

Making Maps for the Center

A Guided Activity

The map or image you place in the center of your Wheel provides a hub to anchor the basic features or themes that remain relatively constant over time. In daily life, most of us usually use maps produced by others. For the *Wheels of Time and Place*, it is the direct experience of making our own maps that can be important. When we map familiar places, we explore them from many angles; we notice them in a new light. As a result, we may also see ourselves and our communities in new ways.

Use this guided process, and the lists of prompts that follow, to take an integrated approach to mapping, one that blends natural history, ecology, culture, economy, and spirit. Even if you plan to use a printed map for the center of your Wheel, or circular journal, I suggest that you take time to experiment with sketching your own. These instructions are focused on the solo practitioner, and they may be adapted for a workshop or classroom.

Pick a time with a bit of slow-paced luxury, and one where you don't need to rush off to daily tasks. You might even begin the process upon awakening in the morning, before opening your eyes. Or, find a comfortable place to sit with paper and pencil in hand. You might actually be at home or, if not, settle into a place where you can imagine that you are at home.

You might do this exercise by sketching or writing in the center of one of the Wheels. Or, you could use a separate piece of paper and transfer your map to the center of a Wheel later on. You might begin by sketching with a pencil and go back later to fill in with color.

Reading the following will help you slow down and begin the map-making journey without attachment to exactly where you are going with it. You could read the guidance to yourself or ask someone to read it to you.

Breathe deeply to welcome an awareness of who and where you are. With each inhale and exhale, notice the sensations. What do you see, hear, feel, and smell? Come fully into this place you call home. What is it? This house or apartment, porch or yard? These people or pets? This neighborhood, farmstead, or workplace? This watershed or bioregion, nation, or continent? What does it feel like to be here; what do you see around you; what sounds do you hear; what scents do you smell?

When ready, place a mark or image or phrase in the center of your paper. Think of it as the heart of your home place, one that resonates with the center that is your own heart. Prepare to take a journey to explore the many dimensions of your home place.

Imagine yourself taking flight with strong wings and hovering right above this center of your home so that you are looking down on it. Continue to soar higher above the earth so that your view includes a bit more area, perhaps your yard or garden. . . then your neighborhood or farmstead. . . Fly higher. Can you see the speck of your home nestled within your watershed or county . . . and then as you fly even higher, within all of your state or region. . . What major geographic features of your region are now within your view?



Take it all in for a moment – and then begin to slowly glide back towards the ground. As you come closer and closer, notice when your heart resonates with a feeling of homecoming. Use this information to begin to identify the shape and size of the geographic area for your map of home place on the paper before you. When you are ready, begin to mark the shape on your map. The shape may be symmetrical, as in a circle or square, or lopsided. Use dotted lines if you are resistant to the ideas of boundaries. You may find yourself working with more than one scale to include both a home base and its connections to either larger or more distant locations. Or, you may find yourself in a small cozy place defined by a porch or plantings. Any way that you sketch out the area your home place is fine.

What do you notice about selecting a scale, or size of area, for the map of your home place? What size and shape will have the most meaning to you as the center of a Wheel, or circular journal? As you get a sense of the outer edges or boundaries for your map, experiment with marking them in some way along the edges of your paper. The shape of your home place may be symmetrical, as in a circle or square, or lopsided. Or, you may find yourself working with more than one scale to include both a home base and its connections to either larger or more distant locations.

Now that you have a sense of what area your emerging map will cover, start to fill it with features that describe the place and its meaning to you: images of land and water; people and built structures; birds and trees; and water, food, & energy flows to and from your home.

You might note in the margins, or in a separate notebook, questions to answer or details to add later. For example, you might not know: Which way is north? What are the names of the trees I see? Can I trace water from its source to my tap? Where is that photo I want to paste in?

Prompts for More Detailed Exploration

As you become satisfied and comfortable with the initial sketch of your map, you may go on to the following lists of prompts and select additional items that seem important to you. Remember to continue to record your unknowns so you can search for the information later.

You are not likely to put information from every prompt on your map. Use them as sort of quiz to check in with yourself about what you already know and value about your home place and what you would like to learn more about or reflect on more deeply.

As you work through the various kinds of prompts below, notice what is happening with the perceived boundary around your home place? Does it change in size and shape as you do more work on your map?

General prompts

What is the center of your home place? What is the “heart of home,” and why?

Consider the scale of your map, the size of area it covers - what are the “boundaries of home”?

What aspects of your home place are the most meaningful to you, and why?

We are here on the planet only once, and might as well get a feel for the place. Annie Dillard



What is the physical setting for your home place?

Compass Directions – Which way is north then east, south, and west

Earth – The ground, including soils, leaf litter, sand, and rocks; Contours, or the shape of the landscape, such as slopes, hills, mountains, valleys, and watershed divides

Water – Lakes, oceans, ponds, rivers, creeks, springs, wetlands, and marshes

Fire – Exposure to the sun through the seasons, sunny and shady places

Air – Weather patterns, such as clouds, prevailing winds, wet and dry seasons

Sky – Views of the day and night sky, sunrise and sunset, the moon and its phases, constellations and planets in the night sky

*One way to open your eyes is to ask yourself, 'What if I had never seen this before?
What if I knew I would never see it again?' Rachel Carson*

How does your home place “work” as part of an ecosystem that sustains you?

Your physical health and wellbeing, noting that your skin, lungs, and digestive tract are also a kind of boundary that allows the exchange of water, air, or food between you and your home place. How do energy and resources move through you and your home place:

Water

Source of tap water coming in

Destination of wastewater leaving through your toilets and drains

Destination of storm water (rain and snow) that falls on your roof or paved surfaces

Earth

Sources of your food

Food wastes/compost

Recycling

Landfill that receives your trash

Fire

Sources of energy for heating, lighting, cleaning, and cooking

Transportation that moves you in, out, and around your home place



Air

Prevailing winds

Fresh air and smells

Sources that reduce the quality of the air you breathe

(A)bout 98 percent of all the 10^{28} atoms in the average human are replaced annually. Bones are quite dynamic . . . their crystals continually dissolving and reforming. The stomach's lining replaces itself about every five days, skin wear and tear is completely retreaded in about a month, and you get a new liver every six weeks. Guy Murchie

What plants and animals inhabit your home place, year round or during part of the year?

Animals – critters and their habitats, including birds, mammals, insects, reptiles, amphibians, and their nests, dens, webs, scat, tracks, and corridors

Plants and vegetation – wild or planted, including trees, shrubs, vines, flowers, mushrooms

Open spaces – gardens, parks, pastures, orchards, forests, meadows

Rare or endangered species or habitats – native orchids, box turtles, pileated woodpeckers or prairie remnants, restored prairies, old growth forest

Evidence of original vegetation – the look of the landscape before European settlement

A watchful eye, a little extra attention to detail, and a sharpened sensitivity to seasonal changes can uncover a veritable Serengeti Park just beyond the bedroom window. John Hanson Mitchell

What is the built environment of your home place, meaning the structures and spaces designed by humans?

Buildings, both private and public

Corridors, including streets, bike paths, bridges, footpaths

Unique structures such as statues, fountains, gazebos, artwork

Social or political boundaries, such as the boundaries of any property that you or your neighbors own or boundaries that define public ownership or management responsibility



What emotional ties and social relationships connect you to your home place?

Specific locations with special meaning or connection

Experiences that you associate with each season or with the holidays you celebrate

Where you go to spend time alone

Where you go to engage with others

Are there aspects of place that liberate you, connect you, or give you positive feelings?

Are there aspects that feel like a burden, give you troublesome feelings, or isolate you in some way?

Where you notice the people who are closest to you, most like you, or seem different by culture, religion, class, age, sexual orientation, or ability.

When we love the earth, we love ourselves more fully. bell hooks

And, finally, what do you notice about yourself as a creature, living in rather than on planet earth?

When you have completed your map . . .

Now you are ready to transfer or affix your map to the center of a circular journal. Here, it will focus your attention as you move on to the observing and recording that will fill the spokes and rim of your Wheel. For more detail, go back to <http://www.partnersinplace.com>

*If it doesn't matter how well you draw, or that you have the best pens, or that you don't have a college degree in cartography, then what does matter?
Simply the ability to try, to fill the world again with personal and communal descriptions of time and space.* Doug Aberly

If you have been working in a group, consider breaking into groups of three and allowing time for each person to describe their map, using the three general prompts from above:

What is the center of your home place? What is the "heart of home," and why?

Consider the scale of your map, the size of area it covers - what are the "boundaries of home"?

What aspects of your home place are the most meaningful to you, and why?

