

In many ways, large American research universities work to dismantle the importance of place in people’s lives. Universities take pride in drawing students from disparate and distant locales, bringing young people together from “all 50 states” and any number of foreign countries. Once assembled at the university’s campus, students are subjected to a curriculum that often emphasizes canonized cultural materials from far away and overlooks local languages and cultures, be they Indigenous, ethnic, or heritage. As students become socialized into a new “cosmopolitan” way of viewing the world, working with professors and teaching assistants drawn from across the planet, they often sever emotional ties with a home place that had formerly seemed deeply significant but now seems restrictive and irrelevant. Knowingly or not, American universities are often complicit in a process of deracination that prepares students for a rootless and untethered life, one spent following jobs from place to place and often valuing only those locales that are extolled in literature, movies, TV, or *The New York Times* Travel Section. Where once they spoke with enthusiasm of a local parade, Christmas lighting display, or community picnic, now they chuckle with an acquired sense of superiority about those poor fools who continue to live in the “fly-over states,” “small-town America,” “urban cesspools,” “the boring suburbs,” “the sticks,” or “the boonies.” Despite its state funding, mandated state resident admissions preferences, and avowed commitment to the greater good of the entire state population (the much touted “Wisconsin Idea”), the University of Wisconsin–Madison is one such large American research university.

Recovering a sense of place and discovering the riches or complexities of the local are tasks that lie at the heart of the study of folklore and should be regarded as fundamental goals or benefits of folklore education. As folklore educators at the UW, we know that one of the great moments of teaching folklore is watching students come to the realization that culture occurs all around them: They are not separated from culture, watching behind a screen or through reading a novel, but, rather, are on stage and participating in the constantly unfolding process of culture enacted right

here, right now. A sense of empowerment arises in students as they become aware that they are conversant in complex unwritten customs with deep historical roots. And a sense of respect is born as they come to understand the artistry of people around them—people whom they may have overlooked before or failed to appreciate fully. Many students regain a sense of appreciation for their home place and home culture when they take a folklore course. That they can do so while sequestered on a campus often far away from their homes can only occur if instructors make use of the campus and broader locale as a means and metaphor for valuing places in general and for demonstrating the rich connections that tie people and places together.

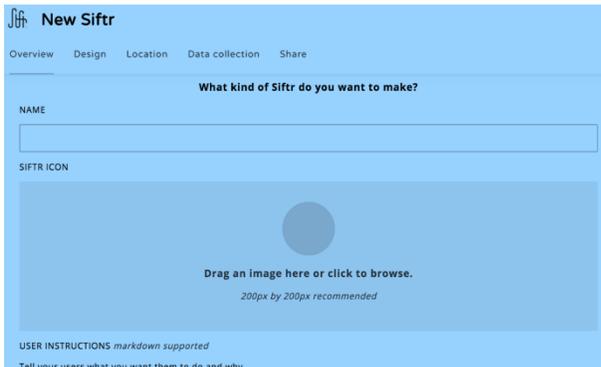
In this article, we present an innovative, user-friendly digital tool developed at the UW and now used in folklore courses at various levels to achieve locative education. Siftr is a freely available data collection and visualization platform that allows users to upload and geotag images and record and share associated notes and field observations. The application was developed by an interdisciplinary team of educational researchers, software engineers, and humanists at the UW known collectively as [Field Day](#). When interacting with Siftr, users can add and view field observations using either a specific mobile application (available for iOS and Android devices) or through the [Siftr website](#). In what follows, we present examples of Siftr projects incorporated into elementary, intermediate, and advanced undergraduate UW folklore courses to illustrate the potential and adaptability of this instructional resource to teach students about the richness and complexities of the world around them. Siftr provides a kinetic and visual activity that takes place most often in the outdoors and in the spontaneity of performed culture, but it also dovetails well with in-class activities and theoretical discussions. It is a platform that readily adapts to group projects and invites interaction and discussion that can enrich a folklore classroom, helping students contemplate the myriad ways in which culture is enacted in local contexts.

### **Folklore and Maps**

Mapping has been a longstanding element of folklore research. At the very outset of our discipline, the historic-geographic method used maps to help chart and chronicle the passage of folk tales and other items of verbal culture across time and space (Krohn 1883, von Sydow 1910, Thompson 1953). In the mid-20<sup>th</sup>-century turn to material culture studies in Europe and then the U.S., mapping and atlases again became important tools for presenting complex data regarding the migration of styles and techniques across geographic and cultural lines (Glassie 1968, Sarmela 1994). In recent years, folklorists have rediscovered the usefulness of maps, creating new products that seek to make archived materials accessible to users in new ways (Tangherlini 2013, Gunnell 2015).

While much of this research has relied upon collaborations with professional cartographers and resulted in fairly static maps, the GPS revolution of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century made complex and continuous mapping a common aspect of everyday life, particularly for people with mobile phones. Siftr harnesses the photographic and GPS resources of smartphones (or computers with Internet connections) to geolocate ethnographic data (images, descriptions) on readily accessible maps, populating concrete spaces and times with relevant ethnographic materials. Once images and notes have been uploaded to a unique Siftr they can be viewed as geolocated icons on a map or via a photo gallery. Users can “sift” or filter through uploaded content by zooming into specific locations on the map, sorting by tags, or searching by upload date and/or keyword. They can also comment on each other’s images and notes.

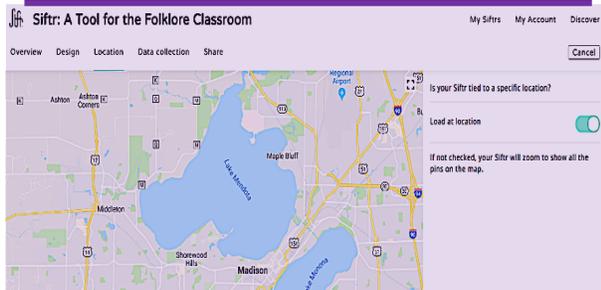
There are many ways to use Siftr within an educational context, but typically teachers create a unique Siftr and then invite their students to contribute to it as part of a whole class assignment or inquiry project. Additionally, some teachers ask individual students or small groups of students to create their own Siftr as part of an independent field research project. While each assignment should be in line with teaching objectives and may require extensive planning, the act of setting up a new Siftr takes only a few minutes.



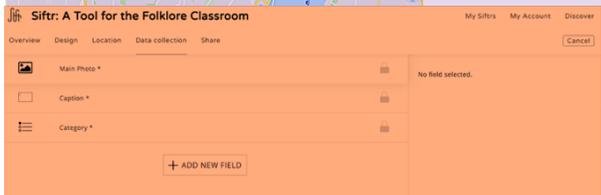
The set-up asks that you name your project, choose an icon, and give instructions.



You may also identify a color scheme.



Determine your starting location.



Add new data fields.



And, determine your preferred privacy settings.

(Siftr set-up screenshots; color added to differentiate between different screens.)

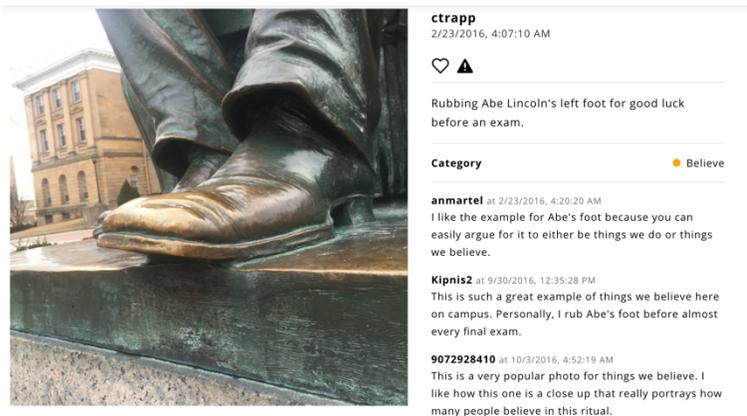
What follows is a discussion of Siftr assignments in the classroom designed by Ruth Olson, Thomas DuBois, and Marcus Cederström.

## Siftr at the Elementary Level with Ruth Olson: Folklore Rules

The elementary folklore class is often a unique experience for students, their one-and-only folklore course, taken early on in their time at Madison or during one of their final semesters before graduation. At the UW, students often take Folklore 100: Introduction to Folklore as an elective or as a course that allows them to satisfy the university's Ethnic Studies (ES) requirement. Depending on their school and major, students' advisors counsel students to take an ES course early in their time at Madison or toward the end of their studies. Regardless of when students enroll, however, the course draws robust numbers and reaches a maximum enrollment of around 80 very early during the enrollment period. Other UW students opt for Folk 230: Introduction to American Folklore, a blended course of about 30 students, in which students do preparatory work online and meet in the classroom once a week for active learning—in-class interviews, small group meetings and discussions, workshops, etc. I have used Siftr in both these courses.

Whether they are first-year students or seniors, most UW students enrolled in introductory folklore courses have a very limited perception of what folklore is; one of my goals is to get students to recognize that folklore includes more than folk tales. I want them to understand that studying folklore is studying everyday life, and they can (and should) use their own lives to reflect on social processes at work and make meaningful connections to these processes and the concepts we study in class. During Week 3 of the 15-week semester, I use Siftr as an introduction to fieldwork, asking students to post pictures documenting different aspects of student life or local culture. For both Folk 100 and Folk 230, our [Siftr is entitled \*Folklore Rules\*](#), based on Lynne McNeill's book of the same title (McNeill 2013). Students traverse the campus to photograph examples for four different categories of expressive culture, based on McNeill's categories of what folklorists study: things we say, things we do, things we make, and things we believe. Doing this out-of-the-classroom exercise early in the semester gets the students actively engaged with ideas presented through course materials, helps them immediately apply concepts, and enables them to find examples illustrating those concepts. It also helps students see folklore as cultural events that occur in particular settings, either seemingly apt for the performance in question or seemingly incongruous. Siftr allows students to view folklore in relation to context and understand the profound ways in which the meanings of places become negotiated through expressive acts.

When someone seeking success on an exam rubs the left foot of the prominent statue of Abraham Lincoln in front of the university's main administration building, Bascom Hall, the act derives part of its interest because the Lincoln statue is grave and serious in appearance and the statue's location makes Lincoln a sort of surrogate for university authority and standards. Students in both courses often document the Lincoln foot rub and also debate whether the act constitutes "something we do," or "something we believe," as is evident in the image and comments posted by ctrapp in 2016.





Things we make: The owner of this bike filled their basket with fall leaves, making it a sort of impromptu decoration. It could be seen as a personal expression of how much they love autumn or a desire to share the beauty of the leaves. I liked this because I also have a habit of collecting pretty leaves in the fall.

Category

● Make

Documenting a category like “Things We Make” can include finding someone (or evidence of someone) on campus who participates in a folk art form: a knitter, woodworker, or graffiti artist, for example. Students may document someone’s tattoo or a specially decorated backpack. Students may document customized additions to buses, bikes, delivery trucks, and cars. Once students photograph, caption, and geolocate their finds, they become visible to classmates in a different way—a cultural artifact or practitioner becomes spotlighted by the Siftr, so that other students may take note of the artifact in a different way next time they pass by. Seeing the image on Siftr, students may even feel enticed to seek out the scene to see the artifact firsthand. Collectively, Siftr allows students to build awareness of the folklore around them, connect that to a place, and inform each other about precisely the sorts of phenomena that they are learning about in class.

While instructing students on how to create an effective Siftr post, my teaching assistants and I also use the activity to emphasize the qualities that distinguish a good ethnographic photograph. Images that can be “unpacked” to reveal cultural information are an important part of folklore fieldwork, and students learn how to produce such images while they hunt for likely subjects for Siftr posts. A short handout I provide alerts students to important considerations, like asking permission before photographing, capturing steps in a process, and using the camera effectively to create clear and compelling images. Students comment on each other’s posts and build a cognizance of what characterizes a good ethnographic photograph.



agarwal39

10/2/2016, 1:39:19 PM



Here we can see a person working on a vase made of clay, the surroundings and the proper availability of tools represents that this person has a close relation with his work and usually works in a workshop along with other people. This makes him an integral part of the folk group consisting of all the people working in this workshop.

Category

● Make

kleasure at 10/2/2016, 4:04:51 PM

This photo was taken really well. The way you capture the subject and the action he is performing is perfect.

Enter a comment...

In Folk 230: Introduction to American Folklore, a blended course, I found that students were more creative and energetic in the images and captions they chose to put on the Siftr, mainly because of face-to-face accountability. They knew that once they had completed the out-of-classroom assignment of posting on Siftr, they would be coming back together as a class to select and talk



**serwin** ×  
10/2/2016, 1:41:33 PM  
♡ ⚠  
Things we do:  
At every Badger game, students hold up a shoe or juggle their keys during every kickoff in order to make a lot of noise.  
Category ● Do  
No comments.  
Enter a comment...



**garmstrong4** ×  
10/2/2016, 3:04:36 PM  
♡ ⚠  
Beading is a traditional yet also now contemporary Native American art form. This could also fit under "Things We Make" but personally for me beading is part of my Native identity and I feel a strong cultural pride/ belief when I bead. Some bead work are worn for ceremonial practices such as a beaded vest for a wedding. This piece of bead work is going to finished into a barrette.  
Category ● Believe  
No comments.  
Enter a comment...



**vwlam** ×  
2/23/2016, 5:07:22 PM  
♡ ⚠  
My parents came down for the weekend and we had a very late Chinese New Year Celebration together where my mom and I cooked, and made red eggs for good luck.  
Category ● Make  
No comments.  
Enter a comment...

about their favorite images (and why those images were favorites). I found that after students had completed a short self-assessment, they were not only more prepared to talk about their fieldwork decisions but also more alert to what they appreciated in other people's images. I then asked them to share with each other in small groups examples they had chosen from our Siftr, which allowed them to practice foundational folklore concepts and vocabulary. In our face-to-face meetings, it was easy to project our Siftr for the entire class on a screen and have students select and display examples they wanted to share and discuss with the class as a group. Often the items selected focused on familiar (and thus recognizable) material such as the statue of Abraham Lincoln at the top of Bascom Hill or the practice of holding up a shoe at kickoff at a Badgers football game.

But students also chose to focus on particular images that they saw as good photographs—aesthetically pleasing, clearly focused on the desired center of interest, delivering complex cultural information. They used the exercise to explore and celebrate their familial and cultural identities, things that the university experience threatened to alienate them from. Class and the Siftr activity became both a safe space and a brave space for displaying one's cultural identity. The Siftr exercise, undertaken early in the semester, helped students get to know each other and themselves better and recognize the Madison campus as a place where they could continue to practice their cultural traditions as elements of personal, familial, religious, or cultural identity.

Since a goal for both courses is for students to be able to situate their own experiences within the larger context of American culture and history, and to understand the richness of everyday American life, Siftr provides a very concrete, visual, and locative framework for literally inserting their culture into a map of campus. And this sensation occurred not only for students whose cultures differed from Madison's white Upper Midwest majority culture; white Wisconsinites documented ways in which people varied in customs or practices from one Upper Midwest community to another, as an interesting post regarding the game of Duck, Duck, Goose illustrates, while also coyly referring to the drinking culture at UW.

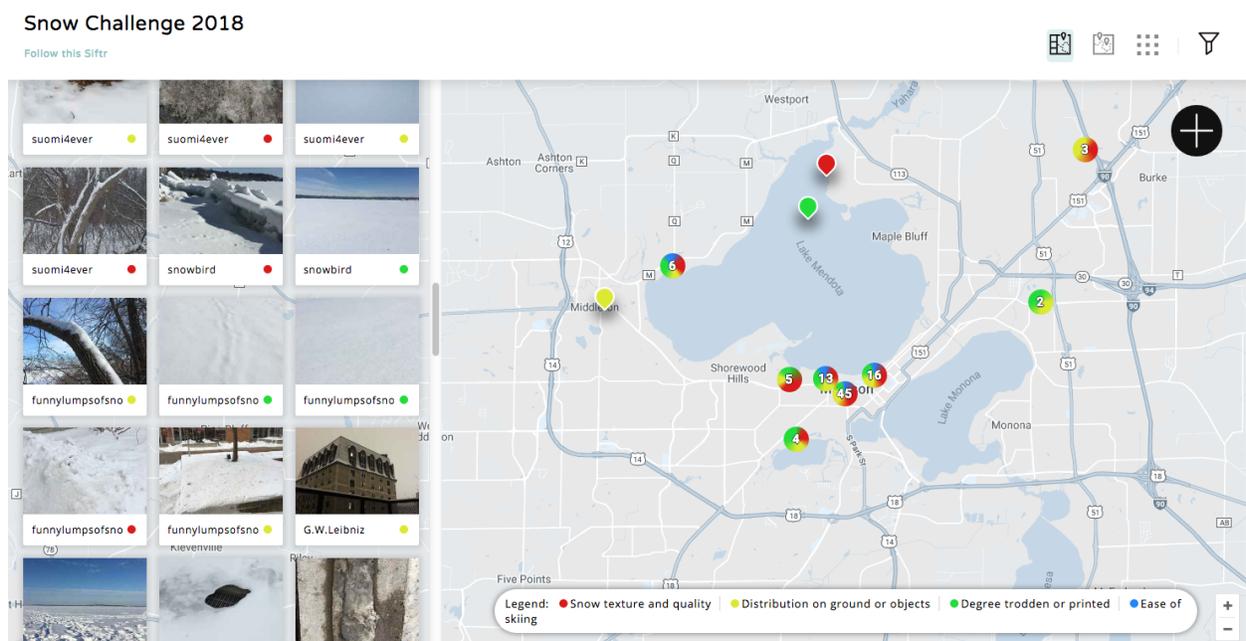


Through this set of exercises, students expanded their view of what constitutes folklore, became more familiar with the vocabulary folklorists use to talk about cultural expressions, and enhanced their understandings of identity, representation, and place.

### **Siftr at the Intermediate Level with Thomas DuBois: Snow Challenge 2018**

The Siftr project Snow Challenge 2018 illustrates how Siftr can be integrated into an intermediate-level undergraduate course, helping convey the complexities of place as shaped by weather and cultural interpretations of it. The project occurs in Folk 443: Sámi Culture, Yesterday and Today. Cross-listed with Scandinavian Studies, this course takes an interdisciplinary approach to the study of the Sámi people by examining Indigenous modes of expression and worldview, contemporary cultural and political activism and by exploring the connections to Indigenous peoples' movements throughout the world. In the 2018 iteration of this regularly taught course, the Snow Challenge assignment was worth 20 percent of students' grades and took the place of an exam for the first third of the course. During this first portion students learned through readings and lectures about Sámi (Lapp) language, traditional livelihoods, and material culture. They read, among other works, Nils Jernsletten's (1997) introduction to Sámi traditional vocabulary for snow, reindeer, and fish as well as Harald Gaski's (1999) evocative essay on how learning terms for snaring ptarmigan played a role in his relationship with Elders in his family and with his identity as a Sámi person. Jernsletten avoids exoticizing Sámi traditional knowledge, explaining it as pragmatic information for effective living in the environment and way of life that Sámi have traditionally occupied. He describes specialized snow terminology as a distillation of concrete observations of environmental conditions packaged into a lexicon that can then be shared from one person to the next in the course of daily activities. Gaski explores the expressive aspects of this lexical process, as Elders instill in children a particular understanding of the world along with specialized terms that help describe

and categorize the world from a culturally specific point of view. These points are important for the course as a whole, as they suggest the importance of finding ways to ensure person-to-person learning in colonial educational systems that tend to atomize and theorize. Many modern Sámi educational activists maintain that the keys to effective Sámi education are frameworks that allow students to talk with and learn from Elders in authentic situations. In an educational context that included—and in some cases continues to include—residential boarding schools where children live apart from their parents for part of the year, guaranteeing such contact is difficult. Further, with the widespread migration of Sámi away from Sámi traditional domicile areas to cities in the south of the Nordic countries such as Oslo, Stockholm, and Helsinki, the challenges of dislocation become even more pronounced.



I wanted the Snow Challenge assignment to help students sense some of these issues in a way that simply reading about the situations would not permit. I wanted them to think about the world they inhabit, the ways their culture(s) may influence their attitudes toward that world, and the ways in which people form relationships with their environment through naming and characterization. Since traditional knowledge tends to be learned not through abstracted processes like reading a textbook but rather through hands-on activities, I wanted my assignment and assessment system for the part of the course related to traditional knowledge to mirror a learn-by-doing education model. In this respect, Siftr proved an ideal vehicle for accomplishing these educational goals.

The Snow Challenge had two parts. In the first, running from mid-January to mid-February, students were tasked with photographing and geolocating on the [class Siftr site](#) examples of Lule



*Madda-bievla*. An absence of snow around the base of a tree. Image by ilovemuohka, Minneapolis.



*Vahtse*. Fresh light snow that makes fresh animal tracks easy to recognize. Image by klp, Madison.

Sámi snow terms, drawn from the lexical work of Yngve Ryd (2007). Because Ryd's text is in Swedish and Lule Sámi, I produced a short translation of a selection of 29 snow terms from the work and created a website containing photographs and explanations.<sup>1</sup> Crucial for the effectiveness of this informational website was its responsive design, so that it would look good and be easy to use on a cellphone as students walked outside searching for varieties of snow. The overview of snow terms, also discussed in a class lecture, introduced words for snow texture, quality, distribution, degree to which it is marked by animal tracks, and effectiveness for skiing. I selected terms that I believed would be fairly easy for students to recognize (e.g., *bulltje* for snow adhering to vertical surfaces like tree trunks or walls) and that corresponded to different times of winter. Some terms, for instance, such as *slievar* (light, fresh, powdery snow lying on the ground) would be readily visible only immediately after a fresh snowfall. Others, such as *maddabievla* (an open area free of snow around the trunk of a tree) would become visible only later in the winter, when the snow has settled and begun to melt. Since winters in Wisconsin have become much less predictable in the past decade than previously, I needed a set of terms that would cover snow conditions over a range of different stages of winter. Students were permitted to work in teams, and they used team names instead of their actual names in their posts. They were required to post five images of snow and post comments on the posts of three other teams. I made screenshots of particularly fun or interesting images that students posted and displayed these in my PowerPoint presentations at the beginning of each lecture during the assignment period to help build student interest in the assignment and understanding of the tasks involved. Students enjoyed seeing their posts become elements of the lecture and were eager to see one or more of their images featured at the beginning of class.

The second part of the assignment asked students to reflect on what they had learned from the assignment, relating it to course readings and lectures as well as to their experiences interacting with the winter environment of the Upper Midwest. The resulting essays displayed a wealth of insights that reflected a richer integration of the ideas of traditional knowledge than students might have gotten only through reading. They showed an awareness

not only of the functionality of Sámi traditional knowledge but also of changes in their personal outlooks that resulted from doing the Snow Challenge, as comments from four students attest:

When snow is on the ground, it was just seen as snow to me. Nothing more, nothing less. But the snow challenge and this class [have] morphed my mind into looking into snow much differently.

A major theme in Sámi traditional knowledge is being able to identify how nature can both impact your survival and be impacted by your activities. One method of identifying these occurrences is through language... Observing these different snow types reveals how they may be used or what they may indicate to the observer. As I was taking photographs of snow, I was able to articulate different snow types that I have seen my whole life but have never had the words to describe their unique features. After learning snow terminology, I could more quickly identify snow types... I found that having a wide range of snow terminology made me feel more connected to my own natural surroundings. This connectivity showcases the importance of language in preserving the Sámi culture and traditional knowledge.

Lectures on language, culture, religion, and more have drawn our attention to a way of life that is so very different from our own; however, for some, it has opened our eyes to the workings of how we ourselves live. Not only that, but it has caused a perspective change, one in which some of us—myself included—have begun to notice little things in our day-to-day lives that we may not have consciously noticed before and how those things affect us.

This project, as well as the readings and lectures these past few weeks, have really enlightened my understanding of traditional knowledge. Before this class, it was my understanding that traditional knowledge does not change. I assumed that this is what makes it traditional. Furthermore, being a science major, it absolutely



*Släbsát*. Slushy, wet snow. Image by Honeybadger, Madison.



*Bulltje*. Snow adhering to a vertical object, such as a tree trunk. Image by Suomi4ever, Madison.

has been a longstanding belief of mine that science is far superior to what could be summed up as “old beliefs of people who lived in the woods hundreds of years ago.” Ironically, I have always had a respect for laymen, who have a great understanding of what specifically they work with, even if they do not have a scientific background. I consider my grandfather, who never set foot on a college campus, to be one of the most intelligent people I know. He has spent most of his life as a farmer and logger and knows almost everything there is to know about the flora and fauna that reside on his land. He taught me the difference between all of the different kinds of evergreens, as well as all of the fish in the local lakes. Grandpa knows which berries and wild mushrooms are safe for eating, where not to step in a swamp, and how to track the places where the deer are hiding. The fact that I could not fathom that Indigenous people have an even greater understanding of the plants and animals around them, down to effective medical treatments, in retrospect astounds me.

As these reflections abundantly illustrate, Siftr allowed my students not only to learn more about Sámi culture than they would have by reading alone, but also to think about their own lives, sources of information, and understandings of culture and community. One learning goal of the course calls for “a consciousness of self and other” and states: “Awareness of self is inextricably linked with awareness and empathy toward the perspectives of others.” In learning Sámi snow terms, and applying them to a Wisconsin landscape using Siftr, students come to recognize Sámi views of the environment and also their own. They realize that locale and culture go hand in hand, and that learning happens not only inside a classroom or library but also when outside, interacting with the environment or its various plants and animals. In a course offered at the intermediate level, in which students are expected to integrate their learning more fully into an overall educational outlook, the locative, kinetic, and integrative aspects of Siftr provide opportunities for learning that are substantively different from those that can be achieved in a lecture hall or seated at a seminar table. Siftr offers a tool for a substantively different kind of learning.



*Slievar*. Light, fresh snow lying on the ground.  
Image by Apaesos, Madison.

## **Siftr at the Advanced Level with Marcus Cederström: Nordic Migration and the Labor Movement**

I turned to Siftr to find a way to engage students with the study of historic folklore—specifically the laborlore of Nordic migrants to the U.S. in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. While there are mapping applications freely available, Google Maps comes to mind, Siftr’s focus on image-based geotagging provided an easy way to incorporate fieldwork and place-based research into the assignment. Rather than ask students to document historic sites of protest or labor unrest, for example, students apply Siftr across time and space to document the unremarkable sites of the labor movement by following immigrant labor activists and their migration to and through the U.S. By documenting the ways that Nordic migrants engaged in the labor movement, we can better understand the history of the working class in the U.S. as well as their vernacular expressions.

My Scandinavian Studies 520 and Folklore 530 course, Nordic Migrations and the Labor Movement, is a blended course with upper-level undergraduate students alongside graduate students. All students are asked to complete preparatory work online before attending class. Class time is designed specifically with active learning in mind, focusing on small group discussions, large class discussions, and a variety of in-class formative assessments. In my courses, I identify three or four content learning objectives and three or four skills learning objectives. I designed this Siftr to help students achieve one objective from each category:

### **Content Learning Objectives**

Students will gain awareness of history’s impact on the present by demonstrating an understanding of the vernacular expressions of immigrants involved in the labor movement, specifically in a Nordic context.

### **Skills Learning Objectives**

Students will be able to apply folkloristic research methodologies ethically in collaboration with at least two of the following: archives, libraries, community organizations, and community members.

Titled [Nordic Migration and the Labor Movement](#), this particular Siftr follows specific Nordic migrants from across the Atlantic as they engage with the labor movement in this country. Students, working in small groups, are assigned an organization with members who were active in the labor movement in the late 1800s or early 1900s. Some students may work with a specific union, others may work with a labor newspaper, and still others may be assigned a labor temple or hall or even a temperance organization. Once a group has been assigned an organization, each student will choose three Nordic immigrant members from that organization using membership rolls or historic minutes from archival sources. Although each student will be responsible for following the history of just one person, I require students to identify three potential candidates to ensure that the student is able to complete the assignment despite the challenges of conducting historical research on working-class immigrants.

The Siftr offers five categories to choose from: Danish, Finnish, Norwegian, Swedish, and Other Nordic, with Other Nordic allowing for smaller immigrant groups like the Faroese, the Icelandic,

and the Sámi to be represented. That Siftr only allows five categories does limit the application for a further expansion of this project to include other countries.

Beginning first with the address of the labor organization from which people are chosen, students conduct research to follow an immigrant from the U.S. back to their home in the Nordic countries. Each student creates five additional points of reference in the Siftr, allowing them to visualize the different paths immigrants traveled to arrive in the same place. Using archives, historic newspapers, online databases, and secondary sources, students create a timeline of an immigrant labor activist's life. That timeline is location-based and features images available in the public domain or through Creative Commons licensing along with contextualizing information in the form of short captions that include dates and information explaining why this particular place is important (Did the person live here? Did the person work here? Strike here? Attend union meetings here? Write a poem about this particular address?) as well as basic citations.



MarcusCederstrom  
4/2/2018, 9:26:55 AM



Signe Aurell in front of what is most likely 2213 29th Ave. S., one of her known addresses in Minneapolis. The image is from page 26 of Bokstugan, issue #16, 1921. Bokstugan was an irregularly published periodical out of Chicago that featured left-leaning writers. However, not all of the work was explicitly political, and the periodical published non-fiction, fiction, poetry, and scientific articles. Aurell wrote several poems which were published in Bokstugan.

Category

Swedish

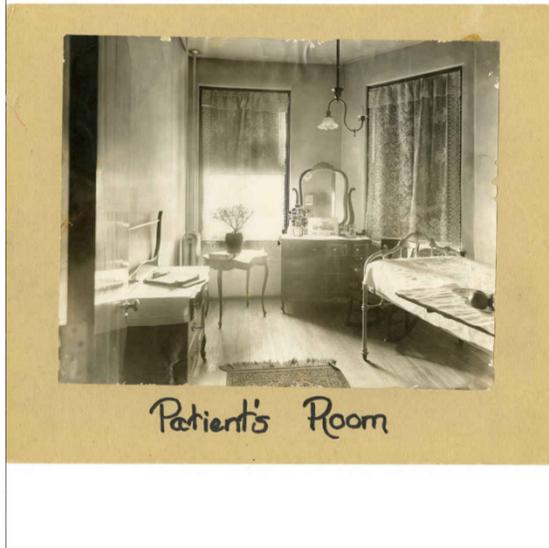
No comments.



This assignment carries a high risk of failure, so the assignment is not worth a large percentage of a student's grade. Conducting research about specific individuals who lived over a hundred years ago can be difficult, frustrating, and sometimes unfruitful. That is a feature, not a bug. In line with both the content learning objective (Students will gain awareness of history's impact on the present by demonstrating an understanding of the vernacular expressions of immigrants involved in the labor

movement, specifically in a Nordic context) and the skills learning objective (Students will be able to apply folkloristic research methodologies ethically in collaboration with at least two of the following: archives, libraries, community organizations, and community members), this Siftr project aims to teach students about how immigration influenced social movements, like the labor movement, on a national scale while also teaching about the challenges of connecting folkloristic research methods to historical projects and giving them the skills to overcome those challenges.

It's important to note that this assignment is scaffolded so that the research students are conducting here forms the basis of the documentary project that they turn in at the end of the semester. The Siftr is a tangible check-in of the student's research progress and students present one of their photos to the class. This gives students the opportunity to see what their classmates have added and examine a macro view that includes the work they are doing on a very micro level. Because of the scaffolded nature of this assignment, assessment is left to the students, similar to the Folk 100 and Folk 230 classes. Students are asked, among other things, why they chose a specific image, why they chose to include the caption they did, and how this particular person fits into the context of the class.



MarcusCederstrom  
4/4/2018, 12:59:23 PM



In 1913, Signe Aurell spent over a week at the Swedish Hospital in Minneapolis, including Christmas Eve and Christmas Day. It was her first Christmas in the United States. She was released from the hospital sometime before New Years Day.

Demolished in 1976, the Swedish Hospital used to stand at 723 S 10th Avenue. Today, US Bank Stadium, where the Minnesota Vikings play, is just north of the lot.

Image citation: 1915. "Private Patient Room at the Swedish Hospital, Minneapolis, Minnesota." Hennepin Medical History Center, Accessed April 2, 2018.  
<https://reflections.mndigital.org/catalog/hcm:2>

Category

● Swedish

Of course, a project like this can present ethical issues. Tracking individuals, especially immigrants, involved in the labor movement has a nefarious history. In conjunction with readings, films, and news articles about that history, we discuss as a class some of those issues, focusing on why taking a historical perspective when examining social movements can be incredibly beneficial to our understanding of history as well as our lives today.

While the right choice for this particular project, Siftr does have limitations like most mapping applications. Because this project is designed to stretch across the Atlantic, zooming in and out of the map can prove time consuming. More important to this particular project is the inability to sift by historical time. Unfortunately, the application does not currently allow for backdating. Students cannot, for example, date a poem to May 1, 1913, but instead must include that information in the commentary. This limitation would be difficult to overcome if expanding the project outside the specific timeframe that I defined in class. That said, with clearly defined categories and timeframe, Siftr provides a visual tool to see individual immigrants' lives in a broader context—in this case in relation to the labor movement—and to examine folklore studies from a historical perspective, while actively engaging students in the necessary research skills.

### Your Turn: Authoring a Siftr for Your Next Class

Given that Siftr is a Wisconsin product, and because of Ruth Olson's continuous collaboration with the Field Day lab, the team of developers who created Siftr (and co-authors of this paper), it was natural that Siftr would become a recurrent element of the curriculum in the UW Folklore Program. But Siftr's boundaries do not end at Madison's State Street or the shores of Lake Mendota. Siftr can be used in any classroom anywhere in the world for free. We suggest that folklorists at other institutions and in other course contexts may wish to come up with a Siftr that suits their course content, objectives, and methods. (See pg. 29 for more tips.)

In closing, we would like to relate a story of a single image. In an attempt to make an enticing and accessible database where UW students can find out information about each of the many majors and minors (called "certificates") available, UW personnel chose an image to display in connection with the Folklore Program. The image is a hand holding a paperback version of the works of

## FOLKLORE, CERTIFICATE



The certificate in folklore is available to students working for a baccalaureate degree in any UW–Madison school or college, and to Special students. The purpose of the certificate is to acquaint students with the nature of folklore, its study, its public presentation, and its relations to a range of human experiences, intellectual currents, and professional endeavors.

Christopher Marlowe atop a spiral notebook and what looks like a big unopened reference book. While at first glance a seemingly innocuous and even appealing image, the UW Folklore Program staff became troubled by the figure. Although reading is an important part of what folklorists may do (as it is for biologists or economists or mathematicians), reading a volume of an author’s poetry or plays did not seem particularly illustrative of what folklore research is all about. After much work, UW folklorists managed

to get the image changed to show a folklore interview. Where the old image seemed to go out of its way to delocalize itself, offering few clues regarding the reader's identity, location, or culture, the replacement image at least shows an element of folklore's work. But suffice it to say, a Siftr screenshot is a more fitting visual display for the Folklore Certificate. In its constantly shifting, multi-centered, and pluralistic nature, Siftr models the sorts of work we do as folklorists, and the sort of research we seek to invite and initiate our students into through our courses. Ethnographic data gets created by folklorists, processed, and then presented. Siftr models this entire process easily and effectively. Where the student in the UW-approved image reads a static book in some unidentified library or coffee shop, the *actual* UW folklore student is traipsing across town, noticing culture, photographing, interviewing, comparing, and concretely geolocating phenomena in a real-world, real-time setting. The folklore student not only *receives* information but helps *create* and *distribute* it. The activity pushes against the universalizing tendencies of university education, *localizing* experience in the way that it actually occurs in people’s lives. We hope that this article allows our folklorist colleagues elsewhere to sense some of the exciting ways in which Madison folklorists aim to instruct students about our field, and we hope that our stories help to inspire you to use Siftr in new ways and in new assignments in your folklore courses.

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#### Endnote

1. See [http://tadubois.com/Muohta/Snow\\_Challenge\\_index.html](http://tadubois.com/Muohta/Snow_Challenge_index.html). I mounted this site as a subpage on my personal website, but it would be easy (and perhaps more effective) to use a simple WordPress platform for presenting such information approachably and effectively.

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#### URLs

<https://siftr.org/folklorerules/>  
<https://fielddaylab.org/>  
[www.siftr.org](http://www.siftr.org)  
<https://siftr.org/30806>  
<https://siftr.org/NordicLaborMigration/>