

Spotlight: Local Learning @ Vermilionville

by Paddy Bowman

Even in a region renowned for Cajun and Creole traditions, French language, folk arts from music to weaving, and unique celebrations, most students do not study regional culture or encounter folk artists in their formal schooling. A four-year partnership between Local Learning and the Vermilionville Living History Museum and Folklife Park in Lafayette, Louisiana, has sought to remedy this by providing professional development for teachers; resources for integrating folklife across subject areas, including French immersion; arts-integrated residencies that put both folk artists and teaching artists in classrooms; and connecting educators with local cultural organizations and culture bearers.

Education of young people and the general public is a keystone of the museum's mission. Inspired by a similar Local Learning partnership with the Acadiana Center for the Arts and Lafayette Parish Schools, the Vermilionville Board and museum education staff reached out to brainstorm about deepening the museum's relationship with the local school system and improving offerings for the thousands of students from around the state who tour the historic village annually. The result is rewarding.

Each year a folklife theme has informed residencies, resources, and training, which includes a summer institute and workshops during the school year. Examples include sense of place, games and play, the seasonal round, and traditional music. University of Louisiana at Lafayette professors in the College of Education assign pre-service students to develop [standards-based lesson plans](#) to test at Vermilionville and polish for publication on the museum's website. Lessons, worksheets, and rubrics from [Louisiana Voices](#) are also invaluable. In addition, local scholars, musicians, poets, and media producers contribute to endowing teachers and students with inspiring and practical support.

Because Vermilionville focuses on Acadian, Creole, and Native American history and culture 1765-1890, the folklife education initiative grounds students in their own living traditions, helping them to see themselves in history and as creators of culture. Students interview Vermilionville folk artists and family and community members and create projects, artwork, and a documentary, [Made by Hand, Built on Tradition](#), made this year by Lafayette High French students with help from the Center for Louisiana Studies and AOC Community Media.



Lafayette High French teacher Mario Charest's Year 3 students producing the video. It will introduce students around the state to Vermilionville and prepare them for fieldtrips.

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Vermilionville film clip: <https://youtu.be/bP1yndger8s>
<http://www.vermilionville.org/vermilionville/educate/lesson-plans>
www.louisianavoices.org