

SENSING

FINDING



KNOWING

SHARING

Place: A Workbook

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Design by Bill Fall

“A place that ever was lived in,
is like a fire that never goes out.”

EUDORA WELTY



We are all shaped by place. The places where we grew up, the places we visit, and the places that we live in influence who we are and who we can become.

Landscape, people, climate, local culture, history, personal memories, physical associations and visual cues connect us to place. As folklorist Mary Hufford describes it: “Sense of place is the totality of perceptions and knowledge gained by residents through their long experience in it and intensified by their feelings for it.”

What is your place? Is it where you grew up? Where you live now? **Place: A Workbook** is one way to reconnect to your place. It starts with something you might already know something about, your community, your neighborhood, your home and encourages you to take a closer look.

Our relationship to place is personal and immediate. By paying attention to our associations with our place, we can become more aware of our own sense of personal geography.

What places hold special significance to you? Why?

What associations do you have with your place?

What are the sounds and smells that you associate with your place?

Describe what your place looks like.

Describe a typical day spent in your place.

Sensing Place Exercises



1. General Impression on Size and Shape (GISS)

Referring to the essential characteristics of a species, the term GISS is used by birdwatchers for quick identification and recognition. Take a step outside, quickly make note of your first impressions of your place.

2. Place Map

Each of us carries an internal map on which we have inscribed the details of our daily lives. Make your own map showing your home, neighborhood, school, downtown and the places where you work, shop and play.

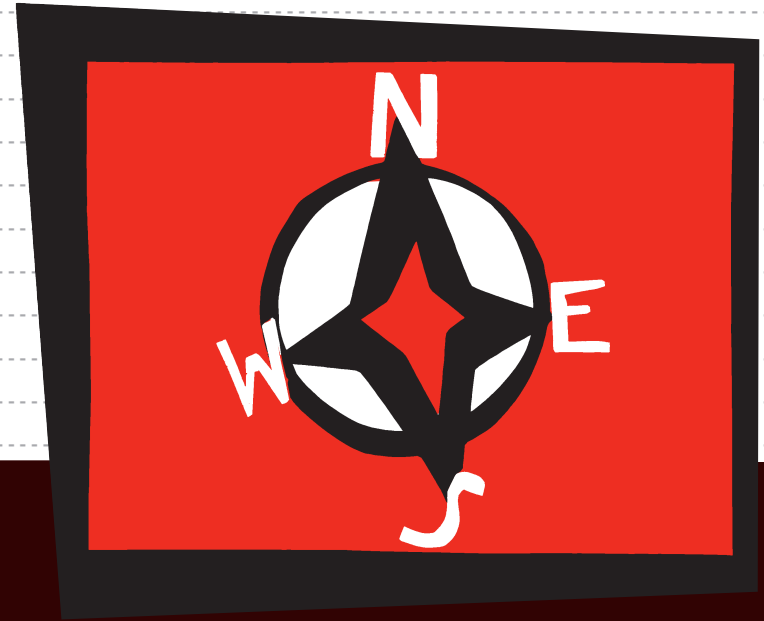
3. Place Walk

On foot, we experience the world as a whole. We can explore place better by walking than by riding in a car. As Wendell Berry suggests, "Get out of the car, off your horse and walk over the ground." Take a daily walk around your neighborhood, your town, your stretch of a long road. Make note of daily observations.

4. Place Journal

Keep a place journal utilizing what Allen Ginsberg called "First thought, Best thought."

Jot down your impressions about the landscape, the sounds, smells, seasons, time of day, the coming and goings of people in your place.



“Stand in the place where you are and think about direction.” REM

Place is experienced in specific instances, not in the abstract:

- The way a Jonesport lobsterman's house shutters are painted the same bright turquoise as his lobster buoys
- The sound of the Camden church bell
- The smells of the Stonington fish fry on 4th of July

List three instances of your place:

1. The way...

2. The sound of ...

3. The smells of...

Places are storied with personal and communal meaning:

The place where you first learned how to swim

The place where your grandparents lived

The place where you could buy penny candy

Jot down one story you associate with your place.

Through fieldwork, place can also be described in specific detailed instances. This involves documenting people as they live and work and asking their perspective about their place and their traditions. Fieldwork involves observing, interviewing, note taking, recording and photographing and can offer insight into contemporary place experiences. Combined with historical research, this type of ethnographic research is one way of seeing the connections between people, place and local life.

Inventories and descriptions of local practices also help us see what people consider important in their place. Consider the following categories and jot down potential local contacts.

Local practices:

Community history

Legends

Community festivals

Bean suppers

Bake sales

Church suppers

Parades

Farmers markets

Holiday Fairs

Harvest Festivals

Sporting Events

Library & Book Sales

Occupational traditions

Other

Natural Environment:

Hikes	Beaches	Gardens	Foraging
Sanctuaries	Swimming Holes	Yardscapes	Beekeeping
Lakes	Ice-Skating Ponds	Fishing Spots	Other:
Rivers	Docks/Landings	Hunting	

Built Environment:

Public Buildings	Homes	Community Performance Halls
Meeting Halls	Churches	Playgrounds
Historic Landmarks	Other places of worship	Baseball Fields
Granges	Ethnic Meeting Halls	Basketball Courts
Neighborhood Spots & Local hangouts	Ethnic Food Stores	Beauty Parlors
Educational Facilities	Farmers Markets	General Stores
Neighborhoods	Community Centers	Coffee Shops
	Arts Centers	Other:

Local People:

Local history

Storytelling

Poetry

Writing

Vocal music

Instrumental music

Local bands

Instrument making

Dance

Theatre

Quilting

Rug making

Embroidery

Knitting

Crocheting

Painting

Calligraphy

Basketry

Weaving

Knitting

Jewelry making

Pottery

Woodcarving

Chainsaw carving

Furniture making

Yard and garden art

Fly-tying

Boat building

Other

Special Places/People Exercise

Collecting specific instances of place is one way of seeing the connection between people and place. Called “Discovery Research,” this process identifies and documents community members for information on local culture. The process is concerned with not just collecting information about place and local culture but in discovering community connections.



By yourself:

List 3 things in each of the follow categories that are special about your place.

Local Practices

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Natural Environment

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Built Environment

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Local People

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

With a Group:

Put the following headings on post-it notes on a wall: Local Practices; Natural Environment; Built Environment and Local People.

Give your group some post its and ask each person to put 3 special places/people under each of the categories. Compile the list and reading it out loud. Use this exercise as a way to start a discussion going about what is important in your place.

“One learns a landscape finally not by knowing the name or identity of everything in it, but by perceiving the relationship in it, like that between the sparrow and the twig.”

BARRY LOPEZ

In taking stock of your place, look at the patterns and relationships that make individuals part of larger groups and events; teams, clubs, families, volunteer organizations, ethnic, tribal, religious or occupational groups. It is through these relationships that we strengthen our sense of place.

List all your identities as a community member.

What circles of people are you connected to?

Six degrees of separation exercise

With a group of people (at least 10) form two circles – one inner and one outer. Have one person be the time clock. Give each person in the both the inner and outer circle 3 minutes to find a connection to the person in front of them (whether it be through school, sports, work, family or where they like to eat) before they rotate on to the next person in the circle.

“People are their place and a place is its people.”

EDWARD RELPH

A strong relationship between people and their place helps community stability. By recognizing these relationships, we are taking stock of what we have and appreciating what's here.

What are you grateful for in your community?

Being respectful of place and local practices leads to a more creative and sustainable sense of community. Start with what is present and positive in your community, not with what is missing. A “place-based” approach to community looks at the whole fabric of the community, focusing on the importance of building and maintaining relationships among members. Looking at the assets you have and recognizing what works encourages resourcefulness and local control.

How can we recognize and strengthen a sense of place on a community level?

Place Based Gatherings

Gatherings can be a welcome occasion to share ideas and concerns about your place. It is one way for community members to explore the idea of place, not solely based on personal associations but on a larger community scale. Convening groups of people with common interest to talk about their place and its future is also a way for them to find common ground as well as encouraging people to think beyond the status quo.



As a gathering icebreaker, do either the “Special Places/People” exercise or the “Six Degrees of Separation” exercise.

- **Artists Gathering:** writers, painters, poets, filmmakers, musicians, performers, artists whose work is rooted in place
- **Natural-Resource Gathering:** conservationists, environmentalists, community activists, fishermen, loggers, farmers interested in conserving their place and way of life
- **Creative Economy Gathering:** arts administrators, municipal employees, planners, community and economic development people interested in conserving and promoting their place

In your own community, who would you invite to a gathering about place?

What topics would you discuss?

Community Storytelling Day

Create opportunities for people to tell stories about place. These stories can be organized around such specific themes as occupational traditions like fishing, logging, farming, or local ghosts stories, “from away tales,” or stories about place names, local events, characters, families. Record the stories, invite a local raconteur to work with you on the

Who would you invite to a community storytelling day?

What types of stories would you present?

Register of Very Special Places

Based in upstate New York, Traditional Arts in Upstate New York has created an innovative census of cultural landmarks. The Register of Very Special Places is a little different from conventional historical preservation efforts. Interested in the relationship of North Country people to a particular site and to its meaning to community life over time, it contains a wide range of community sites including barbershops, local diners, ethnic churches and hunting clubs. For more information: www.tauny.org
www.northcountryfolklore.org

What place would you nominate as a Very Special Place in your community?

Place Matters

Place Matters is a joint project of City Lore and The Municipal Art Society of New York. City Lore, a non-profit organization dedicated to advancing New York's living cultural heritage, has done a number of innovative projects that celebrate place. Started in 1998, Place Matters encourages New Yorkers to survey and nominate important places worthy of protection. Through the Census of Places that Matter, over 500 places have been nominated. The program has devised a tool for surveying significant places that can be used for a variety of purposes. For more information: www.placematters.net

Insider/Outsider Tours

We all have the experience of being insiders in some settings and outsiders in others. Try being a tourist in your own town or invite a friend from another place to be a tourist in your town. Insiders can develop tours that highlight the hidden assets of a community, while outsiders often see things that are taken for granted by insiders. Developing a tour provides an opportunity to see facets of place that wouldn't be visible or accessible to you otherwise. Get a group together (you can include both insiders and outsiders) and plan a one-day tour of your place.

What would your an itinerary be as an insider?

What would your itinerary be as an outsider?

“A real place feels as though it belongs where it is – as though it has grown there- shaped by weather, geography and history.”

SCOTT RUSSELL SANDERS

What is your idea of a real place?

What are the ways you would like to share this place with others?

“If I were now to visit another country, I would ask my companion, before I saw any museum or library, any factory or fabled town, to walk me in the country of his or her youth, to tell me the names of things and how, they have fitted together in a community. I would ask for the stories, the voice of memory over the land. I would ask about the history of storms there, the age of trees, the winter colors of the hills. Only then would I ask to see the museum.

I would want first, the sense of a real place, to know that I was not inhabiting an idea. I would want to know the lay of the land first, the real geography, and take some measure of the love of it in my companion before I stood before the painting or read works of scholarship. I would want to have something real and remembered against which I might hope to measure their truth. “

BARRY LOPEZ

NOTES

Suggested Readings:

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