



Unit IV The State of Our Lives: Being a Louisiana Neighbor  
Lesson 3 Sense of Place

## Spirit of Place Worksheet

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Directions:** Working individually or in groups, read the paragraphs below aloud or independently. Discuss the questions in each section and make notes of answers and ideas that come to you. Choose any number of sections to investigate in your community. From your findings, write an essay about the spirit of your community.

### ***Finding the Soul of the City:***

#### ***20 Questions That May Change How You Think About Your Neighborhood***

*Elizabeth Vander Schaaf*

Ancient peoples believed that places had souls. The soul of a place could be found in the genius loci, the guardian spirit whose personality summed up the special characteristics of the location. A proper relationship to the genius loci was necessary in order for a person to dwell there responsibly. In return, the genius loci would nurture and protect the people of the place.

Even in the modern world the basic truth of this ancient relationship still holds: Places that are accorded the respect we have traditionally given to souls are

better places as a result. And the people who live there have a better life, too, because places that long have been loved and taken care of can take care of those who dwell in them.

We no longer live in a culture that recognizes the soul of a place, especially an urban place. We have to do the imaginative work of finding it ourselves. What are some ways to discover the soul that enlivens and guides our neighborhood, the place where we live?

#### **Pay attention to the shape of your neighborhood.**

What feels like the center of the neighborhood?

Where are the boundaries?



Where is the high ground?

Where are the low places?

Where can you find water? Is it still or flowing?

**Notice how your neighborhood celebrates sacred time.**

What and when are the neighborhood festivals and other gatherings? (Be sure to include unofficial gatherings like garage sale weekends.)

Where does the neighborhood go on pilgrimage (cruising the strip, along traditional parade routes)?

What ritual objects (holiday decorations, public art, lawn sculptures) are displayed?

**Find out what lives in the spaces in between.**

What is in the alleys?



Where can you go to see birds?

Where can you go to get away from cars?

Where do children go to get away from adults?

**Find out where the spirits live.**

Who lived here before you did? And before them?

Where have scandals and tragedies occurred?

Where is the haunted house in the neighborhood?



What happens in your neighborhood between midnight and 6 a.m.?

**Determine how well-rounded the soul of the place is.**

What grows in the neighborhood? Trees, flowers, vegetables, weeds, nothing?

What places are named by the children?

What makes your neighborhood different from adjacent neighborhoods?

Where can you go to talk to someone who is not a family member or next-door neighbor?

What basic needs can you satisfy in your neighborhood without getting in a car?