

Parliament of Victoria

Places we belong: Identity, belonging and community



About this resource

Overview

The activities in this resource ask students to reflect on the significant places that shape their daily lives and explore how these places influence identity, belonging and community.

Students explore the places where people meet, how those spaces are used, and how rules, responsibilities and decision-making can shape participation in those places. The activities build student understanding of places as shaped by a variety of factors including physical characteristics, shared rules, expectations and access to create a sense of belonging.

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Key concepts, questions and activities

These questions and short activities can be used to discuss the key concepts of places, identity, community and belonging.

As the questions and activities explore identity and belonging, it may be worth acknowledging or discussing with students that potentially not everyone has a range of spaces where they feel like they belong and/or can be themselves.

A guide to challenging conversations has a range of classroom strategies for establishing discussion guidelines and creating safe spaces in the classroom.

- *A guide to challenging conversations*: parliament.vic.gov.au/teach-and-learn/Resources/a-guide-to-challenging-conversations

Spaces and places

A space is commonly understood to be a physical location or setting, largely defined by its physical features and functions. This could be a park, classroom or street, and doesn't have any special meaning attached to it. A place, however, is a space where there has some special meaning attached. It's somewhere people feel connected to, and this may be because of someone's:

- experiences
- emotions
- memories
- relationships
- identity/identities
- sense of belonging

Places often hold layers of meaning, influenced by things such as history, significant events or cultural and community practices. A place might be significant to some people and not to others, or significant to a group of people or significant to different groups of people, potentially even in different ways.

Example questions

- What is the difference between a space and a place?
- How can a space become a place that is meaningful to people?
- Why is it important to have places where people can gather and come together?
- Why might some places mean more to some people than to others?

Example activity

To explore the difference between space and place, students could complete the following drawing activity. It is best for this activity for students to select a space that they're really familiar with. Students:

- draw the space, focusing on the physical space and location, keeping the drawing simple with minimal details
- add details until it is transformed into a place
 - Details might include people, objects, signs, activities or even feelings
- annotate their drawing, focusing on what changed between a place and a space, who uses the space, what meaning it has and why they think it is a significant place

Identity

Identity refers to how individuals see themselves, as well as how they may be seen by others. Identity can be shaped by many factors, including:

- personal experiences
- relationships with friends and family
- culture and ethnicity
- interests and hobbies
- places where people spend time

Identity is not fixed, meaning it may shift or change across different places, contexts and time.

Example questions

- What does the word identity mean to you?
- How would you describe your identity
- What are some things that can shape a person's identity?
- Does your identity stay the same in different places or situations?
- How might a place influence how someone sees themselves?

Example activity

To explore identity, students can draw a person and details to represent different aspects of the person's personality. Students could create a person based on themselves, someone close to them or a fictional person. Students can do this by:

- drawing a blank picture of a body on an A4 or larger piece of paper
- adding details, labels and icons to their person to represent different aspects of identity
 - This may include the person's interests, culture, roles, values or experiences
 - If the person is fictional, it may be worth discussing with students concepts of stereotyping, biases and archetypes
- adding annotations to explain some of the details they have added and why these details form part of the person's identity

Belonging

Belonging refers to feeling accepted, included and connected. This could be to a place, group or community. It is shaped by many factors, including:

- access to places
- shared rules and expectations
- opportunities to participate

Who belongs and when can be explored through asking questions such as:

- who has permission to use a space/s
- who is making decisions about the space/s
- how might different groups be excluded through the inclusion of a person or groups of people
- how might different people or groups feel included by the exclusion of different people or groups

Example questions

- What does it mean and feel like to belong somewhere?
 - How can someone feel like they belong in a place, even if not everyone there accepts them?
 - How might rules or expectations change whether someone feels as though they belong?
- What are some places and spaces you feel like you belong?
- Why might you feel like you belong in one place, but feel like you're a stranger in another?
 - What are some things that might make people feel like they belong?
 - What are some things that might make people feel like they are a stranger?

Example activity

This activity explores students' sense of belonging to different places, by each student selecting five places that are familiar to them. Students can then:

- include some descriptions or visuals of each of the places
- place a scale next to each of the places, from '5 - a strong sense of belonging' to '1 - very little or no sense of belonging.'
- annotate the scale on each of the places, providing a reflection on why they assigned that point of the scale for that place

Community

The term 'community' refers to a group of people connected by shared interests, values, experiences, identities or places. Individuals can belong to multiple communities at the same time, including:

- cultural and/or faith-based groups
- interest or hobby groups, such as a book club
- local groups and organisations, such as sporting or environmental clubs
- national and global communities
- online and digital communities, such as groups on social media

Some communities may not be open to everyone and may require membership or meeting some criteria. Access to spaces may be by invitation and have some elements of power and exclusion.

Example questions

- What does community mean to you?
- What communities do you belong to?
- What makes a group of people a community and not just a crowd?
- Who decides who is part of a community and who is not?
- Why might it be okay for some people to be excluded from a community?

Example activity

Students can create a visual map showcasing the different communities they are a part of by brainstorming all the different places they might go to. You might like students to also:

- use lines or arrows to show the connections or separations between communities
- annotate the maps labels and descriptions
- use visuals to provide some additional details about their communities

Formal and informal places

Formal places are typically organised and managed by institutions, organisations or authorities. They are more likely to have clearly defined roles, rules and consequences for breaking rules. Examples may include schools, workplaces and some community centres.

Informal places are shaped more by the people who use them and often rely on things like unwritten rules (shared norms), expectations and understandings, rather than formal rules. Examples may include public parks, playgrounds and local markets.

The significance of an informal places can also change depending on who is using the space and how it is being used. These changes may happen naturally over a period of time, or there might be a significant change (such as a building development) that suddenly changes how these spaces are used.

Example questions

- What might be some of the different reasons people meet formally compared to informally?
- What differences in behaviour and/or clothing might you see at formal places compared to informal places?
- How might formal spaces look different to informal spaces?
 - Think about seating, how people might be arranged in the space and the use of any symbols, flags or logos
- What differences are there in how decisions are made in formal and informal spaces?

Example activity

Students can brainstorm different places around the school and categorise them into formal places, informal places or both. The following questions can help students organise the places into categories:

- Is this place organised or managed by a specific person or organisation, or by the people who use it?
- Who makes the decisions about how this place is used?
- Are there any written rules or signs in this place?
- How do people know how to behave in this place?
- Can anyone use this place or are there limits to access?
- What might happen if someone does not follow the rules for this place?

Explicit and implicit rules

Explicit rules can be clearly communicated to everyone through writing, speaking or pictures. Explicit rules might include laws, policies or direct instructions, and should be easy for people to find. Some explicit rules might be really complex, such as laws, and require specialist knowledge or relate to specific places or circumstances.

Implicit rules on the other hand are often unwritten and learned through observation or experience. These rules are shaped by things like culture, social norms or expectations and will vary from place to place. People often become aware of implicit rules when they are broken or when they feel unsure of how to act in a particular place. Implicit rules might include:

- what a space is or isn't used for
- the language used in a space
- how people should behave
- actions that are or aren't okay

Understanding both explicit and implicit rules helps students recognise how behaviour is shaped in different places, and how inclusion or exclusion can occur even without formal rules in place.

Example questions

- Why do we have explicit rules?
- Why do we have implicit rules?
- Who is responsible for making explicit rules?
- What are some ways people learn new rules or if the rules have changed?
- What consequences might there be for breaking explicit rules? How might these be different to the consequences for breaking implicit rules?
- Who decides on the consequences for breaking explicit rules?
- Who decides on the consequences for breaking implicit rules?

Example activity

The following activity can be used to help students understand implicit rules and how these might be different depending on place and people's experiences.

- What are the implicit (unwritten) rules for:
 - going to the movies
 - eating dinner at your home
 - going to a sports match
 - visiting another family
 - getting ready for school in the morning
- How might you explain, describe or demonstrate implicit rules to someone else?
- Compare your list of rules with other people in the class.
 - Why might there be different rules?
 - Where do these rules come from?
 - How do we learn these implicit (unwritten) rules?
 - What are the consequences for breaking or not following some of these implicit (unwritten) rules?

Activities

Spheres of belonging

In this activity students draw three concentric circles or spheres. Each concentric circle represents a different 'sphere' of belonging and allows students to explore the places they feel connected to and why they feel a sense of community and/or belonging in those places.

Drawing the spheres

Centre circle: label 'private' and include examples of places that are significant to them, where they are able to manage the space or have some ownership over the space

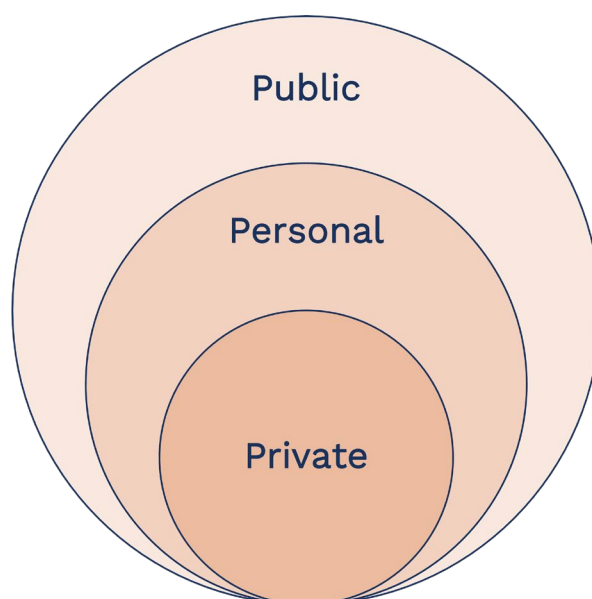
- These may be places within their own home, or anywhere they feel safe, comfortable and most like themselves. For example, a bedroom or a quiet place in their home, where they may be able to seek solitude or decorate it how they please.

Middle circle: label 'personal' and include examples of places that they share with the people closest to them

- These can be places they share with family and/or friends and include places where they gather for social events or shared activities. For example, the lounge room, the kitchen or sporting club, where people might socialise and connect.

Outer circle: label 'public' and include examples of places that are accessible to people from their broader community

- These are often public spaces, shared with different members of the local community. For example, schools, shops or libraries.



Annotations

Once students have their examples, they can include some details about the places that are significant to them by using some or all of the questions below:

- Why is this place important or significant?
- How does this place make you feel?
- Why do you feel like you belong in this space?
 - Think about what actions, behaviours, values, rules and people that help you feel like you belong. Are there also cultural aspects, such as food, language, music, that help you feel like you belong?
- Which places represent groups you belong to?
 - Think about whether these places are social, cultural, religious, sporting, interest based or a combination of reasons.
- What events or experience have helped see this place as important to you?
 - Has your connection or how you see this place changed over time?

Extending the discussion

The questions below can be used to extend the discussion and link the students' spheres back to the broader concepts of identity, belonging and community.

- How might this place (or these places) give you a sense of belonging to your home and community?
- What are the unspoken or implicit rules, norms or expectations that operate in this place?
- Compare two places from your different spheres. How do they offer different types of connection or sense of belonging?
- What might someone else who has no experience in that space think about these places?
 - How is this similar or different to what you think?

Reflections

Following the activity, you may like students to complete some of the reflection questions below. These questions can also be used for small group or class discussion.

- Which circle was easiest to complete, and why?
- Are there places that could fit into more than one circle? Why are these places shared across spheres?
- Which places do you feel closest to? Why?
- How do those places reflect who you are (your identity)?

Variations

Photo curation and analysis

Instead of writing down the places, students can collect images of their example places and organise them into the different spheres of belonging. The images students use do not need to be the actual space, but could be photographs, drawings or images that are similar.

One-to-one interviews

Working in pairs, students can interview each other on their completed spheres of belonging. You may like students to write their own questions or use the following questions to get started:

- why is this place important to you?
- what community does this place connect you to/with?
- how do you feel when you're there?

To present their interviews students could create a podcast (record the interview), write a newspaper article, or film a TV report or social media reel.

Gallery walk

To create a gallery, students can select one or two of their photos, or their completed spheres of belonging, to display on a gallery walk. Including short explanations identifying the place and how it has developed their sense of identity, community and belonging helps students build a shared understanding of the key concepts.

As students walk along the gallery, they can leave questions or comments on the spaces. You might like to give students some sentence stems to help guide their responses, such as:

- I was surprised by ...
- I really like ...
- I wonder if ...

The gallery walk helps build a sense of shared experiences of community by:

- recognising that people have similar spaces to which they belong and have similar connections to those spaces
- identifying different spaces, especially spaces they might not have considered, are meaningful to other people in different ways
- building an understanding of the diverse range of spaces that may be available, where people feel like they belong

Identifying my places of importance

This activity can help students to consider and visualise all the different places in the community that are used, both formally and informally, for people to meet, and therefore may help build a sense of belonging and community.

You might like to provide students with a map (print maps from Google or local council websites) or have them create their own. You may also like to establish boundaries, in terms of the amount of space students are mapping. Setting some boundaries on the map means students can map the same locations, and then compare and contrast the different places they have identified.

Creating the map

Students can use the map provided or one they have created on their own to identify and mark places where people gather and interact in their local community.

Students can also include a key, showing the purpose of different places, which places are important to them and which may be important to other members of the community, and additionally could distinguish between informal or formal meeting places, or places that are both at different times.

The questions below are designed to help students identify places where people gather as well as consider how and why these places are used.

- What spaces are used for people to meet in your school and/or community?
- Who uses these spaces?
- Why do people meet there?
- Does everyone have access to these spaces? Why/why not?
 - If you are not allowed to have access to a space, what do you need to do to get access?
 - Is it possible for everyone to get access or are some people always excluded?
 - Are some people automatically allowed and others not? Why/why not?
 - Why and how might someone be excluded from a space?
- Are the spaces where people meet used the same way and for the same purposes by everyone?
- Why is it important for individuals and groups to have spaces where they can meet?

Digital map creation

Students can create their own online map using Google's My Map:

- google.com.au/maps/about/mymaps/
- students do need to have a google account
- To create their map:
 - select 'create a new map' and give the map a name
 - search the address for where they would like to start the walking tour
 - If it is a street address and the student is happy with the name, they can select the 'add to map' option on the pop-up information
 - If students would like to add their own places and name them, they can drop a pin at the location by selecting the pin option from the tool bar. Students can then name their pin and add additional information
 - to add or edit information to a pin, click on the pin and then click the pen icon
- there is unlimited number of pins that can be added, but only 10 can be included on the walking tour
- the base map can be changed by selecting from one of nine different map types, each have a different amount of detail.
- The 'simple atlas' has street names, building/house numbers and public transport.
- maps have a share option where students can share their links with other members of the class. Students might like to ensure they have selected 'view' maps rather than edit.

Google Earth is another alternative for online map creation

- <https://earth.google.com/web>

Variations

Map gap analysis

Students can complete a gap analysis on their maps to establish where new meeting places could be established in their local communities.

Questions to help students identify gaps include:

- What places appear most?
 - Are they formal, informal or both?
- Were there specific places identified across multiple maps?
- What types of meeting places appear very rarely or not at all?
- Were there specific places that only one student identified?
- Which community groups might be not well represented?
- What activities might people want to do that don't have a dedicated place?
- Were any of the identified meeting places significant to just a select few people or to lots of people?

Compare in a pair

Students can pair up with a partner to compare the meeting places identified on each of their maps.

Comparison questions

- Which meeting places appear on both your maps?
- Which places appear on only one map?
- How might personal experiences explain the differences/similarities between your maps?

Reflection questions

- How do the places identified on each map show the different ways people engage with their community?
- What qualities about these places help people feel a sense of belonging and connection to community?
- What might the places identified tell us about whose voices are most visible in our community?

Influences on places

In this activity students investigate how different influences shape how a place is used, managed and experienced. Students participate in a site visit to a place in the school community—such as the library, canteen or playground—and use the structure in the table below to explore the effects of rules, norms and decision-making.

You might like to assign small groups to go to different areas across the school or for the whole class to visit one place as a whole group.

The structure of the table is split into pre-visit (predictions), during visit (observations & evidence) and post-visit (reflections):

- Pre-visit students are encouraged to predict how their place might be used, managed and accessed, as well as who has access
- During the visit students can collect observations and evidence on how the place is used. This could include photos (with permission), sketches, notes or voice notes, or observations with a partner
- Post-visit, students can reflect on what they observed, what they learnt and compare their original predictions with their observations and the evidence

Pre-visit (predictions)	During visit (observations & evidence)	Post-visit (reflections)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What activities do you expect to see happening here? • Who do you think makes decisions about how this place is used? • What rules do you expect would apply in this place? • Which rules do you think are explicit and which rules do you think are implicit? • Who do you think can access this place easily? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who is using the space right now and what are they doing? • How are people behaving? • What explicit rules can you see and what implicit rules can you observe through behaviour? • Who appears most comfortable using this space and who might be further out on the edges? • What features of the space might support access and what features might limit access? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What surprised you about how this place is actually used? • Which influences had the biggest impact on how the space functions? • How might this place feel different for different groups (year levels, roles, abilities etc.) • How is the space shared amongst different groups? • How would you change this space to be more inclusive? • Who would be responsible for making changes to this space?

Using examples from their predictions, observations and reflections, students can then answer the following questions:

- How do the rules, norms and decision-making of a place effect how people behave at that place?
- How do the rules, norms and decision-making of a place determine how a place is used and works? And why can the same place then be used and work differently for different groups?

Variations

Expert sharing

Students work in small groups to become the experts on their assigned place within the school. Each group brings back information from their site visit, summarises their observations and presents their findings to the class. Students may like to create a PowerPoint or poster to show to the class. They may like to host a Q&A session with the class or collaborate with their peers on ideas for how to improve the space.

Data gathering

As part of their site visit, students may like to collect data to identify patterns in how the space is used. This might include tallies, surveys or recorded observations of who uses the space and when. After the visit, students can represent their findings using graphs, tables or visual concept maps to help analyse what the data shows on who is accessing and benefiting from the space. Students may like to use this evidence to make recommendations about how the space could better meet the needs of different students across the school community.

Design challenge

Following the site visit, students can work to propose a design change to the space to make it more accessible and/or inclusive for their school community. Students will need to consider who is responsible for making decisions about the change and how those decisions are made within the school. The design can be presented as a sketch, written proposal, persuasive speech or any appropriate format of their choosing.