

DEVELOPING A SENSE OF PLACE

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Overview: 5th - 8th grade students investigate a familiar outdoor setting and create a collection of maps, data, and artwork that bring them to a deeper understanding of the physical and cultural aspects of place.

Curriculum Connections: geography, science, art, language arts, math

Teaching Level: 5th - 8th grade

Connection to National Geography Standards:

#2 How to use mental maps to organize information about people, places, and environments in a spatial context

#4 The physical and human characteristics of place

Objectives:

Students will draw a base map of a familiar place, for example, their yard, block or neighborhood. (This map will serve as a template for botanical, animal, cultural maps.)

Students will interview neighbors, family members, etc., and develop a written cultural history of their place.

Students will use data gathered from these oral histories to create documents in media of their choice (stories, historical maps, timelines, etc.)

Students will assemble their physical and cultural documents together and bind them with plant materials from their site.

Materials: Map production materials include paper, markers, colored pencils, pastels, water colors, pen, pencil, ruler, scissors, linen thread or rubber bands, cover stock. Helpful teacher reference materials include:

PrairyErth(a deep map) by William Least Heat-Moon. These stories provide a great deal of information about a very small space. The author's map goes deeply into time as well as into the earth.

Making Books that Fly, Fold, Wrap, Hide, Pop Up, Twist, and Turn by Gwen Diehn. The author gives clear directions for possible binding methods for maps and documents using natural materials.

Clearing: Environmental Education in the Pacific Northwest. Issue 96, Jan/ Feb 1997. "Coming Home: What Childhood Maps Reveal about the Experience of Place". This thought-provoking article can be excerpted for classroom discussion

The Book of Where: Or, How to be Naturally Geographic by Neill Bell. This text has reliable explanations of mapping techniques you may want to use with your students.

Introduction:

Read students selections from "Coming Home: What Childhood Maps Reveal About the Experience of Place".

Engage students in a discussion of wild places they may know. Do they agree with the author's position?

Introduce students to the concept of "deep mapping," the detailed and layered representation of a small space.

Procedures:

Have students develop the criteria for a 1- 6 scoring guide that will be used for student and teacher assessment of students' work.

Present mapping techniques from the *Book of Where*. Have students practice making a scaled map of the classroom.

Guide students in their choice of places to investigate.

Look for connections in physical geography or science that this project reinforces. Supporting classroom instruction might range from the description of landforms to the use of dichotomous keys. Pressed plant specimen pages and microscopic insect drawings are all a part of understanding place.

Begin bookbinding process as a class. This is an excellent time for additional adult help.

Assessment: These projects deserve to be celebrated. Consider class presentations and library display. For graded assessment, students will assign their work a 1- 6 score based on agreed upon scoring guide. Teacher will also score work using this guide.

Extensions:

Seasonal maps and sketches of the same place

Use of archival material in local historical society and in city/county records