

# Documenting Cultural Heritage for Public Spaces



a toolkit for understanding  
the value of place



## Studio Introduction

The work of this toolkit is part of the 2023 capstone studio for the Historic Preservation Graduate Program at the University of Pennsylvania Weitzman School of Design. This course looked closely at historic public spaces in the city of Philadelphia and how they relate to the creation and maintenance of local heritage. The students applied theories and concepts about public life and how these experiences are tied and give meaning to the physical world. They examined the history of the city’s parks, recreation centers, and libraries, identifying themes of philanthropic efforts in the early years that would then be seen as a civic duty of the government. With these lessons as a baseline, the class then turned its attention to the Rebuild Initiative at select sites in Southwest Philadelphia. Rebuild is a mayoral initiative to reinvest in existing parks, recreation centers and libraries to support local communities and to build or repair trust between citizens and the people who serve them in the government sector. The studio sees this work as a form of preservation, one that has the potential to address the tangible aspects of heritage more directly, and highlight the intangible aspects of these spaces.

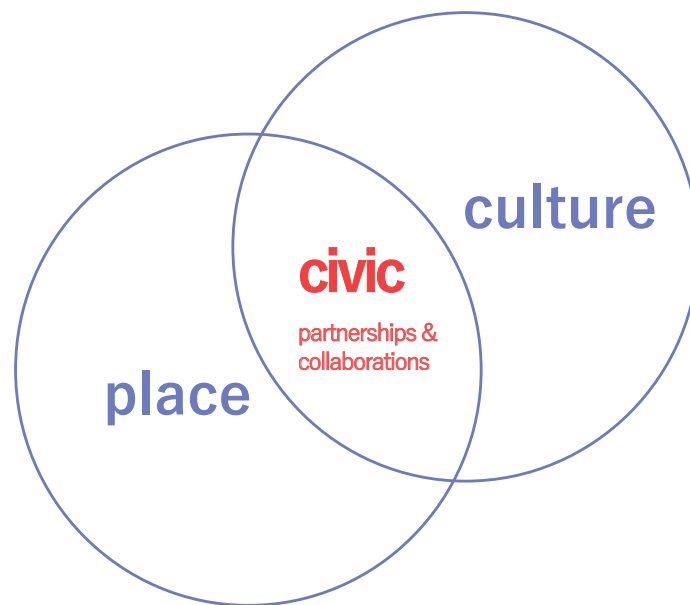
## team members

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cover image: Field Day at Kingsessing R.C., 1975. (image source: Philadelphia Parks & Recreation Archive)

# Why is Historic Preservation important?

Historic preservation plays an important role in validating and celebrating the stories and spaces that hold value to a community. One of the most important reasons to preserve and document historic and cultural heritage is for the benefit of future generations to enjoy. Many of Philadelphia's public buildings are over 100 years old, and with proper care and maintenance can be enjoyed for generations to come.



Civic assets express importance through their architecture and provide a sense of orientation within a community. These spaces have aesthetic, cultural and historic values to the city and the surrounding neighborhoods. They are public landmarks that hold meaning in both the tangible structures and landscapes, along with the intangible cultural uses and community value of the site. They symbolize the original investment into the public good that the city made when these sites were first built, through the use of high quality and long lasting materials and monumental design.

# Statement of Intention

In the history of planning, preservation, and design, practitioners have often not lived in the place in which they are working. For this reason, it is important to acknowledge one's relationship and position of power to the project and provide an intentional methodology for informed, intersectional, equitable and compassionate practices that work to decenter and decolonize systems of power within the field.

As students in the Graduate School of Design at the University of Pennsylvania, we want to acknowledge our own position of power within Philadelphia and specifically within the Kingsessing, Cobbs Creek neighborhoods and ancestral land of the Leni Lenape. As students, we are learners and listeners.



Kingsessing Recreation Center, 1970. (image source: Philadelphia Parks & Recreation Archive)



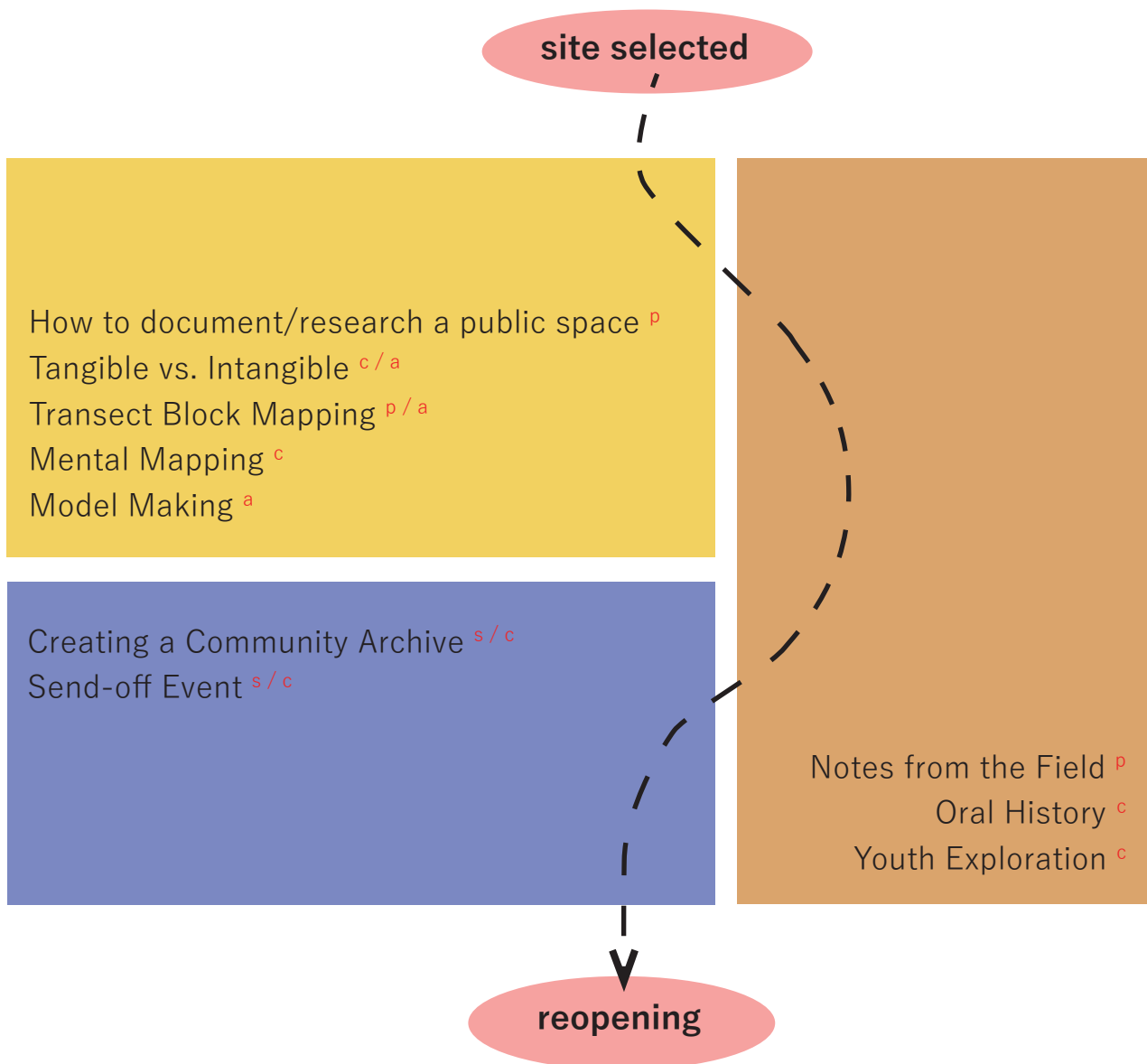
## **About this toolkit**

This Toolkit is designed to develop more holistic approaches to the renovation or rebuilding of an historic public space by more deliberately including the knowledge of its community of users into these change processes. Historic public spaces become part of a neighborhood's cultural heritage through practices of continued use and participation. More expansive, preservation-minded processes that include forms of community expertise about a public space will help design teams understand the layers and character of a site's history, and can reinforce a sense of community pride of place.

These tools are a complement to Rebuild's "Playbook" for Project Users. Their aim is to promote greater community engagement and input in the redesign process, informed by a deeper understanding the values of the place. Projects nearing the construction phase confront a critical time of transition when a public space will gear up for closure, its users and programs preparing to disperse, before being able to return when the revived space is complete. Closure will disrupt the vital patterns of continued use, which have become part of a neighborhood's social and cultural history. These tools aim to help the project team, site staff, and communities of users become better equipped to appreciate and sustain the most important attributes of a public space as it changes.

# Choose your own adventure!

We have identified roles within a Rebuild project for whom this Toolkit is created: Project User (**p**), Designer/Architect (**a**), Community Volunteer/Member (**c**), and Staff (**s**) of the public space. Though multiple roles may be involved in each activity, the diagram below shows the suggested leads for each of the different tools.



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## **THE TOOLS**



# Tangible vs. Intangible Worksheet

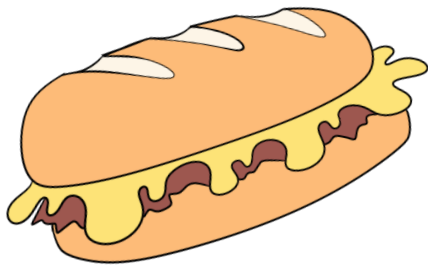
This tool is modeled after the work by Black Space. There are many things that make a place special beyond the physical buildings. Walking down the street and chatting with neighbors on a front porch, celebrating a birthday with family and friends, or getting dinner from a locally owned restaurant are all essential and valuable components of community wellbeing that give meaning and life to the physical built environment. These are called “intangible” elements of cultural heritage, and are just as important to recognize and protect as historic architecture and other traditionally protected elements of historic preservation.

## examples of tangible cultural heritage:

Houses, monuments, landmarks, ancient artifacts.

## examples of intangible cultural heritage:

Music, street sounds, smells, food, legacy businesses, oral histories, stories, intergenerational traditions, parades,



celebrations, murals, graffiti, collective loss and memory, language and slang.



## intangible

What are some examples of intangible heritage that exist within this space?



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## tangible

What are some examples of tangible heritage that exist within this space?



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## both?

Are there any examples of things that might be both tangible and intangible?



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# HOW TO DOCUMENT/ RESEARCH A PUBLIC SPACE

One of the first steps to any project, learning the history of a site and understanding important contextual aspects of an area is vital to making a space that is meaningful for the people who will then come to use and care for it.

## steps

1. Start with an internet search: Google is your friend! Search to see if there are any newspaper articles, photographs, or general websites you can find with helpful information on your building or the surrounding neighborhood from a simple public search.
2. Explore public municipal archives: the Parks and Recreation Archive, for example, has archival materials on many of Philadelphia's recreation centers.
3. Use your library card! The Free Library of Philadelphia has digital and analog archives with a treasure trove of historic documentation. This is a great place to look for information on public buildings and general resources on architectural and social history.
4. Reach out to a local educational institution: many universities or local colleges will happily provide access to visitors and members of the public who are interested in doing research.
5. Check out local archives such as the Athenaeum, Library Company of Philadelphia, or the Historical Society of Pennsylvania. Be advised that some archives require membership fees to access their materials.



6. Collect oral histories from neighbors and users of the site. There are many stories and histories of a space that are not always documented in archives and digitized. Check out [oral history](#) tool for more information.
7. Go to the site itself: sometimes, public buildings will have their own archives, so it is worth visiting the building to explore what information might already be there. Visiting the site is also helpful to see the space up close and give you a moment to create your own documentation through pictures or field notes.
8. Document the site: visiting the site is also helpful to see the space up close and give you a moment to create your own documentation through pictures or field notes. Bring a camera or use your cellphone to take photos. Use our guide on [Transect Block Mapping](#) and [Mental Mapping](#) to document the surrounding social and spatial context. When you arrive, take a few hours to sit and observe how the space is used by visitors and community members.

## online resources

- The Free Library of Philadelphia: <https://www.freelibrary.org/>
- Historical Society of Pennsylvania: <https://www.portal.hsp.org/>
- The Library Company: <https://librarycompany.org/>
- The Athenæum of Philadelphia: <https://philaathenaeum.org/>
- Newspapers.com
- Philadelphia Parks & Recreation Archive: <https://www.phila.gov/departments/philadelphia-parks-recreation/about/philadelphia-parks-recreation-archive/>

# TRANSECT BLOCK MAPPING

A transect walk is a method of collecting visual, spatial, and social information within a set of blocks or a neighborhood. It is meant to be a non-invasive method of observation and documentation of community assets and conditions. Transect mapping can provide a more holistic and community-centered approach to studying a specific site prior to the design phase that takes into account a comprehensive perspective of existing community spaces and intersecting social and urban dynamics.

## pre-planning

1. Plan for where you would like to begin your walk and the area you will be mapping.
2. Coordinate with other stakeholders who will be joining the transect walk, such as community residents, members of the Advisory Council or Friends Group, youth, and decide on the time and place you will be meeting.
3. Think about which supplies you will bring:
  - d. Suggestions: a notebook for sketching and taking notes, pens or pencils, a printed map of your area with room to sketch and make notations, a clipboard or hard surface to write on, a camera phone or camera (but remember to be respectful when taking photos and use discretion).

## embarking on the walk

1. When you get to your site, begin walking along your route and slowly take in the surroundings of the neighborhood.
2. Take notes or drawings as you walk. Keep an eye out for observational elements on your list, and map them onto your notebook or worksheet as you encounter them on your walk.

## what to look for

Make a list of the elements that you want to observe and document during your transect walk. Some suggested observational elements include:

- Land use (commercial/residential/mixed/industrial)
- Vacancy (vacant lots)
- Density
- Materials (condition of school and other building materials used in neighborhood)
- Tree canopy and shade
- Community organizations
- Third spaces (spaces where people might spend time aside from their home or workplace)
- New construction
- People walking around
- Street design and walkability of the neighborhood
- Public transit options
- Parks and recreation facilities/libraries
- Food and grocery
- Hospitals and health services
- Legacy businesses
- Homes (new construction, single family, multifamily)

add your own points of interest to the list!

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Recorder's Name:

Date:

Location:

A large rectangular area defined by a thick, black, hatched border, intended for drawing or mapping.

# NOTES



# MENTAL MAPPING: MAP YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD

A neighborhood is more than just the physical buildings and streets. Heritage and culture, similarly, can be understood this way: it is the coming together of the physical or tangible with memories and experiences. Remembering through this activity can help unearth not only places that hold special meaning to people, but also the ways in which they experience space. Members of the community can use this exercise to inform the Project User and designers/architects of the value of their neighborhood.

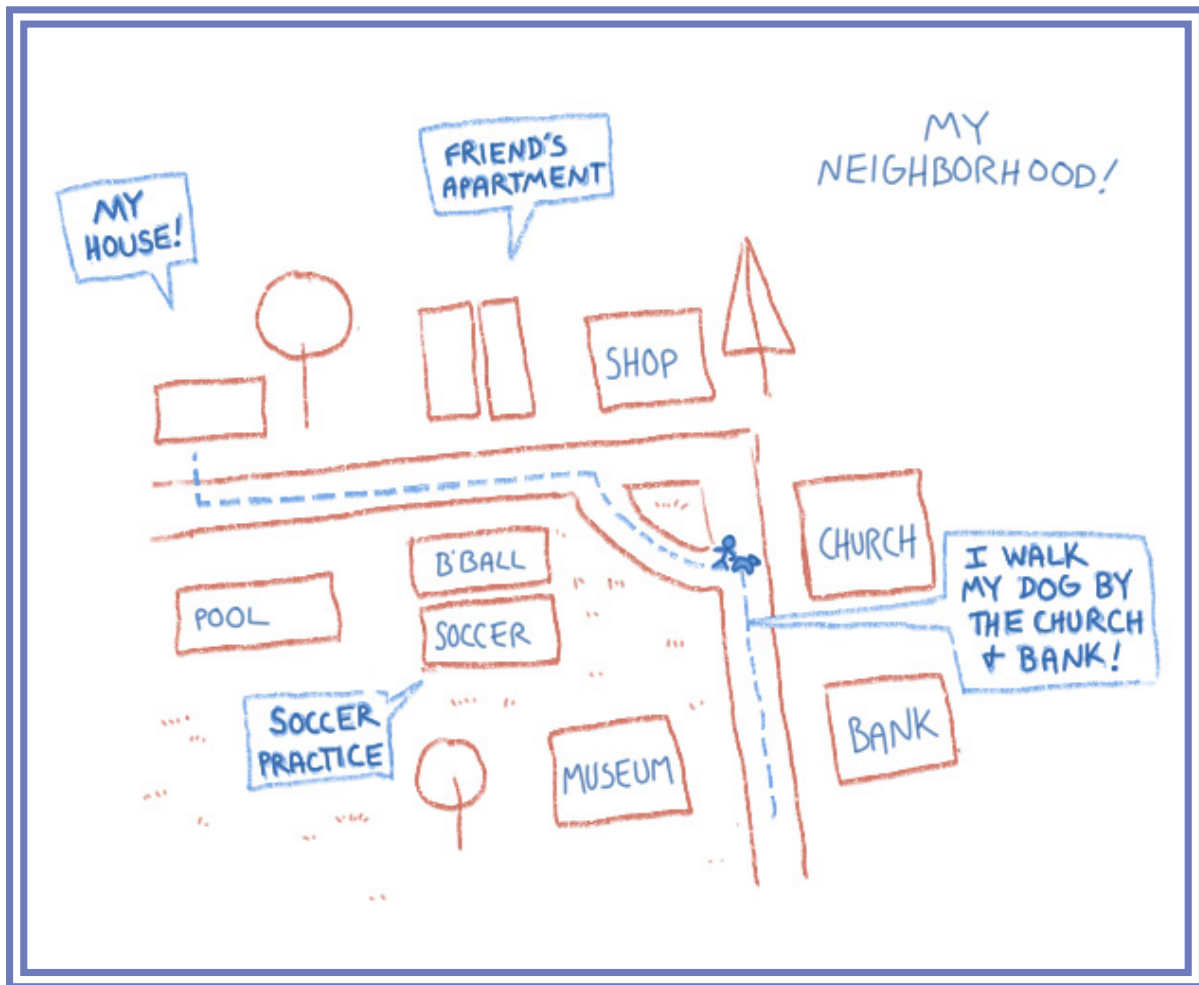
## steps

1. Draw a map of your neighborhood from memory that shows the places and things that have meaning for you. Start from your chosen public space location and slowly move outwards.
2. See the examples below of what you might include in your drawing.
3. Feel free to include notes on the side about why you included some things.
4. Make sure to note your name, the date, and label locations you focused on.

## what you might include

- businesses you frequent
- the direction you travel most of the time
- buildings (where you live, places of worship, schools etc.)
- parks and playgrounds
- a bench or wall you may sit on frequently
- how you travel around (walk, car, public transport)
- bus shelters or awnings of stores that you stand under
- people you see often

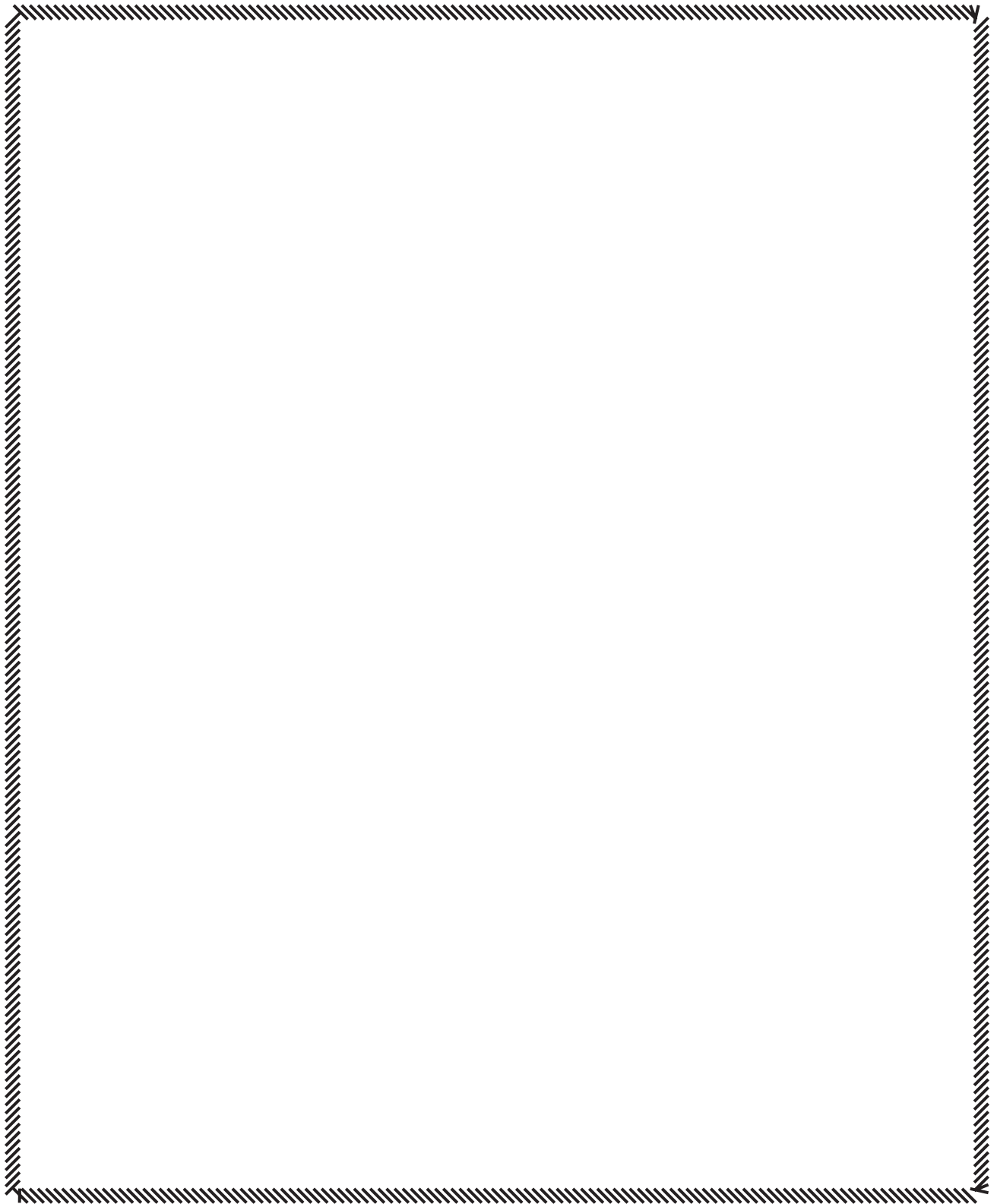
your map can look like this:



Recorder's Name:

Date:

Location:





# NOTES



## NOTES FROM THE FIELD

This tool is a journal writing activity. As part of the Rebuild process, the city requires a monthly report of the work done by people involved in a project to see the progress so far. Though this accounting is more quantitative, including a more qualitative, humanistic point of view can add more description to what is happening on the ground that is not captured by the typical measures.

### info to include

- Basics: your name, affiliation and position; the location of the public asset you are documenting; the date.
- Begin with the essential questions: who, what, where, when.
- Be descriptive and use your senses. For example, write about smells, the weather, sounds, especially how they change throughout the time you are there.
- Write about your experience while you were there. If you come during a thunderstorm, are there moments that are unique that would not have been captured if you came on a nice day? Did you have an important conversation with a site visitor? Share the story.
- Speak on how spaces are used. Are they utilized as intended by the original plans of the architect, or are they more flexible? For example, is a lobby just a lobby, or does it transform into a play area or a reading area?
- While it is easy to note building issues, do not forget to also highlight the joy and positive aspects of the space and the people who care for and use it.
- You can include a conclusion or suggestions based on what you have witnessed in the end, but it is not necessary.

### important notes

- For privacy, unless you have their permission, do not include people's names in this report.
- This is meant to be the length of a memo, so keep it 1 page or less.

# NOTES



## MODEL MAKING

In the design process of a public space, it is important to create a physical model that acknowledges the agency of community members and creates an accessible, interactive and fun process. It provides another method of communicating proposals beyond drawings and renderings. Bringing a model to community engagement events can also help in conversations with the people from the neighborhood, especially as a prompt for questions around how space is used and experienced. It may lead to discoveries of important cultural heritage tied to the place that the new project needs to make space for.

### use fun materials

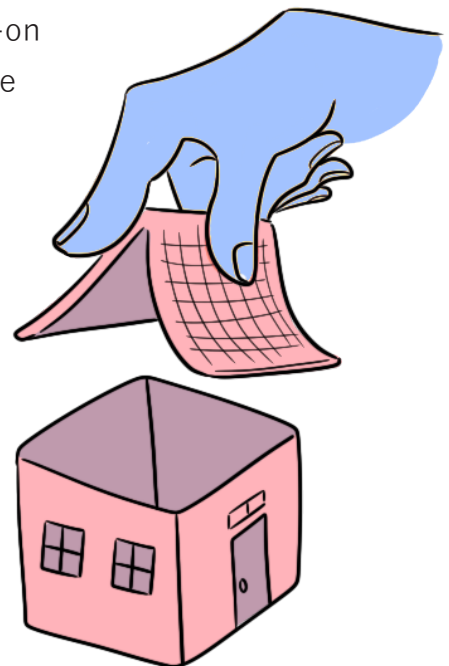
Trying materials of different textures and colors makes it fun for everyone to get involved and feel welcome in the design process. Examples: Legos, cardboard, markers, and found materials like sticks or rocks. A physical model should be easy to understand and navigate without a background in design.

### get hands on!

Allow participants to get involved in ways that meets them on their level and channel creativity. A hands-on and fun design process can break down some of the barriers. Do not treat the model too preciously. Let people play and move elements around.

### ask “what’s missing?”

Check in with community members and stakeholders and ask what might be overlooked by the model and what they would like to see changed or implemented differently in the project. Invite them to put in elements that represent their heritage, like artwork, decorations, or flags.



## case study: **HECTOR**

Mifflin Square Park and Neighborhood Plan is a revitalization plan for Mifflin Square Park in the Whitman neighborhood of South Philadelphia. This project was spearheaded by SEAMAAC, (Southeast Asian Mutual Assistance Association Coalition) and HECTOR based out of Newark, New Jersey. Mifflin Square Park and the surrounding neighborhood are home to a diverse community of many immigrants, refugees, and longtime residents, with a larger concentration of South Asian immigrants and refugees. As with many of Philadelphia's public spaces, the park had been long underserved by the city and was overdue for maintenance and upgrades.

The early phases of the design process involved interviews, surveys, and conversations with community members. Specifically, HECTOR began a "civic investigation project" with an organization through Philly Mural Arts called Park Powers that employed 15 local teenagers to get involved with the civic design process. From there, a group of teenagers with Park Powers began to create power maps and creative solutions that answered questions like questions like, "Who runs Philly Parks?" They also went out into the community to interview people in different parks.

The research and findings done by the Park Powers team was presented to stakeholders and incorporated into the design process. The report set out to answer these questions: how can residents do more to support and improve the park? How can the park do more to bring the people of the neighborhood together? How can we strengthen the businesses and improve shopping on 7th Street? Hector is an exemplar of creative design and community engagement in how they took time to hold meetings for workshopping ideas for the park and gathering community opinions specifically from children, parents, and general longtime residents. They also took a creative and playful approach that was meant to be accessible regardless of language and understanding of design concepts.



# EXPLORATION fun kit!



## about

This workbook is full of activities designed to help you explore what's around you! It could be a library, your neighborhood, your local rec center, a park, or any other place you want to learn about! You'll ask and be asked questions about history, culture, nature, and more; and you'll even get to propose your own ideas for making your favorite places even better!

You're encouraged to explore with friends, classmates, or family members- you might just learn something new!

## what do you need?

Pencils and/or pens are a great place to start! You could also use crayons or markers! Make sure you have a surface to write on, like a table or desk, or, if you're a wandering explorer, use a clipboard!

## how long will this take?

It's up to you! Some sections are meant for younger kids, some are meant for older kids- but that shouldn't restrict you! Do whatever activities you want, and take as long or as short as you need!

### Meet the cast!

**J. SIDNEY SQUIRREL**  
Scurries around city parks  
looking for the next big scoop!



**EDGAR EAGLE**  
Has a detective's eagle eye, searching  
for clues to solve the mystery!

**BLANCHE BEAVER**  
The strongest worker on the  
team! With the biggest heart, too!



# HOW TO USE YOUR NEW EXPLORATION FUN KIT:

Activities and questions each have a level of difficulty!

**LV1 IS THE EASIEST**

**LV2 IS MEDIUM**

**LV3 IS HARD!**

Don't be intimidated, though- try all of them! And if you don't have an answer, try asking a friend or family member for help!

**STAY SMART, BE SAFE, AND HAVE FUN!**



**FRANCES BAT**  
Can hear every little sound,  
and is super soft to touch!

**PHIONA PUNXSATAWNEY**  
An archeologist digging for  
treasure and history!



**PHIL PUPPY**  
A trolleydog! He sweeps the  
streets and takes you where  
you need to go!

# GO DIGGING!

LV1

WHAT EVIDENCE DO YOU SEE OF THIS PLACE'S PAST?

a mural?

a plaque?

LV2

WHAT'S THE STORY THAT THIS EVIDENCE IS TELLING?

LV2

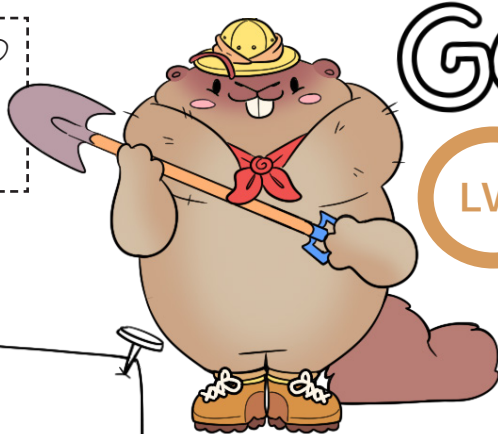
WHAT'S THE OLDEST THING YOU CAN FIND HERE? WHAT'S THE NEWEST?

draw them!

what stories do YOU know about this place's past?

LV2

WHAT EVENTS HAPPEN HERE? DO SOME HAPPEN EVERY MONTH? EVERY YEAR?



Four large, hand-drawn rectangular boxes with wavy edges and corner tabs, resembling sheets of paper pinned to a wall. Each box is intended for a student's response to the questions. The boxes are arranged in a 2x2 grid. The top-left box is for evidence, the top-right for the story of the evidence, the bottom-left for the oldest and newest things found, and the bottom-right for events that happen there.



USE  
SEE!

# YOUR SENSES!



LV2

DO YOU SEE ANY DECORATIONS ON THE WALL? PAPER CRAFTS? POSTERS? ART?

Do you know who made the decorations?

Kids your age? Adults?

LV1

IS THIS PLACE CROWDED?

IS IT EMPTY?

LV2

ARE THERE SOME PEOPLE IN MORE AREAS THAN OTHERS?

WHICH ONES?

LV2

WHAT'S THE STORY THAT THIS EVIDENCE IS TELLING?

# USE TOUCH!

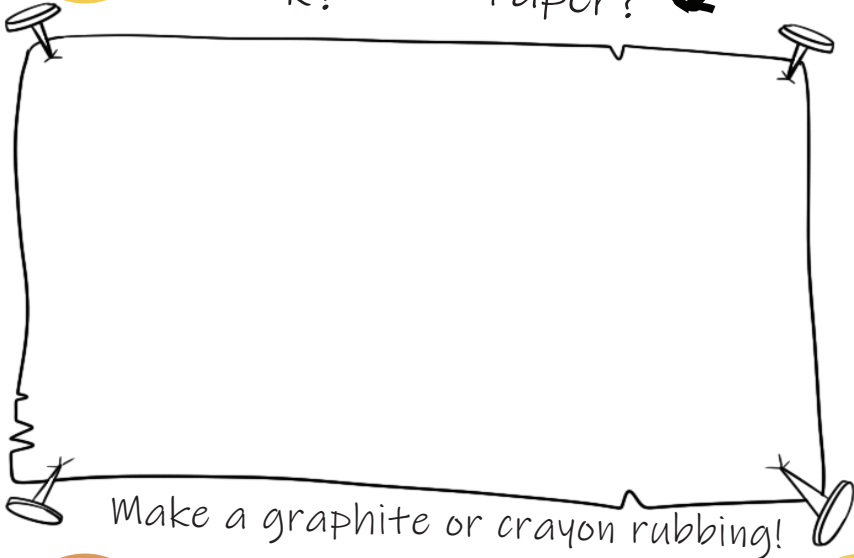
# YOUR SENSES!



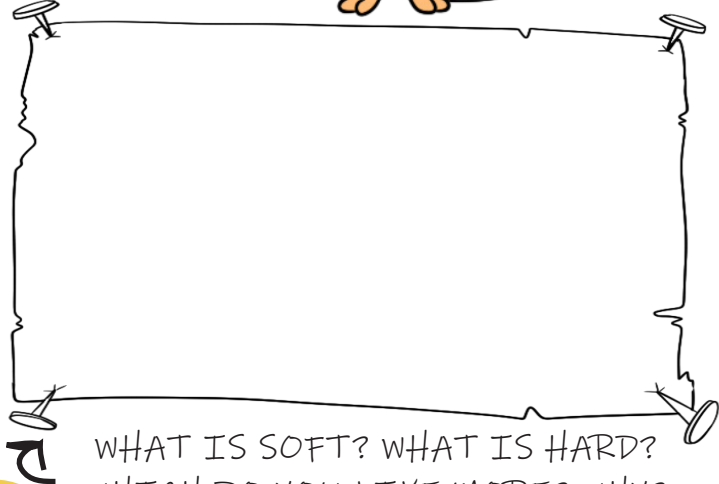
LV1

WHAT TEXTURES ARE YOU ABLE TO FEEL?

Brick? Stone? Paper? Fabric?



Make a graphite or crayon rubbing!



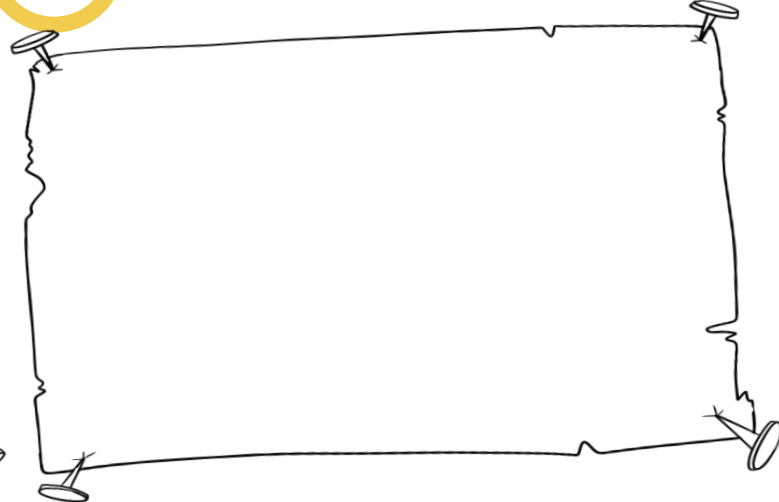
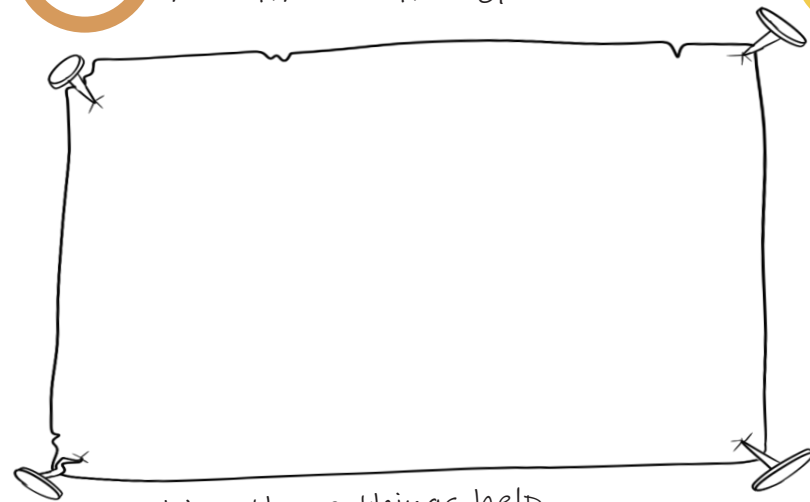
WHAT IS SOFT? WHAT IS HARD?  
WHICH DO YOU LIKE MORE? WHY?

draw them!

LV2

ARE SOFT THINGS OLD OR NEW?  
ARE HARD THINGS OLD OR NEW?

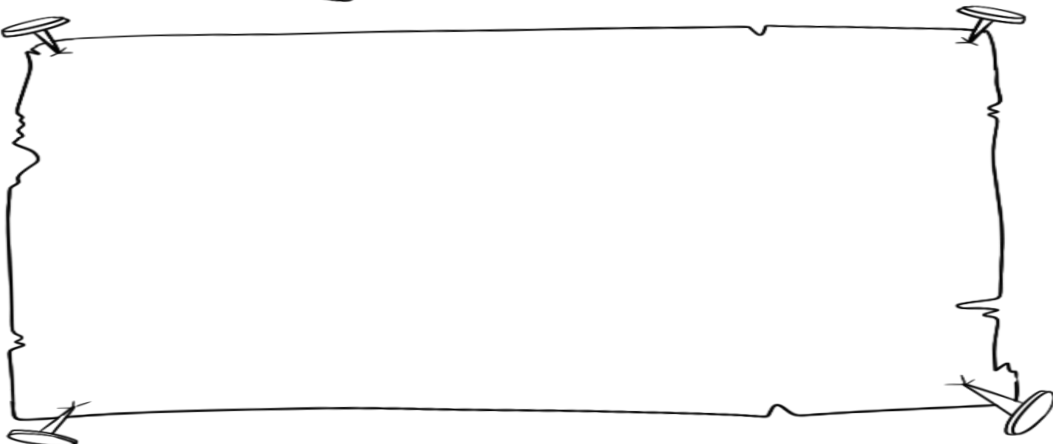
LV1



Does touching these things help you figure out their stories?  
Is the wood worn? The stone cracked? The bricks crumbling?

LV3

What do you think made them this way?



# USE

# YOUR SENSES!

SMELL AND TASTE!



write or draw them!

Large empty wavy-edged box for drawing or writing.

LV2

DO YOU SMELL SOMETHING OLD?

SOMETHING NEW?

What do these remind you of?

draw them!

Large empty wavy-edged box for drawing or writing.

LV1

Does this place smell like something in particular? What smell do you associate with this place?

DIRTY GYM SOCKS?

Grass?

Old books?

Large empty wavy-edged box for drawing or writing.

LV1

DO YOU HAVE SPECIAL FOODS ON SPECIAL DAYS HERE?

For holidays? For parties? For game days?

Large empty wavy-edged box for drawing or writing.

LV1

DRAW A FOOD YOU ASSOCIATE WITH THIS PLACE!

write or draw them!

# USE

# YOUR SENSES!

## HEAR!



LV1

IS IT NOISY HERE? QUIET?  
WHAT DO YOU HEAR INSIDE?  
WHAT DO YOU HEAR OUTSIDE?

What makes it noisy or quiet? trees?  
cars? a street? a wall? busses or trolleys?

A large rectangular box with a hand-drawn border, pinned to the page with four pushpins. It is intended for drawing or writing about the sounds in the environment.

A large rectangular box with a hand-drawn border, pinned to the page with four pushpins. It is intended for drawing or writing about the sounds in the environment.

LV1

WHAT SOUNDS DO YOU HEAR IN THE MORNING?  
IN THE AFTERNOON?  
draw them!

ARE THERE SONGS YOU'VE LEARNED HERE? CHEERS?  
What are they used for? When are they used?

A large rectangular box with a hand-drawn border, pinned to the page with four pushpins. It is intended for drawing or writing about the sounds in the environment.

LV1

IS THERE MUSIC HERE?  
WHAT KIND?



# BE A BUILDER!

GO OUTSIDE!



LV3

THINK OF THE INSIDE AND OUTSIDE OF THIS BUILDING!  
How is your favorite part of this place different from other parts?

LV1

Are there places to sit?  
To play? Draw them!

Do you wish there was something else here  
that would make you like it even more? Do  
you wish something could go away?

LV1

Is the street busy? Do you see  
safe places to cross? To wait for  
the bus or trolley? DRAW THEM!

LV2

WHAT MAKES YOU FEEL  
COMFORTABLE HERE? WHERE DO  
YOU FEEL MOST COMFORTABLE?

# BE A BUILDER!



GO INSIDE!

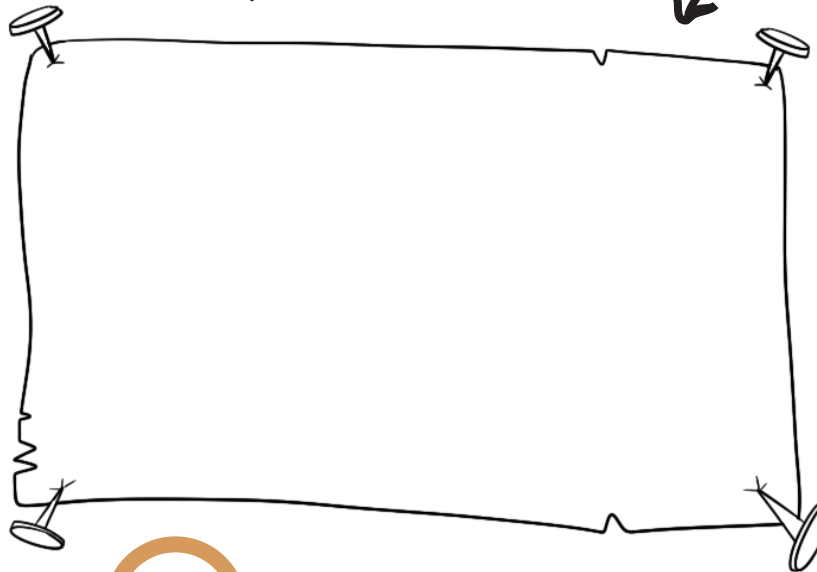
LOOK AROUND!!

LV1

Is furniture sized for you?  
Are there fun decorations?

Play areas? Toys?  
Games? Computers?  
Crafts?

Books for your  
reading level?

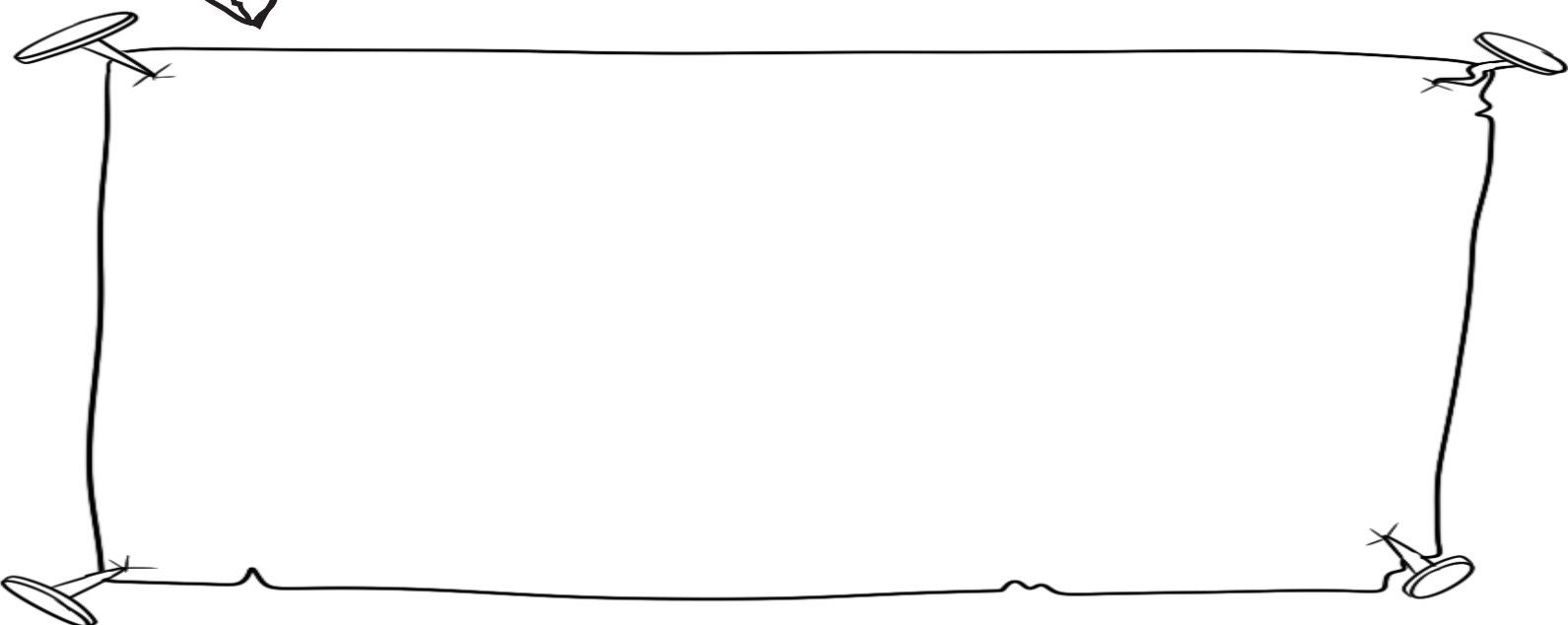


LV1

WHERE DO YOUR  
ACTIVITY GROUPS  
MEET?

LV2

WHY DO YOU LIKE THIS PART MORE THAN OTHERS?  
DO YOU WISH THERE WAS SOMETHING ELSE HERE  
THAT WOULD MAKE YOU LIKE IT EVEN MORE? DO YOU  
WISH SOMETHING WOULD GO AWAY?



# Be A Detective!



GO OUTSIDE!

OBSERVE THE 'SCENE', AND SEE  
WHAT'S GOING ON AROUND YOU!

Don't forget to write things down! A detective takes notes!

LV1

1. What is the weather outside today? Are people outside?
2. What nature do you see? Recognize any plants or animals?

A large, empty, wavy-edged rectangular box for writing notes.

LV2

3. Where are people coming from? Where are they going?
4. Where do people spend time? What are they doing?
5. Are people in groups? Are they alone? Are they here for an event? A class?
6. Is there an event going on? A party? A holiday? A special gathering?
7. Why do you think this event is happening? How are people participating in it?

A large, empty, wavy-edged rectangular box for writing notes.

# Be A Detective!



GO INSIDE!

OBSERVE THE 'SCENE', AND SEE  
WHAT'S GOING ON AROUND YOU!

Don't forget to write things down! A detective takes notes!

LV2

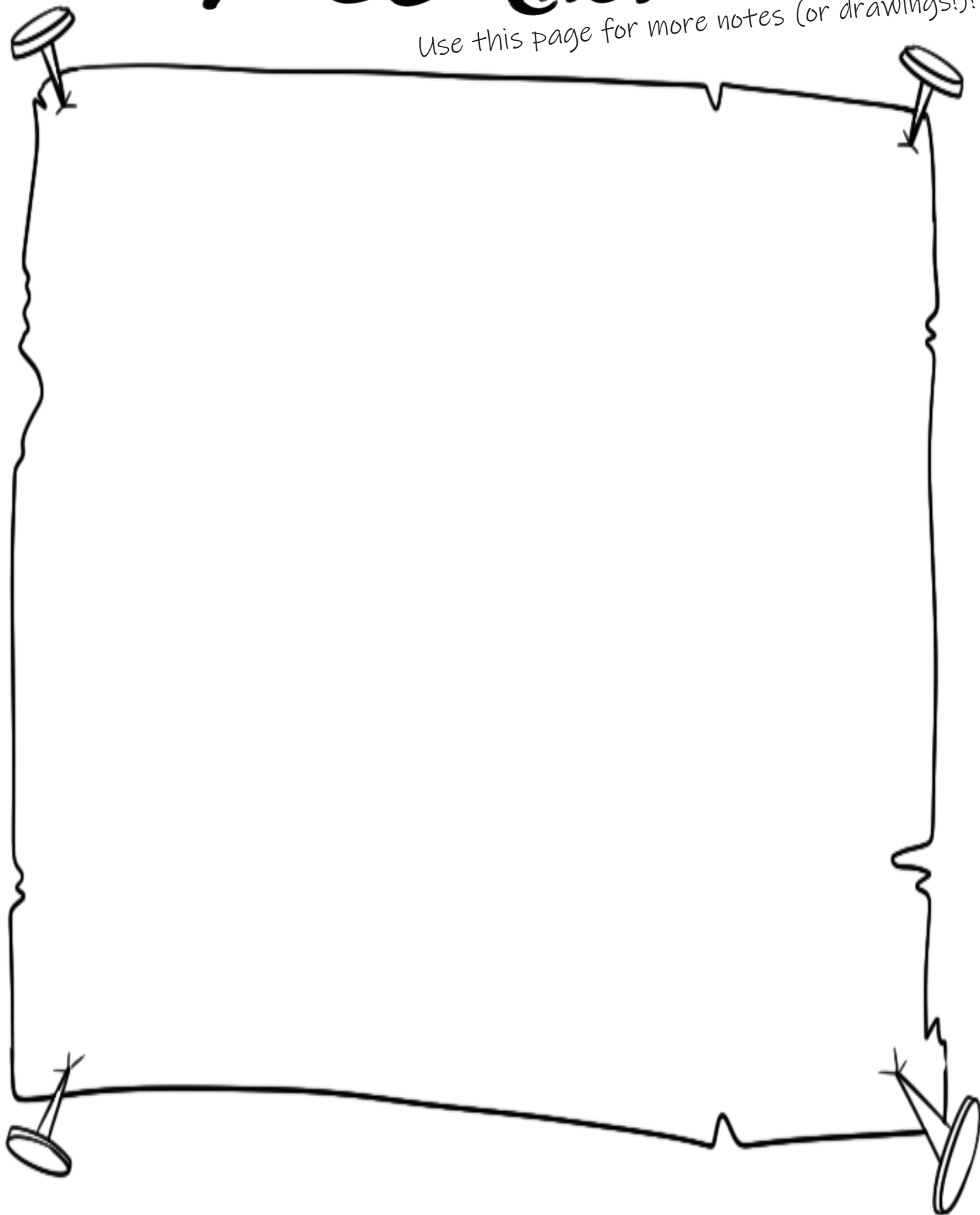
1. Where do people gather? Why? What are they doing?
2. Are people alone? Are they in groups? Are they here for an event? A class?

LV2

3. Is there an event going on? A party? A holiday? A special gathering?
4. If there's an event going on, why do you think it's happening? How are people participating in it?
5. If there's not an event going on, where can you find out when the next one will be?

# Be A Detective!

Use this page for more notes (or drawings!)





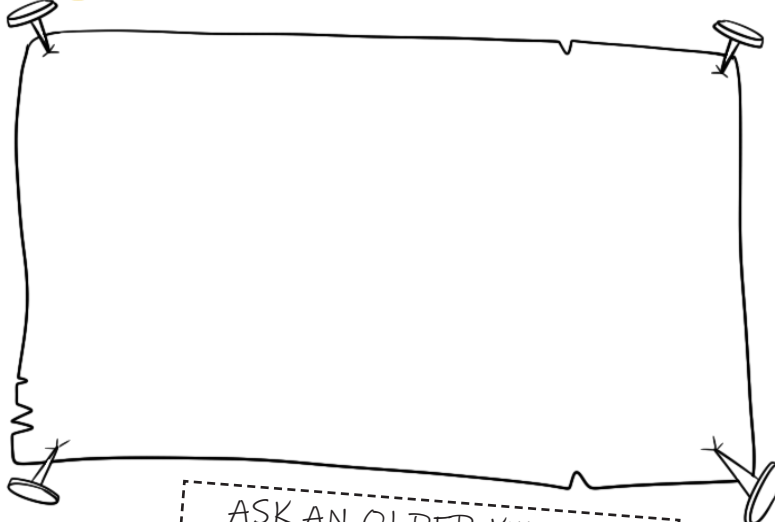
# be a reporter!



Do you have teenage friends or siblings?  
Find where the older kids hang out!

LV1

Do they have their own space here?  
Draw or write about it!!



LV2

IF YES, HOW IS THEIR SPACE  
DIFFERENT FROM THE AREA  
MEANT FOR KIDS YOUR AGE?  
HOW IS IT THE SAME?



LV2

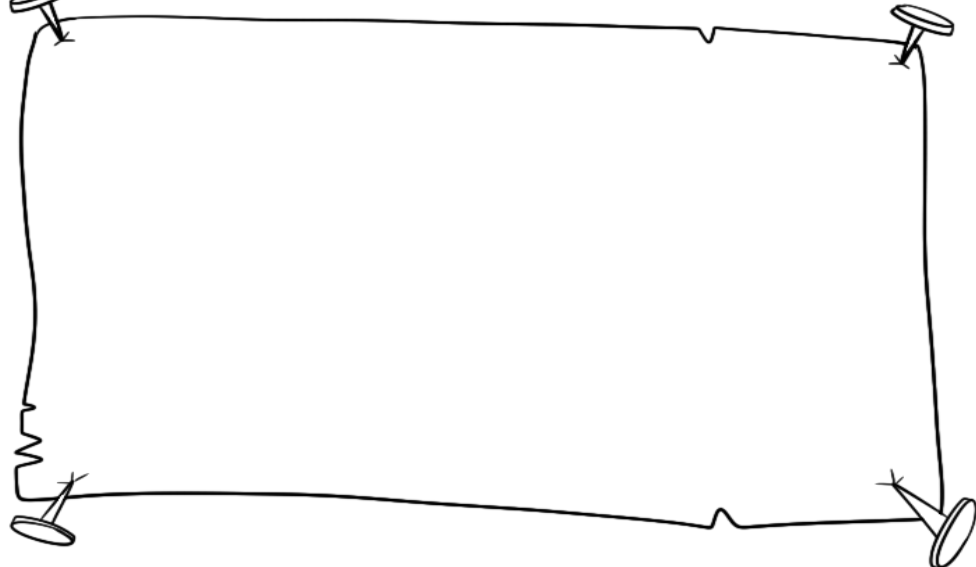
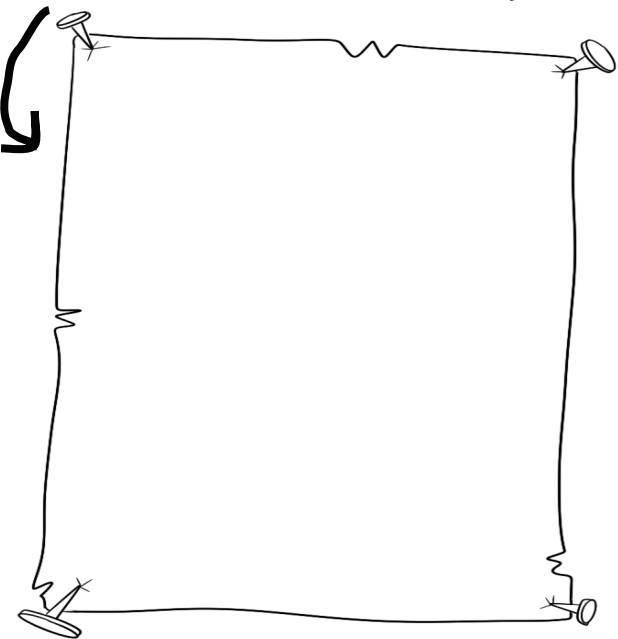
ASK AN OLDER KID WHY  
THEY LIKE THEIR SPACE!  
WHAT'S THEIR FAVORITE  
PART?

Do they have things that you  
want to play with, too? Are they  
different from the things you use?

LV3

If the teens don't have their own  
space, why do you think that is?

Either way: CAN YOU TELL IF THE OLDER  
KIDS LIKE TO STICK TOGETHER? OR DO  
KIDS OF ALL AGES TEND TO MIX?



# USE YOUR MEMORY!

LV1

Challenge an older kid to a memory game! Have both teams try and DRAW all the rooms of this building. Be sure to include hallways and doors! Then, compare them!

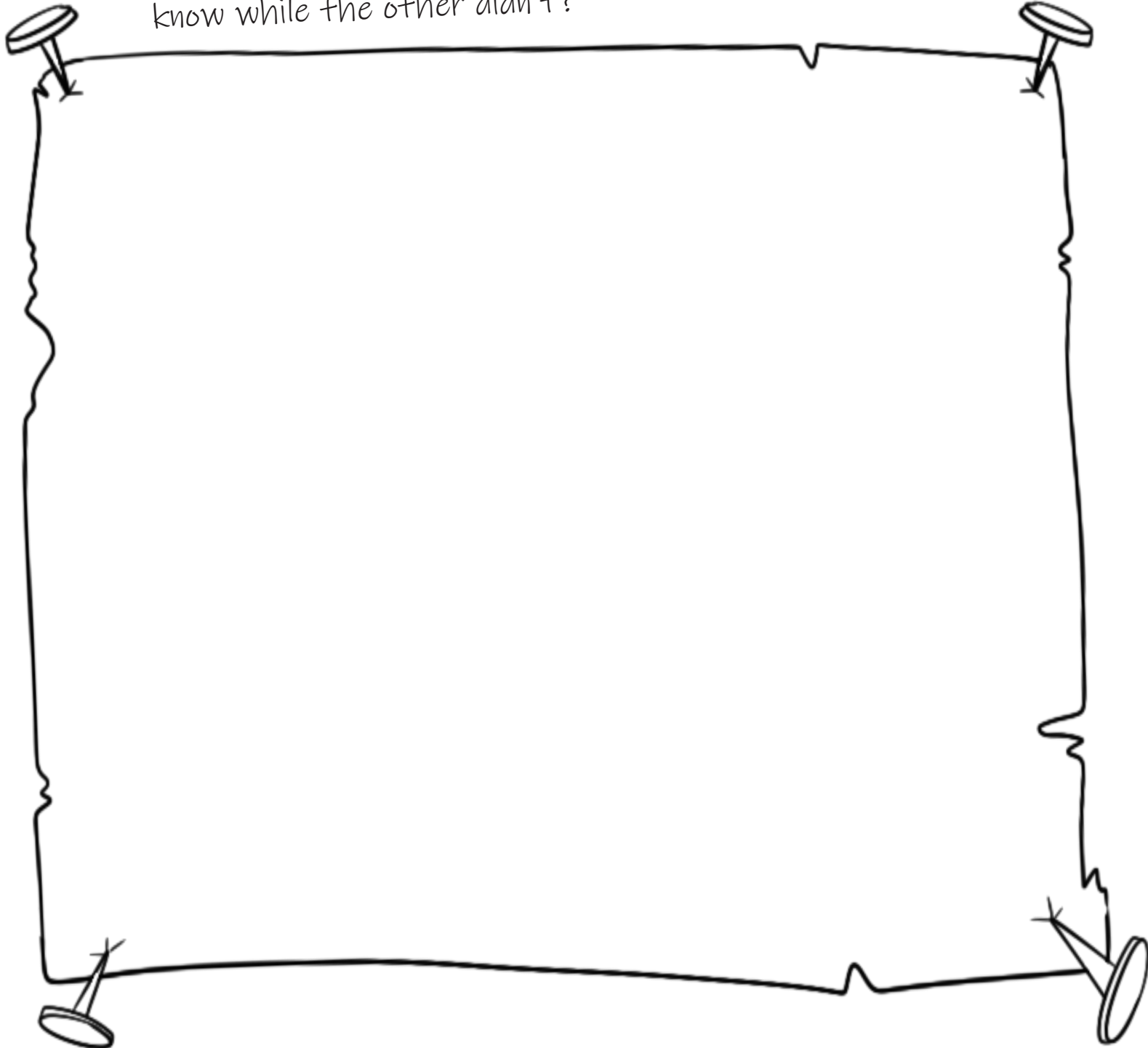
WHICH SIDE REMEMBERED  
MORE OF THE ROOMS  
CORRECTLY?

Were there some rooms that one side know while the other didn't?

LV3



For an extra challenge, try to make your drawings 'to-scale'! This means that you try to keep your rooms the correct size: for example, a gymnasium is usually bigger than a restroom! Be sure to make that clear on your map!



"When you were my age..."

# be a reporter!



TALK TO YOUR PARENT(S) OR ANOTHER ADULT!

LV1

Did they come here when they were your age?

If YES, what did they do here when they were little? Is that something you do, too?  
What stories do they have?  
Does it look different now from how they remember?

A large rectangular box with a hand-drawn border, secured by four pushpins at the corners. It is intended for writing answers to the Level 1 questions.

LV1

If NO, ask them to share a memory they have! Is it close to your experience? How so? And if it's different, what parts are different?  
Draw or write about it!!

DO YOU KNOW SOMEONE OLDER THAN YOU WHO GREW UP IN THIS NEIGHBORHOOD?  
IF NOT, MAYBE YOU CAN MAKE A NEW FRIEND!

A rectangular box with a hand-drawn border, secured by four pushpins at the corners. It is intended for drawing or writing about a memory.

LV2

What do they remember about when they were little? Do you do that, too?

A rectangular box with a hand-drawn border, secured by four pushpins at the corners. It is intended for writing about memories of childhood.



# USE YOUR MEMORY!

LV2

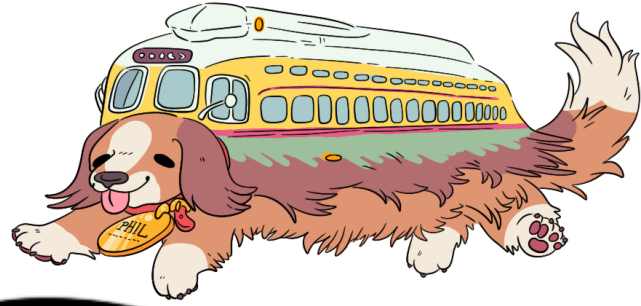
How did you get here today?

Did you walk? Take the bus? The subway?

From memory, DRAW THE ROUTE YOU TOOK!!

What sticks out the most? The street names?

The stores? Parks and nature? Art?

A large, hand-drawn style black outline with wavy, irregular edges, forming a rectangular shape. This is intended for the user to draw their travel route inside.

Challenge an opponent to a memory game!

Can you name all the streets around here?

Did you find yourself remembering street names?

Or did you name landmarks or buildings?

What do the things that appear the most on your map say about you?

HEY TEENS! This part's  
for you!

# be a reporter!



LV2

TALK TO A PARENT OR AN ADULT FAMILY FRIEND!  
DID THEY COME HERE WHEN THEY WERE YOUR AGE?

If YES, what did they do here when they were your age? Is that something you do, too?

What was their favorite book or activity?

WRITE OR  
DRAW ABOUT  
IT HERE!

What stories do they have?

What kinds of games did they play with friends?

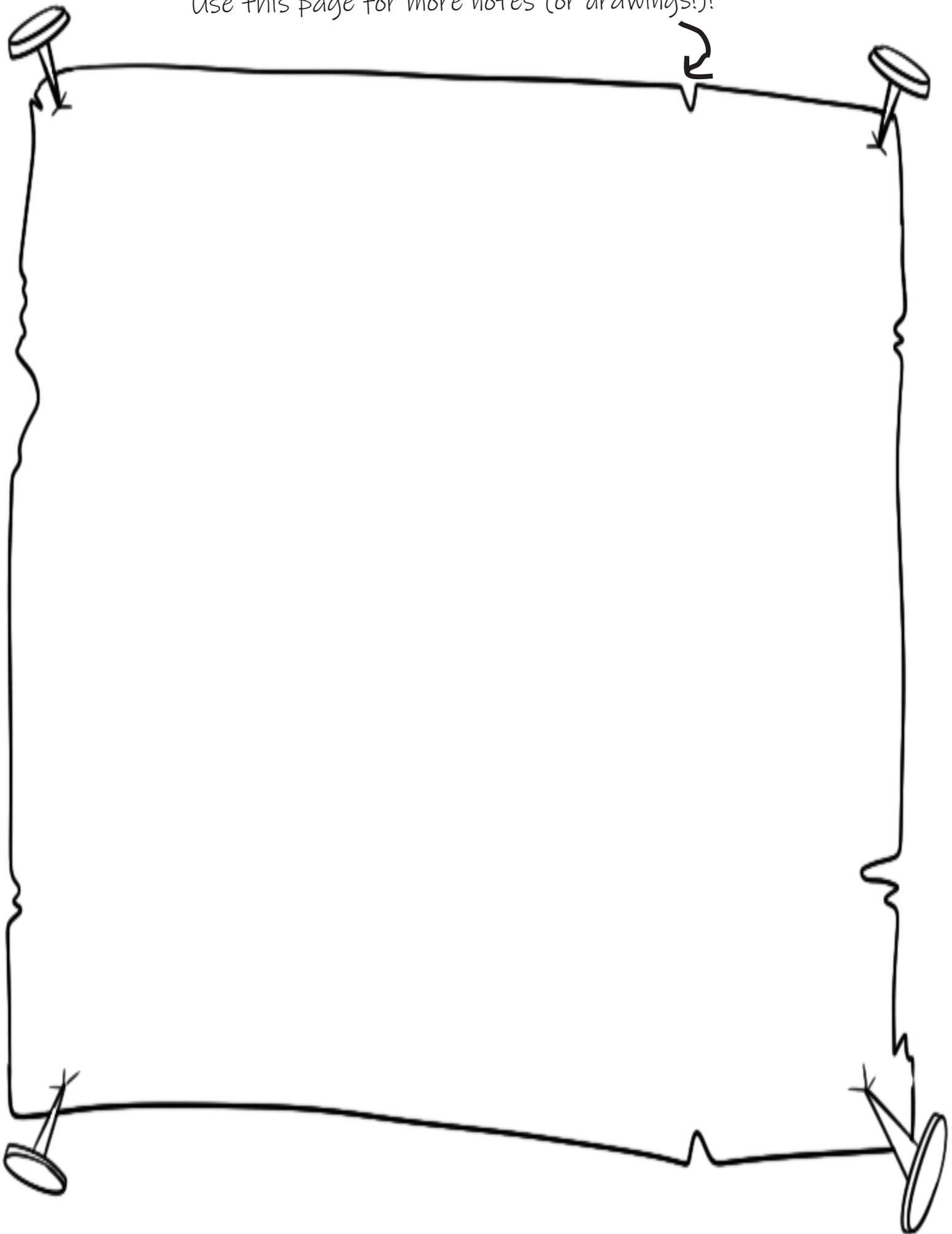
Did they go to school nearby?

If NO, do they have any memories of going to similar places when they were younger?

How were those places similar to where you are now?

How were they different?

Use this page for more notes (or drawings!!)



# NOTES



# ORAL HISTORY

This tool is modeled after the work by StoryCorps. The goal of this recording effort is to unearth important stories about the meaning of public spaces through conversations with people who are regular users or very familiar with the place.

## before getting started

- Figure out where these stories are going to be kept, or who will be preserving them (for example, a librarian or a recreation center director or someone on the advisory council). These stories are meant to be shared to people in your community, so choosing someone that people know well and can approach at your chosen location would be best.
- Get the necessary voice-recording device you prefer (the easiest and probably most accessible is an app on your phone). It would also be good to ask the person who will be storing these conversations what their preferred file format is.

## prepping for the session

- Invite a person you know well, or would like to know better, that has ties to or is familiar with the chosen public space. Examples of people you could ask are a parent/guardian, relative, mentor/coach, librarian/staff, or a friend.
- Agree upon a time that works for both of you, when you are both relaxed and not pressured for time. Set aside approximately 30-40 minutes for this activity (any longer might make the file too large to transfer easily).
- Choose a quiet, comfortable location where you and your partner can record your chat.
- Prepare some questions (around 5 or 6) to ask your partner. Some suggestions are provided at the end of this worksheet, but feel free to add others.

## case study: **StoryCorps**

This is a charitable organization started in 2003 that provides people across the U.S. “with the opportunity to record and preserve the stories of their lives.” People can record with StoryCorps through their mobile tours, booths, and a free mobile app. Learn more about this group on their website: <https://storycorps.org/>.

Other resources for conducting an oral history:

- Smithsonian Institute: <https://siarchives.si.edu/history/how-do-oral-history>
- Oral History Association: <https://oralhistory.org/best-practices/>

## have a conversation

1. Press the record button. Make sure the recording device is at a distance that it can capture your and your partner’s voices.
2. Introduce yourself and let your partner introduce themselves. Say the date of when you are doing the recording.
3. Start chatting. You can start with a few questions like, “When was the first time you came to the [place]” Or “Can you describe your favorite day at the [place]?” This is meant to be a conversation, so don’t worry if you don’t get to all your prepared questions. They are meant to begin and guide your chat. Listen closely to your partner’s stories, and follow up with questions. You might discover something new.
4. Once you’ve hit a good stopping point at around 30 to 40 minutes, end your recording. Make sure you thank your partner for sharing their time and stories with you.

## preserving the story

1. Give a title to your recording.
2. When you transfer the file to the keeper of stories, include a written brief description of topics you touched on. Include your name and the name of your partner. This can be kept either as a hand written log in a dedicated notebook, or on a computer as a Word or Excel file.

## suggestions for questions

- When was the first time you came to [place]?
- What is your favorite memory of [place]?
- What or who are you thankful for in [place]?
- What are your hopes or dreams for [place]?
- What do you think is the future of [place]?
- How has [place] changed your life?
- What are your favorite things to do at [place]?
- What do you do while you're at [place]?
- What do you want other people to know about [place]?
- What are your favorite spaces in [place]?
- When you think of [place], what is the first thing you feel/hear/see/smell/imagine?
- How has [place] changed in the time that you have been here?

## add your own here!

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# NOTES





## CREATING A COMMUNITY ARCHIVE

When a community uses a public space for a long period of time, that space becomes part of the social fabric of the community, thus, part of the community's culture. When such a well-used public space is closed for renovation, the closure disturbs a vital shared location of social dependability for its community. It also can lead to losing an aspect of the community's cultural heritage, which is maintained in public by the community's practices of continued use. This is especially true for communities that have been socially underserved.

But the break in continuity that comes with a closure also creates an opportunity for the staff and community members to actively preserve the defining attributes of their public space's history.

This tool is designed for staff and the community to manage the cultural heritage of the space just prior to and during the closing of the public space. It presents a means for communities to collect, record, and clarify what defines their practices of shared life in a public space, and thereby better prepare to weather change with a greater sense of self-definition and self-determination by taking ownership of their common history.

### what to collect

- Pictures of meaningful spaces and activities in the public space
- Trophies, signage, and other awards for display in the renovated space
- Drawings of the public space by the children in the after-school program
- Videos by teens of interviews with each other, adults and younger children

## case study: **Vare Studio**

The Vare Recreation Center in the Gray's Ferry section of South Philadelphia demonstrates how community engagement can be included in the design of the new facility.

Racial tension is documented to have existed in the area for over a hundred years. Instead of ignoring this history, the Rebuild project included the neighborhood's acknowledgment of this context in the pre-design phase of the new rec center. Rebuild partnered with the project user, Make the World Better (MTWB), for whom community engagement is an integral part of its mission. MTWB collaborated with two other organizations, Philadelphia Photo Arts Center (now the TILT Institute for Contemporary Image) and Monument Lab, to augment their community engagement with these groups' focus on art. MTWB and PPAC created a project entitled Vare Studio, a research and archiving project in which they collected, preserved, and shared a photographic and oral history of the Vare Recreation Center. The Vare Studio also hosted over thirty design workshops for community members to share the priorities, goals, and themes they felt the new recreation center should encompass.

Community engagement in the planning of Vare Recreation Center is more complex than it is for those recreation centers in predominantly white or neighborhoods of color because the planners and designers had to create a level of trust in the community that ensured all voices on several levels would be heard. These different levels of engagement might, also, occur in neighborhoods that are dealing with changes in class as well. The Knight Foundation's report on Reimagining Civic Commons, which ignited the Rebuild Initiative in Philadelphia, states that "[...] when public spaces are revived and connected, they can influence positive change—and help counter the social isolation, economic inequities, segregation, and mistrust of others that many communities are experiencing today."

Learn more about the Vare Studio on Make the World Better's website (<https://www.mtwb.org/>). Information on the Knight Foundation's Reimagining Civic Commons is found on <https://civiccommons.us/>.

## how to build your archive

- Host a community party and invite everyone to bring a pictures taken at the public space from past events, competitions, celebrations, or everyday life.
- Print or make a slideshow of the pictures to show at the gathering.
- Have people record their responses on paper or video to questions like “What do I like about coming here?”, “What’s your best memories of this space and neighborhood?” or “[This place] is important to me because...” Save these responses in a time capsule for the site’s future reopening celebration. See the [Oral History](#) tool for more questions.
- Create a yearbook with the responses and pictures like Vare Studio. (See Case Study.) This can also be electronic using the recordings of the teens’ project, a website, an Instagram account, etc.
- Publish the pictures, and snippets of the written responses and the teens’ recordings on the daily announcement board in the renovated space.

## NOTES

A grid of 15 columns and 12 rows of small blue dots, intended for taking notes.

## case study: **West Philadelphia Cultural Archive Project**

This project is lead by Malkia Okech, the recipient 2021 Leeway x IPMF Media Artist + Activist Residency with the Paul Robeson House and Museum (PRHM) in West Philadelphia. The goal of this effort is to digitize the archives and collection in the site, while also developing and producing new media that addresses “collective community museum processes for Black radical histories using the artistic mediums of documentation, oral history, and 3D interpretation.” The project also invites participation from visitors to the museum, bringing more contemporary meaning to the historic site.

The effort began with a workshop called the West Philadelphia Cultural Archive: Skill-Share & Making Series Intro in 2022. It was also an information session on the digital archives in-house. Record Handling, Cataloging & Digitization Workshops and Working Sessions took place in September and October 2022 at regular times on Tuesday evenings, every other week. The first phase of the archiving project was marked by the event in December held at PRHM which celebrated the opening of the Eslanda Robeson Reading Room.

Events, photos and updates of the archiving process were shared by WPCA through their social media accounts on Instagram (robesonhousephi), Twitter (@RobesonHousePHL), and Facebook. Using various platforms allows the group to reach their audience, and lets others share the events on their own accounts.

## SEND-OFF EVENT

Before a public space closes for construction, a goodbye party is a fun and beautiful way to celebrate the building's past, present, and future. While under renovation, the community will lose access to a vital space that might be closed for a long period of time. It is important to take time to acknowledge and commemorate the value that this space has provided and how it will change when it reopens. Bringing the community together to share food, memories, and resources is a special way to recognize this moment of closure and take time to prepare together for the next chapter.

### celebrate

- Invite the community to bring their favorite food and drinks.
- Have fun! There's no right or wrong way to throw a good party.

### commemorate

- Have a polaroid or camera for people to take photos during the festivities.
- Ask the community to bring any photos of themselves or family using the space that could be contributed to a community archive. For more on this, see our tool on [How To Create a Community Archive](#).
- Use our tools for collecting oral histories through the [Oral History](#).

### share resources

- Share any ideas or resources for services or programming that families can utilize during the transition period.

