

Sharing Your Place: Linking Art and Geography

Pam Stephens

Students are usually quite in tune with their surroundings, so exploring the concept of place offers an abundance of opportunities for effective and meaningful art teaching. For younger students, place is likely to be where they are at that very moment (that is, school). For older students, place is more expanded and could mean the campus or the town where the campus is located.

A word of caution: be sensitive to individuals and their personal situations. You and many of your students might consider place to be synonymous with home; however, do not give in to that notion. Not all students are comfortable expressing ideas of where they live. Stick to places that all students have in common such as the artroom, the halls of the school, or the playground.

Interdisciplinary Connections

The national standards point out logical crossroads between art and geography. In art, students should understand relationships between history and culture (which includes diverse times and places). In geography, students learn about the physical and human characteristics of places. Melding these two standards provides an opportunity for students to examine big questions surrounding the “why” and “how” of place. Some of the many questions to consider include: How do artists see and show ideas of place? Why do artists depict place? How does art show the past or

future of place? Why is visual iconography a good way of recording truths about place?

An Example

Each fall, I ask students in my art education program to think about what “place” means to them. In thinking about place, I encourage students to contemplate truthful icons that accurately define the one place we all have in common: the campus community. When the adjective “truthful” enters the conversation, new perspectives arise. Do the postcards at the bookstore give an honest depiction of place? Do online travel guides offer completely factual insights?

Students are asked to consider how their personal icons of place, if created into postcards or online travel guides, will accurately represent the campus to visitors. What truthful insight about place will the image portray?

When all the cards are complete, color copies are made so that each person in the class has a collection of ideas about our place at a specific time; a record, if you will of who we are, where we live, and what we see and share. It’s always an eye-opening result that points out both obscure and obvious observations.

Open your students’ eyes to their own place and encourage them to share their insights with others through drawings, videos, photography, or whatever medium you choose.

Catharen, a middle school student, paints a truthful picture of place.



Be a Tour Guide

No matter the place, each locale has a sense of identity that can be explored in many ways. The best tour guides are most often the people who experience a place day-to-day. Open your students’ eyes to their own place and encourage them to share their insights with others through drawings, videos, photography, or whatever medium you choose. Consider an exchange with students in other states or countries. Be a visual tour guide.

Please share your ideas and truths about your place. Follow us at schoolartsroom.blogspot.com or join the conversation on Facebook. ☺

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