
Homescapes: Between Dwelling and Movement

Overview

A “homescap” is a meaningful place that is familiar enough to call home but also exists within a living, breathing, changing environment and cultural landscape. Therefore, a homescap can be considered a resting place that is in-between movement and settlement. In this lesson plan, we will move away from thinking about the US-Mexico borderlands in terms of nation-states and boundaries and instead, think about the US-Mexico borderlands as homescap – a space of cultural interaction that is simultaneously place of dwelling and movement. What is the relationship between place and space? How do people form attachments to the places they call home? How does the place in which we live, shape our understanding of who we are? When people move to an unfamiliar place, whether it is across oceans and national borders or a new apartment down the street, they take things with them to help them recreate a sense of home in a different place. Often these things are tangible objects such as food, furniture, pictures, clothing, pets and equipment, but they can also be symbolic aspects of culture such as language, traditions, ideas and even memories. In this lesson plan students will discuss what it means to call a place a home and create a homescap as a collaborative class project.

Objectives

This lesson introduces students to the concept of space and place, the idea of cultural borderlands, and the relationship between identity and locality.

1. To learn about the concept of culture as a fluid and changing process of adaptation and human diversity.
2. To understand migration as a shared experience of recreating home in unfamiliar places.
3. To explain the relationship between personhood and place
4. To design a homescap comprised of individual and collective experiences of home and estrangement

Activities

1. In small groups of three or four have students consider the following scenario: Your family has to move to a new country where you do not speak the language well and have never visited before. You have to travel light and only bring the essentials.
2. Have students discuss their fears and also the excitement they

Materials

This lesson is designed for a 75-minute class period or two 50-minute sessions.

1. Construction paper, markers, scissors, crayons, writing materials, paints, decorations, tracing paper, pictures, collage material...be creative!
2. Notebook paper or computer for recording group discussions and for listing the objects and ideas that students will use to recreate home in a new land.

might feel having learned that they had to move and would likely not return to their homeland for an extended period of time.

3. Have students make a list of the things they would take with them in order to recreate a sense of home in a new and unfamiliar land. They must narrow their list to ten material things and at least five symbolic things (specific traditions, ideas, music, values, memories etc.)
4. Bring the class together to create a homescape. Make a representational map categorizing all of the tangible and intangible things that they listed in their group activity.
5. Now that you have a homescape think about how the map might change as the result of settlement in a new land. Consider how your homescape might change given the following scenarios: 1) the government passes laws banning your religion or language; 2) the locals welcome you and want to learn about your homescape; 3) you are unable to communicate with the locals; 4) you find a homescape in the new land that is similar to yours; 5) the people in the new land fear your homescape and want to change it. What would you do to keep your homescape in tact?

Adaptations

1. Have students write a personal essay about the concept of home, broadly defined. What makes a home special?
2. Have students create a collage of all the objects and ideas that they collected to create a homescape.
3. Have students interview family members or friends about their migration experience and write a short essay or give a presentation to the class about what they learned.

Evaluation

At the end of this lesson students will have a material representation of their homescape in the form of a map, collage or other project that the class invented together. These items can be used to evaluate student participation in the lesson. Students should also be able to answer or at least discuss the following questions after completion of the lesson:

1. Why do people move to new lands?
2. How do people adapt to new and unfamiliar places?
3. What examples of homescapes can you identify in your city?
4. What forces (external or internal) might change how your homescape is configured?
5. What is the relationship between the place you live and the person you are or the person you are becoming?