In Harry Bliss’s illustration *City Living* he depicts multiple, simultaneous lifestyles that have been separated into different sections, yet they still enable interactions. Set in a building that is distanced from the blurred city in the background, there are people who are living their lives oblivious to the fact that they may be impacting the people around them. People are depicted carrying on with their lives and absorbed in their own activities: the children playing, the cat sleeping, the friends watching a baseball game indoors, the woman watering her plants, the latin dancing and music going on indoors, while a traditional American barbeque is going on outdoors, and the man doing yoga through all the chaos going on around him (Bliss). Many of these stories are interacting with one another through the depiction: the people who are being disturbed by the latin music above, the dog intrigued by the smell of cooking food, while his owner is not happy about the smoke from the barbeque party, and the woman who is watering her plants with bad aim as her mind is also distracted by the alarming smoke from below (Bliss). With so many different stories in the image, it is possible that Bliss is trying to connect the audience's urban lifestyle with who we choose to interact with and when. Thus, Harry Bliss’s illustration *City Living* signifies the interconnectedness of city life even through the isolated lifestyles.

In his illustration, Bliss uses images of separation to highlight the isolated lifestyles of people living in the city. The audience can see many different, simultaneous lives in the image,
but one important detail is the way that Bliss has separated the depiction into different boxes (Bliss). The grid-like style of the image conveys messages of separation and isolation; one might even say that they are like cells that the characters of the image are trapped in, though they may not realize it. Just as the people in the image are separated from one another, they are also separated from everything else. Bliss has shown this by having a faint background of city buildings to highlight the distance of these individuals from everything else (Bliss). This is significant because it emphasizes the isolation of the individuals from the reality that they are still living around other people and not in isolation. These images highlight how urban life has brought individuals closer in proximity to one another, however the isolation has still increased among people.

Even through images of isolation, Bliss highlights the interconnectedness of our lives through the interactions of characters in the illustration. Although each character in the picture is in their own space, many of them are interacting with each other or are impacted by one another. Some parts of the illustration that depict this include the smoke from the barbeque party flying up towards neighbors, the people in the unit under the latin dancing who are able to hear the music in their home, the lady watering her plant that may water the head of the woman below her (Bliss). These are all ways in which the people of the image are affecting their neighbors who are around them, highlighting opportunities to connect with one another. As the illustration is frozen at one point in time, we as the audience are able to see these connections from an outside point of view which the characters of the image cannot see. The isolation that they have adjusted to through city life has made them less recognizing of this interconnectedness, which can be turned into positive opportunities for interaction.
As the characters in the image fail to recognize possible relationships among one another, Bliss portrays the characters’ ignorance or oblivion towards one another to convey that interconnectedness in city life is often ignored. Their inability to see how they are impacting one another is depicted by the blindness of the people in the image. The illustrator emphasizes that the characters are blind to their connections by showing the two characters in the barbeque party who are wearing sunglasses (Bliss). Although their glasses are serving the practical purpose of blocking the sun, deeper analysis of the meaning helps us to understand that Bliss is conveying the inability of the man who is grilling food to see that he is irritating his neighbors above (Bliss). For the woman with glasses, she is unable to see what the audience knows is about to happen: the woman watering her plant will accidentally water the woman’s head below (Bliss). These are both interactions that will have to happen among the characters of the illustration, however, the people impacted do not have any idea or do not care to interact and foster any connections. Each individual is absorbed in their own task or what is going on within their own cell in the image. This is a message also conveyed in the depiction of the people in the unit below the latin dancers who are annoyed by the noise (Bliss). The individuals who are frustrated with the noise are just trying to solve their own issue by countering the noise with a broomstick to the ceiling, so as to make the music from above stop. This conveys their ignorance to an opportunity for deeper connection with their neighbors. Connecting back to Bliss’s choice to show this illustration in the form of a grid, even though the people in the image are stuck in the grid, they do not have a problem with that aspect of city life where they are living in isolation despite having opportunities for interconnectedness. In this illustration, city life creates an ignorance towards fostering community and connections that are possible. All of these aspects of the image convey that there is a lot of interconnectivity between the stories and lives of
individuals on the city grid, but they are not given any attention or priority in the lives of city-people.

Overall, Bliss’s illustration *City Living* depicts many interactions among the characters in the image that highlight interconnectedness despite separate livelihoods. Bliss’s message is a very important critique for those of us who are living in the city. We may notice these trends in our lives where we lack connection and communication with our neighbors, only interacting with them when situations may lead us to do so. As we are absorbed in our own lives, we ignore the opportunities for these connections to develop. This significant message compels us to take charge of these opportunities and try to foster those deeper connections with one another even as we all live in our own boxes on the grid. By doing so, we may be relieved of the isolation that we feel and experience in city life.
Works Cited
