explain:

- Who responds when there is a problem?
- What training they receive
- How accountability works
- How safety is measured

Explanation:

4. Funding & Oversight

- How is your system funded?
- Who oversees it?
- How does it avoid problems seen in the history of policing?

Explanation:

Step 3: Make a Claim

Answer the question below using evidence:

Is policing necessary for public safety or can alternative systems work better?

- Police are unnecessary
- Police should play a limited role
- Safety should be handled by multiple systems

Claim & Reasoning:

Step 4: Choose a Creative Format (Pick ONE)

- ★ Community Safety Blueprint (diagram + explanation)
- ★ Podcast Episode Script
- ★ Policy Proposal for City Council
- ★ Illustrated System Map
- ★ Short Documentary Outline
- ★ Simulation or Game Concept

Chosen Format:

Step 5: Planning Your Final Product

Key Message

What should your audience understand about safety?

Evidence You Will Use (List at least 3)

Reflection

Prompt: After studying the history of policing through *Empire City*, what surprised you most about how safety has been defined and enforced?

Response:

Final Checklist

- I researched common arrest categories
- I identified community needs
- I designed a non-police safety system
- I explained how the system works

- I connected my ideas to *Empire City*
- I made a clear claim about public safety
- I supported my ideas with evidence
- My work is clear and complete

Reminder

This project is about:

- ❖ Historical analysis
- ❖ Systems thinking
- ❖ Evidence-based design
- ❖ Creative problem-solving