Culture and experience influence people’s perceptions of places and regions. Standard six is the perception of place and regions. In standard four, we looked at the physical and human characteristics of place. And in standard five, we looked at regional geography. Both standard four and standard five are very closely linked to standard six, the perception of place and regions. In this section we're going to look at how culture and experience influence people's perceptions of places and regions. The way in which people all over the planet perceive of their place of origin and other places in the world is a result of their own culture and experience. That is, each of us sees places at once similarly to, as well as in contrast to, or relative to another place. A one person sees any place or any world region as largely dependent, not only on the physical and cultural features of that place but also on how he or she feels about that place or region.

Our perceptions of places and regions then are both subjective and objective at the same time. It's very important for teachers and students of geography to understand that while there are certainly natural and cultural characteristics at places and regions exhibit that help to distinguish them from other places, there are simply not one single definition or interpretation of any place, or any region in the world.

In Standard 5, the section of this course on Reading and Interpreting Regions, we saw that there are several types of regions: formal regions, functional regions, and perceptual regions. In Standard 6, we focus on the functional and perceptual types of regions and places. How humans use or interact with the places in which they dwell also influences how they will perceive that place or region. Therefore, the utility of a place in meeting the needs of those who dwell there and rely on it is important. For instance, the forests in the Pacific Northwest are useful and meaningful to different people for different reasons depending on the value they place on these forests. How we value something and what it means to us is a key factor in the perception of place and region, and thus, how we choose to interact with it. Think of five places or regions in the US and in Arizona that have different meanings, values, and utility for diverse segments of the population.
Slide 4

Text: Culture and experience influence people’s perceptions of places and regions

Audio: When we grow up in a particular place, we come to know that place on an intimate level. We know something of the history of that place. Who is who in town, where the significant or unique physical and built environment places and spaces are located, the politics of that place, both good and bad, and myriad other details. How we grow up then, our life histories, in part, help to determine how we feel about a place. In addition, as we live in, travel to, read about, or learn more about any place or region, our perception of that place or region can change. It deepens. It broadens. Perceptions are not static. Places and regions are not just compilations of natural and built features but also places of shared beliefs, significance, and values, which in turn, shape the culture of a place or a region.

Slide 5

Text: Nine Nations of North America

[Map of the Nine Nations of North America]

Audio: The map on this page is called "The Nine Nations of North America." In 1981, Joel Garreau, a journalist for the Washington post created this now very famous perceptual map of what he referred to as The Nine Nations of North America. He identified each region by economic activities or historic reference or social attitude. As we look around this map clockwise, we can see several regions. Quebec in Canada, the New England region, the Foundry, Dixie, The Islands, Mexamerica, The Breadbasket, Ecotopia, and The Empty Quarter. Looking at this regional designations then answer the following questions, why do you think Garreau named the mass he did? What was the value and significance of each of these areas of this country? Looking at it and studying it more closely, do you think the regions are still relevant or have our perceptions of them changed or have they--in reality changed? Are there any new nations that should be identified? Any nations or regions that should be deleted? For example, the regions around the great lakes that Garreau called "the foundry" is the reference to what was once called the manufacturing belt of the United States. Today because the manufacturing industry has declined dramatically in the US, this region has become known as the "Rust Belt." What other regions do you think have changed in this country?

Slide 6

Text: Definition of Culture and Region
Audio: The definition of the word culture is complex. Culture refers to a group of people's way of life, their commonalities, their philosophies, their religion, politics, social structures, economics, and the norm to the behavior in that place of region. Looking at the definition on this page, we can see that there are 12 different end entries for the word culture. The ones that a geographer is most concerned with are definitions 3, 5, and 6, and 8, 9, and 10. The third definition is a particular form or stage of civilization is that of a certain nation or period such as the Greek culture. Definition 5 says the behaviors and belief characteristics of a particular social ethnic or age group, the youth culture, the drug culture, and so on. The sixth definition is an anthropological definition and also human and cultural geography. The sum total of ways of living built up by a group of human beings and transmitted from one generation to another. Definition 8 is the act or practice of cultivating the soil, tillage. Number 9, the raising of plants or animals, especially with the view to their improvement. And number 10, the product of growth resulting from such cultivation. The way I learned that the definition of culture was a simple one line definition, transmitted, learned behavior.

Slide 7

Text: Culture, Place, & Perception

Audio: A region is an area of land space that has characteristics or features that unite it and define it or describe it. It is a way for geographers to compartmentalize or make sense up or compare and describe the planet. We can look at physical regions, cultural regions, political regions, and so on. And we can look at the overlap between those regions. The shared notions of a group of people in one place or region have a great influence on how they perceive or how they feel about other places or regions in the world. Teachers and students of geography must be aware of how our own culture and norms impact our perceptions of place, as well as our perceptions of other places.

Slide 8

Text: What is your perception?

[Photo of a forest] [Photo of a spotted owl] [Photo of deforestation]

Audio: Looking at the three photographs on this slide, we see the Pacific Northwest Forests, we see the spotted owl and we see deforested lands in the Pacific Northwest. Different stakeholders and different residents of this region will have different views and different perspectives when they look at these photographs. A logger, for example, sees these forests as his/her livelihood. The forests main fact lead the way in which several generations in any particular family have earned to living. Thus, there is a great personal meaning attached to these old-growth forests.
The forests have personal, historic, and economic significance for these individuals, families and indeed entire communities in the Pacific Northwest. On another hand, an environmentalist sees the temperate rainforests of the Pacific Northwest as home to the spotted owl, a threatened species. And therefore, an environmentalist places a different value on the forests, a preservationist perspective. What's your perspective about the Pacific Northwest Forests?

**Slide 9**

**Text:** What is your perception?

[Image of model home]

**Audio:** Another example of the perception of place. What do you see in the picture below? It's a picture of a model home and a former forest, and farm land that developers are trying to sell to potential buyers. If you are the developer, you may see dollar signs. Perhaps, you've purchased farm and forest land for an exceptionally good price, and now you are developing it and selling lots and houses. If you were a potential buyer, you may love the idea that this beautiful home is located in a peaceful and green site away from the noise and traffic with plenty of area for children to play and quaint pastoral views to look at from your magnificent deck. If you are an environmentalist, you may see nature being destroyed by urban sprawl. If you are nearby farmer, you may perceive an intrusion or disruption or invasion of what you've known as good, quiet country leaving. You may wonder how many old farmsteads are being sold off, you may wonder if you're the last hold out and if you'll end up surrounded by these giants homes that obscure your own views. Will your taxes rise? Will you be forced to sell? Maybe you were a farmer ready to retire and your children don't want to take over the farm. So you may also want to sell it to highest bidder and see development as an opportunity for you in your retirement ages. If you are a city person out for a casual Sunday drive in the country, maybe you'll decide to go in another direction where the forest country views still remain. What's your perception?

**Slide 10**

**Text:** Historical Significance of Place and Region

[Map of New Orleans from 1818]

**Audio:** On the slide on this page, you see an old map of the city of New Orleans. New Orleans is one of our most historical places in this country. What's your perception of the city of New Orleans, Louisiana? What do you consider its significance? How do you think the following demographic groups perceive the city: long time residents of New Orleans and the surrounding area, the Cajuns, wealthy versus poor residents of the city? For this, think the hurricane Katrina
and the Lower Ninth Ward and the distractions in it. What about newly arrived immigrants to the city: Vietnamese, Hispanic and others? What about tourists who packed in the city of New Orleans and enjoyed vignettes of the Cafe du Monde or walked down Bourbon Street and listen to some of the great jazz music? What about outsiders watching the news on TV over the past several years, post hurricane Katrina and the BP oils spill on the gulf region? Each one of these groups will have a very distinct perception of New Orleans.

**Slide 11**

**Text:** Historical Significance of Place and Region

**Audio:** Another of our great cities with historical significance is Washington D.C. It consists of notions or perceptions of the city of the US government, politics and politicians, national monuments, foreign embassies, the Smithsonian, the National Geographic Headquarters, and the headquarters of many other nonprofit organizations. It also is recognized as a place having one of the highest crime rates in the country as well as the place where there are very high incomes along side very low incomes. There a lot of ways we can look at and perceive Washington D.C. How do you perceive Washington D.C.?

**Slide 12**

**Text:** Significance of Place

[Screenshot of Disneyland website]

**Audio:** Likewise, Disneyland, another place, a manufactured place means very different things to local residents, merchants, and tourists, both local and from abroad. In addition, metaphorically, Disneyland is often used when we refer to a fantasy or a dream world. Again, once perception of a place or a region depends in part and who you are, and your knowledge and experience of a place or a region.

**Slide 13**

**Text:** Personal/Cultural/Ethnic Significance of Place and Region

[Drawing of fieldworkers on a planation]

**Audio:** More on the personal cultural and ethnic significance of a place or region. Imagine the Deep South, a plantation perhaps. A white visitor to a plantation today might focus on the beauty and enormity of the house and grounds, and the antiques in the house, and the opulence of a place. A black visitor on the other hand has probably a very different perception of this same
place. The painting on this slide is by Clementine Hunter, it's called a hoeing corn and it's a very personal depiction of Clementine Hunter's experience on the plantation. A black resident or visitor may instead focus on the slave quarters or the laborer, or sea or recollect what is not in plain site but instead the feelings that he or she derives from the significance of a plantation in the Deep South in the pre-civil war period. And these perceptions are very likely different and counter up a distinct image or perception of that place, than the white visitor.

Slide 14

Text: Perception of Place

[Photo of a group of slaves standing in front of their quarters] [Photo of a plantation home]

Audio: What are some of the other factors at play in the perception of a plantation in the Deep South? A white person and a black person's history, understanding and experience of a place or their ancestor's experience of a place will have a lot to do with how these two groups regard a plantation. A white person from the South may have a sense of belonging or affinity with plantation owners. A black person may have an affinity with slaves on the plantations and perhaps will feel alienated from it or revulsion toward it. A Northern white visitor or European visitor versus a white visitor from the Deep South may also have a distinct perception of the place. A white visitor from the North or European visitor will have an outsider perception or perspective, while a white visitor from the Deep South, will have an insider perspective. What is your perspective?

Slide 15

Text: Place and Region & Ethnocentrism, Multiculturalism, and Stereotyping

Audio: In this slide we're going to look at place and region, ethnocentrism, multiculturalism, and stereotyping. Some more themes that are at play in the perception of place and region. As the slides and examples in this unit show us, how we perceive of a place or a region or a culture is both objective and subjective at the same time. Human beings bring their own upbringing knowledge and life experiences into their perception of a place for better or for worse. It is important for geography teachers and students to understand how and why they perceive their own place or region or culture as they do. And it's also important to understand why they perceive other places, regions, and cultures the way they do. Therefore, if we are aware of how and why we feel the way we do about a place, a region or culture, we can better understand and appreciate our own place or culture as well as those of others. Further, the more we understand and appreciate places, we avoid stereotyping and prejudice ideas about places, regions and cultures. We should be observing them through this heightened awareness and appreciation and
thorough other's eyes. Doing this we are better able to embrace a true multiculturalism that reflects the evolution and demography of this country. And we can look at it with a more encompassing geographic eye.

**Slide 16**

**Text:** Thoughts on the Perception of Place and the Value of Nature: *Apart from or A Part of?*

[Photo of Aldo Leopold] [Image of book cover of *A Sand County Almanac*]

**Audio:** Some final thoughts on the perception of place and the value of nature apart from or a part of. In the foreword to his classic book on the perception of nature, *Sand County Almanac*, first published in 1948, Aldo Leopold wrote, "There are some who can live without wild things and some who cannot. Like winds and sunsets, wild things were taken for granted until progress began to do away with them. Now we face the question whether a still higher 'standard of living' is worth its cost in things natural, wild, and free." We abuse land because we regard it as a commodity belonging to us. When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect. How we perceive a place then or how we perceive nature is directly related to how we will interact with that place or with nature. How do you perceive nature? What is its value and significance to you? Is it a commodity belonging to us? Or is it part of the community in which we live and dwell together as human beings? Do we feel apart from it or do we feel a part of nature?

**Slide 17**

[Photo of Elizabeth Larson]

**Audio:** This unit, standard six, Perception of Place, by Beth Larson, lecturer, School of the Geographical Sciences and Urban Planning, ASU, 2010.