

PLACE (plās) *n.* 1. space; room, 2. a region, 3. the part of space occupied by a person or thing, 4. a town or city, 5. a residence, 6. a building or space devoted to a special purpose.

CULTURE (kul'cher) *n.*
1. cultivation of the soil, 2. improvement of the mind, manners, etc., 3. development of special training or care, 4. the skills, arts, etc. of a given people in a given period; civilization.

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Unit 1 — PLACE AND CULTURE

PLACE AND CULTURE IS DESIGNED TO HELP STUDENTS UNDERSTAND WHAT IS ENCOMPASSED WITHIN THE TERM “CULTURAL HERITAGE.” IT EXAMINES HOW BUILDINGS, SITES, STRUCTURES, AND LANDSCAPES ARE DETERMINED TO HAVE HISTORIC OR CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE, AND THUS ARE CONSIDERED TO BE WORTHY OF PRESERVATION. IT ALSO INTRODUCES CONCEPTS SUCH AS HOW SHARED IDEAS, VALUES, AND EXPERIENCES HELP DEFINE A COMMUNITY, AND THE IMPORTANCE OF MEMORY AND THE TRANSMISSION OF SHARED VALUES AND EXPERIENCES TO CULTURAL HERITAGE PRESERVATION.

During the 1930s, the Depression era federal government programs sponsored an extensive photographic documentation effort. This Farm Security Administration photograph illustrates native dances by Mexican Americans at a fiesta in Taos, New Mexico. (Photo courtesy of the Library of Congress)



Learning OBJECTIVES

The following Learning Objectives are intended to guide students in the definition of what is important to communities and what is worthy of preservation. They will also instruct students in various methods of documenting and interpreting historic places and important cultural activities.

Learning OBJECTIVE 1:

Students will develop an understanding of how people and society define the places that are important to them. They will learn how to examine the shared values, experiences, and perspectives that help to define cultural heritage in a community.

Every culture has places that are important to members of that society. The places may include natural formations that are important to the spiritual beliefs of American Indian tribes or neighborhood churches that are important to many immigrant groups. An important place may be farmland where a battle was fought or the site where a town was founded. It may be a series of locations of an important political event such as the trail of the National Farm Workers Association's 1966 Peregrinación. Or it may be areas of a city associated with a particular type of music, such as jazz in New Orleans' French Quarter, or a broad historical theme, such as traditional agricultural methods of Indian tribes of the Midwest. Important places also may be where the first immigrants of a culture arrived or clustered together such as Chinatown in San Francisco or Little Havana in Miami.

There are a range of ways in which people define cultural heritage and share the experience and values with others. Many historic places may be eligible for designation as historically or culturally important by local governments, for entry in a state government's historic register, for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, or for designation as a National Historic Landmark. Other places and expressions of cultural heritage may be cherished by their communities and celebrated by the larger society.

While designation by governmental agencies is an important way to confirm the significance of historic places, so too are actions by communities that assist with the preservation of these places. Actions may encompass educational activities such as the development of a printed or Internet-based history of the place, as well as the documentation of the events and people associated with it or the inclusion of the place in a heritage tour.

Other aspects of cultural heritage may be exhibited and interpreted in museum displays. Folklorists and ethnographers may record intangible culture, such as songs and stories, on tape and CD-rom. Community members may participate in rituals and dances that reinforce their community cohesion and recall practices from the Old World. There are as many ways to preserve culture as there are expressions of that culture.

Research into photographic collections often yields new narratives of American history. This photograph of the Howard University Law School Class of 1900 was exhibited at the 1900 Paris Exposition and is now part of the collections in the Prints and Photographs Division at the Library of Congress. (Photo courtesy of the Library of Congress)



Learning ACTIVITIES

- A. Students should take a field trip to a place designated as historic by a local government, the state historic preservation office, the National Register of Historic Places, or the National Historic Landmarks program of the U.S. Department of the Interior. Students will be introduced to the criteria used by the level of government involved to determine why it is considered historic and whether it is eligible for official recognition. They should discuss the values of the different groups that are represented in the place. They should also visit with leaders of various cultural groups in their community and ask them what is important to their cultural identity and how the larger society can assist with its preservation.
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- B. Students should address the topic of why some cultural groups have few officially recognized historic places to date and what can be done to increase public awareness and understanding of these places.
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- C. Students and the educator should organize a panel discussion to discuss what is considered historic and whether it is worth preserving. Panel members should include students and community leaders who are not guided by official government criteria for designating places and events as historic, as well as representatives of local, state, or federal government agencies who are. Students should explore where concepts of significance differ as well as coincide. They should discuss both non-place and non-physical aspects of cultural heritage, such as ceremonies, as well as place-oriented and physical manifestations of cultural heritage.
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- D. Students should interview older citizens in their community about its history and culture and the changes that they have witnessed. Students will ask questions about events, people, and places of particular significance. They should study how this history and culture serves to maintain the cultural identity of the community. Students should record and edit the oral interviews for deposit in a local library, historical society, historic preservation organization, or state archives. Alternatively, they may seek permission from the interviewees to prepare a slide show or videotape of the discussion.

Learning RESOURCES

PUBLICATIONS

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Wright, Gwendolyn. *Building the Dream: A Social History of Housing in America*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1983.

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Yip, Christopher Lee. "California Chinatowns: Built Environments Expressing the Hybridized Culture of Chinese Americans," in Nezar AlSayyad, ed., *Hybrid Urbanism: On the Identity Discourse and the Built Environment* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2001), pp. 67-82.

V I D E O T A P E S

The African Burial Ground: An American Discovery, Parts 1-4. Produced by Kutz Television, 1994, videotape. 60 minutes. Distributed by the National Technical Information Services, Department of Commerce, Springfield, VA 22161.

Chicano Park, Marilyn Mulford. Produced by Cinema Guild, 1989, videotape. 60 minutes. Distributed by Filmmakers Library, 124 E. 40th Street, New York, NY 10016.

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Learning OBJECTIVE 2:

Students will develop a critical analysis of the ways in which historic places and historical events are interpreted to the public. Students will learn how the interpretation of the same place or event can differ depending on scholarship, community input, and point of view.

Interpretation presents a point of view about history. It can shape how the public understands places, events, people, or groups in society. Sometimes the point of view being presented reflects the attitudes of a particular class or group within society that other groups do not share. Other groups may even find the point of view to be incomplete or wrong. Interpretations can be challenged, and new interpretations can reflect different understandings of society. The process is a dynamic one and is constantly changing to reflect new attitudes in society.

The interpretive message conveyed to the public often reflects the status of research and scholarship on the property. It also reflects the viewpoint and interests of the researcher who investigated the topic, the interpreter who organized and presented it, and the extent of community input. The site's executive director, advisory board, or government agency that owns or operates the property, also shapes the interpretive program.

In some cases, the interpretive program was developed years ago and may not reflect recent scholarship or community views, particularly regarding the roles of the minority cultures in the property's past. In developing an interpretive program, it is important not only to understand the facts as they relate to the property or event, but also to address all contributions made to it during the period being presented. This means that not only must the easily accessed records, such as photographs, maps, public records, and the like be consulted, but that non-written records, such as archeological evidence, traditions, and oral histories must also be investigated. Finally, all evidence must be weighed to determine the full history of the property or event.

Interpretive programs also are important to historic places that are not available for public visitation. Interpretation may take the form of walking and driving tours, audiovisual programs in visitor centers, plaques and other signs, and brochures and other printed materials.

The George Washington Carver National Monument in Diamond, Missouri, was added to the National Park System in 1943 to commemorate the birthplace and childhood home of the renowned agronomist, educator, and humanitarian. The inclusion of the Carver site also was made in recognition of the important role of African Americans in World War II. (photo courtesy of the National Park Service)



Learning ACTIVITIES

- A. Students will be introduced to the field of historical interpretation by visiting historic sites that are interpreted by interpreters or docents. They should take notes on the different ways that the history of the property is presented as well as the content of the presentations. If minority roles are addressed, students should discuss how these minority roles are presented.
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- B. Students should prepare a printed brochure that follows a heritage trail through a place that is important to them and will use both scholarly and community input. The brochure project gives students an opportunity to identify what should be included in the trail, conduct research on important landmarks, and prepare written materials for the brochure. They should take the tour themselves in order to gauge the time it requires to complete the tour. In addition, they could escort a small group on the tour and ask the participants to analyze the tour contents.
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- C. Students should visit an exhibit at a local museum, historical society, or archive. They should critically evaluate how it is presented and recommend how it might be improved to appeal to a broader range of cultures.

Learning RESOURCES

PUBLICATIONS

Alderson, William T. and Shirley Payne Low. *Interpretation of Historic Sites (Second Edition, Revised)*. Nashville, TN: American Association for State and Local History, 1985.

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VIDEOTAPES

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Mystery of the First Americans. Produced by Lauren Aguirre and Peter Tyson for NOVA, 2000, videotape. 60 minutes. Distributed by Video Finders, 4401 Sunset Boulevard, Los Angeles, CA 90027.

The publication, "Historic Black Resources: A Handbook for the Identification, Documentation, and Evaluation of Historic African-American Properties in Georgia", was published in 1984 by the Georgia State Historic Preservation Office. The publication encouraged a greater effort to identify and recognize historic places associated with African American culture. (Photo courtesy of the Georgia Department of Natural Resources)

