LESSON 1 DISCOVERING YOUR SENSE OF PLACE

Overview
Using a variety of activities, students will begin to explore what they believe are the essential ingredients of community, how the appearance of their community contributes to their sense of place, how they feel about changes to their community, and how others in their community feel about this place where they live. These activities can be conducted all on one day, as stations, or they may be done individually over a period of days.

Unit Pre-Assessment
Before beginning this unit, you may want to assess your students’ ability to define their sense of place and what they value in their community, and again after the unit. You could ask students to describe their “ideal” community by posing this question for students to write about in their journals, “What would the perfect community be like?”

Alternatively, use the “How Well Do You Know Your Place” quiz following the Unit Assessment at the end of the booklet.

Objectives
Students will be able to:
1. List at least three essential “ingredients” of community, and how the appearance of their community contributes to their sense of place.
2. Identify their community’s three most important assets.
3. Make predictions about what various age groups like and need from the community.
4. Explore how others feel about their community through books.

Procedure
Set up some or all of the following stations depending upon the size of the class and the amount of time you have. Use a large classroom or library.

Station A. Across These United States*

Using postcards of different natural environments (beach, desert, forest, etc.) and built environments (small town, suburb, sprawl, large city), students identify those places that they find attractive, and those places where they would not like to live.

- Student record their responses into their own an individual table, and then transfer their responses to a large tally sheet posted on the wall for all class members’ responses.
- Compare and discuss students’ varied responses. Does everyone like the same place? Which do they like least? Most? Why? Which is most like they live?

*Adapted from Viewfinders (Activity 1-3) by the Dunn Foundation www.dunnfoundation.org
Station B. **Values Barometer** (Adapted from *Values on the Line*, K-8 Project Learning Tree Activity Guide).

Make two signs (*Agree Strongly* and *Disagree Strongly*) to post on the wall about twenty feet apart. As the teacher reads one statement at a time (see sample statements on the following pages), students arrange themselves along the line between ‘Agree Strongly’ and ‘Disagree Strongly’ depending upon how they feel. Students will observe that there are many different ways to feel about one’s community.

Station C. **What Is Special About Your Community?**

Students list what is special about their community or what they like about their community on a large sheet of newsprint posted on the wall. Later, note the similarities and differences in students’ responses.

Station D. **A Memorable Place**

Students write a paragraph describing a *place* that moved, inspired, or profoundly impacted them (positively or negatively).

Station E. **Quotable Quotes**

Students review a variety of books to look for a quote that describes their own sense of place and explain why. Possible books: *Earth Prayers*, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* by Annie Dillard, *A Year in the Maine Woods* by Bernd Heinrich, *Sand County Almanac* by Aldo Leopold, *The Wisdom of the Native Americans*, ed. Kent Nerburn. Choose a variety of books that will guide your students’ to consider the visual environment and sense of place.

Station F. **Photo Comparison**

Students compare 10-12 photos (provided by the teacher) of the local area. Photos should include natural landscapes and built environment, attractive and not so attractive settings. This is a warm-up for the lessons that follow. Possible photos to include are: franchise architecture, historic buildings, parks, parking lots, attractive landscaping and no landscaping, billboards and attractive business signs, etc. Students record their responses to the photos.

Station G. **Predictions**

Students make predictions about what makes the area a good place to live for each of the following four age groups: i) parents of 0-5 years, ii) 6-12 years, iii) 13-22 years; iv) 23-59 years; v) 60+ years. Discuss whether all age groups have the same needs? Do the needs of some residents conflict with other residents’ needs for: safety, playgrounds, skate parks, ice skating rinks, golf courses, transportation options (bus?), fast food restaurants, libraries, etc. Is it possible for our community to provide for all residents’ needs?

**Assessment**

Each group completes all the stations and turns in their completed record/response forms.

**Michigan Content Standards Addressed**

**Language Arts:**

Standard 1.1 Use reading for multiple purposes, such as, new procedures, and increasing conceptual understanding.

**Social Studies:**

Standard 5.1 Inquiry

- Use traditional and electronic means to organize social science information and to make map, graphs and tables.
**Station A Across These United States Tally Sheet**

Place an X in the column that best describes how you feel about the landscape shown in each postcard. Be sure you record your response in the correct row. Remember, you may not be starting at postcard 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Postcard</th>
<th>Like Very Much</th>
<th>Like A Little</th>
<th>No Feelings</th>
<th>Dislike A Little</th>
<th>Dislike A Lot</th>
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**Questions**

1. Which landscape is most like your own?

2. Which landscape do you like the best? Why?

3. Which landscape do you like least? Why?
What do students value about different aspects of the community in which they live?  
(Pre-teach vocabulary as needed)

As the teacher reads each statement below, the students position themselves along a continuum marked on the wall or floor, labeled *Strongly Agree* at one end, and *Strongly Disagree* at the other end. Have students note the variety of perspectives within their class. Would they expect the same responses from their parents? Grandparents?

1. I live in my community because I like the way it looks.
2. My community has a sense of pride.
3. Our area needs more malls and shopping centers.
4. Our area has too much green space.
5. Property owners should have the final say in what happens on their land.
6. Historic buildings are of little or no value.
7. Small, locally-owned businesses are important to our community.
8. We need more public land for recreation to attract homeowners and tourists.
9. Businesses should not be allowed to put up big billboards advertising their businesses, only smaller ones should be allowed.
10. Traffic congestion is a problem in our community.
11. We should have more big franchise restaurants and stores.
12. Unique natural habitats, geologic formations, and historical places in our area should be protected.
13. All franchise stores and restaurants should look the same in every community.
14. It doesn’t matter to me how our community changes in the next 20 years.
15. I should have a say in how my community grows.
16. Parking lots are just for cars. They don’t need trees or landscaping.
17. New buildings do not need to blend in with the buildings already in our community.
STATION B      VALUES BAROMETER STATEMENTS
(Has a focus on community and natural resources.)

What do students value or think about different aspects of the community in which they live?  (Pre-teach vocabulary as needed)

As the teacher reads each statement below, the students position themselves along a continuum marked on the wall or floor, labeled Strongly Agree at one end, and Strongly Disagree at the other end. Have students note the variety of perspectives within their class. Would they expect the same responses from their parents? Grandparents?

1. My community has a sense of pride.
2. Our area needs more malls and shopping centers.
3. Our area has too many parks and recreational areas.
4. Property owners should have the final say in what happens on their land.
5. Water quality is not important to my community.
6. It is important to maintain habitat in our community for birds and wildlife.
7. Streams get in the way of community growth and development.
8. Businesses should not be allowed to put up big billboards advertising their businesses, only smaller ones should be allowed.
9. We should have more big franchise restaurants and stores so we can be like everywhere else.
10. Unique natural habitats, geologic formations, and historical places in our area should be protected.
11. It doesn’t matter to me how our community changes in the next 20 years.
12. I should have a say in how my community grows.
13. Communities need to provide safe ways for people to walk and ride bikes to places.
14. New buildings do not need to blend in with the buildings already in our community.
15. We have enough parks in our town. They don’t create jobs, they just cost money to keep the lawn mowed and the bushes trimmed.
STATION E  Quotable Quotes

#1 Quote:

#1 Source (Title and Author):

#2 Quote:

#2 Source (Title and Author):

#3 Quote:

#3 Source (Title and Author):
STATION F  Photo Comparison

Look at the variety of photographs displayed on the table. Select one photograph that you really like, and one that you don’t find attractive. Then answer the following questions about the photographs.

Photograph that I really like       # _________
Photograph that I like least       # _________

1. I think # _____ photograph is attractive because:

2. Photograph # ____ reminds me of:

3. Photograph # ____ could become more attractive if the following was changed:

4. If I lived in # ______, I would:

5. I don’t like photograph # ________, because:
STATION G  MAKE PREDICTIONS

For each of the categories listed below, list 3 predictions about what makes our community a good place to live for each age group.

**Babies and Toddlers (0-5 years)**

**Elementary Students (6-11 years)**

**Middle and High School Students (12-18 years)**

**Adults (19-39 years)**

**Adults (40-59 years)**

**Senior Citizens (more than 60 years)**