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FS# 6172

## Helping Learners Develop a Sense of Place

In a rapidly developing world with a growing population, it is more important than ever to teach youth, and adults, about the environment and conservation. However, simply teaching about an issue or topic isn't always enough to achieve significant and long-term impacts. To truly make learners life-long and active stewards of the environment they have to become personally invested in and connected to a place. We all have places to which we feel connected and these feelings come from having developed a sense of place.

### What Is Sense of Place?

Sense of place is an awareness of the collection of all the things that make a place different from others. It includes the geographical, historical, environmental/ecological, cultural and any other facets that characterize a place and make it what it is, and can be enhanced by one's feelings and memories.

### Why Is Sense of Place Important?

Increased development often results in trading off having a sense of place. When places begin looking more and more alike, with the same stores and restaurants, for example, the defining characteristics of a place are lost or at least overshadowed, detaching people from their town, city, state, region, etc. However, people will have more motivation to care for a place and have a pride that comes along with belonging to it when they recognize its uniqueness. This pride and motivation has the potential to translate into active environmental stewardship.

### How Do You Create Sense of Place?

You can help foster a sense of place by including segments on geography, history, folklore and environmental issues while providing an overall positive experience in your program or lesson. The following are a few easy ways and starting points for helping create a sense of place:

- Use maps and map activities to introduce a place and its major features
- Stories help people make connections, so incorporating history and folklore is a good idea
- Learning about and being exposed to local plants and animals that are important to the area
- Teach local environmental issues, but no doom and gloom- focus on solutions to the problem(s)
- Emphasize, partner with and visit local establishments when/if relevant to your program
- Include journaling to encourage reflection
- Hands-on and engaging activities/games that allow learners to interact (safely and appropriately) with the place/environment
- Have participants act as "citizen scientists" and incorporate a community service project

Whether through planned activities or teachable moments, any time you can instill and reinforce the notion of sense of place and help learners make connections is beneficial.

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