

The term **place** can have several different meanings in geography. It is often thought of as a location of a town, city, or region on the Earth's surface. More specifically, place can define the unique characteristics, both tangible and intangible, of a location. This means that it not only includes the visual characteristics and features of a location, but also the **associations** and **feelings** that we have when we see or hear about a particular place. These intangible components may be evoked by photographs, symbols, stories, and songs or music.

Phrases such as **place attachment** or **sense of place** refer to the complex relationship between humans and their surrounding environment. This relationship involves both the influence of the natural environment on humans as well as the changes that human activities have imposed on the surrounding environment. It is sometimes said that places have a way of claiming people, or that a place grows on you. This means that not only are we getting used to a place but also that we are developing a strong relationship with that place and that it is becoming a part of who we are—our **identity**. The complex relationship between residents of the Canadian Prairie and its unique landscape is well described by authors such as David Bouchard in *If You're Not from the Prairie* and W.O. Mitchell in *Who Has Seen The Wind*.

Often we first become aware of our own sense of place and identity when we travel to unfamiliar places and begin to realize that our surroundings are different and that we do not feel "at home" there. The landscape is different; the weather may be different; houses and towns are different; people are not the same; even things such as sounds and smells are not those that we are familiar with. On the other hand, if you move to a new place all of these things will gradually become familiar: you will be developing a new sense of place and it will then become part of your identity.

Most Canadians are familiar with features such as Niagara Falls, Banff, the CN Tower, or the Golden Boy. If you have visited the CN Tower, for example, you will not only associate it with Toronto, but also may recall the feelings you had when you visited there. Perhaps you have memories of feeling "butterflies" in your stomach as you went up the high-speed elevator, or feeling a little light-headed when you first leaned over the railings to look down at the city below. Or you may have felt a rush of excitement at these experiences and remember the feeling of exhilaration when you went up the tower and looked out over the city. In other words, our memory of places often includes feelings and emotions that we experienced there.

This sense of **place** and **identity** can also become a part of our relationship to our home country rather than just our immediate community, neighbourhood, or province. When you travel in a foreign country, you have a different relationship with your surroundings. The sight of Canadian symbols, such as the flag, may make you feel homesick. Perhaps you have a small flag sticker on your backpack as a symbol of your Canadian identity, or when you see another traveller sporting a red maple leaf you might talk to him or her and share things that you have in common—your **Canadian identity**.