

Sense of place

The activities will focus on an exploration of place in multiple formats and media.

They will provide the opportunity for place to be experienced through the senses, analysed as a concept, and expressed creatively.

Students will provide their reflections on the meaning and being of place in the context of an island place, in their chosen format. They will have the opportunity to reflect place through different senses or lenses, and share this with students on other islands.

Place is to be regarded as a metaphor and includes home, virtual, border, embodied, indigenous places, urban and rural, significant, heritage and iconic places, islands, mountains, forests, deserts, aquatic places. Place is more than just a name and a location. It is also the plants and animals that live there. It is the type of soil, climate, and geologic history. A place is the people who live there today and the people who lived there yesterday. All these together make the place.

Equally, 'senses' and 'lenses' are also metaphors. Senses: sound, sight, feel, taste, smell, virtual, spiritual, common sense. Lenses: photography, film, performance, dance, literature, music, history, microscope, visual arts, museum, indigenous insight, tourist, local, academic and through a doorway.

Cultural geographers, anthropologists, sociologists and urban planners study why certain places hold special meaning to particular people or peoples. Places said to have a strong 'sense of place' have a strong identity and character that is deeply felt by local inhabitants and by many visitors. Sense of place is a social phenomenon that exists independently of any one individual's perceptions or experiences, yet is dependent on human engagement for its existence. Such a feeling may be derived from the natural environment, but is more often made up of a mix of natural and cultural features in the landscape, and generally includes the people who occupy the place. The sense of place may be strongly enhanced by the place being written about by poets and novelists, or portrayed in art or music, and more recently, through classifications aimed at protecting, preserving and enhancing places felt to be of value (such as the 'World Heritage Site' designations used around the world, the English 'Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty' controls).

Young children know they are part of the natural world. They understand what most of us have forgotten, that there is no natural world and human world. It is all one. We are part of nature. Young children find these connections everywhere. To them a weedy patch with a bush is as exciting as a national park; an ant or butterfly is as exciting as a tiger or bear. Their imagination allows them to become other animals or go back in time. If children retained this sensibility as they grew up, it would translate into a closer connection to home and community.

People develop a 'sense of place' through experience and knowledge of a particular area:

- A sense of place emerges through knowledge of the history, geography and geology of an area, its flora and fauna, the legends of a place, and a growing sense of the land and its history after living there for a time.
- Memories of personal and cultural experiences over time make a place special, favorite objects that shape to your hand or body with use, songs or dances that emerge from the people of a place, special skills you develop to enjoy your area, these too help to define a place and anchor you in it.
- Over time, shared experiences and stories (history) help to connect place and people and to transmit feelings of place from generation to generation. Shared physical perceptions and experiences help people from different cultural groups fashion a local culture that expresses

their unity in a place. Finally, place becomes unique and special for individuals and their group and the group solidifies its identity through celebrations and rituals.

Developing a sense of place helps people identify with their region and with each other. A strong sense of place can lead to more sensitive stewardship of our cultural history and natural environment and to future planning.

Sense of place is defining oneself in terms of a given piece of land. Landscape acts as teacher in shaping our perceptions of place. Analysis suggests that four major components contribute to a sense of place. These emotional and spiritual bonds to the land are:

- Toponymic - related to naming places
- Narrative - involving personal or group stories or legends
- Experiential - associated particularly with dependence and survival
- Numinous – spiritual.

Resources

Wikipedia definition - http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sense_of_place

Definition by Yan Xu - <http://www.eslarp.uiuc.edu/la/la437-f95/reports/yards/main.html>

Sense of place thesis - <http://envstudies.brown.edu/Thesis/2001/james/senseofplace.html>

Concept map

What is my sense of place and islandness?

- Why do certain places hold special meaning to particular people or peoples?
- Which places on your island have a strong 'sense of place' / have a strong identity and character that is deeply felt by:
 - yourself?
 - your family?
 - local inhabitants, and
 - visitors?
- In what ways is your sense of place dependent on your perceptions or experiences?
- In what ways is my island environment unique?
- What traditions are associated with food on my island?

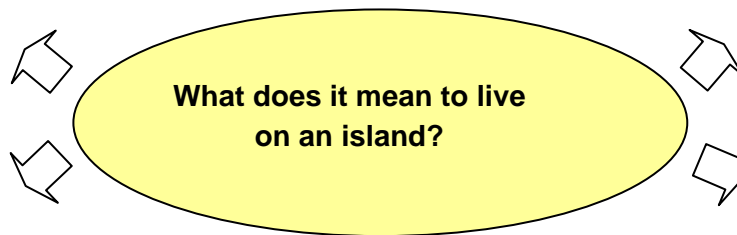
place, sense of place, island, identity, character, inhabitants, perceptions, experiences, meaning, relationships, paradise, characteristics, features

time, change, continuity, atmosphere, mood, point of view

culture, diversity, islands, lifestyle, rituals, traditions, religions, recipe, health, produce, import, export, trade

What unique experiences are associated with living on an island?

- What is an island?
- What does the edge of my island look like?
- How can I care for my coastal environment?
- Where do people live on my island?
- What has changed about my island over time?
- What would I keep and what would I change about my island?
- In what ways can we use things found on beaches?
- In what ways might my island be developed?
- What lives on my island?
- What is my ecological footprint on my island?



What does it mean to live on an island?

What is our connectedness to others? How do islands change over time?

- In what ways are we connected to:
 - our place – emotionally, spiritually?
 - to our communities?
 - to the rest of the world?
 - to other islands?
- In what ways do we communicate with others internally / externally?
- In what ways do we find out about places beyond our shore?
- In what ways can our island's identity be communicated to others?
- How has language changed over time on my island?
- How can the availability of transport between islands create and sustain interdependence between different islands?
- In what ways has your island changed as transport has changed and improved?

connectedness, community, interconnectedness, communication, trade, accessibility, language, native language, isolation, transport, travel, technology, legend, myth, mystery, missionary

environment, extinct, conservation, survival, endangered, development, landscape, protection, ecosystem, invasive, species, endemic, climate change, biodiversity, adaptation

What are the aspects of the environment and culture that impact on us?

- How can we protect our island from invasive species?
- What impact have invasive species had on my island's environment?
- In what ways are invasive species like aliens?
- In what ways are tourists like invasive species?
- How can an island's people become environmental refugees?
- In what ways do religious traditions influence the culture of island inhabitants?
- What impact have missionaries had on island people?
- What roles have myths and legends played in creating mystery about island life?
- How would you survive if stranded on an isolated island?