



Nê tse kurutłtsara.
I am going to propose riddles to you
Tła-dzor-karas'āna
Here is a riddle:
Nonur radarast'ol.
I go reaching beyond the rocks.

Creative Traditions

Creative Texts

Nuestra música preciosa
Our precious music
Tenemos que propagar
We must spread
Y nuestros víreles cantos
As our great songs
Por nuestra raza hablarán
Will speak for our people

JOURNAL OF
FOLKLORE AND
EDUCTION

2021: Volume 8
Sandy Hébert LaBry, Guest Editor



About the Cover Photos: (L-R, top-bottom) *Mama*, documented by Heather Shirey in Simmons, et al.; *Winter Story Mat* detail by Karen Ann Hoffman in Hoffman; Riddle from Smith and Kancewick; *Viaje* excerpt (qtd. in Mendoza 1954) in Fernández; and *Pieces of Now* detail by Haus of Lacks and the Collective GSO in Hart.

Journal of Folklore and Education (ISSN 2573-2072)

A publication of Local Learning: The National Network for Folk Arts in Education

Editors: Paddy Bowman
Lisa Rathje

Guest Editor: Sandy Hébert LaBry
Review Editor: Rebecca Smith

Design: Lisa Rathje

The *Journal of Folklore and Education* is a peer-reviewed, open-access journal published annually by Local Learning: The National Network for Folk Arts in Education. Local Learning links folk culture specialists and educators nationwide, advocating for full inclusion of folk and traditional arts and culture in our nation's education. We believe that "local learning"—the traditional knowledge and processes of learning that are grounded in community life—is of critical importance to the effective education of students and to the vigor of our communities and society. JFE publishes work representing ethnographic approaches that tap the knowledge and life experience of students, their families, community members, and educators in K-12, college, museum, and community education.

Journal of Folklore and Education Editorial Board:

Norma Cantú	Bror Marcus Leal Cederström	Lisa Falk	Robert Forloney	Rosemary Hathaway
Jackie McGrath	Lucinda Megill Legendre	Sandy Hébert LaBry	Rossina Zamora Liu	Vanessa Navarro Maza

Local Learning does not and shall not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion (creed), gender, gender expression, age, national origin (ancestry), disability, marital status, sexual orientation, or military status in any of its activities or operations. As a publication of Local Learning, JFE is committed to providing an inclusive and welcoming environment for diverse authors and readers.



Local Learning is committed to fair use and open access of educational materials. We as Publisher also look to protect the work that we publish from unauthorized, commercial use. JFE is freely available to individuals and institutions and is housed on the Local Learning website www.locallearningnetwork.org. Authors grant to the *Journal of Folklore and Education* the right to license all work with the exception of only alternatively copyrighted media under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0>. This license lets others remix, tweak, and build upon your work noncommercially, as long as they credit you the Author and us the Publisher, and license their new creations under the identical terms.

Local Learning

56 East First Street
New York, NY 10003

Lisa Rathje, Executive Director, lisa@locallearningnetwork.org
Paddy Bowman, Founding Director, pbbowman@gmail.com

The Local Learning Board:

Maribel Alvarez, University of Arizona
Betty Belanus, Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage
Doug Blandy, University of Oregon
Bror Marcus Leal Cederström, University of Wisconsin–Madison
Linda Deafenbaugh, Folk Arts-Cultural Treasures Charter School
Mike Knoll, HistoryMiami Museum
Terry Liu, Retired
Ellen McHale, New York Folklore
Shanendra Nowell, Oklahoma State University
Anne Pryor, Wisconsin Arts Board (Emeritus)

www.locallearningnetwork.org



The Journal of Folklore and Education is supported in part by an award from the National Endowment for the Arts.

Journal of Folklore and Education (2021: Vol. 8)

Table of Contents

Creative Texts | Creative Traditions

Sandy Hébert LaBry, Guest Editor ~ 2021: Volume 8

INTRODUCTION

by Sandy Hébert LaBry

1

La grégue de ma grand-mère — My Grandmother's Drip-Coffee Pot

3

MAKE THE ANVIL THEIRS: WHEN POETRY MEETS FOLKLORE

by Dennie P. Wolf

4

Taught in the light of folklore's values—context, use, candor, imagination, and love, writing poems that notice, praise, and witness, young people can forge language as an act of consequence and resistance.

FROM FRIED CHICKEN TO FASCINATION WITH HOME: HOW LEARNING ABOUT CULTURALLY ROOTED POETRY FORMS CAN TRANSFORM CHILDREN'S UNDERSTANDING OF HOME

by Samira Sadeque

11

In learning about different global traditions of oral poetry, young students build language to form their questions about home.

HEARING BETWEEN THE WORDS: TOWARD THE SLOW STUDY OF TRADITIONAL RIDDLES

by David E. K. Smith and Mary Kancewick

15

This model offers a shared experience for teachers and students to work collaboratively to “hear between the words”—and between the worlds—through cultural context and interpretation of the cultural capsule that a traditional riddle provides.

YO VENGO DE...

by Vivian Muñoz and George Zavala

24

A Spanish teacher and a teaching artist reflect on their residency and provide activities for students to write and make art about where they come from.

WRITTEN IN BEADS: STORYTELLING AS TRANSMISSION OF HAUDENOSAUNEE CULTURE

by Karen Ann Hoffman

30

A National Heritage Fellow shares her stunning raised beadwork and describes her responsibility to understand deeply the teaching and traditions that she is given so the voice of the beadwork is strong and clear.

WRITING MEMOIRS PROMPTED BY FAMILY PHOTOS

Classroom Connection: A Graphic Organizer for Writing with Family Photos

by Sandy Hébert LaBry, Guest Editor

39

Inspired by two writers' memoirs, this graphic organizer suggests ways to read photos as texts and provides prompts for writing about family photos.

PILGRIMAGE

by Vicie A. Rolling

40

Author's Note

42

FOUR EXCERPTS FROM *CANÍCULA: SNAPSHOTS OF A GIRLHOOD EN LA FRONTERA*

by Norma Elia Cantú

Rocking Horse

44

Tino

45

China Poblana One

46

Blue Stroller

47

"HEY, FOLKLORISTS!" FISHERPOETS AND PUBLIC FOLKLORISTS: PRACTICING PARTNERSHIP

by Riki Saltzman

48

The annual FisherPoets Gathering celebrates occupational folklife through creativity and camaraderie and provides context for two dynamic fisherpoets' writing.

FISHERPOETRY: AN OCCUPATIONAL TRADITION

by Jon Broderick

56

How to Tell a Good One

59

For Henry

Classroom Connection: How to Write an Occupational Folklife Poem

60

EN ROUTE TO TOGIAK

by Moe Bowstern

61

En Route to Togiak

62

West Bering Sea, 1996

CORRIDOS: (MOSTLY) TRUE STORIES IN VERSE WITH MUSIC

by Celestino Fernández

63

An important part of the Mexican and Mexican American oral tradition, corridos document the experiences of people whose voice is too often unheard and offer rich ways of interpreting, illustrating, and writing these traditional songs.

Classroom Connection: Composing a Corrido

71

Classroom Connection: Corrido Writing Contest

72

STUMBLING INTO FOLKLORE: USING FAMILY STORIES IN PUBLIC SPEAKING

by Bonny McDonald and Alexandria Hatchett

74

Featuring student work and reflections from Camryn Johnson, Haley Priest, Kennedy Johnson, Paxton Ballard, Madelyn LeDoux, Sierra Fox, and Anna Grace Franques

The incorporation of folklore deeply enriched the introductory speech unit of a Public Speaking course, improving the quality of student work, increasing engagement with course content, and enhancing students' cultural competence. This article describes the user-friendly, adaptable assignment, shares struggles and successes, and offers takeaways for educators.

BLACK HAIR AS METAPHOR EXPLORED THROUGH DUOETHNOGRAPHY AND ARTS-BASED RESEARCH

by Kathy J. Brown and Lynnette M. Gilbert

85

Through duoethnographic, critical arts-based research, which began as a presentation for the 2021 National Art Education Association Convention, the authors examine hair as text and sites of identity/respectability politics, positionality, rites of passage, liminality, and selfhood. Through the lens of African American women professors of art education, they unpack complexities of Black women's hair stories as positional metaphors and share a Culturally Responsive Pedagogy lesson.

Classroom Connection: Hair Ethnography as a Culturally Responsive Visual Art Lesson

101

A MATERIAL CULTURE APPROACH TO ACADEMIC WRITING: PROTESTS, PANDEMIC, AND COMMUNITY-ENGAGED PEDAGOGY

by Incononata Inserra

107

A folklore-studies approach to the college writing classroom enabled university students to appreciate and create cultural texts through a "material culture" course theme conveying the importance of folklore to explore locally engaged, community-driven topics. This approach was especially useful as students made sense of the 2020 pandemic and Black Lives Matter protests in Richmond, Virginia.

Classroom Connection:

Material Culture Observation and Interviewing Exercise

117

Visual Analysis Exercise

118

Neighborhood Observation Tour

119

Memorial Building Exercise

120

INSPIRED BY CALAVERAS: INVOLVING MIDDLE-SCHOOL STUDENTS IN WRITING ABOUT EL DÍA DE LOS MUERTOS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

by Ethan Sharp with Carolina Quiroga and Ashlee Collins

122

The collaboration of a museum educator and a teaching artist encouraged discovery and experimentation with writing and performing calaveras in museum educational programs, promoting greater reflection about el Día de los Muertos.

Classroom Connection: Guiding Questions for Writing *Calaveras*

132

WALLS ARE NOT BLACK AND WHITE: STUDENT EXPLORATION OF BORDER WALLS THROUGH CREATIVE WRITING

by Lisa Falk and Marge Pellegrino

133

*Employing the virtual version of the exhibition *A History of Walls: The Borders We Build*, the authors developed a creative writing and visual literacy workshop series for high school students based on people's complex relationships with border walls. This project allowed Arizona State Museum to make meaningful community connections during Covid-19 shutdowns.*

Classroom Connection: Border Wall Resources

146

PIECES OF NOW: ARTS BORN OF PROTEST

by Carol Ghiorso Hart

149

Creative arts born of protest, in the context of a museum exhibition, can instruct and inspire by expanding notions of what art is and what it can do. The multimedia creations in a Greensboro History Museum's exhibition are expressive individual artworks and social acts. They show how a single voice and vision can connect to larger communities and historical moments to make a difference and lend agency, especially when museum and school staff listen to those voices.

THE URBAN ART MAPPING PROJECT: A DISCUSSION OF STREET ART PRESERVATION AND ANTIRACISM

by Frederica Simmons, Amber Delgado, Rachel Weiher, Eve Wasyluk, Adem Ojulu, Olivia Tjokrosetio, Shukrani Nangwala, Heather Shirey, Paul Lorah, and David Todd Lawrence

156

As a multidisciplinary, multigenerational, and multiracial research team, the Urban Art Mapping Project collaborates with and in support of community voices through vernacular art in the streets. While street art may be ephemeral and fleeting, it can reveal immediate responses to events and make externally visible what people think, believe, or feel, individually and collectively. In the context of crisis, street art can reach a global audience, transform and activate urban space, and foster a sustained critical dialogue.

JOURNAL OF FOLKLORE AND EDUCATION REVIEWS

***Intercultural Education, Folklore, and the Pedagogical Thought of Rachel Davis DuBois*, by Jan Rosenberg**

James I. Deutsch

174

***Teaching Gloria E. Anzaldúa: Pedagogy and Practice for Our Classrooms and Communities*. Margaret Cantú-Sánchez, Candace de León-Zepeda, and Norma E. Cantú, eds.**

Jennifer Barajas

175

***Memory, Art and Aging: A Resource and Activity Guide*. Jon Kay, Project Director and Principal Investigator**

Susan Eleuterio

176

Review of Digital Resources: *Belouga*, *Oddizzi*, and *Touchable Earth*

Sarah McCartt-Jackson

178

2022 JOURNAL OF FOLKLORE AND EDUCATION

Death, Loss, and Remembrance Across Cultures: A Role for Folklore in Education

A Call for Submissions | Mark E. Helmsing and Bretton A. Varga, Guest Editors

180

Journal of Folklore and Education (2021: Vol. 8)



These Days

whatever you have to say, leave
the roots on, let them
dangle

And the dirt

Just to make clear
where they come from

—Charles Olson

Mid-last-century, before Interstate 10 sliced through swampy basins and bayou-lined prairies in Louisiana to tether California to Florida, French was already beginning to fade as the vernacular in our rural, post-WWII community. However, my family still drew upon its Acadian and European French roots linguistically and upheld cultural traditions surrounding family, Catholicism, and land. French was my father's first language. Even in our English-speaking household, conversations were salted and peppered with French. When Daddy wanted to visit friends in the evening, he proposed making a little *veillée*. Any random desire was expressed as an *envie*. We never asked for French toast, but we did enjoy *pain perdu* for breakfast while my grandparents made their coffee in a *grégue*. I heard French spoken among family, in church, between my dad and his hunting buddies or friends from his youth, and on television. Each Saturday afternoon before the *Lawrence Welk Show* aired, our local CBS affiliate featured music by a venerable Cajun accordionist and his band who performed waltzes and two-steps sung in French.

Our seasonal round of traditions included partaking in harvest festivals that promoted agricultural products and contests in towns all around Louisiana's Acadiana region. For example, my sisters and I happily entered our "yam-inals"—fanciful animals—created from oddly shaped sweet potatoes in the "Yambilee" contest. At a festival to our west celebrating all things pork, pretty young women vied to be the Swine Queen, a respectable title, although somewhat unattractive to the ear. At the nearby Cotton Festival's *Tournoi*, local men costumed as knights on horseback attempted at galloping speed to lance suspended rings the size of bangle bracelets, broadly labeled as the symbolic enemies of cotton, such as nylon, flood, and the boll weevil. Our Catholic Lenten season began after celebrating *Mardi Gras*, either with make-believe kings and queens parading in town or the drama of masked *paillasses* chasing chickens in the country and begging ingredients

for a communal gumbo. On Easter Sunday (*Pâques*), we pocked or knocked decorated Easter eggs to see whose would victoriously remain uncracked. Christmas morning saw dozens of family members—from my great-uncles and aunts to more distant cousins—coalesce into a band of roving revelers toasting the day with a drink at each other's homes. A great many of these traditions are ongoing. This was the field where the small seeds of my life were planted and nourished in a mix of French and English soil.

Folklorists, linguists, and historians continue to research and document this seedbed. But more personally, the language patterns and traditions passed on to me live in the landscape of my creative writing, mostly in the form of poetry. Grounded in one language or the other, in seasonal or religious traditions, material culture, work, or characters I've known, my poems reveal my roots dangling with a little dirt left on. In this journal issue, authors show us how other genres of creative text can sprout from folklore. They share ways to use the folklorist's tools of close observation, interviewing, and deep listening to trigger connections, to explore, and to craft varied texts. The genres are as diverse as *corridos* commemorating heroes, outlaws, and notable events in Spanish; memoirs prompted by family or childhood photographs; hair ethnographies in word and picture; family stories rendered as speeches; public and vernacular art and writings that call for social action, visited through collaborative documentation and archiving of material culture; *calaveras* verses that portray the living as dead; riddles to ponder and decipher; myths told in beadwork; writings reflecting on border walls—both real and metaphorical; and an occupational tradition found in FisherPoetry. You will also see how a museum presents protest art, interviews, and conversations to capture history happening now; how exploration of memorials in the writing process decolonizes a classroom; how a classroom artist's residency delves into social emotional learning and finding identity through writing *Yo vengo de/I am from...* poems; how learning about culturally rooted poems can transform children's understanding of home; and how writing poetry using folklore's values of context, candor, use, imagination, and love helps students to craft text with authentic purpose and consequences. The strategies offer readers opportunities to consider how the merely personal can contain the universal, how to make genuine connections, how to work toward equity, or how to strengthen social bonds. Additionally, there are classroom connections for several articles. I hope that you enjoy reading this issue and engaging yourself and others in some of the strategies for generating creative text from the seeds of folklore. I think you will be very satisfied if you do!

Sandy Hébert LaBry is a veteran educator from Lafayette, Louisiana, who has taught and administered educational programs in English, French and pedagogy at multiple levels in the K-16 continuum. She has facilitated writing workshops and, as a school district administrator, employed the National Writing Project's teachers-teaching-teachers model system-wide. She has worked with Local Learning projects in regional schools to integrate folk artists and teaching artists in instruction. Her creative compositions document and transform her own lived traditions, objects of material culture, and interviews with cultural stewards into creative texts exploring such themes as identity, community, relationships, and change.



La grégue de ma grand-mère

My Grandmother's Drip-Coffee Pot

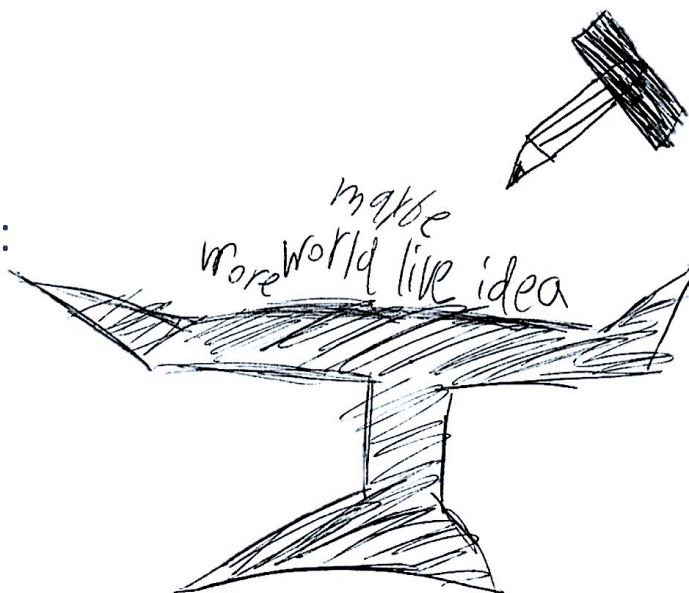
*La grégue de ma grand-mère
reste toujours sur mon fourneau
un don de ma mère sans recette
mais avec une connaissance des rites
de faire le café
dans une manière patiente
lentement
trois cuillères de l'eau bouillante à la fois
et puis trois cuillères de plus
jusqu'à ce que la grégue soit remplie
juste comme nous avons vécu nos vies
nous
ma grand-mère
ma mère
et moi
au fur
et à mesure
comme faire le café dans
la grégue*

My grandmother's drip-coffee pot
still sits on my stove
a gift from my mother without a recipe
but with an understanding of the rituals
of making coffee
in a patient way
slowly
three teaspoons of boiling water at a time
and then three teaspoons more
until the pot is full
just as we have lived our lives
we
my grandmother,
my mother
and me
little
by
little
like making coffee in the
drip pot

—Sandy Hébert LaBry

Make the Anvil Theirs: When Poetry Meets Folklore

by Dennie P. Wolf



If you said poetry doesn't matter, you would be wrong. Poems praise, preserve languages, name injustices, mock tyrants, and give voice. At this moment, we live surrounded by powerful short poetic forms doing just this kind of work: protest signs ("Science not silence"), posters ("Black Lives Matter"), T-shirts (Trans-national), song lyrics ("The Blacker the Berry"), spoken word, and Twitter wit (Lamar 1993). Beginning with the force of these everyday, everywhere forms, and moving out to other kinds of poetry, young people could learn to "do language" as Toni Morrison once said: using their words to call down injustice, raise questions, and conjure a different future (1993).

But not as poetry is usually taught. Open a language arts textbook or look at online worksheets and see how young people are introduced to forms like *haiku* and *renga*. There you will find poetry taught as algorithm:

Renga is an ancient Japanese style of poetry made up of stanzas. It is usually created by several people, each one taking a turn coming up with a stanza that relates to a single theme for the whole poem. The first stanza is three lines long. The first line is 5 syllables, the second is 7, and the third is 5. The second stanza is two lines long, both are 7 syllables each. The poem goes back and forth between the three- and two-line stanzas and ends with a two-line stanza. (Education.com n.d.)

This is *renga* as pattern, lifted out of its history and use. It is not the centuries-old contest, played out in front of scribes and panels of poet-judges. Gone are the crowds of thousands who traveled miles to watch contestants battling within the confines of form and theme as the stanzas mounted up. There is none of the suspense or legend of the famous poet Bashō and friends delivering

The work described in this article was fueled by teaching artists, classroom teachers, and students in the participating Queens public schools. It would not have been possible without my colleagues on the staff of City Lore. All of us are grateful for the generous funding from the Pierre and Tana Matisse Foundation, the National Endowment for the Arts, and a U.S. Department of Education Arts Education Model Development and Dissemination Grant.

hundred-stanza *renga*. Nor is there any sense of the trans-subjective links to a subject and mood that guide the collaborating poets who create the "rolling" of a *renga* (Ogawa 2009).

Or consider what happens to the song lyrics of "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot." They become the hunting ground for identifying figurative language ("What does the River Jordan stand for?" "What are the many meanings of home?"). In this format, metaphor and allusion are vocabulary words, not strategies for double-coding resistance silenced by enslavement, then sharecropping, and now the persisting structures of racism. Taught this way, poetry lessons reveal how poetry *works*, but not what poetry *does*. By teaching the cogs and wheels of poetry, we cut young people off from understanding a poem as an opportunity to notice, speak out, and choose words in ways that will make them heard. Thus, we narrow and blanch what could be a major route to learning to *do* language.

However, the work of City Lore, a center for urban folk culture in New York City, suggests that we have options for teaching poetry that come from outside conventional definitions of literature and literacy. For the last five years, City Lore has brought extended poetry residencies to classrooms throughout Queens, one of the most culturally and linguistically diverse regions of the city. These residencies, Roots, Routes, and Rhythms and Homer 2 Hip Hop, have been carried out by a corps of teaching artists who are rooted in oral traditions ranging from the duels of Lebanese *zajal* and the *extempo* traditions of Trinidad and Tobago, to contemporary hip hop battles (City Lore 2021). In long-term residencies, these artists do their work in ways that are deeply informed by core folklore tenets: the power of context; the beauty of everyday use; the anchor of candor, public imagination, and love.

The Power of Context

In folklore, objects or performances get their meaning from context. Place the lyrics of "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot" in the context of 19th-century chattel enslavement, and it is no longer a hunting ground for figurative language. It is the work of unnamed musicians, passed along orally in a world where it was a crime to teach enslaved people to read or write. In that context, it carries the legend of being one of Harriet Tubman's favorites, whispered or sung softly, but expectantly, to announce the coming of "a conductor" who would lead enslaved people North. It uses the imagery of a Christian journey to heaven to project their fierce determination to reach the free territories.

Baba Israel and Grace Galu teach hip hop poetry in this context, tracing its roots from spirituals, through the blues, into Northern cities where jazz and popular music became the spoken word of hip hop, continuing the tradition of people using their words to resist given conditions and frame alternate worlds. Together and independently, they teach hip hop in that context. As Baba insists, "People took what they had—their bodies, their voices, the light poles in the streets—and created a music and an oral tradition that we are still listening to." They reference and honor this tradition of oral improvisation by teaching beat boxing and insisting that everyone does it as entry and interlude to reading their own and each other's work. Moreover, they insist on the generational and communitarian values that grow out of this tradition. When two groups of girls started dueling over their team names, each accusing the other of stealing their ideas, Baba intervened, "There's no stealing here. You got it from me, and I got it from my teachers, and they got it from the ones

that came before. You are part of a tradition. Honor it. Think about how we begin with a cipher, taking turns with what we've brought that day. Find names that say what your group is going to bring to that tradition." And they do.

The Beauty of Everyday Use

In folklore you can't understand a ukulele, a falconer's glove, or a kimono until you see how people use those objects to claim an identity or sustain the meaning of a tradition. You have to witness the musical evening, watch the hunt, or see women enrobing one another. An essential part of the beauty of everyday use is that it is live, daily, and constantly evolving. Poetry is no different. *Renga* poems may have begun centuries ago, scribed in ink on unfurling scrolls, but during the pandemic they returned on the back of cellphone technology, with writers linking their experiences of isolation via emailed stanzas that roll forward using the shared imagery of birds:

Jealous of two birds
perching (not even) one wing's
full distance apart?

Birds fly by in the shape of a hand.
All I remember is missing this.

Come here, little sinking heart. Yes, I used that word.
Look, the finches have turned from olive-drab
to lemon-yellow overnight. This is not nothing. (Smith College 2020)

Poet Sergio Jimenez translated this commitment to the beauty of everyday use into his sessions. To write a poem about where they are from, he asked his students to make a map of their homes, recording the dinner smells trapped in the hallway, the dip in the couch where they watched weekend cartoons, and their 1st-grade stickers that won't wash off. He shared his own tour, recalling the door through which his mother tried to talk to him and the hole in a wall where, once, he punched it. In a culminating event, Jimenez asked students to invent a poetry form of their own, naming it, outlining its structure, and explaining *how and when it is used*. As one student wrote:

The Mexico Firework Pop can only be done during fireworks are going off when
you write it and go to sleep you will dream about a man in a bright suit he will grant
you 3 wishes that will come true.

The Anchor of Candor

Folklore embraces all of living: births, weddings, and funerals; holiday noisemakers and winding sheets. The words of spirituals and especially the blues speak candidly to all aspects of living. Think of Billie Holliday singing "I Can't Face the Music":

Breeze, stop moanin' those weird melodies
My man has left me
And I can't face the music
Without singin' the blues

Rain, your rhythm on my window pane
Drives me insane because
I can't face the music
Without singin' the blues
(Koehler and Bloom 1938)

In that same spirit, City Lore teaching artists do not shy away from life in all its joy and sadness. Artists ask students to be open to poems that speak candidly to family fights, grief, and fears. With 3rd-grade students, poet Amira El-Behiri wrote a collaborative poem using the image of a house to speak to the need for hope while living in Queens, an epicenter of the Covid-19 virus:

We can build a house called tomorrow

A house that we can survive in

A house that can protect us

A house filled with happiness smiles and laughter

We can make a house called tomorrow together

A house that always has color

A house that gets hit by rainbows

With a similar frankness, teaching artist Kate Bell introduced classes of 7th graders to witness poems, using Langston Hughes' "Let America Be America Again," inviting them to take a turn speaking to their experiences of promise and reality with startling results:

Change

Opportunity, chance, possibility

A place to be who you want to be

At least that's what they say

And want to believe...

Nationality, status, inequality

This is what matters

And what they don't want to believe...

We are living in denial

Implanted in a society

Where racism roams mighty

The land of the free?

More like the land of the greed

The home of the brave?

More like the home of the misled

People with skin like dark, creamy chocolate

And eyes like black-gray coal

People with light, beige skin

With eyes that can slice your conscience open

Bodies are a range of fruits

With various different sizes

And countless different attributes

Do you want a change?
Exchange the negativity
For the positivity?
From bloody slavery
To written history
From discrimination
To communication
Small changes work together
To let harm surrender.

The Public Face of Imagination

David Drake was poet, potter, and an enslaved Black man who made some of the most impressive ceramic jars to come out of 19th-century North America. In defiance of laws forbidding literacy to enslaved people, Drake not only signed his jars, he often inscribed them with poetry, declaring himself as an artist and author:

I wonder where is all my relations
Friendship to all—and every nation (qtd. in Noyes 2020)

This speaks to a deep belief in folklore that imagination and invention are not rare, but universal—they belong to cooks, day workers, and aunts who whittle, play trumpet, and sew wedding dresses. In that spirit, all kinds of word work—lullabies, jokes, proverbs, and prayers—are worth rapt attention. Folklorists extend this encompassing view of imagination to children—hand clap and jump rope games, the rules for stickball, riddles, and taunts are taken seriously as examples of traditions passed down as ways of holding and evolving the values and energy of a given community (Dargan, Zeitlin, and Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1990).

Along with this belief in the pervasiveness of imagination comes a second value: Imagination is not a private good, but a public activity in which people offer, learn, borrow, and add—exactly as in the *renga* tradition. In many City Lore residencies, this commitment shows up as collaborative poems. With primary school students, Libby Mislán and Samira Sadeque asked children to contribute to a list of wishes. Once harvested, the wishes yielded a giant, jointly built catalogue of what children long for (of which the following is only a slice):

I wish I was a scary box.
I wish I was a golden fox.
I wish I can spill like ice tea.
I wish I was a purple bat,
I would have a nose that was flat.
I wish I was the fire you seek and fear.
I wish Wendy's would bring back chicken nuggets.
I wish I could be a medicine that makes people feel better.
I wish I was a green box of chocolate foxes.

Throughout Baba Israel's residencies with older students, which ran online during the lockdown months of 2020 and 2021, they worked on collaborative spoken-word poems, with each student adding a final line to a common chant:

Gratitude is in my blood and veins
Gratitude is in my blood and veins
Gratitude is in my blood and veins
ESCAPING SOLITUDE LIKE GETTING OUT OF A STORM

Gratitude is in my blood and veins
Gratitude is in my blood and veins
Gratitude is in my blood and veins
APPRECIATE THIS LIFE I WAS BORN TO FEEL WARM

Love

Love runs through folklore—it is about a deep affection and curiosity for what people make, do, and speak. As Baba Israel taught during the pandemic months, he regularly asked students to read their work aloud. Sometimes he listened closely, making short but specific responses to their work, acknowledging the courage and originality of their contributions (“Got the rhythm going there and words on top.”). In every session, he urged students to respond to one another with claps and praise, “Show them some love.”

Building on this exercise in mutuality and gratitude, Baba introduced young people to praise poems dedicated to someone close to them, asking them to write the story of their name, offer a telling incident, and compare the person to something in nature, an animal, and an object. Many students praised their mothers:

In praise of Elside
She is smart like Wonder Woman
Wise like an owl
Strong roots like a tree

What Now?

Is it just an exercise to see poetry in the light of folklore? Again, Morrison’s words help. She writes of an old woman trying to teach the children of her village that language is a living thing that will let them act in and on the world—if they care for it:

Being a writer, she thinks of language partly as a system, partly as a living thing over which one has control, but mostly as agency—as an act with consequences.
(Morrison 1993)

Or, in the words of one student in a City Lore poetry residency:

I will remember that writing poems can affect people by their emotions or feelings
and also that writing a poem you can tell people what to do and what not to do.


To confirm this, I asked an 11-year-old writer, “If a poem could be a tool for doing things, what tool would it be?” He was not at all confused by the request. Straightaway, he drew his ideas to help him as he talked:

An anvil. You can forge words and ideas on it. All the time, you have these thoughts floating around in your head, sort of soft and messy and not real. When you try to put them into a poem, you have to forge them out. The hammer and the heat of it gets the shape you really want—you get more world-like ideas.

Taught in the light of folklore's values—context, use, candor, imagination, and love, writing poems that notice, praise, and witness, young people could forge language as an act. They could *do* language, as Morrison urges. They could author “an act with consequences” (Wolf, Holochwost, Bar-Zemir, Dargan, and Selhorst 2014). But not unless we:

- Teach poetry as regularly as mathematics.
- Teach its composition as if it were bread. Reading poems is only half a slice.
- Convince living poets to do the teaching, remembering: “the poet in the time of the world's night utters the holy” (Heidegger 2013).
- Draw on the oral traditions of the world, the ear's the deepest well where close listening begins.
- Insist that words are deeds.

In short, make the anvil theirs.

Dennie Palmer Wolf is a researcher and author committed to exploring how opportunities to imagine and create are distributed in our contemporary world—to whom, for how long, and how deeply. She questions and writes about the stubborn inequalities in who gets to write, make art, or create and perform music. Together with colleagues she investigates how we can challenge this hoarding of creativity and its recognition. For more visit www.wolfbrown.com.  ORCID 0000-0003-0134-4537

Works Cited

- Dargan, Amanda and Steve Zeitlin. 2021. In the Moment: Poetry Duels and Improvisations. (Film available at citylore.org as of September, 2021).
- Dargan, Amanda, Steve Zeitlin, and Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett. 1990. *City Play*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 121.
- Education.com. Renga. Fifth Grade Worksheet. Accessed at: <https://www.education.com/worksheet/article/renga>.
- Heidegger, Martin. 2013. *Poetry, Language, Thought*. New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics.
- Koehler, Ted and Rube Bloom. 1938. “I Can’t Face the Music.” Accessed at <https://genius.com/artists/Billie-holiday>.
- Lamar, Kendrick. 1993. “The Blacker the Berry.” *To Pimp a Butterfly*. Accessed at <https://genius.com/Kendrick-lamar-i-album-version-lyrics>.
- Morrison, Toni. 1993. Nobel Lecture. Accessed at <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1993/morrison/speech>.
- Noyes, Chandra. 2020. David Drake: Poet, Potter, Slave. *Art & Object*. February 11. Accessed at <https://www.artandobject.com/news/david-drake-poet-potter-slave>.
- Ogawa, Tadashi. 2009. The Trans-subjective Creation of Poetry and Mood: A Short Study of Japanese Renga. *Comparative and Continental Philosophy*. 1.2:193-209. DOI <https://doi.org/10.1558/ccp.v1i2.193>.
- Palmer Wolf, Dennie, Steven J. Holochwost, Tal Bar-Zemer, Amanda Dargan, and Anika Selhorst. 2014. “Some Things in My House Have a Pulse and a Downbeat”: The Role of Folk and Traditional Arts Instruction in Supporting Student Learning. *Journal for Learning through the Arts*. 10.1.
- Smith College Poetry Club. Accessed at <https://www.smith.edu/news/2020-renga-poem>.
- Zeitlin, Steve. 2016. *The Poetry of Everyday Life: Storytelling and the Art of Awareness*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

From Fried Chicken to Fascination with Home: How Learning about Culturally Rooted Poetry Forms Can Transform Children’s Understanding of Home

by Samira Sadeque

The students did not know what to write in response to the prompt for “home.”

Should I describe my house in New York or Colombia?

...Bangladesh?

...Nepal?

When my co-teacher and I designed this prompt to teach New York City students at P.S. 69 in Queens the traditional poetry form of *ghazal*, we did not anticipate so much confusion. As an immigrant myself, and the two of us poets ourselves, we built rapport with students quickly, so only in hindsight did it make sense that our students—4th graders predominantly from immigrant families from all over the world—would have these questions.

Libby Mislan and I are teaching artists for City Lore’s Homer 2 Hip Hop Project. This is a multi-year program with New York City public schools exploring traditions of oral poetry from around the world in a number of classrooms and schools. Our residency involves following the work of the same cohort of students across three years.

In the first two years, we explored the concepts of “home” and “a journey to home” numerous times given the project’s scope, designed to introduce students to the practices of oral poetry from around the world. Homer 2 Hip Hop operates on the premise that most poetry throughout history has oral roots and this orality still plays an important role in everyday lives of people around the world. City Lore provided numerous resources to teach poetry from Southeast Asia to Africa, including poetry writing, poetry recitation, and poetry duels across these regions and across historical eras.

One lesson included the *ghazal*, which we were teaching toward the end of our second year with students, who were now 4th graders. The *ghazal* is primarily spoken and written in Urdu, Pashto, and Arabic. The process of teaching included adding to a running poetry web, where students put their definitions of poetry from time to time. This development allowed me to document the growth

Home

Home

Home

Home

Home

Home

Home

Home

Home

Home

Home

Home

Home

Home

Home

Home

Home

in their understanding of poetry over the first year. For example, in the beginning, students said poetry meant “rhymes.” As we progressed through the year, their definitions added words such as “reflection” and “feelings.”

Libby and I incorporated videos into our lesson plans during remote teaching during the pandemic of 2020. At first virtual teaching was a challenge, but it gave students an opportunity to watch performance videos of several forms of poetry and to be very creative with their assignments. During in-person classes, students primarily delivered poems that they wrote in their notebooks in the confines of the classroom. Remote learning meant they could use tools such as Zoom backgrounds and videos that they created through their artwork. They enjoyed using these tools to enhance their poetry.

Our first year of work had focused on learning the roots of culturally based poetry from around the world and from different eras. For example, students studied Brazilian *folhetos*—*Literatura de Cordel*—and African American blues. During the teaching process, I took inspiration from contemporary children’s poetry books, such as *Wishes, Lies, and Dreams: Teaching Children to Write Poetry*, by Kenneth Koch (New York: Harper Perennial, 1999).

Oh, Tibet, how you have freshwater lakes, and
chunks of snow.
Oh, how I miss you.

How you smell of barley, and wheat.
When my feet touch your soil.

How you taste like snowflakes falling on my
tongue.
I feel so cheerful.

How you sound like cows mooing, cats purring,
and dogs barking.
I promise that I’ll be back soon.

How when I’m there, I see relatives, friends,
and other Tibetans.
I feel happy.

How I feel happy, to play with the animals, and
do the chores,
and see my family.

I’ll see you soon.

–Tenzin Pasang

A Student *Ghazal*.

In early 2020, before the pandemic lockdown, as part of our poetry class on *folhetos*, we organized a field trip to the Jackson Heights neighborhood, noted for the diversity of people who live there, predominantly South Asians and Latin Americans. We headed to Diversity Plaza, a mini-courtyard by a major intersection populated by a string of shops and restaurants owned and represented by people from many countries. The aim was for students to take notes of different colors, scents, sounds, and shapes that they encountered so they could return to class and draw their impressions for the covers of their *folhetos* collections. We asked them to take notes about these questions:

What do you see?
What do you hear?
What do you smell?

Back in the classroom, we put students in groups of four and assigned them to come up with a group drawing based on their notes. This required them to collaborate and negotiate on what each wanted in the drawing. It also gave me an opportunity to observe their decision-making and collaboration skills. I watched them try to agree on whether to put an image of the Number 7 train or a huge watch that one student noted from a store in Diversity Plaza. This inspired one group to make a surrealist painting of a massive watch against the backdrop of New York City.

“As a teaching artist who used the tools of folk arts and poetry to engage students in learning, I realized that I was also providing the students foundational scaffolding to build not only the word literacy, but also the cultural literacy that can help them better understand and represent their whole selves.”

Once students finalized their artwork, we worked with another City Lore teaching artist, Alan Calpe, in a printmaking workshop to finalize covers for their *folhetos*. In the assignment and subsequent drawings, almost all wrote mainly about the Wendy’s fast-food restaurant that they saw. One student wrote in an “I wish” poem, “I wish Wendy’s would bring back fried chicken.” Here we had a group of nearly a hundred students, most of whom picked Wendy’s as the most interesting thing to observe in a neighborhood known for its different languages, cuisines, and colors, with one of the busiest train junctions in the city. In the follow-up to that field trip, students had fun writing poems about fried chicken and drew the “W” of Wendy’s for their *folheto* covers.

I realized that children may view the concept of culture differently from how we expect. This was a learning moment for me in how powerful students’ work can be and the complex concepts that even very young students may show when they are free to choose how to represent what interests them and what they believe in.

Although this experience differed widely from my expectations of what they might observe and what I had hoped to achieve through the field trip, I found their work honest. And this honesty laid the foundation for how they would interrogate themselves in the coming year while writing their poems about home. This honesty was at first a seed and then the fruit of their ability to ask questions about their identity. This search for honesty is what would cultivate the practice of asking questions, building up to this moment, a year later, when they peppered us with questions about what defines “home” for them. In the prompt for the *ghazal*, one stanza asked them to write details of their home. They wondered whether to write about the color of their house in their parents’ homeland or the color of their current building in New York City. Many struggled to articulate whether their parents’ homeland is also their homeland or whether where they currently live is their home. In these instances, I observed how difficult it is to interrogate yourself when you do not even have the language to form your questions. As teaching artists who used the tools of folk arts and poetry to engage students in learning, I realized that we were also providing students foundational scaffolding to build not only the word literacy, but also the cultural literacy that can help them better understand and represent their whole selves.

In teaching them about the different global traditions from *haiku* to *ghazals*, *Ars Poetica* inspired by Horace, and contemporary spoken-word poetry, we were laying the groundwork for this search for honesty. In all their work, we actively encouraged students to write words in any language they spoke or heard in their homes; we also encouraged them to include foods from their dinner table; and we encouraged them to include words they use to refer to family members—from Baba to Tía, without disclaimers.

Every time we did so, we saw in them a sense of fascination. They were building the language they did not initially have to form their questions about home. The idea that they could merge the world they were living at home with the world they were living in at school changed how they wrote their poetry. They held this idea like different pots of Play-Doh, merging and mixing the colors into their own, unique stories.

We are at a time of cultural shift focused on identities rooted in history, language, culture, and inequity. This moment can make for a crucial time for us, as artists and teaching artists, to ensure students' identities are highlighted and given space in their works—and through that, cultivate a practice in which they are free to write about whatever they would like: from fried chicken to the five different ways of writing about home. Maybe both.

Oh the beach, how you make sand castles,
get a tan and even embarrass yourself.

Sometimes you dance in the dark on the beach
til the sun rises, and sometimes just come to
admire the ocean and sand.


How you smell the coconut water or coconut milk
made of coconuts on the palm trees planted in the sand.

How you taste the yummy ice cream to beat the
heat, and sometimes get a brain freeze.

How you sound like the music you dance to, and your friends, too.
How you see the stars in the dark in the starry night sky.

—Diana Alvarado

A Student *Ghazal*.

Samira Sadeque is a Bangladeshi journalist and poet in New York City. She has been a *City Lore* teaching artist since 2019. Through her journalism and poetry, she writes about immigration, hate speech, and gender equality, among other issues. She graduated from the Columbia Journalism School in 2017.  ORCID 0000-0001-8229-7079

Journal of Folklore and Education (2021: Vol. 8)

From Fried Chicken to Fascination with Home: How Learning about Culturally Rooted Poetry Forms Can Transform Children's Understanding of Home
by Samira Sadeque

Hearing Between the Words: Toward the Slow Study of Traditional Riddles

by David E. K. Smith and Mary Kancewick

In the manner of the Denaakk'e-Koyukon Dene-Athabaskan riddling tradition, we first ask your permission to join us in riddling.

Nę tse kurutłtsara.
I am going to propose riddles to you.

Taking your continued reading of this article as agreement, we propose a traditional riddle.

Tł̄a-dzor-karas'āna
Here is a riddle:

Nonur radarast'ol.
I go reaching beyond the rocks.

We ask that the reader approach this riddle with us as a co-puzzler who has been offered a cultural capsule to unpack.

The riddles of cultural riddling traditions, and especially those of endangered or lost riddling traditions, contain enigmas that can never be fully understood outside their time, place, language, and culture. For that reason, we maintain that the exercise of pursuing greater understanding of such riddles—while holding in mind the key premise that understanding will inevitably be ever-limited—is in itself an important, worthy pedagogical goal. Riddle study thus becomes an exercise in observation and perception, of limitation and self-correction, and of infinite persistence—skills essential to cross-cultural, cooperative decision making. We offer that the slow study of traditional riddles, especially of locally Indigenous traditional riddles, should in this spirit be employed across curricula. It is our hope to engender in educators a new willingness to source Indigenous riddle traditions to help students learn to face incomprehensibility with open mindedness, contextual sensitivity, and infinite patience and persistence and to move toward an evolving understanding that promotes respect, sharing, and cooperation.

The authors are non-Native residents of the lands upon which Athabascan peoples have lived for thousands of years, and upon which the authors have resided for three or more decades. We will therefore attempt to model this process of slow study using a riddle from the Dene-Athabascan tradition of Alaska. We are a young educator and an elder poet who strive to honor the lands and the peoples of a now-shared state. It is important to note that the collective term “Alaska Native” predominates in the state because of its legal use in the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act of 1971. The collective term references the various Indigenous peoples who populate the state, including the Iñupiaq, Yup’ik, Aleut, Athabascan, and Southeast Coastal Indigenous peoples. The word “Native” when referring to Alaska Natives is always capitalized. When speaking of a single cultural group, the group’s name for itself is preferred. The riddle offered here is a riddle of the Denaakk’e people.

Traditional Riddling in the Alaska Classroom

Riddling traditions are ubiquitous worldwide and have long been recognized for their educational merit as mind exercises and their role in transmitting culture. In cultures where such traditions continue, there has been a recent push to promote their recognition and to support these educational roles (Akinyemi 2015, Januseva and Lozanovska 2013, Gachanja and Kebaja 2011). Where such riddling traditions are endangered or lost, as in the case of the Dene-Athabascan traditions of Alaska, riddles with their answers have been presented to students as examples of environmental observations in social studies units, as an introduction to metaphor in language arts units, and as an imitative framework for museum scavenger hunts. Dene-Athabascan riddles have been included in such curricular materials developed by the Alaska Native Education Board (Dauenhauer 1975a, 1975b, 1976), the Indian Education Program of the Anchorage School District (Partnow 1975, 1985), the Alaska Department of Education/University of Alaska Fairbanks Department of Geography/Alaska Geographic Alliance (Farrell 1994, Partnow 1995), as well as the Anchorage Museum (Partnow 2013) and in Canada (*A Dene Way of Life* 2006). The six atrium columns of the Anchorage Museum presently feature a Dena’ina riddle each, set low enough for most school-aged children to access.

To determine whether these materials reached students, we spoke with educators, teachers of teachers, and curriculum creators in Alaska—including Patricia Partnow, who helped develop many of the curricula mentioned above. We found no data to indicate to what extent or how successfully any of these materials have been used. Our search revealed a persistent lack of awareness among Alaskan educators of the existence of traditional riddling.

To date, Alaska Dene-Athabascan riddle sources include the collections of Jetté (1913, Denaakk’e-Koyukon, 110 riddles), Chief Henry (1976, Denaakk’e-Koyukon, 28 riddles), and Wassillie and Kari (1981, Dena’ina, 36 riddles). Guedon (1971) includes five Nee’aaneegn’-Upper Tanana riddles in her PhD dissertation and Kari (forthcoming 2021) includes two (Lower) Tanana riddles in an upcoming language dictionary. Of the 11 Alaska Dene-Athabascan language groups, only four have documented riddle traditions: Denaakk’e-Koyukon, Dena’ina, Upper Tanana, and (Lower) Tanana. The riddle collections show minimal overlap. The best documented riddling tradition is that of the Denaakk’e-Koyukon people, with two primary sources, one the work of an outsider ethnographer and the other the work of Native speakers of the language. Thus, in this

article, we focus on the Denaakk'e-Koyukon tradition. This not to say that the other traditions should not be explored. The Denaakk'e-Koyukon language is spoken in 11 remote villages along the Koyukuk and middle Yukon rivers. The language has three distinct dialect variations: Upper, Central, and Lower. Out of a population of about 2,300, some 300 people speak the language, about 13 percent. The language vitality is rated as "moribund" (Koyukon, Alaska Native Language Center).

Approaching the Riddle

As noted earlier, Alaska educators have used traditional riddles in limited contexts, but previous users did not explore fully the cultural puzzle that they provide. To this end, we see potential in approaching the traditional riddle more broadly as a cultural capsule. Puzzling through a riddle arising outside one's culture, especially from a lost or endangered riddling culture, requires asking many questions and holding multiple possible answers simultaneously. We begin by offering questions and observations from our (limited) perspectives, hoping to prompt questions and observations in the reader and as learners together increase our understanding of the riddle's possibilities. Such a shared process of thoughtful exploration is how we propose that riddles, as approachable capsules of culture, be reassessed as a rich pedagogical resource.

The chosen traditional riddle has been offered first in the original Denaakk'e-Koyukon Dene-Athabaskan language. Let's begin by unpacking these terms.

The word "Athabaskan" refers broadly to the interrelated complex of the languages of the peoples Indigenous to Interior Alaska, western Canada, the southern Oregon and northern California coast, and the desert Southwest and also refers to the peoples who speak these languages. The word "Athabaskan" has no relation to what the peoples call themselves, but rather is an Anglicized version of a Canadian Cree (not Dene/Athabaskan) word meaning "'where there are plants distributed in a net-like pattern,' referencing an expanse of reeds or reed-like grass in shallow water" (Krauss 1987). By the late 18th century, the word named a major lake—Lake Athabasca—that featured such shallow reedy expanses and was a border area between the Cree and the Chipewyan, who were part of what later came to be known as the Athabaskan language group. The name "Athabaskan" was given to the language group about 1826, by Albert Gallatin, friend and Secretary of the Treasury to Thomas Jefferson, who shared Jefferson's interests in American Indian language classification (Gallatin 1836).

The term that Athabaskan peoples have long used for themselves is *Dene* (sometimes written in an earlier time as *Ten'a*). This word has been commonly translated as and understood to mean "people" (Sapir 1915); however, the literal translation is more evocative: *de* means "flow" and *ne* means "mother-earth." As expressed by Canadian elementary school educators, "This encompasses an understanding that we as Dene people flow from Mother Earth and we are a people of the Creator and Creation" (*A Dene Way of Life* 2006, 2). The term *Dene* is widely used in Canada, and its use in Alaska is growing. The word *Dene* has been exclusively applied to northern Athabaskan speakers across Alaska and Canada. The designation "Koyukon" is a Russian spelling for an Iñupiaq word that a Russian trader applied to a tributary of the Yukon River, along which the speakers who call their language Denaakk'e, meaning "like the people" or "like us," live (*Koyukon* n.d.).

Concerning Translation and Contextual Ethnographic Commentary

We've posed a Denaakk'e-Koyukon Dene-Athabascan riddle in English translation. Reading the riddle in English, you might think that you know the answer. But can your answer match the answer that the creator of the riddle intended if you know nothing about the creator, or about the language or culture or history or environment in which the riddle arose? Riddling is an allegorical and symbolic tradition set within the framework of cultural and environmental reference. A guess based upon your own contrasting language, history, culture, and environment is very different from the harder effort of an answer informed by a genuine attention and respect for another people's context—with the simultaneous understanding that some things will not translate, some things will be slow to be understood, and some things might never be understood.

With our proposed riddle being read in English translation, we must immediately ask ourselves, how much can the translator be trusted? Our chosen riddle was recorded by the Jesuit missionary Father Julius Jetté and published in his collection of traditional riddles in 1913, after he had lived among the Denaakk'e-Koyukon people and studied the language for about 15 years, while the riddling tradition was a living part of the culture. Jetté's collection is the earliest, largest, and most annotated documentation of Alaska Dene/Athabascan riddles and has subsequently been used as a key resource by both Native and non-Native scholars (see Dauenhauer 1975a, Jetté and Jones 2000). Jetté documents that there were riddles he did not understand. That self-awareness could have been respectful, but Jetté attributes his lack of understanding to "the narrow scope of an uncultured intellect" (1913, 185). Jetté recorded detailed observations of riddle language and cultural context, but he may have been critically blinded by the biases that caused him to describe the Denaakk'e-Koyukon people as "simple natives" and "savages," and the riddles as "crude" and "artless" (181). We have to ask ourselves, what might he have missed or misinterpreted in the context of his cultural biases? An example of cultural extension: Jetté renders the expression translated most directly as "Here is a riddle," as "Riddle-me," assuming an equivalency with his own cultural tradition over a more closely held translation. When offering the chosen riddle, we used the more direct translation of the traditional opening phrase over Jetté's matching of equivalence.

In his description of the Denaakk'e-Koyukon riddling tradition, Jetté alludes to the educational function of riddles, saying that riddling was how children and Elders alike would "sharpen their wits or quicken their memories" (182). He notes that the time for riddling begins just after winter solstice and seems to say that riddling might continue until summer solstice, as the Denaakk'e-Koyukon believed that the riddling helped along the lengthening of the days. He presents this as superstition, perhaps missing a cultural metaphorical connection between practicing and strengthening intellectual powers, and the strengthening of daylight. Richard Nelson (1983), who spent 16 months living in the villages of Huslia and Hughes, notes that "for the Koyukon, [the environment] is also sensitive to human behavior, because the natural and human communities originated together in the Distant Time and have never become completely separate" (33). Jetté notes that between summer solstice and winter solstice, riddling was taboo, as it could interfere with the natural course of nature. He does not make the connection that summer and fall were and are the hunting, fishing, and gathering times, the time not to practice, but to apply intellectual powers.

Jetté says that unlike stories, which were told in the dark when everyone was in bed, riddles were proposed and discussed “in the light” “night after night for hours” at lively “evening parties” that included both children and Elders. Jetté fails to make clear whether the riddling parties were held outside by moonlight and/or firelight, or inside by oil light. Importantly, Jetté notes, “To be considered correct, the answer has to be the very one which the riddler has in mind. It matters not whether a different one, offered by the guesser, would perhaps fit the question more aptly: for the aim of the Ten’a (Dene) in solving a riddle, is to get at the other man’s thought, and no wise to answer the question on its merits” (184). Emphasizing the importance and difficulty of finding the riddler’s intended answer, and clarifying Jetté’s reference to “in the light,” Dena’ina Athabascan Elder Albert Wassillie’s (1981) comments in the introduction to his collection of Dena’ina riddles, “Sometimes the solutions to riddles took a month or more to be correctly reached. Night after night, answers would be put forth as the people sat around the fire.”

Jetté (1913) tracks the frequent use of personification in the riddles. He observes that the riddle terms seem to incorporate an older, more poetic version of the language, testifying to the tradition’s antiquity, and that figurative language is very much emphasized—figurative language seems to be the point. Jetté suggests that at least some of the riddles are improvisations upon long-memorized lore. He writes with awareness that “our unfamiliarity...and our different view of it, would carry our thoughts in a widely diverging direction” (185). Jetté also asserts that, already then, more than a hundred years ago, the riddling tradition had begun to wane because of distractions and pressures of outside contact. Wassillie (1981) notes some 50 years later, “The telling of riddles is rapidly becoming a lost art” (2). Endangerment of riddling traditions in Indigenous cultures has been consistently linked to colonialism (see Akinyemi 2015).

Reaching Beyond the Rocks

Jetté’s (1913) direct translation of our chosen riddle, #70 in his collection, goes like this: “the rocks beyond I-go-reaching.” His edited version goes like this: “I reach beyond the distant hills.” Did the Denaakk’e-Koyukon people equate “rocks” with “hills”? The village of Nulato where Jetté was based is surrounded by low-lying tundra-covered hills. Jetté might be onto something there. But might the “rocks” reference the more distant, more “rocky” mountains? The cultural anthropologist Richard Nelson, writes, “During the long nights, when a full moon circles high, the snow-covered mountains are often clearly visible at great distances, luminescent against the sky’s blackness. And indeed, the light shines far beyond them” (Nelson 1983). Is there more we are missing? Is there an endangered or lost metaphorical depth to the term that is translated as “rocks” (see Istrom and Pirainen 2012)? Did the Denaakk’e-Koyukon people know or believe that the moon is itself rock? For our translated version of the riddle, we took elements from both Jetté’s renderings, keeping the “rocks” for their essential ambiguity but adapting the verb structure for English readers. Access to Elder speakers of the Denaakk’e-Koyukon language would aid in this discussion. The key Elder resource in this case would be Denaakk’e-Koyukon Elder Eliza Jones, who worked 20 years with unpublished Jetté materials to complete the *Koyukon Athabascan Dictionary*. Now 83, she lives in the remote village of Koyukuk without email. A snail-mail letter was sent February 22, 2021, without response, as of submission date.

What else might we surmise? We might recognize that the riddle is being posed during the months of moonlight, and that the brightness of moonlight on snow provides significant illumination for a

substantial time in the subarctic. We might recognize that, especially at its nadir and in its fullness, this subarctic moon can clearly be seen to illuminate the far reaches of the landscape. On the other hand, we might remember that the riddles are told in the first place to encourage the return of the sun, which from its low angle on the horizon could be seen to be reaching, straining to return, from a distance. In the traditional Dene-Athabaskan story about how Raven brought humans light, Raven steals the moon first, but makes a bigger impression with the sun (Marshall 2011). Denaakk'e-Koyukon storytelling imagines the moon and sun as brother and sister (Nelson 1983). An Upper Tanana Elder tells a story about a boy empowered by the moon (David 1975). There is a Gwich'in Athabaskan story about a boy who follows the sun, working his way south, seeking lands with sun for six months rather than three months of the year (Wallis 1997, Yaska 2019).

Jetté's (1913) commentary admits that the Native language speaker would have a further linguistic clue: The verb form in the riddle can be understood in such a way that it would not apply to the sun. Did you reach the conclusion that the moon might be the answer? However, Jetté lists the sun as a second answer. A slightly different inflection of the verb form would open this possibility. In other words, we would have had to have been there—to hear the way the words of the riddle were said, before we could proceed to “hear between the words.” Traditional riddling is an oral tradition. The words of the page do not give us the inflection, or the facial expression, or the body language—any of which might have provided clues to the answer intended by the riddler.

We stop here, without a definitive answer for this riddle, but we have opened ourselves to what might have informed the riddler's intent. We understand now more about the culture and how the riddler might have intended the riddle to have been understood and answered. We will puzzle upon this riddle, perhaps forever, as clues continue to accrue.

Embracing an Ambiguous Conclusion

Traditional riddles are compact cultural capsules that, cautiously unpacked, can reveal glimpses of another cultural universe. The interpretation of a riddle is a process that should be undertaken carefully and critically. It is in the process that we learn about a people and about an environment and about a way of life and about a tradition, and also about the way our own preconceptions and ignorance and laziness can get in the way of approaching better understandings. Jetté writes that, through riddling, the Denaakk'e-Koyukon become “proficient in the art of . . . ‘hearing between the words’” (Jetté 1913, 185), a highly prized accomplishment. Nora and Richard Dauenhauer (1984) point to the Denaakk'e-Koyukon cautionary tale of Gaadook (see also Pilot 1975) to emphasize the importance of this skill to this culture. The story of Gaadook, as the researchers, one Native and one not, write, is “about the socialization of a child who learns to communicate indirectly”:

In the beginning, he sleeps often and is otherwise very lackadaisical in doing his work. His mother gives directions indirectly and metaphorically—often in forms similar to riddles, especially when speaking about animals to be trapped. The child takes the instructions literally, with disastrous results. The story is complex and involves a transformation in which the child re-enters society as a fully awakened, useful and productive member, with skills in indirect communication. (1984, 26)

Toward a Pedagogical Model

Working to emulate the teachings of Gaadook's mother, we have modeled a path for using riddles to help students to "hear between the words." We attempt to elucidate specific pedagogical strategies for targeting the traditional riddle to cultivate cultural intelligence. The guide may be applied to any chosen riddling tradition in any order that promotes the riddle investigation.

- *Choose a Riddle Tradition:* Traditional riddling is vibrant in many cultures all over the world, and many endangered and extinct traditions have been documented. You might consider looking for riddling traditions close to your current home, your homeland, or from your students' backgrounds.
- *Explore the Context:* Collaboratively investigate where your riddle comes from. Is the tradition living, endangered, or lost? Who uses this tradition and what language do they riddle in? From what natural and cultural environments do the riddles emerge? How do the people of this riddle tradition see the world? How has that worldview been affected by colonial forces? What is the historical context?
- *Unpack Relevant Terms:* What terms describe or define the people, place, or culture? What can the history of the terminology teach? Consider especially what the people from the riddling culture call themselves, their language, and their lands, in contrast to what others call them.
- *Know and Attempt to Follow Riddle Tradition Rules:* As you approach the riddle, attempt to abide by the rules of the riddling tradition. Is there a specific time of year that this lesson should be taught? Or perhaps a time of day? Should you be inside or outside? Is there a riddle ritual? Are riddles framed by introductions or conclusions?
- *Choose a Riddle:* Choose a single riddle that speaks to the study group collectively. The word riddle is singular here with purpose. A long list of riddles with given answers does little to spark inquiry and imagination. One riddle when studied deeply can provide expansive, fascinating insight into a culture and encourage extended puzzling as an attitude and a process.
- *Learn about the Language:* Take the opportunity to discuss issues of translation, if the classroom language is not the original language of the riddle. Talk about the impossibility of one-to-one translation, about the choices of approximation every translator must make. Are there issues of potential translator reliability or bias to take into account? How are words and sentences constructed and meaning communicated in the language? How do grammar, syntax, tonal inflection, and body language affect meaning? If possible, listen to the riddle in the original language, or at least language samples.
- *Learn about the Culture:* Explore related forms of oral tradition, including proverbs, stories, and songs, to connect content. Explore the landscape. Explore the way of life.
- *Consider the Purpose:* Consider the aim of the riddler in solving a riddle. Is it to get at the riddler's thought, not necessarily to answer the question? Is it to build relationships between the riddler and riddle or within the community as a whole? Perhaps the riddler hopes to build critical-thinking skills, pass down cultural knowledge, or simply enjoy shared play.
- *Wonder:* Encourage and embrace uncertainty. Be careful not to provide definitive answers, but remain in the realm of possibility and probability. Approach the riddle from as many perspectives as possible. The process does not end. Use the steps above not as a list but as an iterative cycle to continue to add more and more layers of meaning.

Conclusion

Dene/Athabascan riddlers knew that riddling was not about the answer but about the process, about what that process can teach. For contemporary teachers and students, a respectful path and process might be extended engagement in slowly unpacking, to the best of always limited abilities, what a tradition has layered into a riddle. Introducing lists of riddles with answers and assigning imitation—the primary pedagogical approach at present—fails to recognize the importance of an investment in extended process. It is a better approach to emphasize continuous learning and incrementally increased understanding over the immediate and false mastery of a single “right” answer. Riddles are about relationships, about the relationship between the riddler and the subject of the riddle, and between the riddler and the riddlee, and between both and the culture.

In this article, we aimed to model a shared experience for teachers and students to work collaboratively to “hear between the words”—and between the worlds—through exploring cultural context and engaging in cautious interpretation of the cultural capsule that a traditional riddle provides. We touched upon a fraction of many possible questions, potential allusions, and approximate understandings, toward approaching, not an answer, but rather an opening, a peek into the heart of a people through a single riddle. Through this exploration, we hope to have modeled the attitude of attention and care that creates the conditions for small and large enlightenments, the conditions for building working bridges of ongoing cross-cultural learning. We urge teachers in all places of Indigenous presence to acknowledge and support riddling traditions where they exist, and, where such traditions are endangered or lost, to recognize their riddles as worthy of such slow study.

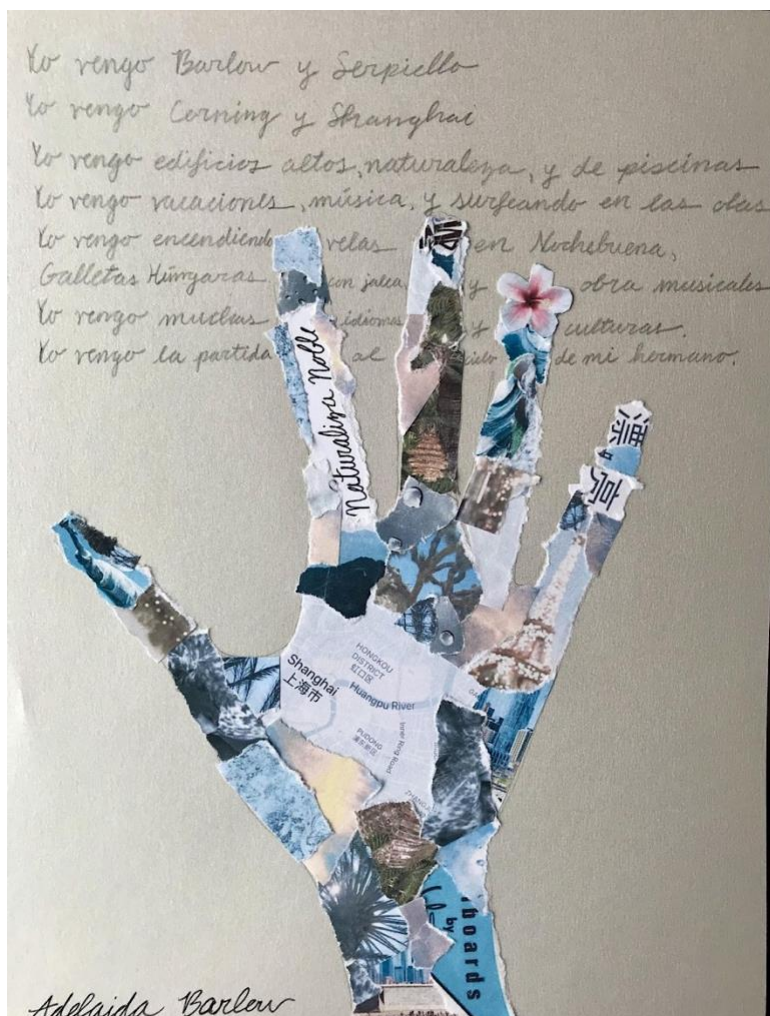
David E. K. Smith is a doctoral student in Social and Comparative Analysis in Education at the University of Pittsburgh. His research interests include the role of traditional arts in education, decolonial methodologies, and music as a cross-cultural tool for addressing enduring social issues.

Mary Kancewick is author of the 2019 poetry collection *Be-hooved*, a finalist for the Montaigne Medal, awarded for “thought-provoking” work. The collection addresses life in urban, village, and wilderness Alaska in this time of climate challenge. For decades, she worked as an Indigenous rights attorney, publishing works on Alaska Native subsistence and sovereignty.

Works Cited

- Akinyemi, Akintunde. 2015. *Orature and Yoruba Riddles*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Dauenhauer, Nora and Richard. 1984. Alaska Native Oral Tradition. Washington, DC: *Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage Folklife Festival Program Book*.
- . 1975a. *Koyukon Riddles*. Anchorage: Alaska Native Education Board.
- . 1975b. *Folklore Handbook for Bilingual Classrooms*. Anchorage: Alaska Native Education Board.
- . 1976. *Riddle and Poetry Handbook*. Anchorage: Alaska Native Education Board.
- David, Titus. 1975. Needzeek: *The Boy That Went to the Moon*. Anchorage: Alaska Native Education Board.

- A Dene Way of Life: Teacher's Guide: Grade Four Social Studies*. 2006. Northwest Territories Department of Education, Culture and Employment, https://www.ece.gov.nt.ca/sites/ece/files/resources/edukit_-_dene_way_of_life.pdf.
- Farrell, Nancy Warren. 1994. *Alaska: A Land in Motion*. Fairbanks: University of Alaska Fairbanks.
- Gachanja, Muigai Wa and Kebaja, Charles. 2011. Pedagogical Aspects of Riddles: A Critical Examination of Abagusii Riddles. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*.
- Gallatin, Albert. 1836. *Synopsis of the Indian Tribes within the United States East of the Rocky Mountains, and the British and Russian Possessions in America*. Worcester, MA, <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/100896409/Cite>.
- Guedon, Marie-Francoise. 1971. *People of Tetlin, Why Are You Singing? A Study of the Social Life of the Upper Tanana Indians*. PhD Dissertation. Bryn Mawr College.
- Henry, Chief. 1976. *K'ooltsaah Ts'in'*. *Koyukon Riddles*. Fairbanks: Alaska Native Language Center.
- Istrom, Anna and Elizabeth Pirainen. 2012. *Endangered Metaphors*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Januseva, Violeta and Nikolina Lozanovska. 2013. Riddles in the Macedonian Language Educational Process. In *The First Cycle of the Nine-year Elementary Education in the Republic of Macedonia*. *Journal of Elementary Education*. 26.2:15-27.
- Jetté, Julius. 1913. Riddles of the Ten'a Indians. *Anthropos*. 8.1:181-201
- Jetté, Julius and Eliza Jones. 2000. *Koyukon Athabaskan Dictionary*. Fairbanks: University of Alaska Fairbanks.
- Kari, James, editor. Forthcoming 2021. *Lower Tanana Dene Dictionary*, 3rd edition. Fairbanks, Alaska Native Language Center.
- Koyukon*. Fairbanks, Alaska Native Language Center. Accessed February 22, 2021, <https://www.uaf.edu/anlc/languages/koyukon.php>.
- Krauss, Michael. 1987. The Name Athabaskan. In *Faces, Voices and Dreams: A Celebration of the Centennial of the Sheldon Jackson Museum*. Sitka: Division of Alaska State Museums and the Friends of the Alaska State Museum, 105-08.
- Marshall Cultural Atlas. 2011. *Raven Steals the Sun, Stars and Moon*. Fairbanks: Alaska Native Knowledge Network, <http://www.ankn.uaf.edu/npe/culturalatlases/yupiaq/marshall/raven/RavenStealsSunStarsMoon.html>.
- Nelson, Richard. 1983. *Make Prayers to the Raven: A Koyukon View of the Northern Forest*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Partnow, Patricia. 1975. *Teacher's Manual for the Athabaskan Indians of Interior Alaska: Social Studies Unit for Elementary Grades*. Anchorage: Alaska Native Education Board.
- . 1985. *Teacher's Guide: Athabascans of Interior Alaska*. Anchorage: Anchorage School District Indian Education Program.
- . 1995. *Teacher's Guide to Alaska: A Land in Motion*. Fairbanks: University of Alaska Fairbanks.
- . 2013. Tools for Teachers: Lesson Plan 6: Things That Are Well Made. In *The Dena'inaq Huch'ulyeshi: The Dena'ina Way of Living*, Suzi Jones, James Fall, and Aaron Leggett, eds. Anchorage: Anchorage Museum.
- Pilot, Sally. 1975. As told to Eliza Jones. I. Donqoghnotok'idaatlno II. Gaadook. Fairbanks: Alaska Native Language Center.
- Sapir, Edward. 1915. The Na-Dene Languages, A Preliminary Report. Read before the Anthropological Association at Philadelphia.
- Wallis, Velma. 1997. *Bird Girl and the Man Who Followed the Sun*. New York: Harper Perennial.
- Wassillie, Albert and James Kari. 1981. *K'ich'ighi = Dena'ina Riddles*. Anchorage: National Bilingual Materials Development Center.
- Yaska, Will. 2019. The Man Who Followed the Sun. DPAN.TV. Accessed February 22, 2021, <https://dpan.tv/programs/mm-nativeaslstorymp4-5384f8>.



Yo vengo de....

Barlow y Serpiello,
 Corning y Shanghai
 De edificios altos, naturaleza y
 de piscinas
 De vacaciones, música y
 surfando en las olas.
 De velas encendidas en
 Nochebuena,
 Galletas Húngaras con jalea y
 obras musicales.
 De muchos idiomas y culturas.
 De la partida al cielo de mi
 hermano.

—Adelaide Barlow

Yo vengo de...

by Vivian Muñoz and George Zavala

As part of Local Learning's 2020 third annual New York State Culture, Community, and the Classroom initiative in Corning-Elmira, high school Spanish teacher Vivian Muñoz hosted George Zavala in a virtual classroom residency. Along with 40 other educators, eight folk artists, and several folklorists and museum educators in a July Zoom workshop, Vivian learned about integrating local art and culture into the classroom, interviewing tools, and collaborating with guest artists. An experienced teaching artist who worked with City Lore and Mind-Builders in NYC before moving to western New York, George brought his gifts of listening closely to teachers, envisioning curricular connections, and integrating art into any subject area and grade level. The eight educators and artists who had classroom residencies presented highlights from their experiences in a virtual Culture, Community, and the Classroom Showcase hosted by the Rockwell Museum in Corning. Here Vivian and George share their experience.

Vivian

I had never worked with a visual artist before. George made it so easy. He is caring and perceptive and gave me room to create a teaching plan. After a half-dozen planning phone calls, we met by Google Meets with students four times because our school was all virtual at that time. He shared some of his artwork for me to critique, and through one of his drawings and conversations I discovered that we had lived in the same town in Puerto Rico. Now we live in the same New York town. When I told him that I would be teaching a unit on identity, he suggested asking students to write “Yo vengo de” poetry to inspire and incorporate into visual art collages.

George Ella Lyon

Gracias to the writer George Ella Lyon, whose 1993 poem “Where I’m From” has inspired thousands of people to write about where they come from; what matters most to them; how traditions, people, and places shape them. George Zavala developed a Spanish version, “Yo vengo de,” for his Local Learning folk arts residency in Vivian Muñoz’s 9th-grade Spanish class at Corning-Painted Post High School in Corning, NY. Learn about Lyon, the former Kentucky poet laureate, read her original poem, and find suggested activities for teaching with this poem on her website <http://www.georgeellalyon.com>.

George

I know that working with an artist can be a little intimidating for teachers. I want them to be comfortable and to see how what they have to teach can naturally fold in with artmaking. It’s about process as well as product. With Vivian’s students studying identity, I knew that as adolescents they would be searching for identity as part of growing up and that the “I Am From” poem would work well.



Vivian

To introduce George, I shared the Artist Statement and Artist Portrait that George created during our summer Culture, Community, and the Classroom workshop. George wrote his statement in English and in Spanish. I used the Spanish version. I then showed slides of some of his artwork and asked students to look closely: “What do you see? What does this image tell you? What colors and objects do you see? What do you think is going on here?” They were not shy about answering: “I see NYC and Puerto Rico.” “Family.” “Home.” “Protests.”

Before George came to class, we talked about the importance of manners, practicing good online or virtual learning etiquette, leaving cameras on when possible, asking good questions, and listening closely. Students were very polite and quickly felt at ease. When students met George, they were surprised at how much they had learned about him from his art.

George Zavala, *Obrero del arte*



George Zavala © 2020

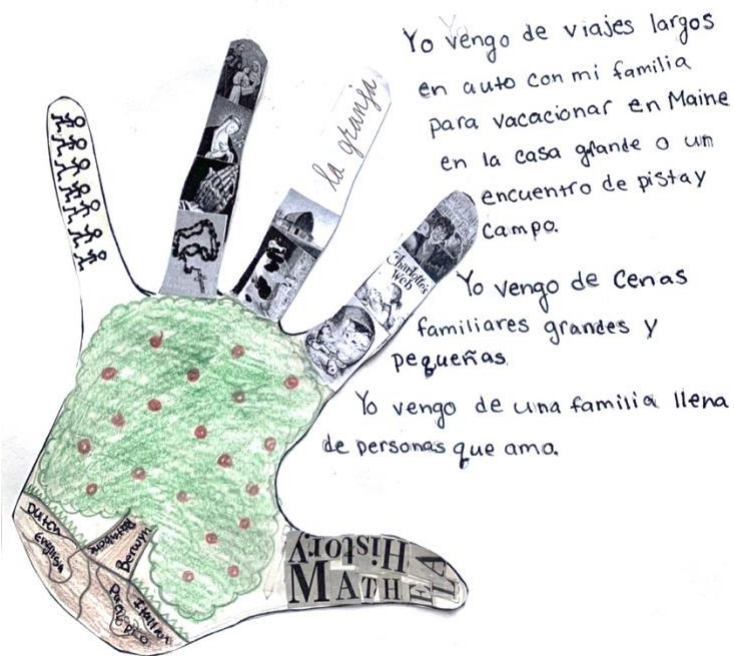
Desde mi niñez me ha fascinado el arte y las formas diversas y únicas con la cual se comunica. A través del arte yo aprendí a hablar inglés, lenguaje de la tierra donde nací y fue el arte que me sirvió de guía, ayudándome a navegar esta nueva cultura americana con un lenguaje y costumbres tan diferentes a los de mis raíces puertorriqueñas. En mi juventud el arte se convirtió en una herramienta para explorar mi persona y mi mundo y un vehículo para mi expresión política. El arte es el enlace con mi herencia ancestral y mi conexión universal con otros pueblos y sus culturas. A través de mi vida el arte siempre ha sido la forma por la cual exploro el mundo y manejo sus complejidades. A través de mi trabajo en las artes visuales y el teatro, he tenido la buena fortuna de poder ganarme la vida creando arte con gente diversas de muchas comunidades culturales y he sido testigo de cómo el arte puede ser un puente para crecimiento personal, aprendizaje mayor y crecimiento socio político/ espiritual. Explorando cultura y tradiciones utilizando el arte de collage ha sido una

manera maravillosa de crear arte uniendo imágenes y palabras en una composición. Yo creo y tengo fe en el poder del arte para transformar y liberar y me considero bendecido tener el arte como el trabajo que me ha sostenido hasta el día de hoy. [See English translation at end of article, eds.]

George

To get students started, I read my “*Yo vengo de*” poem and told students that brainstorming in English first would produce richer ideas for their poetry. The final product would be in Spanish, but they would be building on familiar words and topics important to them. I developed a worksheet with prompts in English. I encouraged the students to use their homes and family stories as part of their research. Many of them commented on learning new things about their family history by looking at objects, photos, and artifacts in their surroundings and conversations with

Yo vengo de Catolicismo, Oraciones con familia y misa dominical.



their parents and family members. Next they had to think about distilling: What do I remove? Which essential words should go in the poem? Then they translated these words into Spanish, but they also had to write poetically, so artistry had to go into the translating. As they began to share their poems, students found many surprising connections to one another, just as Vivian and I had. For example, three had lost siblings.

During the pandemic, educators and students have been hearing a lot about Social Emotional Learning (SEL). The work that we did with George was very much in line with SEL. Students were opened to one another's vulnerability, respectful, and connected. Another important aspect was how their vocabularies bloomed. Students learned new Spanish words relevant to their personal poems, and they used these words in other contexts. Unlike a standard vocabulary lesson in which everyone learns the same words, they have unique new words.

To turn their “*Yo vengo de...*” poems into a visual format, Vivian and I discussed using collage as a medium because the students could use images and words to create their pieces. It was a familiar art form and could be easily done at home or in class. I decided to have the students trace an outline of their hand as the “canvas” for their work. We discussed the uniqueness of each individual hand and the use of hands in art throughout history, going back to ancient hand drawings in caves. We viewed images of the prehistoric hand paintings discovered in the Cave of Hands, *Cueva de las manos*, in Argentina. I spoke about the use of hand imagery in my own artmaking and showed some examples.

I also liked that the hands would be a unique imprint of each individual student, which tied into the theme of “Identity.” At the same time, they would be a common visual element joining all the students’ work together. The hand is also an appropriate metaphor for individual contributions necessary in building community. As we got closer to the actual art-making process, we also offered students the option of using just words or just drawings within the student’s hand outline, to give the class more creative choices. I also made a “word” hand and a “drawing” hand as well as a “collage” with my own hand outline to use as examples for them.

Vivian and I decided on 9” x 14” cardstock for each student’s work, but 9” x 10” or 8” x 10” heavy stock or watercolor paper also work well. She prepared the cardstock and packets of materials that she gave to students when they came for in-person class time. Collage materials included scissors, images from magazines, copies of photos, images from the Internet, colored pencils, markers, pens, pencils, glue sticks or white glue. Hands are the most important tool! This was my first experience doing a Zoom art project after many years of art making in person with students. Thanks to Vivian’s passion and dedication to the process, it was an incredibly effective experience.

I’m a recent addition to this area, and it was wonderful meeting the students and learning about my new community through their creative process and the beautiful art they produced. After the project ended I received a package of notes and art from the students speaking of their experience and the cultural awareness they experienced through the process. Their messages were very moving and really confirmed the success of the workshop.

Vivian

There is so much that the students learned. In addition to expanding their Spanish vocabulary authentically and individually, they developed deeper ideas about identity and connectedness. When the students shared their final poems and artwork, their peers were so attentive, respectful, and empathetic. We had a Google “gallery walk,” and students could choose to be anonymous, to keep their privacy.


We planned to share the work on Parents’ Night, but the event was cancelled. I am framing the artwork and will surprise them at the end of the school year. I hope that the students will hang onto their work and remember how much they learned about themselves, how people and families connect with one another, what gives life meaning.

*Yo vengo de Lilly y VanSlyke
De Noruega, Hungría y Cherokee de las Américas.
De gatos y perros de peluche,
“Guerras de las Galaxias”, y “El auto Increíble”.
Yo vengo de un hogar tranquilo, en comunión con
la naturaleza.
De Navidad y de reuniones familiares para hacer
leftes.
De soldados, de inmigrantes,
De música de los 80’s.
De viajes a Disney, mi primer paseo a caballo.
De vacas y otros animales, noches de verano en el
lago. Autocines con mis abuelos,
De baloncesto y softbol y boxeo.
Yo vengo de luchas y amor.
De Proyectos de ciencias,
De amigos y familia*

–Lilly Vanslyke



***Vivian Muñoz** teaches Spanish at Corning-Painted Post High School in Corning, NY. She is also Chair of the Corning-Kakegawa, Japan Sister Cities.*

***George Zavala** is an artworker currently living in the Finger Lakes region and was a teaching artist in NYC from 1988 to 2019.  ORCID 0000-0002-1175-353X*

English translation of George Zavala's Artist Statement shared with Vivian's students:

Meet George Zavala, Art Worker

Since my early childhood I have been drawn to art and have always been fascinated by the diverse and unique forms through which it communicates. Through art I learned to speak and write in English, language of the land of my birth, and art guided me into this new American culture whose ways and language seemed so different from those of my own Puerto Rican roots. As a young man, I used art as a tool to explore myself and my world, and art became a vehicle for my political expression. Art is the path to my ancestral heritage and the road to my universal connection with all peoples and cultures. Throughout my life making art has been the means through which I experience the world and deal with its complexities. Through my work in the visual and theater arts I have had the good fortune to create art with many different people from many cultural communities and have witnessed how art can become a bridge to personal awareness, higher learning, and sociopolitical and spiritual awareness. Exploring culture and traditions through collage has been a wonderful way to create art by bringing together images and words into one composition. I believe in the power of art to transform and liberate and consider myself blessed to have art as the labor that has sustained me to this day.



Another “Where I’m From...” poetry initiative

In Spring 2021, City Lore launched an effort to help people “cross the great divide” of our differences through writing and sharing “Where I’m From” poetry and hand collages. They quoted George Ella Lyon by asking, “Do we speak from the stances we take—or do we speak from a deeper place? Are we more than our labels?”

<https://citylore.org/2021/04/i-am-not-my-label>



Written in Beads

Storytelling as Transmission of Haudenosaunee Culture

by Karen Ann Hoffman

Shekoli (Greetings), my name is Karen Ann Hoffman. I'm a Haudenosaunee Raised Beadwork artist and a citizen of the Oneida Nation of Wisconsin, one of the Six Nations of the Haudenosaunee. From colonial days, the French called us the League of the Iroquois, but Haudenosaunee, which translates roughly to People of the Longhouse, is the name we call ourselves. Our original homeland is in the Eastern Great Lakes stretching roughly from Lake Erie eastward to the Hudson River both north and south of that imaginary dividing line between what are now called the United States and Canada.

From our earliest days, in addition to song and story, we have used forms and designs to transmit our worldview, to carry our culture forward. Early on our traditions were etched into shell and stone. Later we used land-based materials like clay, moose hair, and hide to hold our teachings. Now, with glass beads and thread, we continue a long chain of unbroken cultural transmission. While the materials have changed over time, the message has not.

About the photo: Detail shot showing structure and overcast of beadwork, Rock Art Caribou.

Photo by Karen Ann Hoffman.

Since the 1800s we have developed a specific style of Haudenosaunee Raised Beadwork that is a cultural hallmark for us. Our designs grow from our Eastern Woodland environment. Like many Woodland people, we use the flowers, berries, animals, and natural features endemic to our homeland as common design elements. What is unique to us is the way our beads are sewn onto fabric, typically velvet, velveteen, or wool, in a dimensional, mounded fashion so that the beadwork rises high above the substrate. To accomplish this three-dimensional effect, we use small glass seed beads sewn down with bees-waxed cotton thread and a steel needle. Atop a paper pattern, a row of beads is sewn down in one direction (the structure) and then overcast with multiple rows of beads sewn down in the opposite direction. I marvel that these simple elements, handled properly by a person of a Good Mind, provide everything necessary to craft another strong link in our cultural chain.



See a piece of beadwork, Rock Art Caribou, go from concept to completion.

Beadwork by Karen Ann Hoffman.
Flute music by her father, Robert Messner.

Some years back I was listening to Wisconsin Public Radio. An anthropologist, whose name I have since forgotten, said something to the effect of “civilization began with the advent of the written word.” Oh my, I thought, that’s just shortsighted. Writing may go back a long way, and it’s doubtless a good thing, but for millennia Native American cultures have been strong, vibrant, and “civilized” without the use of a codified written language. Songs, stories, and figural art are, I knew from experience, perfectly capable of transporting complex cultural cargo.

At that moment I was inspired to begin a series of beadwork pieces that would write our stories, our traditions, using our Raised Beadwork as the alphabet.

I began by thinking about the formation of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy. I’d heard the story many times of how five once-warring Nations gathered together under the Great White Pine, the Tree of Peace, with its four white roots. The women of those Nations had instructed their head men to sit together around a Council Mat. Council Mats may, in certain circumstances, be thought of as a point of gathering. Implicit in that gathering is the commitment by the participants to work to create solutions that are in the best interest of all, no matter how long that may take or how complex that task may be. Those solutions must respect the past, respond to the moment, and lay a bountiful table for those whose faces are yet to be seen. Agreement to these solutions must be by consensus so that all feel their concerns have been respectfully heard, and equitably included in the solution. Urged on by Jigonhsasee, the Mother of Nations, the men were told to sit and talk until they found a way to live together in Peace. A Council Fire burned adjacent to the men. The retelling said that the Council Mat was a white deerskin and that someone was assigned to fan the ash off the mat because, “...a clean mat means a clear mind and a clear mind makes good decisions.”

Over the next six years, I beaded four Council Mats and a red Flame Urn to act as symbols for the retelling of this fundamental story. I also added another layer; rather than leaving the Council Mats blank, I embellished them with beadwork. I beaded each mat with a different seasonal

Journal of Folklore and Education (2021: Vol. 8)

Written in Beads:

Storytelling as Transmission of Haudenosaunee Culture
by Karen Ann Hoffman

tradition. If a clean mat could spark a clear mind, I reasoned, how much more effective might a mat emblazoned with cultural symbols be?

I began beading the first of the Council Mats with a well-known Fall tradition that is written in the night sky for all to see: the Great Bear Hunt. Without using a word, the beadwork remembers four brothers and their little white dog with black rings around his eyes. The mat talks about how those brothers and their dog Four Eyes trailed the Great Bear into the Sky and killed him. How, because it is wrong to kill without feasting and gratitude, the brothers butchered Bear, causing Bear's blood to drip down from the stars, coloring Maple's leaves a bright red. The beads explain how after the butchering, the Brothers roasted Bear for a great feast, Bear's fat sizzling down to Earth as snow. How after the feast the Brothers rested until awoken by the trail bark of Four Eyes. The little white dog with black circles around his eyes was once again on the trail of Bear, who had reconstituted himself and was traversing the night sky.

Learning the Story

Great Bear Hunt is a long and nuanced story. Its telling can go on for hours. And, as with many traditions, there is no clear ending, only a choice of highlighting one principle or another and emphasizing those elements in a particular telling. The teachings in one "story" morph seamlessly into others, weaving a continuous exploration of culture. The Great Bear Hunt is just one truly wonderful example of the interconnected nature of Haudenosaunee worldview.



Great Bear Hunt Mat.

Photo by James Gill Photography.

Pleased with the outcome, I went on to bead a Spring Council Mat depicting the joyous return of the birds, in this case, Sandhill Cranes. It is said that the return of the birds in the Spring is a reminder to be hopeful.



Spring Crane Mat.

Photo by Karen Ann Hoffman.

Following these two seasons, I used raised beadwork to write the Summer story of the Three Sisters Garden. This mat celebrates the Haudenosaunee teachings of growing Corn, Squash, and Beans together in an earthen mound. We know this cooperative community approach to gardening to be healthful for the plants, the soil, and our bodies. The beaded presence of our Elder Brother the Sun in the upper right of the mat is mirrored by the warmth of His shape as a negative space in the base of the mound. The dangles along the bottom of the mat remind us of the importance of Water and Rain to the success of our gardens and, consequently, to the lives and the health of our People. Written with beadwork, this figural mat explains a host of cooperative ecological teachings given to us Haudenosaunee in our Original Instructions.



Summer story of the Three Sisters Garden.

Photo by Karen Ann Hoffman.



Winter Story Mat Great White Pine Detail.

Photo by James Gill Photography.

The Mat Series culminated with the beading of Winter Story, a circular mat created from custom-dyed, icy-blue silk velvet. Turtle swims in the center of the mat as a symbol of our land—Turtle Island. It is said there was a time when Creator needed to turn His attention away for a short while. Creator gave Trees the responsibility to keep watch over everything on Turtle Island during this time. Trees proudly agreed and were awake and watchful for a long time. But the time became longer and longer. Trees grew tired and one by one fell asleep, abandoning their responsibilities. First the Poplars, then the Maples and Elms, and finally even the Oaks slumbered in Creator's absence. Upon return, Creator found that only the Pines had lived up to their responsibilities and stayed awake and alert the whole time. As a reward for Pine's commitment, Pines keep their green all the year through while the other trees lose their leaves in the order in which they failed their commitments to their brothers and sisters on Turtle Island. This teaching of commitment to community over self is a key element in the worldview of our People.



Winter Story Mat.

Photo by James Gill Photography.

As I continued to write with beads, I understood that my beadwork has less to do with me than it does with my responsibilities. My responsibility to understand the gifts and limitations of the materials with which I work so that they can excel at what they do. My responsibility to understand deeply the teaching and traditions that I am given to work with so that the voice of the beadwork is strong and clear. I am responsible for getting it right. A slow and thoughtful beader, I'll often spend a year or more on each of my "legacy pieces." There will be months of researching, talking with Elders, experimenting with pattern making, and testing an idea prior to taking the first of thousands of hand stitches. This level of intimacy with the artworks imbues them with a life and an animacy beyond my own. As Native people we exist in the worlds of our ancestors, the present, and the unseen faces, all at the same time. As an artist, it is my intention that my work have this same relationship to our community.



Bernard the Buzzard Bag.

Photo by James Gill Photography.

Journal of Folklore and Education (2021: Vol. 8)
Written in Beads:
Storytelling as Transmission of Haudenosaunee Culture
by Karen Ann Hoffman

A recent foray into beaded storytelling is my Bernard the Buzzard Bag. Bernard is born of six different shades of black beads, transparent ruby red beads, and a vintage glass taxidermy eye. He soars toward our Elder Brother beaded with 14-karat gold beads on a field of maroon velvet.

The concept for the Bernard the Buzzard Bag began with an everyday run into town for groceries with my husband, Mike. Some days earlier we had noticed a dead rabbit along the side of our county road. We had enjoyed watching the local buzzards feasting on the carrion during our rides to town, although they always flew off as we approached.

On this day, one of the buzzards stayed on the ground. “Odd,” we thought. “Car hit,” we figured. Mike pulled over and gently moved the barely breathing bird off the gravel shoulder and into the cooler, quiet grasses in the ditch to die quietly. “Poor thing,” we thought. “Reminds me of my Uncle Bernard,” I said.

On our return trip, we glanced into the ditch to look at the dead buzzard. But Bernard wasn’t dead, he weakly flapped a wing as we passed by, and Mike hit the brakes. “Bernard needs us,” he said.

We wrapped Bernard in a blanket, put him in a box, and called REGI, the raptor recovery center a hundred miles away in northern Wisconsin. “Sure,” they said. “Bring him in, we’ll see what we can do.” Bernard didn’t survive the weekend. “Internal injuries,” the REGI people said.



Hear me tell Bernard the Buzzard’s story,
“How the Birds Got Their Feathers.”

Photo by James Gill Photography.

Mike and I would talk about Bernard every time we went to town for groceries for a long time. Five seasons later, we were walking around our 40-acre property. It was a classic September day, bright skies, crisp breezes, the smell of Fall in the air. We looked up into that amazing September sky and saw a lone buzzard soaring great circles between the Sun and the Moon. “Wow!” we said. “Bernard!” we said.

At that moment, I saw the Buzzard Bag, complete and whole in my mind. “Bernard wants me to bead him,” I said. Mike agreed. And so, that afternoon, I sat down at my kitchen table and began Bernard the Buzzard Bag and the story he holds about how the birds got their feathers. Thanks, Bernard.

My Father, a truly fine musician, once asked me if I knew why musical notation, in all its varieties, was invented. Because, he said, human memory is limited. Dabs of ink on paper, Daddy said, allow us to share, and share precisely, more than memory can carry alone. Looking at a symphonic score he could literally hear the music that Ludwig had heard in his head an ocean away and two hundred years earlier. I think beads are like that too. I have come to understand that, if well crafted, those quiet little pieces of glass can out-last, out-share, and out-travel the original creator, carrying their voices to places the beader might never reach.

Journal of Folklore and Education (2021: Vol. 8)

Written in Beads:

Storytelling as Transmission of Haudenosaunee Culture

by Karen Ann Hoffman

I am currently working on a multi-year project in concert with a local archeologist, Ray Reser. The university from which I graduated, the University of Wisconsin–Stevens Point, is built on a mass Native burial. This burial has been ignored since the campus opened in 1894. Wrenchingly, every day for nearly 130 years students, faculty, staff, and visitors have walked over the bodies of these Ancestors. It is my mission to bring rest and acknowledgment to them by insisting that the university install a Native-designed Monument/Marker on site. On a personal level, a piece of beadwork is growing out of this as well, a piece that will sing for and honor the lessons of those who can no longer speak with their mouths. Sometimes, I swear, I hear the voices of my Ancestors whispering in my ear and urging me on. “Do it right,” they say. “Do it well, Karen Ann. Share our lessons with a world that needs to learn.”

Peace.

***Karen Ann Hoffman** has been beading peace, beauty, and meaning through her Haudenosaunee Raised Beadwork since the 1990s. Haudenosaunee Raised Beadwork (also known as Iroquois Raised Beadwork) is unique to the Six Nations of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, characterized by lines of beads that arch above the textile surface for a three-dimensional effect, typically sewn onto velvet. Hoffman is a respected national leader in this art, known for reimagining existing forms to expand their significance for today and the future. She is also an NEA National Heritage Fellow. Retired from a sales career, Hoffman pursues her twin goals of strengthening Haudenosaunee Raised Beadwork within the Haudenosaunee community and gaining recognition for it more widely. She produces two to three large pieces each year, with some in the permanent collections of the Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian, the Field Museum, the Iroquois Indian Museum, and the Oneida Nation Museum. She teaches and hosts a beading circle at her home. She is a co-organizer of the annual International Iroquois Beadwork Conference and has curated multiple exhibits of work by Native artists.*

Artist biography courtesy of Anne Pryor. Read more at

<https://www.arts.gov/honors/heritage/karen-ann-hoffman-oneida-nation-wisconsin>

Artist Website <https://karenannhoffman.com>

Embedded URLS

Bernard the Buzzard Bag “How the Birds Got Their Feathers” Video

<https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLiynlqfrhoznRvYEEpjtZAna7jySQIN3i>

Rock Art Caribou Concept to Completion Video

<https://youtu.be/HP-JIXR7bUg>

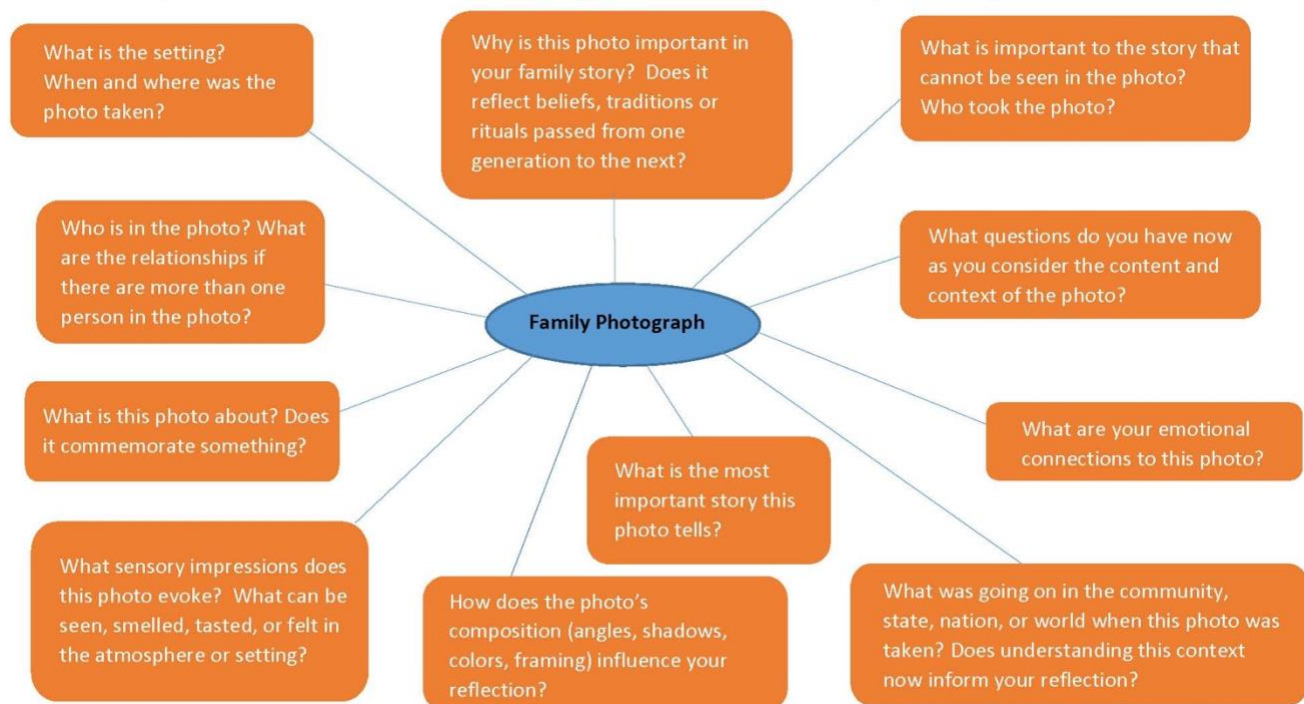
Writing Memoirs Prompted by Family Photos

Classroom Connection: A Graphic Organizer for Writing with Family Photos

by Sandy Hébert LaBry, Guest Editor

The next two authors offer memoirs and family photos. Writing a memoir, capturing an episode of life with reflection on its meaning, can lead writers to explore their relationships with people, places, or things within historical context. Family photos capture many aspects of folklore, and they are a proven springboard for writing personal memoirs.

The following questions are offered as a means of gathering thoughts related to a photo prior to drafting a memoir. Interviews may be important to finding answers to these questions. There is no hierarchy of response dictating where to begin the writing.





Pilgrimage

by Vicie A. Rolling

Daddy had spent the better part of two days washing, simonizing, and otherwise detailing our new car. It had to look *extra-good*, 'cause we were going on a big trip. All the kids on our street knew they had better make a wide berth around it as to not chance messing up his masterpiece.

The Georgia-bound 1947 chocolate-brown Lincoln cruised on fat white-walled New Jersey tires as it travelled down Route 301, with Daddy behind the wheel. It was crystal clear we would stop only for gas and to pee. That was Daddy's rule.

The smooth wide leather bench seats were firm and comforting. We had driven over 600 miles, and I had been smelling the food in the box on the floor next to me the whole time. Mama had spent all yesterday making us her fabulous fried chicken, pound cake, and other delights wrapped in wax paper and aluminum foil. She covered it all with dish towels, then neatly packaged everything in a good-sized cardboard box. I'm here to tell you that box just couldn't hold the smell in!

On the floor with it was the big green Aladdin thermos jug with sweet orange-lemonade Mama and I made the day before. I rolled the lemons for her to make them soft so they were easy to squeeze and juicy. Just thinking about the taste of that drink made me thirsty, but I knew better than to ask. Drinking meant stopping to pee, and I remembered Daddy had special rules about when to stop the car. He was in charge of all rest stops!

It was 1953 and I was a six-year-old child in the days of no seat belts. I hung onto the thick, heavy fabric cord safety strap loop mounted on the side panel between the front and back doors. On the backseat next to me lay Mama's Bible and hymnbook as well as my picture-and-word Golden books. I loved to read and preferred them over toys—so they made the trip with us.

Standing with both feet on the backseat, arms overhead with hands hooked in the strap, I leaned sideways resting my head against the back of the front seat, which held my summer-straw-capped father and my flower-dressed, comb-filled-pompadoured mother. Mama would start a hymn and Daddy would add his bass harmony from time to time. There were lots of funny stories about the relatives we were headed to see. Daddy and Mama were going back home for a visit. We were all so happy.

This morning started as all the yearly summer southern pilgrimages would for years to come. Daddy had placed our stuffed luggage in the trunk of the car along with presents for the relatives

we would see soon. He had to be real careful not to upset Mama, because if he crushed her hatboxes, somebody was going to hear about it for a long time after. That somebody would be Daddy, of course, but I would be in earshot.

Mama would begin, *All those hours, all that time and money, shopping for materials, creating designs, making hat forms from wooden molds, cutting, sewing, gluing! Have mercy, Jesus!*

Suffice it to say, the luggage always went in first and the hats (her one-of-a-kind showpieces) last. On the other hand, my father's felt fedora and bowler hats always made the journey inside the cabin with us, prominently displayed in the rear window behind the backseat.

Before the trip began, once we were settled in our seats, the second early-morning prayer began with us all holding hands. (The first and longer version had been said in the living room of our house.) It was still dark outside. I remember the sound of crickets and peepers from the Assunpink Creek not far from our house.

Dear Father God, we humbly come before you this morning seeking traveling mercies, knowing that you can do all things and are all powerful. We beseech you to wrap us in your loving arms, Jesus! Hold us, Father! Build a fence around us, Father, that no man can put asunder! Keep us, Father, from all hurt, harm, or danger! These things we ask in Jesus's name, Amen.

We never left without a prayer of safety and protection raised.

I had slept for a while, but now my backseat standing position gave me a wide view of the increasingly southern panorama. Trees, flowers, crops, chickens, cows, billboards, roadside stands, gas stations, and restaurants flashed by. The billboard pictures had lots of children. Huge heads of a boy and a girl next to a big bag of bread with colorful dots I recognized as Wonder Bread. A yellow-haired baby on a beach looking back at a puppy dog pulling at her pants exposing her very white bottom puzzled me. There were aproned moms serving their families, dressed up ladies with hats and fur stoles, and lots of men with rosy cheeks smoking cigarettes and pipes who were laughing. I delighted in repeatedly seeing the big, smiling, sombrero-wearing man announcing the number of miles to reach "South of the Border," the one scheduled stop Daddy would make.

Reading these signs was a pastime for us car folk. Daddy would read one, then Mama, then I would get a turn. I was a good reader, but most of the signs had too many words for me to read at the speed we traveled.

The Burma-Shave signs, however, were my favorites—small, white, one-word signs with black lettering. These words were digestible even to a child. One or two words per sign spaced several consecutive yards apart made up a whole sentence that always finished with the words "Burma-Shave."

"Have a date? Don't be late! Burma-Shave!" "For faces that go places, Burma-Shave!" "Aid the blade! Burma-Shave!" "Look spiffy in a jiffy! Burma-Shave!" "When you shop, for your pop, Burma-Shave!"

There were other signs that looked like Burma-Shave signs, *but they were not*. These signs were always on the sides of gas stations and restaurants—small, white, one- or two-word signs with black letters. I felt proud that I could read them. When I read them out loud, it got real quiet in the car. I felt the air change. Daddy cleared his throat, took off his cap, and shifted in his seat. Mama’s head got real still, but I couldn’t make out what these signs meant.

After passing and reading several of them out loud in a row, I finally asked, “Mama, what do they mean? What are they for?”

My mother turned toward the backseat and me and said with a thunderclap, “Sit down, be quiet, and eat some chicken!” I knew “happy” had left our car.

We rode on in silence and the air stayed heavy for a long time. Finally, Daddy decided it was time for a rest break. He pulled off the highway to the side of the road with some high grass on a slight slope and a stand of tall trees further in. Mama and I took toilet paper and went into the tall grass near the car and lifted our skirts, squatted, and did our business.

Across the road was a large, open field with crops already high. Daddy got out of the car and stood up real straight. He put his cap back on, lit a cigarette, and leaned his back against the car frame, arm slung over the open driver’s door, and gazed over the crops in the open field, momentarily lost in memories he had chosen to forget.

He was coming *Home*.



Author’s Note

Jim Crow and the promise of gainful employment gave Southern Blacks a reason to participate in mass migration to Northern urban centers. But not everyone left, and longing for family who stayed South, traditions, and things familiar occasioned many “new” Northern Blacks to return home to rejoin family ties and old ways of being. Not everyone who returned home had a “Green Book” to guide them, and the 1940s, 50s, and 60s were perilous times on Southern U.S. roads for Blacks in shiny new cars with Northern license plates. This story talks about what it was like driving back “down South” for such a family without aid of anything but prayer, vigilance, natural wits, and foreknowledge of southern ways.

In general, I write because the faces and voices of so many elders are fading, like an old photograph left too long in the sun. So many stories have never been and never will be told because when an

elder who held them dies, a library is lost. Many people did not tell their stories because they were too painful to remember and they did not want to burden their children with them. For some, part of breaking free is leaving behind the past.

I write because I believe all stories are important. Stories help us know who we are and who we have been as a people, as a country. The small stories of ordinary people knit us together and break us apart. Everyday revelations (stories) illustrate truth unimpeded by vanity. Stories show what human nature sees (reveals), including the threadbare cloth of lies, allowing us to feel their bumpy texture inside and out. When we can capture them, we must pass the stories on, and the people will not be forgotten. It is essential for the human race to learn from those who have gone before us. We must pay attention and always try to do better, because as humans we have that capacity, and that's our job. Our ability to thrive is tied to this concept. To do otherwise guarantees self-destruction.

I call my work *"framing the past in the peace and possibility of the present."*



Vicie A. Rolling lives in upstate New York. As a retired Professor of Health and Wellness she has gone on to more artistic pursuits. She is a "StoryCatcher." Her avocation is storytelling that includes poetry, short stories, and historical reenactment. She works as a teaching artist in a variety of settings including, schools, museums, historical societies, churches, and festivals. She has produced two chapbooks and two CDs of poetry and short stories. For information email info@framingthepast.com.

Four Excerpts from *Canícula: Snapshots of a Girlhood en la Frontera*

by Norma Elia Cantú

Rocking Horse

I ride the rocking horse Buelito's built from discarded wood planks, painted the color of the red coyoles—red as memories. My feet sandaled in brown huaraches from Nuevo Laredo with tiny green nopales and the tinier red pears, tunas, painted on the delicate leather. A white ribbon holds flimsy black curls away from my face; wisps of rebellious curls escape. Mami has made my sundress, blue like the sky, and embroidered tiny pink rosebuds on the handmade smocking just like the ones she made when she worked as a seamstress at the dress factory. I wear a serious face; riding a horse is serious business at age two. Even as I squint in the noontime sun, I look straight at the camera at Mami who's kneeling on one knee to be at eye level with me. The screened front door and the window of the house on San Francisco Street where Tino was born frames us, me and my red horse. Blood-red verbena on the ground, tall-leaf coyoles bloom red in the background. The ride's bumpy on the gravel front yard, but I hold on as tight as if I were riding the real pony I long for—the sad-looking pinto that we ride round and round at the carnival. Because I'm the oldest, I am the beneficiary of Buelito's carpentry skills; he makes toys from wooden spools and toothpicks and rubber bands. Later, when we live on Santa María, the same year Dahlia is born, he'll build a tiny table and chair for me and my dolls. There I'll sit and drink Choco Milk and eat galletas marías when I come home from Señora Piña's escuela where I learn to count and sing and declamar poems for Mother's Day: "Si vieras mamita, que lindas flores / amarillas y azules / de mil colores / aquí las veo abiertas / acá en botón / pero todas alegran mi corazón" and "Un lunes por la mañana me decía mi mamá / levántate, Azucena, si no le digo a tu papá / y yo siendo una niña de carta cabal / me quedaba calladita / '¿Qué no me oyes, lucero?' / ¿Lucero? ¡Si ni candil soy!" Buelito, who is sometimes gone, has come to be with us for a while. I ride a red rocking horse to the rhythm of lullabies, look at Mami, and suddenly cry. My tears are round stains on the smock of the pinafore, a darker shade of blue.



Reprinted with permission from the University of Mexico Press. From *Canícula: Snapshots of a Girlhood en la Frontera*, Updated edition, by Norma Elia Cantú. 2015. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, <https://unmpress.com>.



Tino

He did it at four. And again at nine. He stands to the side with his hand out as if pointing a gun or a rifle. Everyone else is crowded around me; the piñata in the shape of a birthday cake sways in the wind above our heads. Everyone's there: aunts, uncles, cousins, the neighbors, my madrina, everyone, even Mamagrande Lupita from Monterrey. I'm holding the stick decorated with red, blue, yellow tissue paper that we will use to break the piñata. And he's playing, even in the picture, at being a soldier. Only ten years later, 1968, he is a soldier, and it's not a game. And we are gathered again: tías, tíos, cousins, comadres, neighbors, everyone, even Mamagrande Lupita from Monterrey, and Papi's Cousin Ricardo who has escorted the body home. We have all gathered around a flag-draped coffin. Tino's come home from Vietnam. My brother. The sound of the trumpet caresses our hearts and Mami's gentle sobbing sways in the cool wind of March.



China Poblana One

Smiling, I look straight at the camera; I grimace, smile, squint under bright sun. Must be around noon—not a shadow shows. We have just returned from the George Washington’s birthday parade. I hold up my china poblana skirt and point my toe as I stand for the photo. Mami has braided my shoulder-long hair, adding volume and length with yarn—green, white, and red—verde, blanco y colorado, la bandera del soldado. The dazzlingly white blouse embroidered with bright silk to shape flowers like the ones that grow in our yard—roses, hibiscus, geraniums, and even some that look like the tiny blossoms of the moss roses remind me of summer, although it’s a warm February day.

I know Raúl is hiding behind his dad’s car to make fun of me; I pretend not to notice. Instead of his teasing though, I hear a whistle—a wolf whistle—and I become even more upset than if he had called me skinny or wetback, yelled his favorite taunts, “mojada” or “flaca.” I mustn’t move because Mami wants me to stand perfectly still until she takes the picture. I resist the urge to grab a stone, hit Raúl with it. My aim is good and I know exactly where he is, if only I could. And I feel like the Chalupa in the lotería game, like María Félix, Dolores del Río, a movie star frozen in costume. But then it’s all gone like the dust remolino that came up unexpectedly and left us all dusty. A lonely urraca lets out a loud cawing in the noon heat, predicting a change of weather, warning of the freezing winds that will hit later that afternoon and will cut into my face as I ride the wheel of fortune at the carnival, where I’ll bite into pink fluff of sugar and find it disappear into sweetness. We go inside the frame house, have lunch: sopa de arroz, picadillo guisado, and fresh corn tortillas with orange-flavored Kool-Aid. Mami tells Bueli that I’m growing so fast the costume won’t fit by next year, and Dahlia will wear it to the parade. I cringe and want to cry, but I won’t let the thought spoil the present, and I ask: can I buy cotton candy at the carnival? Maybe I’ll even win a little pink or blue chick to keep me company. And I do but when the chick becomes a chicken, Bueli wrings its neck, drains the blood, and we have arroz con pollo for Easter.

Blue Stroller

I'm in the stroller that I suspect came with us from the other Laredo. A young Bueli is pushing it, dressed in her late-forties platform shoes and tailored dress, her hair up in a chignon. My memory for everything but the stroller is like the photo, black and white; the stroller is the blue of my winter coat when I was sixteen. When I saw the coat on the rack at J.C. Penney's, I had to have it. Spent almost all I'd earned proofreading for the weekly community paper on that coat. Years later I realized it reminded me of that stroller. Painted blue, made of metal and wood. I remember it well; we used it until Margie was born. Just like my periquera—the fancy high chair that could be converted into a toy wagon, and the crib that rocked like a cradle that Papi repainted and redecorated with bunnies, cubs, kittens, and other baby animal decals for each birth; things were used and reused. Children's furniture and other pieces, too, as when Papi's old desk became our desk. It held his old books and magazines, correspondence courses: electrician, magician, even auto mechanic. Dreams of what he'd wanted to be. And some adult joke books that were hidden away from prying eyes—mine. He emptied it of his things, painted it red for Tino's school things. In the photo, I'm an infant—chubby, puffy cheeks, and under a hat, little hair—oblivious to what is going on, more interested in playing with a rattle, with the red, yellow, green, and blue wooden balls strung on a wire. Mami, a young woman, takes the photo, nineteen when I was born; does she see herself ten years and five children later? Twenty years from then, ten children later?

Norma Elia Cantú is the Norine R. and T. Frank Murchison Distinguished Professor of the Humanities at Trinity University in San Antonio, Texas.

Journal of Folklore and Education (2021: Vol. 8)
Four Excerpts from *Canícula: Snapshots of a Girlhood en la Frontera*
by Norma Elia Cantú



Norma Cantú's memoir pre-writing exercise for high school and university students:

Ask students to think of a photo of themselves between the ages of 5 and 12.

Answer the questions:

- Who is taking the photo? A family member? A professional photographer?
- What is the occasion? School photo? Birthday or graduation? Or no special event?
- What are you wearing? Be specific, what color? Fabric?
- What does your hair look like?
- What shoes are you wearing?
- What sounds do you recall? Smells?
- Who else is in the photo?
- If you could talk to the you in the photo what would you say?
- If the you in the photo could talk to you what would they say?



FisherPoets and Public Folklorists: Practicing Partnership

by Riki Saltzman

[The FisherPoets Gathering](#) (FPG) seduces audiences with poems, songs, and stories in celebration of Northwestern commercial fishing heritage. Men and women who earn their livelihood fishing assemble to catch up on news, renew old ties, and make new ones. This annual event takes place in scenic Astoria, Oregon, at the mouth of the Columbia River, and brings together local commercial interests, heritage, and traditional expressive culture for three nonstop days of performance. The Gathering happens in the dead of winter—the last weekend in February. While this may seem an odd time for most of us to go traipsing off to the wet and windy northwest coast, it’s downtime for most Pacific Northwest fishermen. As poet, fisherman, teacher, and FPG founder Jon Broderick has noted, however, crabbers and long-liners are still hard at it. Regardless, this event warms and renews all who take part.

The FisherPoets Gathering started in 1998, when a few commercial fishermen—the term that both men and women prefer—decided to create a get-together to share their songs, stories, and poetry. Fishing has long inspired a variety of expressive culture centered around work; witness the long history of sea shanties and work songs from those who make their living on water. In the 20th

About the photos: Dave Densmore's boat, the *Cold Stream*, anchored at Pier 39, Astoria, Oregon (L), and Dave Densmore at the Liberty Theater, Astoria, Oregon (R).

Photos by Riki Saltzman, courtesy of the Oregon Folklife Network.

Relationships Matter in Folklore and Education

One of the main reasons I was drawn to folklore, as an undergraduate and then as a career choice, had to do with my love for hearing stories, whether they are folk tales, oral histories, or personal experience narratives. My first folklore fieldwork was with watermen on the Chesapeake Bay in 1975. I was an undergraduate in a folklore and fieldwork class that folklorist Bob Bethke and historian Jim Curtis, University of Delaware faculty, were team teaching. I marvel now at their courage in first mentoring then setting loose a group of college students to document the stories of working watermen. In 2012, after over three and a half decades of folklore practice across the U.S. and the U.K., I started a new job at the Oregon Folklife Network (OFN), the state's designated folk and traditional arts program. I was looking forward to hearing new stories in new places. Jens Lund, then the folklorist for Washington State Parks, had told me about the FisherPoets Gathering some years before; once he knew I'd be taking the OFN position, he urged me to attend the 2013 Gathering. He introduced me to FPG organizers Jon Broderick (commercial fisherman, retired high school English teacher, fisherpoet and singer/songwriter) and Hobe Kytr (marine historian and singer/songwriter).

century, commercial fishermen began to communicate over radio during long hours at sea. Some of this was just chatter, and some was more creative storytelling and versifying. With a focus on the latter, the FPG welcomes commercial fishermen to come together to celebrate who they are; mourn their losses; laugh at their mistakes; tease each other; talk about politics, regulations, and the economy; and then write movingly in poetry and prose about who they are, what they do, and even the fish they catch. The Gathering speaks to the significance of the Pacific Northwest's historic fisheries and fishing communities and their relationship to the environment, local economies, and local cultures.

Of course, the event was not originally intended to be public entertainment. As Hobe Kytr firmly told me in our first email exchange, "This is a celebration of commercial fisheries by and for commercial fishers." Jon Broderick responded to my long-winded offer to volunteer at FPG in his usual laconic way: "I'll say we need help. See [the volunteer

schedule]. Want to take a shift?" I did, and I thoroughly enjoyed myself. For me, this was a folklorist's dream—hearing working men and women recite poetry and prose and sing songs about their occupational trials and triumphs. What a kick!

Since 2013, the OFN has partnered with the FisherPoets Gathering to document fisherpoets, their work, and their occupational poetry and prose. As folklorists who have the privilege to interview fisherpoets, our appreciation for the artistry required to make hard physical labor into verbal art that invokes community has led to an ongoing relationship as well as friendships and fish. OFN's incorporation of the annual FPG into our mission to mentor the next generation of public folklorists has been a further consequence. It's become one of my greatest pleasures to introduce University of Oregon Folklore and Public Culture Program students to the annual Gathering and to folklore fieldwork—a bit of paying forward of my own first foray into folklore as a student. The FPG provides a perfect first fieldwork experience—a physically and temporally bounded event that immerses all who attend in the traditional expressive culture of commercial fishermen. While most UO Folklore graduate students attend FPG only once, a few attend multiple years because they've decided to focus their MA theses on some aspect of the event; both Brad McMullen and Julie Meyer, noted below, researched and wrote about how gender affects the form, content, and performance of fisherpoetry.

Journal of Folklore and Education (2021: Vol. 8)

"Hey, Folklorists!"

FisherPoets and Public Folklorists: Practicing Partnership
by Riki Saltzman

Fieldwork Rules—Do No Harm!

Each year, OFN offers UO Folklore students the opportunity to travel to Astoria for the FisherPoets Gathering. Part of the experience is getting there, which includes a four-hour drive to Astoria from Eugene, and the transition into this once-a-year world; usually it's pleasant, but some years we've driven through mountain snow as we cross from the Willamette Valley over the Coastal Range. We check into the same hotel as the poets and enjoy our first reunions with old friends. We tear ourselves away and head over to the Gear Shack. This temporary gift shop is where everyone registers and receives that all-important button that allows access to the event—volunteering for a three-hour stint at a performance venue gets us our admittance buttons. The Gear Shack sells fisherpoets' chapbooks, books, CDs, DVDs, and art; it's also the site of a silent auction.

Fieldwork Ethics and Community Relationships

Before traveling to FPG, students must learn about the ongoing relationship we have with the Gathering and our responsibility to document the poets respectfully. OFN has been doing this since 2013, so we have archived over 40 interviews. I have students read a paper that I wrote describing the event and OFN's previous collaborations with FPG and individual poets. We talk about what commercial fishermen do, the dangers they face, how at least one boat goes down each year, and how this event is THEIR reunion; we are privileged to have an insider track. That privilege and trust come from being open and collaborative, inviting and paying fisherpoets for performances and workshops outside FPG, and helping periodically to write grants to fund poets' travel to FPG. Letting students know that they are part of a long tradition of folklorists' documentation is really important, as is emphasizing that their behavior reflects on OFN and UO's Folklore Program.

Students attend at least one performance of a fisherpoet whom the student will interview as well as many other performances, film showings, and workshops as they can fit in. Besides the official program, it's important to pay attention to opportunities to talk informally with the fisherpoets. The deep conversations occur back at the hotel, after performances are done for the evening, and I encourage students to join in and get to know the fishermen. They all bring food and beverages to share, and it's polite for us to do so, too. Zoe Steeler (BA, UO Folklore, 2016), then an undergraduate Folklore major, observed:

During the Gathering there was a sort of energy; the town came alive during the event. So many businesses had "Welcome FisherPoets" signs hanging in their front windows. Everywhere I went, I saw someone else that was involved in the Gathering. The whole town was a part of it. The lobby of the hotel we stayed at was the site of casual after-hours groupings; every restaurant I passed was filled with people sporting fisherpoet buttons [the entry "ticket" to admit everyone to performance venues], and the maritime museum opened their doors to the Gathering as a place for talks. The buttons were like a badge of community, a sign of camaraderie. The program for the event was a local newspaper. It felt like everyone in this town was involved and connected with the event.

Some weeks before we leave for Astoria, I meet with all the students (usually those who are part of my Public Folklore or Folklore and Foodways class, so they've already gotten an introduction to fieldwork) and go over what to expect from the weekend. We discuss the event in general, logistics like making sure to bring food and drink to share for evening after-hours get-togethers, and how to do the actual interview.

There are usually several opportunities to share experiences during meals at FPG, and we debrief during the car ride back to campus. We also talk about the experience during class or another gathering back in Eugene. And we make sure to send those digital interviews along with a thank-you email to those we've interviewed. Manners count!



Folklore student Kayleigh Graham interviewing Rob Seitz at the Columbia River Maritime Museum.

Photo by B McMullen,
courtesy of the Oregon Folklife Network.

UO's Folklore students have eagerly taken up OFN's offer to journey to document fisherpoets at the annual Gathering. Steeler reflected on the event's transformational impact:

The FisherPoets Gathering was an incredibly special event. It was my first time participating in any sort of folkloric fieldwork, and I found it to be something I definitely want to do again. I learned how to do interviews in a real-world setting, and I got to witness the finer aspects of fieldwork from people I like and respect. . . . I got to be a part of something that I will never forget. On this trip I was able to finally find the work that I want to be a part of in a long-term manner.

The Fieldwork Interview

The fieldwork interview is an important part of the learning experience, which includes scheduling the interview, conducting it, creating the metadata (audio log, datasheet, fieldnotes, reflection), and collaborating on an OFN newsletter feature. We start with looking over the FPG website, [In the Tote](#) recordings and bios, and performance schedules, I go over fieldwork etiquette and potential issues in general:

- Make sure to read any posted bios and writings of the poet you'll be interviewing.
- Be respectful of people's time.
- Introduce yourself.
- Listen and try to nod instead of responding verbally.
- Try not to interrupt your interviewee.
- Use the recommended questions as a guide.
- Listen actively and ask follow-up questions.
- Thank your interviewee and offer to send him/her the digital recording and any photos you have taken of him/her.

In our discussions, we also cover the logistics as well as the ethics involved through a series of topics—cultural context, how to ask questions, and how to listen. I provide examples of when things have gone wrong in fieldwork situations (not just at FPG) and how to turn what sounds like a dumb question into a way to gather more information; if you act as if you know the answers, why should our interviewees provide their own? Because this class session is about fieldwork in general, we do cover issues that students might realistically confront in a variety of fieldwork situations, from general surveys to contract work for a particular employer. We discuss how folklorists might respond to a fieldwork scenario when they don't agree with the person they are interviewing. We also spend time having students reflect upon who they are and who they may represent when doing fieldwork.

To give everyone experience in how to ask and how to listen, we do practice interviews with each other. We start with reading “Writing as Alchemy: Turning Objects into Stories, Stories into Objects” (Liu and Sunstein 2016). Then we talk about the specifics of the annual Gathering. Students look over the [FPG website](#) and a particular year's list of participants, listen to some [In the Tote recordings](#), and check out available biographies and writings for those they will be interviewing. Jon Broderick usually provides a suggested list of fishermen to interview along with their contact information. After an initial explanatory email to all from me, students take the lead and schedule their interviews. First, they look over the schedule to learn when their poet will be performing; the interviews take place the next day at the [Columbia River Maritime Museum](#) (thanks to the very gracious director and staff). The side bar lists suggested questions and topics, but interviewing is much more an art than a science; listening to responses and asking follow-up questions is more important than following a script.

Interview Notes

General topics

- How a particular fisherman got into commercial fishing
- How the fisherman became a fisherpoet
- How the FPG is meaningful to the fisherman

Potential interview questions

- How did you get into fishing?
- What is your first memory of fishing?
- From whom did you learn?
- Why do you continue to do it?
- What kind of dangers have you faced?
- Funny moments?
- What makes a good fisherman? A good deckhand? A good captain?
- Do you work outside of fishing?

The writing experience

- How and why did you start writing poetry and/or prose?
- Did you write poetry before you fished?
- When did you write your first poem? About fishing?
- What makes a good poem/prose piece?
- What's your way of starting, writing, and revising a poem?

The Gathering experience

- Why did you start coming to FPG?
- How long have you been coming and do you come every year?
- What's meaningful to you about FPG?
- Who are your favorite fisherpoets and why?
- What makes a good fisherpoet?

Commercial fisherman, fisherpoet, and former social worker [Tele Aadsen](#), whom folklorist Brad McMullen interviewed a few years ago, described the interview experience as a “guided meditation.” I love this phrase because it gets at the heart of what a good interview can do and how to give back to the interviewee. The process of ethnographic interviewing starts with pre-formulated questions, usually based on previous work—research or fieldwork—with a particular person in a particular field. A good interview uses those questions as a guide but also, crucially, involves active listening, commenting when appropriate, and asking follow-up questions. In our interviews with fisherpoets, we ask both about the work and the creative writing process. Most people, even these creative folks, don’t really think explicitly about their process. When we as folklorists ask them how they do what they do, how they process their fishing experiences into poetry and prose, we are trying to elicit those implicit processes—and that’s not always easy to articulate. The interview process is itself a creative collaboration that builds from basic and general questions to more intimate ones. I almost always end an interview with the question, “Why do you do it [whatever the traditional art is]?” Engaging deeply with those we interview about their work and the resultant traditional art invites interviewees to think and talk about how they process experiences into expressive forms.



Moe Bowstern at the Liberty Theater, Astoria, Oregon.

Photo by Riki Saltzman, courtesy of the Oregon Folklife Network.

The creative products of folklorists—including this article—may also include blogs and newspaper articles. Read some student examples at these links:

<https://blogs.uoregon.edu/ofnblog/2020/07/16/fisher-poets-gathering-2020>

<https://blogs.uoregon.edu/ofnblog/2018/04>

Folklife, Fieldwork, and Paying It Forward

The FPG gang seems happy to have us around, and the graduate students reported back to me after the 2014 Gathering, which I couldn’t attend, that the fisherpoets had taken to greeting them around town with a “Hey, Folklorists!” Now emcees thank us from stages and the FPG acknowledges us as partners on their website. We appreciate that we’ve earned their trust, and we remain sensitive with the relationships; giving back to those communities we document is critically important. Julie Meyer’s exhibit [Shifting Tides: Women of the FisherPoets Gathering](#) and her MA thesis on the same topics are great examples of just that. Meyer listened well to her interviewees as they shared their processes as fishermen, writers, and performers. She also proved her mettle by going to Bristol Bay for a few weeks over two summers to learn and do the work of a set-netting crew. Both her exhibit and her thesis exemplify the results of her collaboration with fisherpoets and with OFN’s exhibit curator and staff. Likewise, the articles that students produce for OFN’s newsletter include student reflections on their experiences as folklorists as well as their fisherpoet documentation. My role as instructor and folklorist includes documenting students’ ethnography

and sharing those images and reflections with both them and the public. Becoming a folklorist, like becoming a fisherman, is a process; it happens gradually—and by doing the work. Reflecting on her experiences, Meyer wrote:

Overall, I went into the FisherPoets Gathering with a lot of background knowledge about the fisherpoets and about the environments where they were coming from. It is my belief that a fieldworker should have as much background information as possible when going into important interviews, because without this background information individuals cannot truly reach the complex issues buried in the interviews. If we spend most of our time contextualizing and asking for basic information about terminology, I think we are missing out on the more complex issues about community and folklore. My experience at the FisherPoets Gathering vastly transformed over the year, from my first trip to the event, to my work in the fisheries, and finally my return to the Gathering. Upon my return to the 2015 FisherPoets Gathering, I feel as if I've finally gotten a true taste of the magic of the FisherPoets Gathering to which the community members constantly refer.

As part of the OFN, I've been empowered to reach out to local groups—to meet, document their traditions, and offer assistance as needed. This is an enterprise that many of us are privileged to share and indulge our curiosity about cultural traditions. We get to document the traditions, meet and sometimes become friends and colleagues with those who keep and pass them on, and, we hope, make a difference by calling attention to, celebrating, preserving, and promoting folklife—and the individuals who make it possible.

I don't think you can be a folklorist without a passion for the lore as well as those who create it. For many folklorists, particularly those of us who work in the public sector, that admittedly selfish attraction to the artistic products, to the performances, leads us to work with individuals and then the communities to which they are attached. Their concerns and issues become ours, and sometimes it's hard, if not impossible, to separate personal from professional life. We are not folklorists by accident, although it can sometimes seem that way.

My own theoretical interests in performance and occupational lore have helped me to understand how working men and women repurpose traditional expressive structures and forms to create and sustain community. But my involvement with the FPG and the men and women who create it and participate in it is not just about the theory; it's about the praxis, and deeply so. And, of course, it's about the poetry, which speaks to the traditions of an age-old occupation—and the occupational tradition of lightening the load by making art.

Conveying my love of my field and the joy I take in working with the fisherpoets has been an unexpected pleasure. Introducing students to the field of folklore and to the traditions and expressive culture of commercial fishermen is fun. I enjoy in-person reunions with the poets, many of whom I've become friends with outside FPG. Entering the liminal space of this reunion of hardworking, generous workers is invigorating, exhausting, and always inspiring. Former graduate student Makaela Kroin (MA, UO Folklore, 2016) put it succinctly, "My first in-depth experience with fieldwork was exciting, overwhelming, and physically and mentally draining." She continued, "The sense of community was intense throughout the event, making it an incredibly interesting

event for folklorists to document.” As Tele Aadsen wrote at the end of the 2019 FisherPoets Gathering, “Gratitude to [coast community radio, KMUN, which broadcasts the FisherPoets Gathering each year], the venues, the FisherPoets organizing committee, the performers, and the oodles of volunteers who’ve made this life-giving magic happen for 22 years now.” As it is for the commercial fishermen, so it is for us. The collective experience of the work is at the center—for the FPG has the generative power to recreate community and imbue performers, audiences, and folklorists with *communitas*, that feeling of oneness and flow that all good festive celebrations share. In a 2017 interview, fisherman Pat McGuire shared her thoughts about FPG with former graduate student Hillary Tully (MA, UO Folklore, 2018):


Well I think first of all it's wonderful to be able to share what you do with like-minded people, it's just, if you're a fisherman in the everyday land world, you're kind of an oddity. So it's really nice to be around people that know what you're talking about. But I think too because we bring out the best in each other, we share experiences, and we grow from it. And it makes me want to do better as a poet and try to communicate some of the shared experiences with other fishermen.



FisherPoets 2018, Pier 39, Astoria, Oregon.

Photo by Riki Saltzman, courtesy of the Oregon Folklife Network.

Lack of sleep, camaraderie with each other and the poets, and the seductive power of all good performances to take us away from ourselves make for an addictive feeling. We keep coming back for more. Finally, there is the payback, the special gift that teachers sometimes receive—to watch students learn, to see them have their own ah-ha moment as they transform into folklorists, in the process of their own performance of the work that we do.

Rachelle H. (Riki) Saltzman is the staff folklorist for the High Desert Museum in Bend and folklore specialist for the Oregon Folklife Network, for which she served as Executive Director 2012-20. She teaches Folklore and Foodways, Public Folklore, and other courses for the University of Oregon's Folklore and Public Culture Program. She obtained her PhD in Anthropology (Folklore) from the University of Texas at Austin and has served on the Executive Boards of the American Folklore Society and the Association for the Study of Food and Society. Her books include *A Lark for the Sake of Their Country: The 1926 General Strike Volunteers in Folklore and Memory* (Manchester University Press, 2012) and *Pussy Hats, Politics, and Public Protest* (University Press of Mississippi, 2020).  ORCID 0000-0001-6648-9273

Works Cited

Liu, Rossina Zamora and Bonnie Stone Sunstein. 2016. Writing as Alchemy: Turning Objects into Stories, Stories into Objects. *Journal of Folklore and Education*. 3:60-76, <https://www.locallearningnetwork.org/journal-of-folklore-and-education/current-and-past-issues/journal-of-folklore-and-education-volume-3-2016/writing-as-alchemy-turning-objects-into-stories-stories-into-objects>.



FisherPoetry: An Occupational Tradition

by Jon Broderick

The FisherPoets Gathering, the last weekend of every February in Astoria, Oregon, is an honest celebration of commercial fishing culture. A hundred skippers and deckhands—current, former, female, male, grizzled, green—each with authentic experience working in the commercial fishing industry, and many with no more in common than that, come from coasts far and near to perform original poetry, prose, and song for one another and for a surprising number of fisherpoetry fans, too.

Work knits commercial fishing culture together and fisherpoets are compelled to write creatively about it. Rob Seitz has written about mending torn nets, about a cracker-jack deckhand who dreads demons awaiting him back in port. Maggie Bursch about ghosts that haunt a young skipper's

Photo by Perry Broderick, son of the author, features their crew at work.

restless sleep. Toby Sullivan about the durable equipment, both mental and material, a new deckhand will need. Meghan Gervais about repairing a blown hydraulic hose in the thick of a frenetic season.

In the audience, everyone nods.

Me, I've written about my son Pete hauling back a heavy net, about Ole Olson starting a stubborn outboard, about Mike Treesh stopping by our boat on a rare calm evening after delivering his fish. Like a lot of commercial fishing outfits, ours is a family operation. I wrote "How to Tell a Good One" after watching my youngest son, Henry, who was about 12 at the time, during his first trip as crew. Now, years later, he's a veteran and runs one of our boats. I should probably write another poem.

Veterans in any trade will always assess, always warily, the new guy. To craft this poem I concentrated on describing Henry's specific behaviors that impressed me without explaining their obvious effect.

Some vocabulary is specific to our salmon set gillnet fishery. In Bristol Bay set netters fish by chasing the tide's rising or falling shoreline up and down expansive mudflats, moving and anchoring, then moving and anchoring some more, a shallow 100-yard gillnet, keeping it in the path of migrating salmon, perpendicular to the beach. While it's anchored we pick fish, sometimes an awful lot of them, from the net into the boat. There's a technique. Part of it is to let gravity hold the fish for you. Before long you realize there's only a finite combination of ways a salmon can tangle. I made up a name for one of them.

In the poem as we tow the net deeper, chasing the falling tide, I didn't want to explain too much. The new guy is a little puzzled, too.

An effective poem's end will avoid the obvious and predictable and, through some combination of subtlety and surprise, invite insight, offer new perspective, suggest further contemplation. Henry's question from the bow, where safely out of the way he's watching, reveals a lot about his nature. Not only observant and curious, he fancies himself already part of the crew. "What did *we* just do?"


If you're lucky enough to find a satisfying end to a poem, then a satisfying title—one that doesn't reveal too much—may still elude you. Emily Dickinson seldom titled her poems. They're mostly referred to by their first lines. But a title can contribute profoundly to a poem, and be nearly part of the poem itself. For example, Robert Frost's famous poem is not titled "The Road Less Traveled." "The Road Not Taken" is about the other road.

As titles go, "How to Tell a Good One" tries to create some anticipation without revealing too much. Better than "How Henry Impressed His Dad the Skipper" but probably not much better than "The new guy wears waders..." Robert Frost could have done much better.

To avoid cluttering poetry or prose with the obvious, I try to describe observable behavior, without explaining its motive or effect. To show without telling. To demonstrate without explaining.

I'll often observe the finest details of someone, say, at work, noting even those details that don't seem significant. I might try describing the specific actions, the observable behaviors of a patient person, or a wise person, or an arrogant person.

Maybe you'll have a try. Show everything. Explain nothing. Then bring it to Astoria—we've an open mic—and read it to us.

Jon Broderick lives on the Oregon coast and is the guy who made the first phone calls years ago that started the FisherPoets Gathering. He and his family have been set netting summers in Bristol Bay, Alaska, since 1987.  ORCID 0000-0003-2176-2963

Learn more about the FisherPoets Gathering at <http://www.fisherpoets.org>.



Photo by Perry Broderick.

How to Tell a Good One

For Henry

The new kid wears waders that come clear to his chin
and a life jacket at his mother's wise insistence.
When, at the end of a long slog across the mud, we reach the skiff
Pete, his brother, a veteran of a dozen campaigns,
hauls him aboard by the scruff of his gear.

But the kid coils the line as Pete pulls the anchor.
Nobody has to tell him.
And as we set for the first time this season
he neatly throws clear a loop of leadline from a binboard snag.

He pulls when we pull.
He picks when we pick,
making surprising quick work of your basic #1 double-gill-on-the-bagside,
he hardly touches the fish.

When we take a break at the water's edge
he's quick to the beach with the dipnet
rounding up stragglers
and climbs back in the boat three times.
"Practicing," he says.

At the bottom of the tide we cut the skiff loose.
Pete carves a tight turn at the outside buoy.
The skiff pulls up easy alongside.
I snag the trip line, tie it astern,
Pete tows out and up
until we like what we see and nod both.
He cuts the throttle and I cast the buoy free.
The boat drifts a moment in the lazy brown current and the blue two-stroke exhaust.

In the bow the new guy is watching.
He hikes up his bibs,
hooks his thumbs in his suspenders.
"What'd we just do?" he wants to know.

—Jon Broderick

Classroom Connection:

How to Write an Occupational Folklife Poem:

First, read a bunch of them and find some you like,
but stay away from rhymers for now.
Pick two or three favorites.
Say each one aloud, slowly.
Notice what parts you like best.
Maybe write those words down to keep somewhere
sort of like a photo on your phone.

Now, wonder what prompted someone to write that poem you like best.
Ask what might prompt you.

What if you
describe what you think your mom or your dad does at work
or describe how to do a chore that others might not be familiar with
or describe someone doing something he or she is really, really good at
or describe someone attempting something difficult for the first time
or list the businesses and shops you pass on a trip through your town,
list the sounds you'd hear, the fragrances you'd smell, the bits of conversation you'd catch as you
pass.

Wonder.
As you do, write sentences, plenty of them.
And when you're done, read what you've written aloud, slowly.
Fix the parts that don't make sense. Take out the parts you don't need.

Now, here's the poem part:
Read your sentences aloud again, slowly / and put a slash mark / where you'd like to pause / even
just / a little bit. /
Get a clean sheet of paper.
Sharpen your pencil.
Copy down your sentences
but put the parts between the slash marks
each
on its own line.

Now read it to someone
aloud, slowly
who has also a poem
to share with you.

—Jon Broderick

En Route to Togiak

by Moe Bowstern

Much of the time I've spent as deckhand, I've been on a leash of some kind. On a small boat, there's little that irritates a skipper more than seeing crew sprawled in the galley reading a book or writing poetry when any number of things could be cleaned, sorted, piled, stacked, scrubbed, polished, sharpened, repaired, or seized in decorative knot work. We were to be working, or asleep. Even standing at the rail we were expected to be observing horizons with keen eyes.

We were looking for fish, of course, but also anything that might offer a clue to better fishing. Tide rips might hide streams of swimming silver, or a deadhead—a tree or other timber so waterlogged it bobs vertically in the water, where a stray wave could punch a lethal hole in our hull. Tenders running fish to the cannery might signal heavy fishing. We were required to spy on other boats. What were they doing? Where were they going? Why was there a North end boat on the East side? How big was the bag of fish they just hauled aboard?

All this looking of course done without notebook or any other recording technology outside my writer's brain. At the time, I resented it. I stared mulishly over the waves, my city brain desperate to fill itself with chatter. I eventually learned to see. Nowadays, 30 years later, my friends remark on my excellent eyesight—I who can't read a stop sign without my glasses—because while traveling 65 miles an hour, I still catch the flick of an osprey over the highway.

Fishing trained my brain to know a speck in the waves as fish, piling, or murrelet; to smell the difference between estuary, river, and sea water; to discern a land breeze from an ocean wind. Fishing taught me patience and also how to sink into a dream. The rhythm on board was good for letter writing; during the winter months of crab season I wrote letters every morning on the hour-and-a-half commute to the grounds over the icy blue waves before I chopped frozen sardines into bait with a dull hatchet.

I sang a lot on the boat, made a lot of art, and wrote long letters back home to my friends. We didn't have a lot of free time, so it was precious; I would work all day composing letters and thinking about my friends, then when I got a free moment I would scribble notes.

I went herring fishing for a few years; in 1996 our little boat made the long trip from Kodiak Island to Togiak Bay, across the Shelikof Strait, through Unimak Pass and across the eastern edge of the Bering Sea. We drove for 24 hours, stopped in the Shumagin Islands for fuel, drove another 24 hours to the herring grounds. We each took two-hour watches; with four of us on the boat, I had long, lovely periods of time to gaze out at the sea while the engines roared on, powering us forward.

Traveling on a boat and keeping watch took us out of the usual calendar time. We stayed up all night in the little community of Sand Point where we stopped for fuel, enjoying the novelty of walking on roads. I found a phone booth; at 5 a.m. it was 9 a.m. where my mother lived, and it happened to be Mother's Day. While I spoke with her on the phone, a pair of young martens came out to play on the wooden dock where I stood; I remember describing their bright eyes to her. I

wrote this poem as a postcard to my parents, wrote it down in one of my special waterproof notebooks and then sent it from the post office.

En Route to Togiak

West Bering Sea, 1996

Venus hangs low and bright in the fading dark of the spring Alaska sky.
The Big Dipper, one of the few constellations to punch through the atmosphere,
 swings directly above the mast, ten boat lengths up.
The beautiful weather of this crossing has fallen me in love again with the sea.
It is a sweet, sweet romance; this time
she leads and I follow
in full awareness of my enchantment.
I wash my shirts in the sink
and dream, at night, of walking.

—Moe Bowstern

***Moe Bowstern** is editor of *Xtra Tuf*, a zine chronicling the experiences and adventures of commercial fisher folk in Alaska and beyond since 1996. She has performed annually at the FisherPoets Gathering since it began in 1998. She has appeared at the Sea Music Festival in Mystic, Connecticut; the Working Waterfront Festival in New Bedford, Massachusetts; the Cowboy Poetry Gathering in Elko, Nevada; and Tony's Bar, "Kodiak's Biggest Navigational Hazard," in Kodiak, Alaska, among other places. *Xtra Tuf* #5: The Strike Issue won the 2007 Lilla Jewel Award. Moe has worked on fishing boats since 1986, when as a miserable 18-year-old boat cook she once inadvertently threatened the lives of the crew by serving pasta tossed with shards of glass. She has fished salmon, halibut, herring, tanner crab, and cod in Alaska; shad on the Hudson River; shrimp in Miami; and mackerel, crab, and lobster in the Moray Firth of Scotland.*

Corridos: (Mostly) True Stories in Verse with Music

by Celestino Fernández

Año de 1900

Presente lo tengo yo

En un barrio de Saltillo

Rosita Álvarez murió

Rosita Álvarez murió

The year 1900

Is present in my mind

In a Saltillo neighborhood

Rosita Álvarez died

Rosita Álvarez died

Rosita ya está en el cielo

Dándole cuenta al Creador

Hipólito está en la cárcel

Dando su declaración

Dando su declaración

Rosita is now in Heaven

Giving accounts to the Creator

Hipólito is in jail

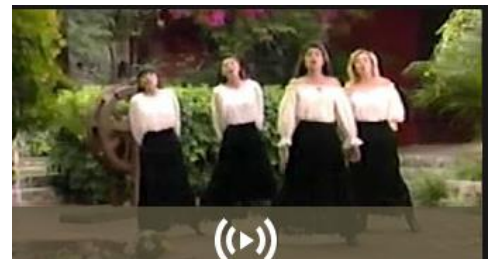
Giving his statement

Giving his statement

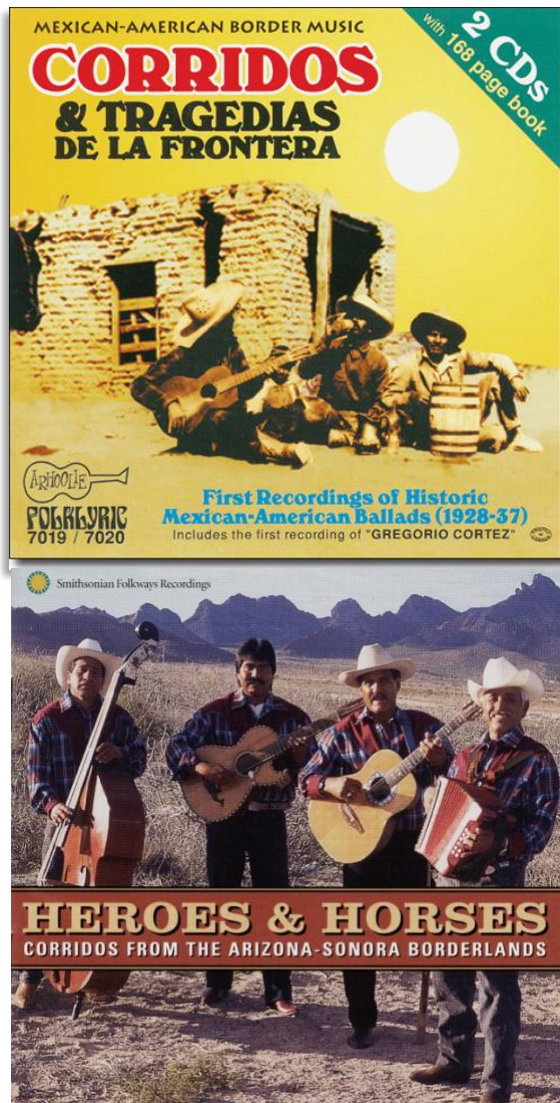
Imagine real-life events, from horse races to assassinations and other true stories, captured in rhythmic poetry and put to simple music. That is what *corridos* are, yet *corridos* are so much more. The two stanzas above are the first and last from “*El Corrido de Rosita Álvarez*.” This *corrido* relates a story that took place in Saltillo, Coahuila, Mexico (Santos 2010) about the beautiful, 20- or so-year-old Rosita Álvarez who, despite her mother's warnings, went to a dance one night and ended up being shot by Hipólito, a drunk whose invitation to dance she had declined. This *corrido* is somewhat uncommon in that the last line is repeated and belongs to the Public Domain (PD) as the author is unknown, which was the case with most *corridos* in the past.

An important part of the Mexican and Mexican American oral tradition, *corridos* are a way of documenting the experiences of people who often have no other voice. They are always written from the perspective of *el pueblo*, everyday people (Fernández and Officer 1989).

Originally popular in central Mexico by the 1830s (Mendoza 1954), *corridos* also became common by the end of the 1800s along both sides of the 2,000-mile U.S.-Mexico border (Paredes 1959). Today, they remain a popular means of documenting and remembering events about or inspired by life in Central Mexico, the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands, and wherever Mexicans and Mexican Americans reside.



There are over a hundred recorded versions of “*El Corrido de Rosita Álvarez*.” A rather harmonious version was recorded by Sparx, a New Mexico band composed of the four Sanchez sisters. This corrido also inspired three commercial films: *El Corrido de Rosita Álvarez* (1947), *Yo Fui Novio de Rosita* (1955), and *Destino Sangriento* (1982).



Border *corridos* albums on [Folkways](#).

It should be noted that although the overwhelming majority of *corridos* are based on fact and inspired by real-life events, a few are not, even some famous *corridos* such as “*El Corrido del Caballo Blanco*.” Additionally, even factual *corridos* may contain errors in dates and names (which is even the case with official government documents throughout the world, including birth, marriage, and death records), or may include exaggerations and other distortions. Also, some *corridos* have inspired variants with additional or different stanzas from the original *corrido* (Paredes 1959). Still, the expectation from the audience is that *corridos* be factual, and it can be disappointing to learn that sometimes that is not the case.

Much like the editorial page of the local newspaper, the *corrido* takes a topic of importance and accurately (mostly) and poetically documents the essential points, interprets them (often through a moral lens), provides commentary, and may offer advice or recommendations (Griffith and Fernández 1988). However, the *corrido* always takes the point of view of the working class; it is from this perspective that an issue is documented, analyzed, and interpreted. In a world in which common people have little economic or political power and influence, cultural expressions such as *corridos* play an important role in amplifying the voice of *el pueblo*.

The ballad tradition of narrative folk songs is not unique to *corridos*. Throughout the world, including in England, Ireland, Scotland, Australia, South America, the Philippines, and the U. S., for example, various forms of ballads have told the stories of the folk. However, the *corrido* tradition may be unique in its lasting, wide, and continuing popularity throughout Mexico and in the U.S. with Mexican Americans for over 150 years. The *corrido* is one of Mexico’s primary musical genres.

Because *corridos* generally are so detailed, they have been an important source of historical information along with other historical documents. Merle E. Simmons (1957), for example, uses *corridos* as source documents in his study of modern Mexico. Several *corridos* have preserved stories that otherwise would have been lost or only known locally. The stories in some *corridos* are so interesting that they have inspired commercial films such as *The Ballad of Gregorio Cortez* starring Edward James Olmos, *El Moro de Cumpas*, [La Carcel de Cananea](#), and *La Banda del Carro Rojo*, to name a few.

Corridos, the songs of the people, the ballads of Mexican music, have a long history of commenting on topics pertaining to the U.S.-Mexico border—usually on its activities and characters (see Folkways album covers). For example, “[El Moro de Cumpas](#)” documents the famous horse race that took place in Agua Prieta, Sonora, across the border from Douglas, Arizona, between the *Moro* (from Cumpas, Sonora) and the *Saino* (from Agua Prieta). Perhaps the best-known border *corrido*, “[El Corrido de Gregorio Cortez](#),” documents the heroic events of a Wild West “outlaw” near the Texas-Mexico border. The folklorist Américo Paredes wrote his celebrated book about this *corrido* and its many variants (Paredes 1959). “[El Corrido de Joaquín Murrieta](#)” explores the life of a man known as the Robin Hood of Mexicans in Southern California (Ridge 2018). There are literally hundreds of examples of border *corridos*.

Since *corridos* center on themes important to *el pueblo*, they are deeply influenced by the changing atmosphere of the border. For example, the prevalence of drug violence spurred creation of the subcategory *narcocorridos* (Holscher and Fernández 2003). Two of the most famous Norteño bands, Los Tigres del Norte and Los Tucanes de Tijuana, regularly focus on drug-related themes in their music. Since the mid-1970s, Los Tigres have rarely released an album without including at least one *narcocorrido*; they even recorded an entire album devoted to these songs as have Los Tucanes and many other performers. Because these *corridos* tend to glamorize the drug trade and negatively influence young men, they have been banned by radio stations in several cities, including Tijuana, Mexico. Yet they continue to be popular and several drug lords have commissioned *corridos* about them and their power and heroics; of course, such commissioned *corridos* always paint the *narcos* in a positive light.

The themes of *narcocorridos*, such as drugs, money, sex, continue in an emerging subgenre known as *corridos tumbados* that have quickly become popular with urban youth. These *corridos* are performed in rap style and in first-person; traditional *corridos* are performed in third-person. The performers dress in hip-hop style attire, including hats, tennis shoes and bling. The most popular composer/singer of [corridos tumbados](#) is 19-year-old Natanael Cano, originally from Hermosillo, Sonora, Mexico, and now residing in Los Angeles, California. He has become an overnight sensation, inspiring others to perform *corridos tumbados*, including Iyonna Galaz, the first woman to record such *corridos* on her album *Voy En Camino*.

Trapcorridos, performed with trap music, are a newer subgenre. The word “trap” has become a common prefix for hip hop-influenced subgenres, even if they do not share the qualities of trap music, which is characterized by sharp snares; booming bass; and hazy, minor-key melodies. *Trapcorridos* are primarily composed and performed by Mexican Americans around urban themes or personalities. Examples include Nipsey Hussle, the American rapper, activist, and entrepreneur killed March 30, 2019, outside his store (“[Corrido de Nipsey](#)”), and Kobe Bryant, the famous basketball player who died in a helicopter crash January 26, 2020 (“[Corrido del 24](#)”).

Popular Corrido Themes

The *corrido* has documented and provided commentary on a wide range of events and personalities of local, national, and international importance that remain in common memory (Fernández and Officer 1989). Although any topic may inspire a *corrido*, some themes have been covered extensively by this folk tradition (Fernández 2020), such as:

- Wars and armed conflicts: Most notably the Mexican Revolution is a subject, but so are WWII, the Korean War, Vietnam, the Persian Gulf War, and the Afghanistan and Iraq wars. Some of the best-known classic *corridos* are about the Mexican Revolution, such as “[*Corrido Villista*](#),” “*La Persecución de Villa*,” and “*Carabina 30-30*.”
- Immigration: These *corridos* discuss many aspects of the Mexican immigration experience: leaving the family in Mexico, details of the trip, crossing the border, encounters with the U.S. Border Patrol, migrant deaths in various forms (in the desert, automobile accidents, inside locked train boxcars, and in overcrowded trailers of semi-trucks). This author has collected over a hundred migration *corridos*.
- Folk heroes: Many folk heroes have been memorialized through *corridos*, including Gregorio Cortez and Fernando Valenzuela, a pitcher for the Los Angeles Dodgers in the 1980s who was recruited from the Mexican state of Sonora and in his first year won the Cy Young and Rookie of the Year Awards. Various authors have discussed the archetypes of *corrido* subjects (Herrera-Sobek 1990).
- Personalities: Barack Obama’s 2008 candidacy drew worldwide attention since he was the first Black person with a chance of winning the U.S. presidential election and several [*corridos*](#) were penned and performed about him. Likewise, when Hillary Clinton was a candidate in 2015, the famous Mexican singer Vicente Fernández (no relation to this author) performed a [*corrido*](#) about her. Shortly after Michael Jackson died June 25, 2009, several [*corridos*](#) documented his life and death.
- Tragedies: Train accidents, earthquakes, and the terrorist acts that brought down the Twin Towers (“[*Tragedia en Nueva York*](#)”) are but a few of the tragedies reflected in *corridos*.
- Horses and horse races: Some of the most notable *corridos* on this topic include “[*El Corrido del Caballo Blanco*](#),” “*Caballo Prieto Azabache*,” and “*El Moro de Cumpas*.” There also are *corridos* that involve other animals such as heroic dogs, cockfights, and bullfights.
- Miraculous events: Two individuals associated with miracles depicted in *corridos* include Jesús Malverde and St. Toribio Romo. Malverde has a public shrine (he is not recognized as a saint by the Catholic Church) in Culiacán, Sinaloa, Mexico, and is credited as a Robin Hood character while alive and since the 1970s has been known as the “narco saint,” the “saint” of drug traffickers; he apparently helps them move drugs going north and deliver them to the U.S. St. Toribio Romo González (an official saint of the Catholic Church, canonized May 21, 2000) is said to appear to distressed migrants making their way across the U.S.-Mexico border and cures them as well as gives them food, water, money, and even directions. Today, St. Romo’s image can be seen everywhere, including on religious cards carried by immigrants. His shrine in Santa Ana, Jalisco, Mexico, is visited by 5,000 tourists and migrants every week.
- Assassinations: U.S. President John F. Kennedy and Mexican presidential candidate Donaldo Colosio (“[*El Corrido de Luis Donaldo Colosio*](#)”) are two conspicuous examples.
- Towns and regions: These *corridos* usually document, with much pride, the special characteristics and features of a town or state, for example, “*Corrido de Mazatlán*” and “[*Corrido de Chihuahua*](#).”

Corridos are of the moment; they capture and commemorate people or important events. For example, several were composed about the Covid-19 Pandemic, including “*El Corrido del Covid-19*” (Homero Guerrero, Jr., y Los KDTs de Linares) and “*Corrido del Coronavirus*” (Los Potrillos De Turicat). The 2020 killing of George Floyd by police in Minneapolis and subsequent demonstrations against police brutality sparked throughout the U.S and across the world have also

been documented in *corridos*, including “*No Puedo Respirar / El Corrido de George Floyd*” (Ayala Band) and “*8 Minutos de Infierno*” (Pedro Rivera). “*El Corrido de George Floyd*” (Humberto Reyes el HR), is an eerie *corrido* sung acapella, clearly by a nonprofessional, that provides details of the killing of Mr. Floyd by the police, including the date, the policeman’s knee on his neck, and George’s pleas, “I can’t breathe,” as the following stanzas indicate:

<i>Un 25 de mayo</i>	A 25th of May
<i>En tierras americanas</i>	In the United States
<i>El racismo acabó</i>	Racism ended
<i>Con una vida humana</i>	With a human life
<i>El autor un policía</i>	At the hands of a policeman
<i>Y tres mas telamerada</i>	And three more of the same cloth
<i>“Ya no puedo respirar”</i>	“I can’t breathe”
<i>Aquel hombre pronunciaba</i>	That man said
<i>Ya por favor oficial</i>	Please, police officer
<i>La vida a mí se me acaba</i>	My life is ending/I’m dying
<i>Mas las suplicas, señores</i>	But the pleas, ladies and gentlemen,
<i>Nunca fueron escuchadas</i>	Were never heeded

Characteristics of Traditional *Corridos*

Although there are exceptions, there are clear patterns in the form and structure of *corridos*. Some of the more salient characteristics of the older, standard, more common *corrido* style follow (Fernández 2020).

- Perspective: Since *corridos* take the perspective of everyday people, they are composed in vernacular language, generally by well-informed observers, in some cases eyewitnesses, situated in or intimately knowledgeable of the culture of the working class.
- Meter and rhyme: Meter refers to the number of syllables in each line and traditional *corridos* are composed mostly in six or eight counts per line. Stanzas can be either four or six lines. If the verse is four lines, the rhyme scheme is ABCB, so the end of the last word of the second- and fourth-lines rhyme. If six lines, the rhyme pattern is ABCBDB, the last words of lines two, four, and six rhyme.

Four-line Pattern

<i>Las mujeres de mi tierra</i>	The women of my country
<i>No saben ni dar un beso</i>	Do not even know how to kiss
<i>En cambio las Mexicanas</i>	On the other hand, Mexican women
<i>Hasta estiran el pescuezo</i>	Even stretch their necks [to do so]
	—Stanza from “ <i>La Cucaracha</i> ”

Six-line Pattern

<i>Ya con ésta me despido</i>	With this I bid farewell
<i>Y si me voy, no es por mi</i>	And if I leave, it’s not because of me
<i>Es que tengo quien me compre</i>	It’s that I have someone who’ll buy
<i>En el pueblo, mi maíz</i>	My corn in town
<i>Al mejor precio del año</i>	At the best price of the year
<i>Que no paga el Chapulín</i>	That Chapulín won’t pay
	—Last stanza from “ <i>El Corrido de Don Chapulín</i> ”

- Length: Old-style *corridos* are long (20–30 stanzas), providing rich detail as they narrate an event. In fact, when *corridos* were first audio recorded, many did not fit on one side of a record, and it was common to record “Part 1” on one side and “Part 2” on the other. Now *corridos* tend to be much shorter (8–10 stanzas), easily falling within the standard time for songs aired on commercial radio.
- Opening, middle, and closing: The *permiso* (permission) and *despedida* (leave-taking or farewell) serve as markers to the performance, the bookends so commonly used in *corridos*. The *permiso* lets the audience know that they are about to hear a story and should pay attention to the words (McDowell 2000). Thus, many *corridos* begin by noting that, indeed, this is a *corrido*. Some familiar lines include *Este es el corrido* (This is the ballad) or *Señores, pongan cuidado* (Ladies and gentlemen, lend me your ears). Generally, the first stanza provides a setting by giving a specific date, place, or person. The middle is the longest section and relates the story details. Finally, the listener is frequently alerted that the story is coming to an end in either a penultimate or final stanza with the *despedida*, for example, *Así termina el corrido* (That’s how the *corrido* ends). Also, it’s in either the penultimate or last stanza that one may find the moral of the story. If the *corrido* has described death, the penultimate or the final stanza begins with *Vuela, vuela, palomita* (Fly, fly, little dove), referring to the spiritual afterlife.
- Performance space: Traditionally, *corridos* were performed wherever people gathered, such as plazas, *mercados* (marketplaces), and *ferias* (fairs). Even today, it is common to hear *corridos* wherever people gather, including in the *plazas* of large cities and at family gatherings.



Corrido performers in Summer 2010, Zapopan, Jalisco, Mexico. The woman both played the *vihuela* (small, rounded-back guitar) and sang. The man in the wheelchair had a cast on his left ankle.

Photo by
Kim Fernández,
wife of the author.

- Singers: Throughout the late 1800s and early 1900s, *trovadores* (wandering singers) would reflect on the news of the day in their *corridos* as they travelled from town to town. They played mostly for tips, although some also sold broadsheets with the words of *corridos* they were performing. In earlier periods, broadsheets with lyrics to ballads were also common in England, France, Spain, and other parts of the world, often with artistic borders and printed lyrics (see broadsheets below).

Although historically males overwhelmingly have been the composers and singers of *corridos*, women also have been involved in all aspects of the tradition, as composers, musicians, and performers (see the photograph above). Even today, one can see married couples performing *corridos* in plazas and marketplaces in Mexico; however, seldom is a woman street *corrido* performer seen alone. Additionally, women have been the protagonists of numerous *corridos*.



Examples of two *corrido* broadsheets. “*Los Siete Fusilados*” is from 1902 and “*Corrido de la Revolución de México*” is from 1913. Public Domain.

- Singing style and accompaniment: Because *corridos* emphasize the words and the story, old-style *corridos* were performed by individuals accompanied by a basic tune on their acoustic guitars, without embellishment, additional instrumentation, or complicated musical interludes. Today, *corridos* are performed by both individuals and groups and in almost all genres, from *mariachi* to *norteño*, and with all the instrumentation of such bands. Still, the emphasis remains on communicating the words clearly so that the listener can follow the story; thus, *corridos* are sung as a sequence of stanzas with the same melody.

Why should the *corrido* tradition continue?

Although mass media and scholars regularly document, analyze, and interpret important events, such documentations and interpretations are seldom from the perspective of the common folk, *el pueblo*. The *corrido* “*Viaje*,” included in Mexican musicologist Vicente Mendoza’s book (1954), summarizes the importance of the *corrido* tradition:

Nuestra música preciosa
Tenemos que propagar
Y nuestros víreles cantos
Por nuestra raza hablarán

Our precious music
We must spread
As our great songs
Will speak for our people

Instructions for [Composing a Corrido](#) and organizing a schoolwide [Corrido Writing Contest](#) follow. Let the *corrido* speak for the people!

Celestino Fernández is a Cultural Sociologist whose research and teaching interests include equity in education at all levels. He was a founding board member of a high school, serves on two other school boards, and has a charter high school named after him. Other specialty areas include Mexican music, particularly mariachi, norteños, and especially corridos. He has studied and led workshops on corridos and is preparing a CD of some of his compositions. He also focuses on happiness and created a course that enrolled 500 students each semester and lectured throughout the U.S. and abroad on this topic. He earned his MA and PhD in Sociology from Stanford University and is Distinguished Professor Emeritus at the University of Arizona and a Consultant in several areas, including accreditation, happiness, corridos, and other genres of Mexican music.

Embedded URLs

El Corrido de Rosita Alvarez <https://youtu.be/98TPsiDjyM4>
Smithsonian Folkways <https://folkways.si.edu>
La Carcel de Cananea <https://youtu.be/MLt4TvNBAXM>
El Moro de Cumpas <https://youtu.be/YURfTjYEN1o>
El Corrido de Gregorio Cortez https://youtu.be/M9Jp4p8_fh8
El Corrido de Joaquín Murrieta <https://youtu.be/t9dS3-FwF6k>
Corrido de Nipsey <https://youtu.be/9xXHUFx5kmc>
Corrido del 24 <https://youtu.be/VvgJjY6xmt4>
Corridos tumbados <https://youtu.be/TOlx8t8ja2Y>
Corrido Villista <https://youtu.be/dcimmyOryLo>
Obama corrido <https://youtu.be/0fd-MVU4vtU>
Hilary Clinton corrido <https://youtu.be/QCTwAz0GL60>
Michael Jackson corrido <https://youtu.be/ZSnJIm7iOKY>
Twin Towers corrido <https://youtu.be/LFXJjSPOaTY>
El Corrido del Caballo Blanco <https://youtu.be/wxbF81eohDI>
El Corrido de Luis Donaldo Colosio
<https://youtu.be/IEVNVl7Msh0>
Corrido de Chihuahua <https://youtu.be/n-XZoIlrSF4>

Works Cited

- Fernández, Celestino. 2020. Running Tales of the Times. *BorderLore: Heritage and Culture of the U.S. Southwest and Northern Mexico*, <https://borderlore.org>.
- Fernández, Celestino and James E. Officer. 1989. The Lighter Side of Immigration: Humor and Satire in the Mexican Corrido. *Journal of the Southwest*. 31.4:471–96.
- Griffith, James S. and Celestino Fernández. 1988. Mexican Horse Races and Cultural Values: The Case of *Los Corridos del Merino*. *Western Folklore*. 47:129–51.
- Herrera-Sobek, María. 1990. *The Mexican Corrido: A Feminist Analysis*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Holscher, Louis M. and Celestino Fernández. 2003. *Contrabando y Corrupción: The Rise in Popularity of Narcocorridos*. In *California's Changing Majority: Historic and Contemporary Dynamics*, eds. Steven M. Miller, Louis M. Holscher, and Iris M. Jerki. Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall Hunt, 249-59.
- McDowell, John H. 2000. *Poetry and Violence: The Ballad Tradition of Mexico's Costa Chica*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press.
- Mendoza, Vicente T. 1954. *El Corrido Mexicano*. México: Fondo de Cultura Económica.
- Paredes, Américo. 1959. "With His Pistol in His Hand": *A Border Ballad and Its Hero*. Austin: U. of Texas Press.
- Ridge, John Rollin. 2018. *The Life and Adventures of Joaquín Murieta: The Celebrated California Bandit*. New York: Penguin Books.
- Santos, Martha. 2010. *Rosita Álvarez acabó trágicamente: La mataron por bonita y coqueta. Zócalo*, <http://www.zocalo.com.mx/rosita-alvarez-acabo-tragicamente-la-mataron-por-bonita-y-coqueta>.
- Simmons, Merle E. 1957. *The Mexican Corrido as a Source for Interpretive Study of Modern Mexico (1870-1950)*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Process Writing Steps for Composing a <i>Corrido</i>	
<p>Notes to the Teacher: Although <i>corridos</i> are normally written in Spanish, composing or studying them addresses skills in other curricula such as language arts and social studies. Students may compose <i>corridos</i> in either Spanish or English; however, compositions should follow the other conventions of the genre to be recognized as a <i>corrido</i>. Writing original music is not required. For a classroom exercise on the poetry and content of <i>corridos</i>, students may borrow a tune from an existing <i>corrido</i>.</p>	
Guidance to Students	
1. Pre-writing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listen to at least three mentor texts of <i>corrido</i> performances. Many are accessible via YouTube, e.g., “La Persecución de Villa” https://genius.com/14532991 or “El Moro de Cumpas” https://youtu.be/YURfTjYEN1o. For K–12 education, <i>narcocorridos</i> are not appropriate. • Read transcripts of the songs. • Individually chart characteristics of a <i>corrido</i> that you notice by listening, viewing, and close reading. Discuss these observed characteristics with others and create a comprehensive checklist to serve as a writing guide. • Interview family or community members for additional ideas or memories about <i>corridos</i> and particular heroes, outlaws, or events in their lives. • Review events of interest (primarily current events but past events are acceptable). • Select one topic (event, hero, outlaw story, town, etc.) for writing a <i>corrido</i> to present orally to the class and wider community audience.
2. Drafting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Draft 1: Compose <i>corrido</i> concentrating on content, telling the story. • Draft 2: Shape content of the <i>corrido</i> with attention to form, word choice, sentence fluency, and story organization.
3. Responding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read or perform your draft for a group of three to four peers to get constructive feedback. • Also confer with the teacher for feedback.
4. Revising Options	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clarify. • Reorganize. • Refine. • Edit language use (correct, precise, succinct, clever, etc.).
5. Publishing Options	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read from an Author’s Chair in class setting or perform the <i>corrido</i>. • Perform the <i>corridos</i> live for a real or virtual community audience. • Record and upload the performances for online documentation. • Create a commemorative booklet in physical or virtual form, including images if appropriate.

Classroom Connection: *Corrido* Writing Contest

Anyone can compose a *corrido*. For example, the author of this article is not a professional *corridista*, yet he has composed many. A *corrido* writing contest can be organized at any level, from classroom to school, district, or state. The contest described below is based on a competition held in high schools in Arizona.

Some years after the author began organizing a *corrido* contest for Tucson Meet Yourself, a local folklife festival, the University of Arizona Poetry Center approached him to assist in organizing a *corrido* contest in a few local high schools. After only two years, the contest became so popular that it quickly expanded to all the high schools in Southern Arizona and soon after to the entire state. The contest operated annually for 15 years. One year there were over 400 submissions! The entries were judged by a panel of two or three judges who varied over the years. One year, Linda Ronstadt (yes, that Linda!) and the author were the judges. Each year the top three winners were invited to a celebration where their *corridos* were performed, and they received cash prizes. To be sure, one does not need to offer cash prizes, any recognition will do, including a simple certificate that can be printed in color.

Below are details for a classroom contest that may work best in Spanish classes although it could easily be included in language arts, humanities, history, and social studies. The same structure could be applied at the school or district level.

Fall

- At the beginning of the school year, announce the contest. The teacher can make it a class requirement or assignment. The notice should include details on the contest, such as the following:
 - Specify a due date.
 - Provide directions on how to submit entries (written, electronic).
 - Describe limitations, such as length and topics (we recommend not accepting *narcocorridos* glorifying drugs, drug trafficking, drug violence).
 - Each student may submit only one *corrido*.
 - Encourage students to submit entries in Spanish, using common, everyday language, although entries in English may also be accepted.
 - The tone can vary from sincere to humorous to satirical.
 - Include one or two paragraphs describing *corridos* and encourage students to conduct research on their own.
- Entries should be submitted no later than the end of Fall semester.
- Students are not expected to compose music for their *corridos*. The focus is on the lyrics, and it is quite acceptable for students to borrow tunes, especially standard tunes from other *corridos* as this is part of the *corrido* tradition.

Spring

- Entries are judged in January–February by a panel of 2–3 judges (local volunteers) or by the class.
- Winners are notified early March.

- If the winners do not sing or play an instrument, local musicians (perhaps a parent of a student) can be recruited to work with the composers to learn and put music to the winning *corridos*. Ideally, composers would sing their own, but this is not required.
- In late April or early May, family and friends of the winning *corrido* writers gather to witness the composers receive their prizes or certificates and hear the winning *corridos* performed, followed by a small reception.

Such guidelines can be modified to the local context. Contests need not be complicated, keep them simple and manageable.

Contest Promotion Tips

If the contest is at the school level, following are a few tips for promoting it:

- Display flyers in the school library, cafeteria, and hallways.
- Send a notice announcing the contest to the school website and newsletter.
- Publicize the contest in the student newspaper.
- Announce the contest on the PA and/or at assemblies.
- Include teachers in the planning, particularly Spanish and language arts teachers. Ask them to teach *corrido* lesson plans and encourage students to enter.
- Write an article about the contest and ceremony for the PTA newsletter.
- Post about the performances and award ceremony on the school social media.



Marcus Garvey once said, “A people without a knowledge of their past history, origin, and culture is like a tree without roots.” My name is Camryn Johnson, General Business major, Tennessee-born and Texas-raised. I am going to share with you today the tradition of African American Quilting as it pertains to my culture and family...My great-great-grandmother was born in 1885 (one generation from slavery) and taught the skill of quilting to her children and grandchildren. My grandmother inherited the center part of this quilt from her grandmother upon her death in 1972. My grandmother completed the quilt—all hand stitched—in 2019. It was one of many quilts she has made. My great aunt, who is 92 years old, learned the skill from her mother and passed down the tradition to her daughters. For many years, she would make each child born into the family their own special quilt. I was gifted my special quilt on my fifth birthday.

Stumbling into Folklore: Using Family Stories in Public Speaking

by Bonny McDonald and Alexandria Hatchett

Featuring student work and reflections from Camryn Johnson, Haley Priest, Kennedy Johnson, Paxton Ballard, Madelyn LeDoux, Sierra Fox, and Anna Grace Franques

Undergraduates in our Introduction to Public Speaking course share special objects and tell stories from their family folklore, such as in the above excerpt. We teach in the Communication Studies Department at Louisiana State University (LSU). Like many Public Speaking classes around the country, the course requires a formal speech of introduction. As the basic course director in the department, McDonald crafted an assignment for instructors that draws on culturally relevant pedagogy, a pedagogy that concerns itself with student development of “academic success, cultural competence, and sociopolitical consciousness” (Ladson-Billings 2014, 75). Hatchett, currently a PhD student worker in the department, used this assignment in her classes. The assignment has two parts: a warm-up speech called the Family Story Speech, in which students tell a family story, and an introductory speech called the Family Objects Speech, in which students share one or two family traditions using two objects that represent those traditions. Our training and research have not been in Folklore, yet we stumbled into aspects of the field when we asked students to share their family stories and traditions in this assignment.

The American Folklore Society (n.d.) defines folklore as “the traditional art, literature, knowledge, and practice that is disseminated largely through oral communication and behavioral example.” Communication Studies’ various definitions of culture are similar; both fields are interested in how groups develop and perform personal identity through shared behaviors, beliefs, and traditions. Folklore emerges in inherited language patterns and lexicons, as well as in the customs, rituals, and traditions of students’ speeches. In this article, we discuss the ways our incorporation of folklore deeply enriched the introductory speech unit of our Public Speaking course, improving the quality of student work, increasing engagement with course content, and enhancing students’ cultural competence. We want to describe the user-friendly, highly adaptable assignment, share some of our struggles and successes, and offer some takeaways for educators.

The Family Story/Objects assignments respond to Gloria Ladson-Billings’ (1995) call to resist deficit approaches to education by honoring a multiplicity of family backgrounds and linguistic norms in the classroom. Building on Ladson-Billings’ touchstone work, Django Paris (2012) proposes a culturally sustaining pedagogy that “seeks to perpetuate and foster—to sustain—linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of the democratic project of schooling” (95). LSU is a predominantly white institution in which white, middle-class norms tend to dominate the cultural landscape in classrooms like Public Speaking—a discipline enmeshed in a long history of race and class hierarchies and exclusions (Conquergood 2000). Our assignment centers family folklore by inviting students to speak as experts of their own cultural experiences in their unique accents or dialects. The assignment aims to make space for non-dominant voices and to challenge the sense of cultural homogeneity within academic spaces and within the Communication Studies discipline. The plurality of family backgrounds drawn out by calling upon folklore provides a firm foundation from which to build cultural awareness and sociopolitical consciousness. As Paris (2012) writes of culturally sustaining pedagogy, “Such richness includes all of the languages, literacies, and cultural ways of being that our students and communities embody—both those marginalized and dominant” (96).

When we introduce the assignment, we name our positionalities (McDonald—a white, middle-class woman from the South, and Hatchett—an African American, middle-class woman from the Northeast) to encourage students to begin to identify their unique standpoints. Between us, we have used the Family Story/Objects speech assignments with about 250 students over the last two years, both in person and online. In online learning modes, some classes submitted speech videos asynchronously, and others performed speeches synchronously on Zoom. We received written permission from several students to include their work and reflections for this article. Versions of these oral assignments would function well as pre-writing for personal essays or poems, a tool for sketching out a theatrical monologue or narrative performance, an icebreaker to introduce themes of cultural identity and plurality, or an oral presentation as described here.

The Family Story Warm-Up Speech

We begin with a low-stakes “warm-up speech” asking students simply to tell a short family story. We encourage them to think of a particularly memorable family experience or a favorite story that is told and re-told during family gatherings. We note that “family” does not have to be immediate or biological; we define family broadly as “the community who raised you, whoever they happen to be.” The options for family stories are limitless; the stories may be funny, serious, exciting, anything that says a little something about who their families are. These brief speeches do not

require any research, and we encourage students to tell the story as they would over a dinner table, bringing their “home language” into the story (Baker 2002).

We instruct students to bookend their warm-up speeches by using “I come from _____ people” for the first and last lines, filling in the blank with an adjective or phrase that characterizes their family. Some examples we heard were “weird,” “bayou,” “country,” “woke,” “card-playing,” and “have your back no matter what” people. The idea to use this line came from our LSU colleague Emily Graves (2015), who borrowed the idea from a workshop with performance artist Tim Miller.

Before the warm-up speech, we lay the conceptual groundwork for the assignment, underlining the significance of voice, narrative, and positionality in public speech. We emphasize voice as an aspect of family culture in classroom discussion. We have students read and/or use terms from Judith Baker’s (2002) article “Trilingualism,” which suggests there are at least three different forms of English that Americans need at this time in history: “home” (personal dialect), “formal” (academic/school), and “professional” (specific to one’s career) (51-52). We also have students watch Jamila Lyiscott’s (2014) spoken-word poem, “3 Ways to Speak English,” which considers code switching. We then facilitate a class discussion about what is “proper” speech, who defines “proper” speech, and who benefits from this idea. We encourage students to use their home language if they wish and to feel no pressure to perform a formal voice or code switch. We want to make it clear that voice is part of family folklore and personal identity and that all voices are welcome.

We assert that personal narrative (and the use of narrative generally) is a skill worth practicing for speech composition. We want students to distinguish between an explanation and a narrative. Students may briefly characterize their family in this speech but should spend most of the time telling a story that is dear to their families. We remind them that something should *happen* in the story. The story can be funny, serious, exciting, etc., but it should have a beginning, middle, and end. To model, McDonald shares a story from her family lore in which a great uncle cuts off his brother’s finger with an axe on a dare-gone-wrong.

We dedicate class time to discussing the relevance of identity to public speaking as a practice. We want students to think broadly about what social norms and cultural groups have influenced their personalities and opinions. An early chapter in our course textbook introduces a dictionary definition of culture: “the distinctive ideas, customs, social behavior, products, or way of life of a particular nation, society, people, or period” (Valenzano 2020). We try to complicate our shared definition of family culture in class discussion by asking questions, constructing alternative definitions, and offering personal examples. Folklore provides a useful framework for thinking about our cultural practices: What do we do, know, make, believe, and say? If “culture” is what we do, how do we perform ourselves on a daily basis? What social practices and meanings have we inherited?

Below are excerpts from our students’ speeches.

“I come from a huge family”

Just on my dad's side of the family, I have 18 cousins, bunch of aunts and uncles, and a lot of friends we also consider family. Every year during Christmastime... around 11 o'clock, we always go to my grandma's house, all of us. She lives in this little, tiny house and it's about like 35 of us all packed in there, and our grandma makes sure to get all of us five presents. But the thing is, she has to open them up with us. So, one by one she opens up five presents with every single person, and as you can tell doing that with like around 35 people, it can take some time. It's funny 'cause it's always a question of who's gonna get frustrated first, who's gonna yell at her to hurry it up, because it just takes hours and it goes way into the night opening presents. But this year with Corona, we weren't able to have it for the first time, and she wasn't able to go to Christmas. And everybody was bitin' their tongue, and everybody realized how grateful we are to have a grandma that wants to open up all the presents with us. —Paxton

“I come from Catholic people”

It was Easter Sunday, and every family received a candle to light. I was about seven years old, and it was my first year to be allowed to hold the candle, so I was very excited! I lit the candle and brought it back to where my family was sitting. Then the priest said, “You may be seated,” so naturally everyone sat down, but there was a book in my spot. So, as I went to move it, the woman in front of me sat down and her hair went directly into my candle. It immediately erupted into flames and my entire family was in shock. My mom started to pat her head desperately, and I was blowing on it—which in hindsight was probably making it worse. My dad and two brothers were just sitting there and staring in utter disbelief—as was the rest of the church. Then the woman ran to the bathroom followed by my mom and they put the fire out. To this day I will never hold a candle in church again. Now I hope you have learned a little bit about me and my family! We may light people's hair on fire, but don't let that scare you off, because we are a proud, Catholic, perfectly dysfunctional family. —Haley

“I come from a relaxed family”

Since it's Mardi Gras season, I've decided to tell a Mardi Gras story. My aunt was in a parade. She was in Zulu. So, she wanted me, my mom, and my grandma to come. We made signs; we made a bunch of stuff, so she'd be able to see us. So, we get out there for Zulu. People are, you know, drinking, playing music, just having a good time like people do at parades. And so, we're sitting and we're waiting for my aunt's float to come up, and eventually her float comes up. She looks us in our face and it takes her a while to recognize us. So Zulu, obviously, is famous for their coconuts—anybody who goes to Zulu knows exactly how people act for coconuts. They will lose their mind over coconuts that they just keep in their house, or maybe in storage. So, she's trying to hand us our coconuts and beads and everything and people are actively jumping on our backs. So eventually we just decide to give up. Most people maybe woulda lost their minds, but we decided to be the bigger people and just let it go. So, I feel like that's how I come from a relaxed family.

—Kennedy

The Family Objects Introductory Speech

Once students demonstrate a measure of comfort with telling a family story, we offer some basic public speaking conventions and strategies to transform their original stories into a more involved introductory speech. Speakers select two objects that represent their family's traditions and compose a three- to four-minute speech showcasing those objects. Students show each object, explain how it fits into the tradition they are discussing, and include at least one narrative or memory of the object in use. Students may include the story they told in the warm-up speech or choose new stories altogether. Our guiding questions for students are, "What is the difference between telling a story and giving a speech?" and "How are you naming or characterizing your family traditions?" To help answer these questions, we use a common rubric for the course that measures five key elements: central message, language, organization, delivery, and support.

Central Message

The central message of any speech should be easily identifiable and memorable. For the Family Objects Speech, the central message should introduce one's family by sharing personal or family traditions that represent one's cultural group. The objects should serve as evidence for their personal and/or family traditions and symbolize two aspects of the same tradition or two different traditions. For example, a student speaking about her Cajun culture may display an object that symbolizes particular food practices, as well as a relationship to Mardi Gras festivities. Another speech might address two different traditions—a student might show one object to illustrate how his family celebrates Christmas and another to demonstrate how his family is obsessed with football. In both cases, the central message contains one's most important family traditions.

Organization

In the warm-up assignment, we want students to practice delivering a narrative; in the longer introductory assignment, we want them to practice composing and delivering strong organizational language that helps to frame narrative examples for the audience. To this end, we ask that speeches include a straightforward statement of purpose (a line overtly naming the purpose of the speech) combined with a preview statement (a line or phrase that outlines the main areas of the speech) in the opening of the speech. For example, one student said, "I'm going to introduce my family by using two objects: this confirmation dress, which represents my Catholic upbringing, and this jambalaya paddle, which represents my family's Cajun culture and cooking." As in this example, each object should symbolize some aspect of their family identity, paving the way for each main point to (a) characterize their family culture and (b) illustrate that culture with a story. One purpose of the objects is to practice "chunking" ideas into separate main points to build a speech. The two objects cue the two main points and serve as a structure for composing (and remembering) clear transitions and topic sentences for each main point in this and following speeches in the course. For example, when the student moves to the second point of the speech, she might say, "Now I want to show you this jambalaya paddle—it represents how important traditional cooking is to my Cajun family." The objects help students to



A student's confirmation dress as a family object.

practice fundamental speech composition skills: previewing the speech, transitioning, and naming their main points.

Language

For this component of the rubric, we ask students to put some thought into crafting memorable opening and closing lines. They may continue to use the “I come from _____ people” line to open this speech or compose original opening and closing lines. We offer some techniques for these lines, such as a joke, a surprising anecdote, an antithesis, a metaphor, a rhyme, a quotation, or a “takeaway.”

Support

In later speeches in the course, support takes the form of research. For this speech, however, support amounts to the inclusion of at least one narrative example. In addition to explaining what happens at a family’s Hanukkah celebration, for example, the student should include a brief narrative illustrating a moment in time during the celebration.

Delivery

While we teach many delivery techniques later in the course, for this first speech our main goal is to conquer anxiety and have a good experience “on stage.” We ask students to try to project their voice, to sound conversational, and to aim for strong eye contact with the audience, but we are not too picky about delivery. We urge students to try to enjoy telling a familiar story.

To wrap up the assignment, we employ a short reflection that includes the following:

- How did your speech go? What worked for you or didn’t work as well in terms of your process and/or performance?
- Whose work stood out to you as especially compelling? Why?
- What did you learn about your own culture and/or other cultures?
- What did you learn about speech writing and speech delivery?

Their reflections indicated a strong preference for speeches with “good stories.” Speeches that stood out were ones like Haley’s in which the narrative arc was especially apparent. They noted surprise at the variety of cultural traditions represented in the class. They were proud when the audience reacted to their stories, and many commented on the importance and difficulty of being relaxed enough to “be yourself” as a speaker.

Reflections and Challenges

We want to share some observations about what worked for us, some speculations about why it worked, and a challenge we faced. In our reflections as teachers of these assignments, we found it constructive to understand the task we asked of students as folklore. We think it will benefit students to include the definitions of folklore from the American Folklore Society and other folklore texts in future versions of the assignments to clarify the aims and to assert the art of storytelling as a fundamental communication form.

We consistently found the warm-up speech created a welcoming space for students to showcase their family culture through folklore. In this assignment, many students named their family

traditions as part of a specific racial, ethnic, religious, or regional identity (e.g., African American, Asian American, Cajun, Catholic, Southern). Others told funny or shocking stories about family traditions, and their speeches described their families as “quirky,” “competitive,” and “silly.” Overall, we believe that the invitation to talk about “lore” and “traditions” helped students to name and claim their cultural heritage. We want to prioritize this goal in future classes.

For the warm-up speech, the sense of “anything goes” was important for student confidence in what was for many their first attempt at public speaking. In our classes, the Family Story Speech is worth ten points out of a possible eight hundred, while the Family Objects speech is one hundred points. Since the warm-up is a lower-stakes assignment, we speculate that students may feel less pressure to be “perfect” and thus more willing to showcase their unique personalities, accents, and dialects. Both speeches allow students to focus on a topic in which they are experts: their own family. In this way, the assignment upholds culturally sustaining pedagogy by valuing the cultural practices and linguistic competencies of students from all communities (Paris 2012, 95). We saw this notion echoed in many student reflections on the assignment and include a few here.

I have always loved storytelling, especially about my family, so telling one of the many family stories I have was a relatively easy process because the emotion and comedy, which often must be well thought out in order to make a good speech, was already so accessible and easily packed together because it was a real-life memory.
—Paxton

At LSU I do not really talk about “family culture.” In your class was actually the first time I have really spoken out about my culture. In college I have never really had to talk about who/where I come from....Not that I do not want to talk about me being Asian American—I have just never been given the opportunity to do so.
—Madelyn

I really enjoyed this family speech because I had the ability to tell my story through the lens of a Black American woman in modern times. Much of my culture has been tainted, assimilated, appropriated, and destroyed. That being said, this is one of the earliest accounts of history my people can recollect. Our history before slavery has been made to seem nonexistent. History books celebrate a white man’s “discovery” of a land that was already inhabited....This speech gave me a chance to showcase a tradition that my ancestors have been able to retain, pass down through generations, and receive recognition for their contributions....I believe allowing students to share cultural experiences and traditions in the classroom is highly effective in creating a more welcoming environment. Since students come from various backgrounds, being able to share their culture helps cultivate understanding and mutual respect. —Camryn

Freire (2005) discusses how a deficit approach to pedagogy, in which students who do not fit into the constructed cultural norm are perceived as Other, has long been used to assimilate marginalized students and maintain control over what constitutes knowledge. The deficit approach often prioritizes white, middle-class modes of communication in terms of dominant languages, literacies, and cultural practices. In contrast to the deficit approach, the Family Story and Family

Objects Speech assignments invite students to share family stories in an academic setting, where such stories are not always brought to the fore alongside course materials.

One notable outcome was increased cultural competence, particularly for white students, who often see their cultural experiences as de facto or “neutral.” Many emails come in from white students asking for help on this assignment, to the effect of, “but I don’t have any traditions—my family is super normal.” Hearing an array of cultural experiences within and across visible differences challenges the idea that there is a “normal” experience. Many personal, often overlooked traditions came to the fore in the course of the speeches. Hearing many stories about celebrating Mardi Gras, going to crawfish boils, and going shrimping from a variety of students who grew up in South Louisiana created a sense of a shared cultural identity within and across various groups. Students who were not from the United States, or who were from other states, were quick to point out that going to crawfish boils was not “normal” to them. Thus, the stories help many students to recalibrate a sense of their own unique traditions.



A student demonstrates cultural knowledge by sharing their bait box for the Family Objects Speech assignment.

Devika Chawla (2017) argues that personal storytelling is an important performative practice of decolonial pedagogy. According to Chawla, autobiographical stories (including her own family immigration story) can serve as disruptions to Western colonial classroom norms. Chawla asks students to share their stories about family immigration in her majority-white classrooms and finds that these stories “are an invitation to the majority-white students to ask questions, to learn more about Other realities, and to interrogate their own family histories, rooted also in multiple migrations” (Chawla 2017, 118). We strongly agree with Chawla. Storytelling has been a gateway to intercultural learning and more equity in our classrooms. Below are excerpts from student responses in reflective writing about the assignment.

One speech I thought was really good was the girl who shared about her multiethnic family. I thought it was good because she really opened up about the struggles she went through and how people used to call her siblings “mutt.” It was brave of her to talk about that to the class. –Sierra

Hearing about my peer's experience growing up in a very different culture in the Middle East made me realize America has its own culture, too. I haven't travelled outside of the U.S. and haven't thought about this much—how other people see us.
—Anonymous

I heard speeches that had cultures and traditions I was familiar with (ex: growing up in Louisiana, being Catholic, coming from a big family, etc.); there were also many people whose cultures I did not relate to. One speech that stood out to me was Maddie's. Something I thought worked in her speech was how her two items contrasted each other. They were both utensils (fork and chopsticks), yet their meanings contrasted [with] each other and how she grew up. One represents her white, more Americanized side, and the other represents her Asian identity. Her experience of growing up mixed and being told by her peers she was too "white" to act her culture was something that was eye opening to me. —Anna Grace

The array of family stories, and the similarities and differences in personal experience they brought to bear, helped us to clarify concepts in our curriculum moving forward. The stories allowed a point of departure for developing sociopolitical consciousness. We suddenly had a trove of student examples about critical cultural topics in Public Speaking: voice and dialect (what constitutes "proper" speech and whom does it benefit?), audience awareness (how can I account for a plurality of audience members' experiences as a speaker?), and inclusive language (what terms are best for addressing a diverse audience?). These are important questions for students tasked with producing creative texts for public audiences. Having the touchstones of our family stories to kick off the semester made all these conversations more complex and more concrete. In one class, McDonald pointed out how many students talked about "my camp," a patch of family-owned land where they grew up hunting and fishing in Louisiana. McDonald proposed thinking about land ownership in the context of racial heritage, pointing out that families of those with European ancestors were more likely to have received land or were encouraged to purchase land from the government in the 1800s and early 1900s, while families of those with enslaved African ancestors were more likely to have been denied access to land ownership altogether. One student knew the history of a relative who was granted lands through government programs in Virginia and used the money from their farm to buy the family camp in Louisiana. Some students, like Camryn, used the opportunity to raise consciousness explicitly about the historical significance of her family's traditions:

The history of African American quilts is nearly as old as the history of America itself. Although long-ignored and absent from many early accounts of American quilt history, African American quilting has come to light.... Slave quilters not only made quilts for the owner's family, they also made quilts for their personal use with "throwaway" or discarded goods as their material. The inner layer of quilts would often be filled with old blankets, worn clothes that could no longer be mended, or bits and pieces of wool or raw cotton. I come from a resourceful family steeped in tradition, pride, and talent. Being able to take scrap pieces to create something not only functional as a barrier to elements but also a work of art—creative and beautiful.

Although the assignment was generally successful, the transition from the Family Story Speech to the Family Objects Speech was challenging for some students. We found that students' delivery for the warm-up speech was often stronger than the Family Objects Speech that came one or two weeks later. In the warm-up speech, for instance, student stories were often humorous and delivered in a relaxed, conversational manner. Many students spoke with enthusiasm and personality, as if they were recounting a precious moment with a friend. However, in the formal introductory speech, a much higher-stakes speech, many students seemed burdened by a sense of obligatory formality. Although the content was similar, many students delivered their second speeches with a sense of hesitation or rigidity not displayed in the warm-up speech. Students seemed to think their speeches needed to be "perfect," and their fear of straying from "perfect" prevented a conversational delivery style. Perhaps simply having more points on the line resulted in students feeling more fear and less confidence.

In McDonald's classes, students with varying dialects and accents from all over Louisiana even seemed to mask accents they previously used in the story speeches, falling into a forced Standard American English. Perhaps this points to classroom norms instilled by a deficit paradigm in education, which often lacks an appreciation for home languages, something teachers must actively counter. Baker (2002) insists that teachers must first establish respect for students' dialects, writing:

I concentrate on how different forms of English are appropriate in different contexts, instead of relying on the right/wrong dichotomy students usually face in school. I do this because I want their own usage, vocabulary, modes of expression and their self-esteem to survive the language learning process (52).

We are left wondering: How can we further support students to bring their full selves into their major assignments? How can we better compose assignments that invite a full range of personal expression and also ask students to practice writing and composition skills that students need in various contexts? How can we invite students to think critically about the intersections of voice and power in education and culture?

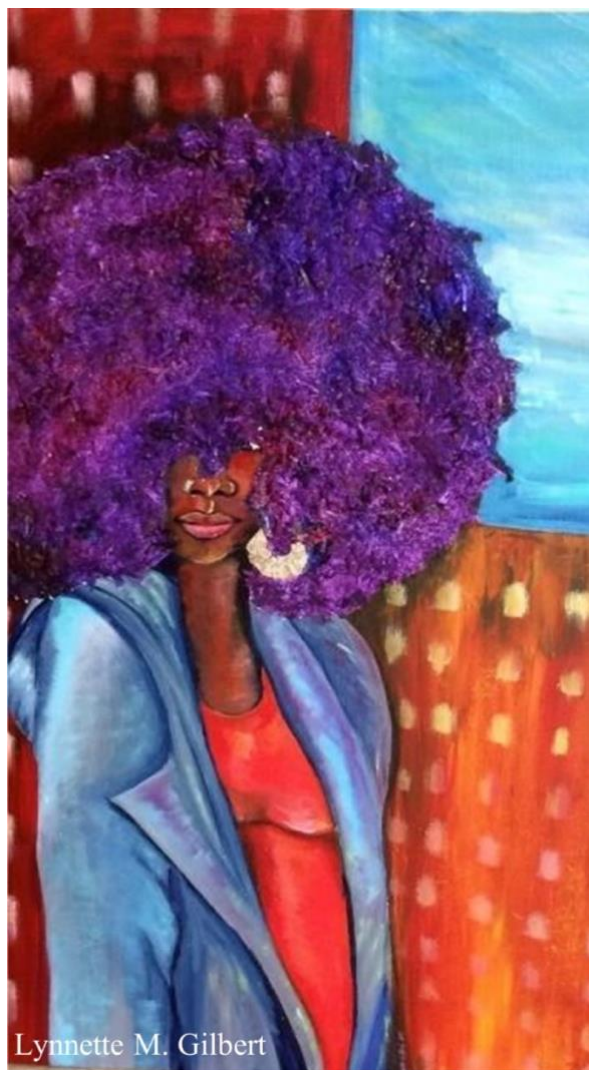
We learned that performing a conversational delivery style is easier when telling a family story but becomes considerably harder to achieve when speech requirements are more complex. In future classes, we will have students analyze their own vocal performance to become aware of what is "natural" for them, and to honor a "home" voice while rehearsing for a higher-stakes performance. We believe that lower-stakes classroom speaking opportunities, such as the Family Story Speech, could play a strong role in pre-writing, narrative development, and delivery practice, especially when teachers can offer students feedback on what elements should be retained or revised in more formal speeches. One of the things that we hope students learn from this two-part assignment is that striking a compositional balance between organized and carefully crafted yet conversational and colloquial is truly an art, and speeches that nail this balance require extensive drafting and rehearsal. We observed that most students possess the ability to tell wonderful stories, and, with practice, these stories can develop into engaging narratives that support strong speeches. We hope that centering folklore in speech composition will help our students tell great stories, value their own and one another's voices, and be heard.

Bonny McDonald, PhD, is a performance practitioner-scholar invested in cultivating community and classroom projects that address social justice topics with groups of all ages. She is Director of Basic Courses in the Communication Studies Department at Louisiana State University where she teaches courses in Public Speaking, Performance, and Communication Pedagogy.

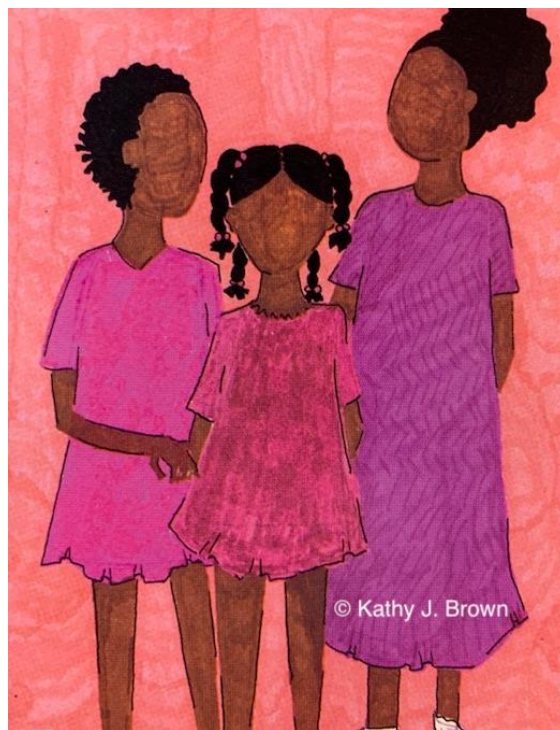
Alexandria N. Hatchett is a PhD student in the Department of Communication Studies at Louisiana State University. Her research interests include rhetoric, critical/cultural studies, and critical communication pedagogy.

Works Cited

- American Folklore Society. n.d. What Is Folklore? Accessed May 7, 2021, <https://www.afsnet.org/page/WhatIsFolklore>.
- Baker, Judith. 2002. Trilingualism. In *The Skin That We Speak: Thoughts on Language and Culture in the Classroom*, eds. Lisa Delpit and Joanne Kilgour Dowdy. New York: The New Press, 51-61.
- Chawla, Devika. 2017. Contours of a Storied Decolonial Pedagogy. *Communication Education*. 67.1:115-20.
- Conquergood, Dwight. 2000. Rethinking Elocution: The Trope of the Talking Book and Other Figures of Speech. *Text and Performance Quarterly*. 20.4:325-41.
- Freire, Paulo. 2005. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: Continuum.
- Graves, Emily. 2015. Personal Interview. August 8. Baton Rouge, Louisiana.
- Ladson-Billings, Gloria. 2014. Culturally Relevant Pedagogy 2.0: a.k.a. the Remix. *Harvard Educational Review*. 84.1:74-84.
- . 1995. But That's Just Good Teaching! The Case for Culturally Relevant Pedagogy. *Theory into Practice*. 34.3:159-65.
- Lyiscott, Jamila. 2014. 3 Ways to Speak English. TED, 4:29. June 19, https://youtu.be/k9fmJ5xQ_mc.
- Paris, Django. 2012. Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy: A Needed Change in Stance, Terminology, and Practice. *Educational Researcher*. 41.3:93-7.
- Valenzano, Joseph M., Stephen W. Braden, and Melissa A. Broeckelman-Post. 2020. *The Speaker's Primer*. Custom Edition for Louisiana State University. Southlake, TX: Fountainhead Press.



Lynnette M. Gilbert



© Kathy J. Brown

Black Hair as Metaphor Explored through Duoethnography and Arts- Based Research

by Kathy J. Brown and Lynnette M. Gilbert

Introduction

We present a duoethnographic (Hood and Travis 2021, Wilson and Lawton-Harris 2019, Sawyer and Norris 2015), critical arts-based research project (Travis 2020, Wilson 2018, Wilson and Lawton-Harris 2019), which began as a pre-recorded, on-demand presentation for the 2021 [Virtual] National Art Education Association Annual Convention (Brown and Gilbert 2021). This is an edited, expanded print version of our conference session examining hair as text and sites of identity/respectability politics, positionality, rites of passage, liminality, and selfhood. Seen through the lens of African American women professors of art education, we unpack the complexities of Black women's hair stories as positional metaphors and share a culminating antiracist, Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP) lesson overview adaptable for grades 7-12.

About the images: *Bold*. Acrylic and shredded paper on wood panel. c. 2016 © Lynnette M. Gilbert (L); *Little Sister*. Marker on paper c. 2001 © Kathy J. Brown (R).

Furthermore, we both situate ourselves within the “artist-as-scholar model” (Wilson and Harris Lawton 2019, 83). We share similar hair narratives but enter this work from different research frameworks and speak in individual voices. The creators of duoethnography, Sawyer and Norris, (2015) posited, “To keep the voices separate, we began to write in script format in a way to promote the quest of inquiry as a phenomenological process of reconceptualization, not the identification of portable research findings and answers” (2). I (Kathy) am a critical qualitative researcher, emerging AfroFuturist, pedagogue, and cultural historian. I employ methods such as autoethnography, narrative inquiry, and arts-based research. I (Lynnette) am an artist-art educator who examines diverse lesson planning through implementing multicultural art education, more specifically African American artists, while challenging artistic approaches to storytelling through culturally relevant teaching methods. Additionally, our disclaimer, as we do not want to misrepresent ourselves, we are not folklorists nor are the artist exemplars we suggest folk artists. We are educational researchers using duoethnography and arts-based research methodologies as employed in educational research and teacher education. We present our emerging qualitative work in four parts: 1) brief historic literature review, 2) hair narratives, 3) artist statements, and 4) lesson overview.

Duoethnography, theorized by Sawyer and Norris (2015), foregrounds multiple-voice dialogue, the fluidity of lived experiences and an acknowledgment of difference, “... we sought to turn the inquiry lens on ourselves, not as the topic, but as the site of an archeological examination of the formation of our beliefs, values, and ways of knowing... the exploration of how life histories of different individuals impact the meanings they give to those experiences...” (1-2). Moreover, in this inquiry, we also use Sawyer and Norris’s four pillars of duoethnography as a methodology that is:

1. Polyvocal/dialogic in nature,
 2. An examination of life history as curriculum,
 3. Intends not to profess but rather to learn and change as the result of the conversation, and
 4. About the importance of learning.
- (2015, 3)

Arts-Based Research (ABR) is most often attributed to art education theorists Eisner and Barone (2012), who sought to fill the gaps in contemporary qualitative methods by expanding and validating the visual as viable sites of inquiry and findings. Wilson, in her 2018 autoethnographic article, builds upon the work of previous researchers, expounding upon the idea of *critical* arts-based research by noting:

In this sense, arts-based research acts as a heuristic through which I deepen and make more nuanced an understanding of an aspect of a lived experience emphasizing the generation of forms of feeling that have something to do with understanding the self. (214)

Moreover, we situate this article as a specific type of (critical) arts-based research called *art-informing inquiry*, in which the artmaking or the art pieces signify viewer understanding and interaction with the images, “...arts-informing inquiry is research where art is used to evoke responses from an audience to a situation” (Qingchun, Coemans, Siegesmund, and Hannes 2017, 9).

The impetus of this inquiry began during the height of the Covid-19 pandemic quarantine, global civil unrest, and racialized uprisings following the murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor. We were a group of three friends—former doctoral classmates—in daily communication via group text. Immersed in chatter about the events of the day, two of us (Lynnette and Kathy) were also reflecting and making art. Additionally, like many others, increased time indoors resulted in additional time to lament on the state of our hair. These events catalyzed this duoethnography, a co-examination of two friends and colleagues’ dysfunctional relationship with our crowns of naps, kinks, and coils. We situate our parallel experiences and evolving naming process of transformations and epiphanies as a catalyst for embodied artmaking and racialized discourse. As stated above, we approach this article through an overview of the literature, telling our own stories, and sharing artwork as hair ethnographies and conclude with an instructional resource for a 7-12 lesson overview that includes five contemporary BIPOC artist exemplars examining Black hair in their work.

Brief Historiography of Black Hair

We investigate the origin of our hair in this literature review in the vein of Black women as artist-academics engaging in art-based research identity work (Wilson and Lawton-Harris 2019, Wilson 2018). With this historical information we do not seek to police Black hair, nor suggest that chemically or heat-altered hairstyles denote a denial of self, because a Black woman has the right to wear her hair however she chooses. Instead, we simultaneously highlight celebratory moments in our history, while apologetically naming and tracing systemic, generative dysfunction. Ellis-Harvey, Doss, Davis, Nicks, and Araiza (2016) wrote, “Black women face a double ‘othering’” (91) as both gendered and racialized beings. Johnson and Bankhead (2014) posited that the antithetical, lifelong tensions of many Black women and their manes are rooted in historical trauma and perpetuated by current-day *isms*; our hair is “...part of African cultural identity, as hair and identity are inseparable...intricately connected to cultural identity, spirituality, character makeup, and notions of beauty” (87). We contextualize our research within the concepts of historical trauma, oppositional triumphs, and current movements.

“Transatlantic Children of the Mother Continent”*

In the 15th century on the African continent, Thompson (2009) states, “Hairstyles were used to indicate a person’s marital status, age, religion, ethnic identity, wealth and rank within the community” (79). White and White (1995) wrote, “In 1602 the Dutch explorer Pieter de Marees published a plate showing sixteen different hairstyles of various classes and genders in Benin alone” (51). Our phenotypical differences from those of the European colonizer, including our hair, were used to justify, dehumanize, and commodify (Paulino 2019). It is reported that upon arrival at some colonial entry points, shaving the heads of newly arrived, kidnapped African people was instituted “to symbolize their removal from their cultures” (Ellis Hervey et al. 2016, 871). Additionally, among many documented brutalities such as floggings, brandings, mental and sexual abuse, shackles, malnourishment, and amputation, head shaving and hair cutting were also a form of punishment (White and White 1995) in antebellum America. White and White (1995) recounted 17th-century Virginia runaway slave advertisements describing an enslaved young woman whose hair was cut into a disfigured style and a young man who not only had his head shaved but was also branded on both facial cheeks with hot iron.

* (Newkirk II 2018)

Moreover, in Louisiana in 1786, the Spanish governor imposed Tignon Laws upon free Black and Creole women requiring them to cover their heads with scarves called tignons (Figure 1) to appear less attractive to white men and mark or metaphorically brand who was Black and who was not among lighter-skinned Mulatto women (Pitts 2021, Young 2020). Although the tignon was meant to be a symbol of positional reminder, humiliation, and shame for women of color, it instead became an act of rebellion. Women embellished them as fashionable headpieces and proudly donned them as small acts of revolution (Pitts 2021, Young 2020, Sherman 2020). In homage, Chesley Antoinette, a Dallas-based fiber artist has extensively researched the Tignon Laws to create a series of sculptural head coverings, exhibited throughout the region (Sherman 2020). I was first introduced to the tignon when I (Kathy) saw Antoinette's work exhibited at the Texas Woman's University in 2019.



Figure 1. *Portrait of Betsey*
c. 1837, François Fleischbein.
Public Domain image.

The regulation of our hair continued during forced enslavement: “Once enslaved, hair became more a matter of the labor one was forced to do. For instance, field slaves often hid their hair, whereas house slaves had to wear wigs similar to their slave owners, who also adorned wigs during this period” (Thompson 2009, 79). Furthermore, Black hair was designated as wool and slaves had to cover their hair to be deemed more acceptable to white people (Ellis-Hervey et al. 2016, Randle 2015). Moreover, the term “Nappy” was first weaponized to describe the appearance of African captives on the slave auction block (Kenneth 2021). The source of the word “nappy” is considered to have derived from “...the word *nap*, which was used to describe the frizzled threads rising from a piece of fabric. There is a lot of speculation that *nap* was redefined as a disparaging phrase for the coils and kinks in the hair of the African enslaved, in connection with the fields of cotton that drove the Colonial economy” (Paulino 2019, para.6). Still considered by some to be a racialized insult, in recent years African Americans have reclaimed “nappy,” for example, in publication of actively antiracist, decolonizing children’s books such as *Nappy Hair* (Herron 1997), *I Love My Hair* (Tarley 2001), *Hair Love* (Cherry 2019), and *Happy to Be Nappy* (hooks 1999).

20th Century

Through it all, African American people have remained intelligent, resourceful, innovative, and resilient. Sharing toiletries and assisting one another with hair grooming during our extended period of forced enslavement is only one example. Well after Emancipation and into the dawn of the 20th century the quest to appear “presentable” to the dominant society persisted for many reasons: survival, upward mobility, work acquisition and retention, necessary respectability politics of the day, and prior centuries of mental and physical abuse and indoctrination. In the early 1900s, as the Industrial Age boomed, Madam C.J. Walker seized the moment and patented a revolutionary hot comb/pressing comb and “hair softener” product (Randle 2015, 118) readily allowing Black women to straighten their hair at home or in the salon (Pitts 2021, Thompson 2009) and by 1925, straightened hair became a marker of the Black bourgeoisie (Randle 2015). Moving forward to the late 1950s, the civil rights era in the United States and a fight toward integration had begun, and it was important for Black people to have an acceptable aesthetic (Pitts 2021). At this juncture, the relaxer, colloquially known as the “perm,” was invented by an African American

businessman and lab-trained chemist, George E. Johnson (Mack 2018, Thompson 2009). The perm/relaxer originated in 1954 as the Ultra Wave for Black men to achieve popular chemically altered hairstyles (Mack 2018). Previously, to achieve this hairstyle for men called the “conk,” one had to undergo treatments at home, “with the extremely painful application of a homemade mixture of potatoes, eggs, and lye” (White and White 1995, 48). Three years later in 1957, the relaxer for women as we know it was born under the label of Ultra Sheen (Mack 2018). He later created the Johnson Products company, and his success story is chronicled in a 2019 documentary *No Lye: An American Beauty Story* (Mack 2019). The relaxer transformed the beauty industry much like the pressing comb had decades earlier, because the relaxer could be done at home too and the results were “permanent,” only needing to be “touched up” every six weeks or so. These results far outlasted “press and curl” results from Madame C.J. Walker’s earlier pressing comb (Pitt 2021).

In the late 1960s and 1970s, a cultural awakening took place during and following the Civil Rights Movement and the 1964 Civil Rights Act (Pitt 2021). The Afro was lauded as “a symbolic representation of political change” (Ellis-Hervey et al. 2016, 873). A few years into the 1980s, the Afro began to fall out of favor, and chemically altered hairstyles such as the Jheri Curl returned (Kenneth 2021), later satirized in the film *Coming to America* (1989). Also in the 1980s, Thompson (2009) posits that hair weaves further revolutionized the hair care industry because a Black woman could have hair that was “not just straight, but also very long” (79-80). A particular type of braided style became popular with films such as *Poetic Justice* (1996) and usually involved hair extensions. The ultra-straight hair trend flourished into the 1990s. I (Kathy) remember the “wrap” hairstyle in the 1990s that required a perm to achieve and maintain that “look,” and media perpetuated a style that may have possibly been harming us:

... the juxtaposition of the dangers of relaxers and the rampant popularity of straightened styles were present within the black community. The National Institutes of Health had just released a study that revealed a link between relaxers and fibroids. But at the same time, bone straight hairstyles made famous by wildly popular celebrities such as Nia Long and Aaliyah lead to thousands of black women following suit. (McLeod 2018, para. 2)

New Millennium

Depending on the source, a resurgence and reclamation of hair in its natural state emerged from social media, advancing the neo-natural hair movement that began in the early to late 2000s (McCleod 2018, Pitt 2021). The rise of popular hair influencers, YouTube hair tutorials, and “natural hair bloggers” renewed sociocultural understanding of our hair in its natural state and inspired a new generation of girls and women (McCleod 2018). Additionally, in 2019, the CROWN Act was introduced, after several national news stories of Black children being disciplined in school for their hair (Mbilishaka and Apugo 2020) or adults being chided, losing their jobs, or denied employment because of their hairstyles. Pitt reported,

The CROWN Act, which stands for “Create a Respectful and Open World for Natural Hair” would end discrimination based on hair styles and hair textures in workplaces and schools.... Though many states have introduced protective legislation regarding hair,.... To date, the CROWN Act has been introduced in sixteen states where it did not pass. (2021, 5)

Spearheaded by a Black woman, California Senator Holly J. Mitchell, the CROWN Act was introduced and passed in California in 2019 to prevent further school and workplace discrimination (Acuff and Kraehe 2020, Pitt 2021). At the time of this writing, ten states have enacted CROWN laws and three more have passed similar legislation (www.thecrownact.com).

Illuminating the concept of hair as a metaphor, Thompson (2009) describes what she calls *hair stories* (here we call them hair ethnographies and hair narratives interchangeably), noting that “‘straightening’ serves as a rite of passage for most young black girls from childhood into adolescence and womanhood... and [study participant Ruth stated]... it would be unfair to say that you can compare another race’s hair issues with ours” (82). Phenotypically we are the group of people whose hair grows up and out like a crown, as opposed to straight or wavy and downward (Brown and Gilbert 2021). Furthermore, the 2016 Ellis-Hervey et al. quantitative study surveyed 282 Black women from various social, economic, and environmental backgrounds, yielding interesting statistical findings from their regression analysis, demonstrating a small difference between the hair choice of natural or altered hair styles, “... a slight but significant positive correlation between a higher internal locus of control and those who choose to wear their hair in a natural state” (869). In the same study, Ellis-Hervey et al. described hair as a universal symbol of beauty; however, the measure on which the standard of beauty was based has not changed to match our contemporary diverse society. “Hair alteration is not necessarily a result of self-hatred, nor a desire to be White, but about working within internalized beauty paradigms to attain one small piece of what society defines as beautiful” (2016, 874). This is an important distinction, as we highlight Black hair as racialized texts.

Theorizing Black Hair

Art education researchers Kraehe and Acuff (2021) suggest that hair is a significant racially identifiable marker. In 2015 researchers Opie and Phillips (2015) conducted an extensive three-part, mixed-methods study applying Optimal Distinctiveness Theory (ODT) to Black women wearing their natural hair in corporate work environments. Theoretically, “ODT asserts that people actively manage the balance between the need for belongingness and the need for uniqueness” (2). One of Opie and Phillips’ (2015) findings resulted in what they call the “agency-penalty” (2) when Black women were perceived as more dominant or angry based on the aesthetic of Afrocentric hairstyles in the workplace. Opie and Phillips (2015) posited that because Black women can decide whether to wear their hair natural, hair as a readily identifiable racial marker that can be intentionally changed for invisibility or hypervisibility.

As the natural hair movement regained momentum, researchers illuminated Black hair as a sociopolitical site. For example, Tameka Ellington and Joseph Underwood edited *Textures: The Art and History of Black Hair* (2020), while Doherty (2020) advances the possible issues that arise from Black women constructing racialized research, such as the risk of the angry Black woman trope and one’s work being dismissed. Doherty (2020) suggests what she calls “strategic emotionality” (554) while doing the kind of work we are attempting in this article. As we (the authors) understand the root of Dubois’ (1903) double consciousness to which Doherty refers, we simultaneously unbind ourselves from the psychology and aesthetics of white patriarchy—foregrounding our stories and hair journeys as inspiration, celebration, and normalization.

Our Hair Narratives

Lynnette



Figure 2.



Figure 3.



Figure 4.



Figure 5.

As a little girl, I can remember my dad saying to my mom, “What are we going to do with her hair?” Even now, my dad’s comments on my hair range from, “What are we doing with our hair today, Daughter?” which usually means he’s not too sure about my style of choice, to “Wow, Pooh, your hair looks nice. We’ve come a long way,” as he nods his head in approval.

My hair is an ongoing journey of self. Early on, I remember the time spent with the kitchen beautician, my mom, and the hot comb to straighten my hair. As a young girl, my hair was natural (Figure 2). I believe by the time I was seven, the family went to the Jheri Curl (Figure 3). I didn’t mind the curl so much, because it gave my hair freedom and removed me from the hot comb. After the curl, I advanced to more chemical assistance, a relaxer (perm). I admit I fell into the “good hair, bad hair” camp, and straight, long hair meant good hair. The only way to achieve straight hair was through a relaxer (perm), but long and luxurious never happened for me, so I embraced my short hairstyles. I kept my hair in a permed short cut, and this would remain my style through college and well into my professional career (Figure 4). In 1998 I actually cut my hair. I went to the barbershop and asked the barber to cut all the perm out to reveal my natural texture. I had just graduated college and moved to a new state and started in my master’s program. I remember going home to visit my parents and my younger brother opened the door and with the biggest smile on his face said, “Hey, you look like me!” I instantly thought he meant I looked like a boy, and the next day I bought a box perm and permed my hair. Looking back, I realize I had a fear of acceptance of my hair, and my self-confidence was at an all-time low. I didn’t understand the beauty of my natural hair and how I felt about my hair was a direct reflection of my identity.

It would be 2010 before I would truly begin my natural hair journey. I recall sitting in my stylist’s chair and saying, “Just cut it off.” Financially, I was exhausted, and my hair has always been where I release my stress, so it was also a feeling of freedom. Even though I felt free, I was still uneasy about my decision, so I asked for color (Figure 5). Color always brings me joy, so adding color to my newly natural cut hair was a way for me to find joy instantly in my decision. I kept a Teeny-Weeny Afro, or TWA, for about two years before I decided to grow my hair out. My hair started to loc naturally (Figure 6) because of my curl pattern, but I was unsure, so after a few weeks I had my stylist cut my hair. My hair never really became dynamic like I saw on various natural hair posts on Pinterest, television, or some of my closest friends. I had always loved natural hair and its versatility, not fully understanding why my hair



Figure 6.

literally did what she wanted to do no matter what products, twist, or wash method I used. I felt like the line out of “Cleva,” a song by Erykah Badu, “My hair ain’t never hung down to my shoulders, and it might not grow, Ya’ never know...” (Badu 2000).

My twist-outs are usually a twist don’t, they just make my hair curlier. The one time I had a great twist-out was when I had color. It was violet, blue-violet, and a little red-violet. I was a living analogous color scheme and loved it. The dyes changed the texture of my hair slightly, and that was why my twist-out was successful because my texture had changed (Figure 7).



Figure 7.

My revelation—to love my hair for what it is and where it is—finally clicked when I was at a convention in Washington, DC. I asked this beautiful, young Black woman about her hair. It was gorgeous! I took the opportunity to compliment her hair and start a conversation about her hair regimen. Her response was first to thank me, and then she told me where I could get the same wig! I was blown away. I realized then that we all have natural hair struggles, successes, and solutions.

Nowadays you will find me with natural hair color with my favorite headband or headwrap, hair fluffed or in a high puff (Figure 8). The summer usually calls for protective styles because the humidity is not kind to my hair. I usually go with faux locs (Figure 9), because now, 11 years after beginning my natural hair journey, I am ready to loc my hair. I often think back to when my hair began to loc naturally and think about how maybe I should have started then, but that’s the beauty of the journey, I had to learn to love my hair before locating my hair.



Figure 8.



Figure 9.



Figure 10. *Seek and Ye Shall Find*. Acrylic and acrylic sand medium on canvas. c. 2015
© Lynnette M. Gilbert

Hair-Informed Artmaking

Lynnette

My artwork reflects the faith, essence, beauty, presence, and value of being a Black woman. I have always been fascinated with colors, textures, and patterns. Art is my creative place of exploration and just being. Through my work I use the boldness of colors and the play of pattern and textures to capture what radiates from within. I use shredded paper and acrylic mediums to capture the complex beauty of our natural crown (Figures 10-12, and title page image).



Figure 12. *Hopes and Dreams* (This painting is a work in progress. I photographed my niece to be the model for the painting. Paper, textures and text will be added.) c. 2021

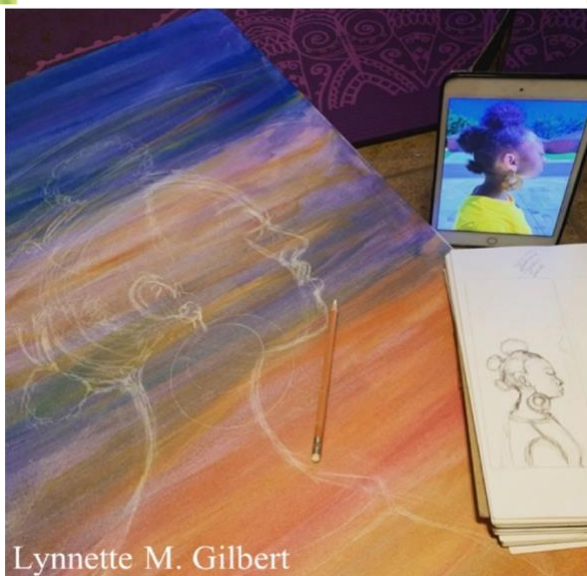


Figure 11. Sketchbook and canvas sketch.



Lynnette M. Gilbert

Figure 13. *Locitude--Crown and Glory Series (2018-)*. Collagraph print on butcher paper. c. 2018

© Lynnette M. Gilbert



Lynnette M. Gilbert

Figure 14. *Bantuiful--Crown and Glory Series (2018-)*. Collagraph print on paper. c. 2019

© Lynnette M. Gilbert

Crown and Glory (Figures 13-14) is an ongoing collagraph printmaking series I began in 2018. The series is a direct response to the negative backlash that Black children, as well as professionals, were receiving based on their hair. I saw society once again stripping our identity and making our crowns seem unworthy, ugly, devalued. I wanted to celebrate and honor the beauty of the natural crown by exploring different textures through recycled materials such as cardboard to create textures for the hair.

The #SayHerName movement, Breonna Taylor, and the sheer essence of being a Black woman served as a catalyst for my piece *#BlackQueensRising* (Figure 15), a call to rise up for justice, rise up to uplift, protect, and honor Black women. The mask is symbolic. It not only speaks to the current pandemic but also to the power of the protests while in the pandemic, and the pandemic that has been happening for centuries, the pandemic of the unprotected, dismissed Black Woman. Her hair is a symbol of youth and power created through shredded newspaper and acrylic sands. The mask (Figure 16) is not to be seen as a symbol of silence but as a symbol of voice and protection of the Black Woman and to speak SAY HER NAME boldly, demanding to be heard and demanding justice! As I continue in this body of work, it is my desire to explore meanings through space, time, experience, and identity—exploring hair as power, strength, position, and voice.

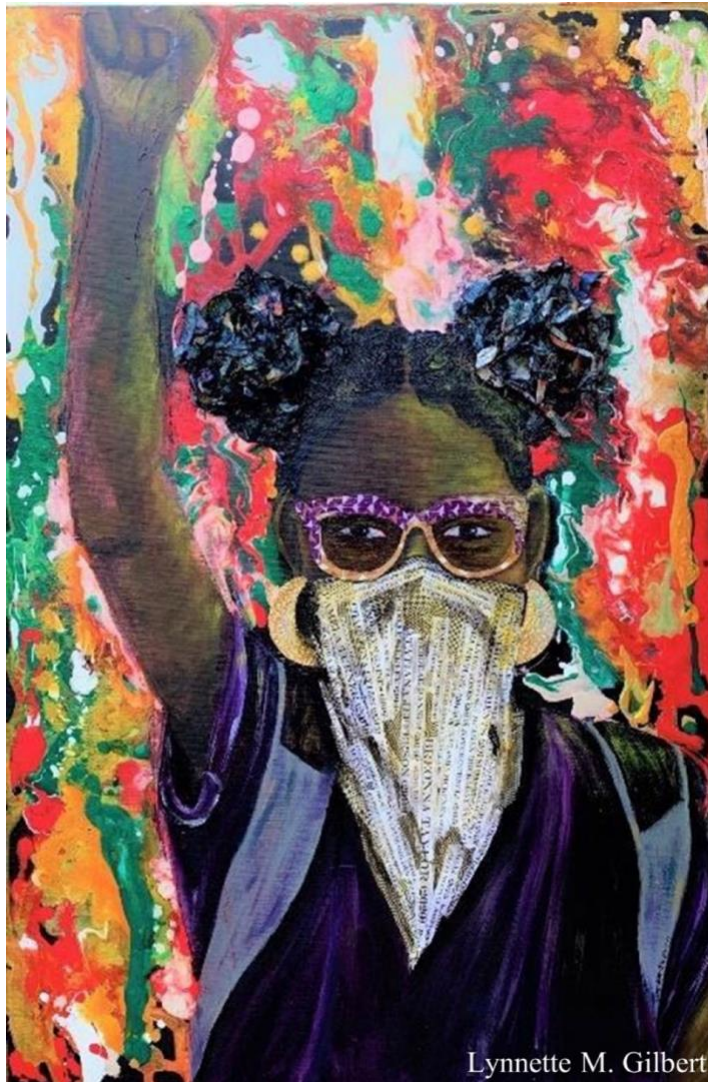


Figure 15. *#BlackQueensRising*. Acrylic paint, newspaper, textured and untextured paper on canvas. c. 2020

© Lynnette M. Gilbert



Figure 16. Close-up view of mask. All the names on the mask are Black women who were killed by police.

Kathy



Figures 17 and 18. Watercolor on canvas board.
Top image, Age 24 Self-portrait, c. 1998
Bottom image, touched-up version, c. 2021



Figure 19.

I first went natural with the “big chop” in 1996 or 97, when my college boyfriend volunteered to cut off my permed hair for me. I had the quintessential TWA. It grew out and I kept it natural for my first year as a teacher; however, after my first year, I left the profession. After a few unemployed months back living at home with my mom, I interviewed for a corporate job. I was excited to experience a new work venture. However, to get the job there was the contingency that I straighten my hair, “do something with my hair,” an overt application of Opie and Phillips’ “agency penalty” based on my coif choice (2). The watercolor self-portraits (Figures 17 and 18) reflect what my hair looked like during this specific liminal period.

Regretfully, I complied because I needed the job, and based on current statistics, I was definitely not alone in that experience and decision from over 20 years ago. According to a recent Dove Crown Act 2019 Research Study, where 1,000 Caucasian and 1,000 Black women of varied ages were surveyed (www.thecrownact.com), the numbers are staggering. The website reported Black women were 80 percent more likely than Caucasian women to agree with the following comment: “I have to change my hair from its natural state to fit into the office.” Such stark percentages speak directly to the pervasiveness and longevity of Black hair bias in the workplace as well as the permanence of imbalanced American beauty standards. During that particular period in my young professional life, I had to accept the position to provide myself stability, and I didn’t have long to make the decision and lament the indignity. In that moment I had to suppress my feelings for temporal financial security. I was navigating a system that was not designed for me and had to redirect my literal appearance and expectations to assimilate into “office” culture.

The next year I quit and returned to the K-12 classroom, which I enjoyed. I kept my hair permed, then later flat ironed/pressed again for another few years as a young teacher. Then I was on and off natural and flat ironed/pressed. Wearing it flat ironed/straight required weekly salon visits and a restricted lifestyle to deter my fear of it “turning back” or reverting to coils (Figure 19).

My late, elder cousin Everett was a licensed cosmetologist with her own beauty shop, and she would press my hair with copious amounts of Blue Magic hair grease in the old-school press-and-curl style. I remember getting it straightened for special occasions like school pictures or church on Mother’s Day



Figure 20. 2nd grade school picture.



Figure 21. Sketchbook drawing of 2nd grade school picture.
© Kathy J. Brown.



Figure 22.

(Figure 20 and 21). In between, on ordinary days, I think I wore it plaited or pulled to the top of my head in a neat little Afro puff in the style of Janet Jackson on the television show (airing in reruns) *Good Times*. (This is probably the idealized version from my memoryscape). In retrospect, subconsciously I think I equated hair straightening with being presentable, with dressing up. Kraehe and Acuff (2021) had similar memories in their recollections of Black hair and memory. For me, most notably in 7th grade, my parents were in the midst of a contentious divorce. My cousin and mom had been doing my hair; I've never been talented in that area myself. At that point, there was so much going on there wasn't time to take me to Everett's, and I believe I received a home perm that caused some hair breakage, etc. My hair was not at its best, and I remember my classmates teasing me for my nappy hair. It wasn't something my parents would have done on purpose. I think that I was equating presentability with straight hair, like many others. It was certainly NOT a concept my beloved mom would have intentionally harmed me with, but an unspoken message that was probably passed down, transferred from generation to generation.

It's been a long road of natural, permed, flat ironed, hot combed, braids, weaves, and everything in between to accept my hair as it grows out of my head. I may change it tomorrow, as that is any woman's prerogative, but understanding why we do these things is imperative. I am thinking of locing my hair as the next phase of my story, but I want to understand the history and the power of locing fully it before I decide to do it. As I became more familiar with visual culture theories such as the concept of the "gaze," which Acuff and Kraehe (2020) define as when "... the relationship between social location and perception is not predictive, the context of seeing—when and why we look—is as significant as the object of the gaze—what we look at—in determining that which is visible and its possible meanings" (10). Upon further reflection, I wonder, was I doing these things to my hair for the male gaze, the "white colonial gaze," or both? At this writing, I lovingly wear it as it grows from my head, sometimes with product and manipulation, sometimes without (Figure 22).



Hair-Informed Artmaking: Alter Ego and Protest Art

Kathy

I've been a maker since childhood, studied art in college, and started making art professionally once I returned to teaching in 1999-2000. Even the themes of some of the abstract work I was doing then foregrounded Black experiences and self-work. My earlier stylized figurative artwork evoked the power of hair before I began studying its history and racialized meanings. I created a series of ten or so mixed-media drawings and paintings that I mass-produced onto bags, notecards, mouse pads, and journals called *The Adventures of SisterGirl Jones Series* (c.1999-2021) (Figures 22-24, and title page image) inspired by fashion magazines and illustrations and meant to foreground the daily lives of Black women and girls as adventures and triumphs. The protagonist was my alter ego, and as I look back, when drawing her I always took time to render her Afro or Afro puff. I re-examine them now, her coif was a central figure in each piece.

Image 23 (top): *Ladies Night*. Marker, Watercolor and India Ink on paper. c. 2001

Image 24 (L): *Morning Routine*. Marker on paper. c. 2002

Image 25 (R): *Decisions, Decisions*. Marker and colored pencil on paper. c. 2002



Journal of Folklore and Education (2021: Vol. 8)

Black Hair as Metaphor Explored through Duoethnography and Arts-Based Research
by Kathy J. Brown and Lynnette M. Gilbert

In Bennett Capers' (2010) speculative legal article "Afrofuturism, Critical Race Theory, and Policing in the Year 2044," he posits three central tenets of Afrofuturism: representation, disruption of hierarchies, and alienation/redemption. I now realize these themes show up in my previous and contemporary work, both subconsciously and with intentionality. Hair has been a feature of my work because it is an integral part of my phenotype. More recently I have been creating fabric collages/assemblages draped and tailored over plastic mannequin busts. The first two of a series are reactions to police brutality killings and the long overdue uprisings of 2020. In *Clothes You Can't Remove: Pre and Post Breonna Taylor* (Figures 26 and 27) the figure's hair is not shown; instead she adorns a headdress commonly worn by contemporary Black women and girls—reclaiming the headwrap once used to hide or diminish us. As the fabric collage began to form, I wanted her to don a scarf as a symbol for the everyday Black girl/woman. The technique I used—unintentionally at the time—evoked ancestral tacit knowledge and turned out to have similarities to South Carolina Gullah Geechee traditions (my paternal grandad's lineage), explored further in a separate article, currently under review.



Figures 26 and 27. *Pre and Post Breonna Taylor: Clothes You Can't Remove (Post Mourning in the Morning)*. Hand-sewn fabric and wire collage/assemblage on readymade mannequin bust. c. 2020

© Kathy J. Brown



The second piece, produced in 2021 and entitled *Variations on a Theme* (Figures 28 and 29), was created in the same style, an ode to the many Black men who have been victims and survivors. Most notably, it is a homage to Sgt. Issac Woodard. His horrific blinding by South Carolina police in 1946 draws comparison to the 2020 murder of George Floyd because Sgt. Woodard's case also ignited global attention, followed by legislative and social change in the U.S.

In the art piece, the materiality of hair is emphasized because I employed a version of Gullah Geechee rag quilting—a technique I read about when researching for my first piece (Figures 26 and 27). I chose for his hair to resemble a version of rag quilting to denote the beauty of his “nappy” hair and proudly reclaim the disparaging origins of the word nappy as quoted in the literature review, “...the word *nap*, which was used to describe the frizzled threads rising from a piece of fabric” (Paulino 2019). The piece is incomplete as shown. I am in the process of creating a custom fabric and wire crown for his head. At the time of this writing, both are on display at the Greater Denton Arts Council's Meadows Gallery.

Figures 28 and 29. *Variations on a Theme*. Hand-sewn fabric and wire collage/assemblage on readymade mannequin bust. c. 2021

© Kathy J. Brown

Classroom Connection: Hair Ethnography as a Culturally Responsive Visual Art Lesson

Culturally Responsive Teaching is a pedagogy that recognizes the importance of including students' cultural references in all aspects of learning.

—Gloria Ladson-Billings (1994)



Hairprint. See Lynnette M. Gilbert's Instructional Exemplar below for more information.

Art is storytelling and through art education we organically embody the fundamental framework of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP), learning within the context of culture, student-centered instruction, culturally mediated instruction, reshaping the curriculum, and envisioning the teacher as facilitator (Ladson-Billings 1994). CRP allows our students to reach beyond the surface and connect to deeper meaning through visual storytelling. Geneva Gay, Professor of Education at the University of Washington-Seattle, states “stories are means for individuals to project and present themselves, declare what is important and valuable, give structure to perceptions, make general facts more meaningful to specific lives, connect self with others, proclaim the self as cultural being...” (Gay 2018).

HairStory is an art lesson that presents a perspective of storytelling around the positionality of hair. It was created in response to self-discovery through situating hair to connect to personal truths through exploring various media to examine the complexities of textures, movement, and meaning. From hats to headwraps to the glorious bald crown to straight, soft curls, kinks, coils, and all the textures in between, hair holds stories of culture, community, influence, and identity. This lesson is adaptable for grades 7-12 as well as community education and higher education.

HairStory: Identity, Culture, and Representation

Possible Big Ideas

Hair as Social Norms
Hair as Oppression
Hair as Celebration
Hair as Marginalization
Hair as Identity
Hair as Acceptance
Hair as Narrative

Learning Objectives

The student will (TSW):

- Discover and reimagine self through the exploration of hair
- Investigate hair as a metaphor through positionality, rites of passage, liminality, and/or self-hood
- Develop the ability to communicate the concept of hair as “identity”
- Increase awareness and understanding of hair through viewing and discuss works of art by artists who use hair as subject matter
- Create a mixed-media visual HairStory demonstrating visual concepts of storytelling that examine hair as “identity” through various media

BIPOC Artist Exemplars

Kenturah Davis <http://www.kenturah.com>

Time and Place Have Had Their Say (2019)
Everything That Cannot Be Known (2019)
In Praise of Shadows (2019)

Jessica Spence www.jessicaspenceart.com

Tawanda (2016)
Sunday Evening (2017)
Laid (2019)
Fro Hawked (2016)

Lorna Simpson <https://lsimpsonstudio.com>

Stereo Styles (1988)
Naturally Difficult/Released (2017)

Jamaal Barber <http://jbarberstudio.com/identity-series>

I Could (n.d)
I Am (n.d)

Rabea Ballin www.rabeaballin.com

Phillgood (2008)
Coming of Age (after Ojekeire) (2009)
Self Portrait (2009)

Journal of Folklore and Education (2021: Vol. 8)

Black Hair as Metaphor Explored through Duoethnography and Arts-Based Research
by Kathy J. Brown and Lynnette M. Gilbert

Materials

Materials are choice-based. TSW explore three or more different media. Materials are to be seen as a tool to create as well as a means to tell their story. Material options include but are not limited to:

Paint (acrylic, watercolor, gouache, tempera)

Digital media (digital photography, Photoshop, digital drawing)

Graphite

Colored pencils

Inks

Chalk pastels

Oil pastels

Collage

Relief printmaking (linoleum block or collagraph)

Instructional Resource Guidelines

(Based upon National Visual Arts Strands: Respond, Connect, Create, and Present)

RESPONDING

- View artists. Discuss the different ways hair is displayed:
 - What does the image say about hair?
 - How does the artist use hair as a method of identity and individuality?
- View vintage ads and discuss how hair tells a story through style, posture, text, and textures.

CONNECTING

Consider personal hair. How do you style your hair? Why do you style your hair? Do you identify with cultural connections to your hair? What is your hair routine or non-routine? Why? How do your hair and hair accessories speak to who you are, how you identify, your emotions? What do these relationships to your hair look like in a work of art? Reflect through journaling exploring different media, mark making, and thumbnails.

CREATING

- **Voice** How will you tell your HairStory? How will you present it to the viewer? How will the various media assist in telling your HairStory?
- **Studio** Examine, Explore, Engage, and Develop a Visual HairStory.

PRESENTING

Reflecting upon previous questions, identify key elements of your HairStory. Express the key elements through the connection of positionality and artistic choices.

Instructor's (Lynnette) Exemplar

This is an example of a possible outcome based on the provided learner objectives. I created the exemplar based on my personal hair story. The piece is entitled *Hairprint*. I explain below how I examined each strand to create the piece.

Media Linoleum block print (fingerprints and portrait), chalk pastels, acrylic paint, alcohol markers. I purposefully selected media that I normally do not use together to work through the complex nature of my HairStory.

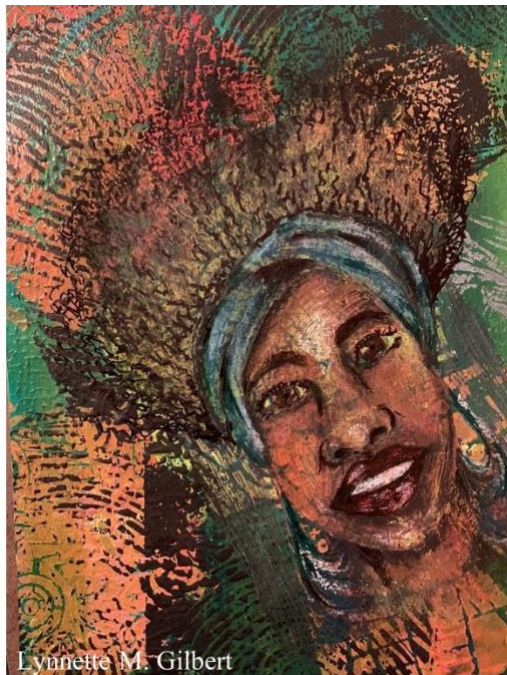
Identity Fingerprints, pathway stencils, and hair.

Fingerprints as Hair Fingerprints are the individual uniqueness of a person, setting us apart from everyone else. Through a pattern of whirls and lines, my fingerprints take on the pattern of the coils of the hair.


Pathway Stencil Roadmap journey of finding self

Emerge Acceptance. As the hair manifests into the fingerprints, self also emerges from the continuous journey of self-discovery.

This lesson creates space for students to express their hair culture through using mixed media. Society has for too long attempted to define our curls and coils and diminish our representation by defining beauty, from facial features to hair texture, in a negative light. This is an opportunity to share a method of teaching students how to define themselves and debunk the societal myths of African American hair.



Exemplar by Lynnette M. Gilbert, *Hairprint*. Mixed media (linoleum block print, acrylic paint, chalk pastels, alcohol markers). c. 2021

Lynnette M. Gilbert, EdD is an art educator from Ridgeland, MS. She received her doctorate in Curriculum and Instruction with an emphasis in Art Education from the University of Houston. She has 16 years of experience in secondary art education teaching in Memphis and Houston. She is Assistant Professor of Art Education at Arkansas Tech University and Director of the Windgate Summer Art Launch for Arkansas Educators hosted by the Arkansas Tech University Art Department. Her current research focuses on African American Women Artists-Art Educators from Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU). Her artwork reflects faith, thoughts, and personal experiences that capture the beauty, presence, and value of Black women. Her work was most recently featured in the 2021 National Alliance of Artists from Historically Black Colleges and Universities (NAAHBCU) Roots for Change Exhibition in Fayetteville, North Carolina.  ORCID 0000-0002-9922-7453

Kathy J. Brown, PhD, is Assistant Professor of Art Education at the University of North Texas. Prior to pursuing doctoral studies at the University of Houston, she was an elementary and middle school art teacher for many years. Her critical, art-based, ethnographic research interests include social justice art education, anti-Blackness in education, art teacher narratives, cultural histories, and Afrofuturism as antiracist pedagogy. Current projects include a collaborative, three-part, rhizomatic self-study exploring the use of the 5E lesson-planning model in art teacher education, duoethnographic research about Black hair as CRP, an Afrofuturist/Gullah Geechee inspired fibers project, and co-leading an ongoing panel series, the 2044 Series: Anti-racist Praxis as Futurist Art and Design Pedagogy.

Works Cited

- Acuff, Joni Boyd and Amelia Kraehe, 2020. Visuality of Race in Popular Culture: Teaching Racial Histories and Iconography in Media. *Dialogue: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Popular Culture and Pedagogy*. 7.3:1-14.
- Ashe, Bertram D. 1995. "Why don't he like my hair?" Constructing African American Standards of Beauty in Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon* and Zora Neal Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. *African American Review*. 29.4:579-92.
- Barone, Tom and Eisner, Elliot W. 2012. *Arts Based Research*, Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Badu, Erykah. Cleva. 2000. Universal Motown Records, a division of UMG Recordings, Inc. Accessed June 23, 2021, <https://genius.com/Erykah-badu-cleva-lyrics>.
- Brewer, Marilyn. 1991. The social self: On being the same and different at the same time. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*. 17, 475-482.
- Brown, Kathy and Gilbert, Lynnette. 2021. Hair as Metaphor for Power, Identity and Agency/ HairEthnographies as Culturally Responsive Pedagogy. On-Demand Presentation/Lecture at [Virtual] National Art Education Association National Convention, March 4-7, <https://naeanationalconvention.us3.pathable.com/people/JXgKihzJtpBzmq8Bo>.
- Capers, I. Bennett. 2019. Afrofuturism, Critical Race Theory, and Policing in the Year 2044. *New York University Law Review*. 94:102-57.
- Cherry, Matthew, A. 2019. *Hair Love*. New York: Penguin Random House.
- Doharty, Nadena. 2020. The "Angry Black Woman" as Intellectual Bondage: Being Strategically Emotional on the Academic Plantation. *Race Ethnicity and Education*. 23.4:548-62.
- Ellis-Hervey, Nina, Angela Doss, DeShea Davis, Robert Nicks, and Perla Araiza. 2016. African American Personal Presentation: Psychology of Hair and Self-Perception. *Journal of Black Studies*. 47.8 869-82.
- Fleischbein, Francois. 1837. *Portrait of Betsy*. Oil on canvas. The Historic New Orleans Collection, Public Domain.
- Gay, Geneva. 2018. *Culturally Responsive Teaching: Theory, Research, and Practice*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Herron, Carolivia. 1998. *Nappy Hair*. New York: Dragonfly Books.
- Horne, Madison. 2019. A Visual History of Iconic Black Hairstyles. *History.com*, February 1. Accessed February 21, 2021, <https://www.history.com/news/black-hairstyles-visual-history-in-photos>.

- Hood, Emily Jean and Travis, S. 2021. Breakdowns and Breakthroughs: Duoethnography as Critical Reflective Practice in Art Education. On-Demand Presentation/Lecture at [Virtual] National Art Education Association National Convention, March 4-7, <https://naeanationalconvention.us3.pathable.com/meetings/virtual/y7BCz5phkeiZDwmje>.
- hooks, bell. 1999. *Happy to Be Nappy*. New York: Hyperion Books.
- Hopson, Mark. C. 2009. Language and Girlhood: Conceptualizing Black Feminist Thought in Happy to Be Nappy". *Women and Language*. 30.1:31-5.
- Johnson, Tabora A. and Teiahsha Bankhead. 2014. Hair It Is: Examining the Experiences of Black Women with Natural Hair. *Open Journal of Social Sciences*. 2:86-100.
- Kenneth. 2021. The Natural Hair Movement: A Historical Perspective. *CurlCentric.com*, June, 7. Accessed June 21, 2021, <https://www.curlcentric.com/natural-hair-movement>.
- Kraehe, A.M. and Joni Boyd Acuff. 2021. It's Not Just About Hair: Visual Education and the Aesthetics of Racism. *Art Education*. 74.2:50-1.
- Ladson-Billings, Gloria. 1994. *The Dreamkeepers*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishing Co.
- Mack, Bayer. 2018. *The Man Behind Afro Sheen and Sponsor of Soul Train | George E. Johnson | Black History*. [Youtube video]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UkxAZqFw4Qo>.
- Mack, Bayer. 2019. *No LYE: An American Beauty Story*. Block Starz Music Television.
- Mbilishaka, A.M. and Danielle Apugo. 2020. Brushed Aside: African American Women's Narratives of Hair Bias in School, *Race Ethnicity and Education*. 23.5:634-53. DOI 10.1080/13613324.2020.1718075.
- McLeod, Nia Simone. 2018. How the Internet Changed the Natural Hair Movement. *UrbanReviewsrva.com*. Accessed February 20, 2021, <https://urbanviewsrva.com/2019/01/23/how-the-internet-changed-the-natural-hair-movement>.
- Newkirk II, Vann R. 2018. The Provocation and Power of Black Panther, *The Atlantic*. Retrieved from <https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2018/02/the-provocation-and-powerof-black-panther/553226>
- Opie, T.R. and Katherine W. Phillips. 2015. Hair Penalties: The Negative Influence of Afrocentric Hair on Ratings of Black Women's Dominance and Professionalism. *Frontiers in Psychology*. 6:1-14.
- Paulino, Michael. 2019. The Racial Roots Behind the Term "Nappy." *NPR Code Switch*. August 9. Accessed March 18, 2021, <https://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2019/08/09/412886884/the-racial-roots-behind-the-term-nappy>.
- Pitts, Britney. 2021. "Uneasy Lies the Head that Wears a Crown": A Critical Race Analysis of the CROWN Act. *Journal of Black Studies*. DOI <https://doi.org/10.1177/00219347211021096>.
- Randle, Brenda, A. 2015. I Am Not My Hair; African American Women and their Struggles with Embracing Natural Hair! *Race, Gender & Class*. 22.1-2:114-21
- Rooks, Noliwe, M. 1996. *Hair Raising: Beauty, Culture, and African American Women*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.
- Rousseau, Nicole. 2013. Historical Womanist Theory: Re-visioning Black Feminist Thought. *Race, Gender & Class*. 20.3:191-204.
- Sawyer, Richard and Joe Norris. 2015. Duoethnography: A Retrospective 10 Years After. *International Review of Qualitative Research*. 8.1:1-4.
- Sherman, Rebecca. 2020. Chesley Antoinette's Lush Depictions of Turbaned Creole Women Continue the Conversation About Race. *PaperCityMag.com*. November 17. Accessed March 22, 2021, <https://www.papercitymag.com/arts/dallas-artist-chesley-antoinette-tignon>
- TheCrownAct. 2021. *13 Down, 37 to Go*. Retrieved from <https://www.thecrownact.com/about>.
- Thompson, Cheryl. 2009. Black Women and Identity: What's Hair Got to Do with It? *Michigan Feminist Studies*. 22:78-90.
- Tarpley, Natasha A. 2001. *I Love My Hair*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company.
- Travis, Sarah. 2020. Portrait of a Methodology: Portraiture as Critical Arts-Based Research *Visual Arts Research*. 46. 2:100-14.
- Wang, Qingchun, Sara Coemans, Richard Siegesmund, and Karin Hannes. 2017. Arts-Based Methods in Socially Engaged Research Practice: A Classification Framework. *Art/Research International: A Transdisciplinary Journal*. 2.2:5-39.
- White, Shane and Graham White. 1995. Slave Hair and African American Culture in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries. *The Journal of Southern History*. 61.1 45-76. DOI 10.2307/2211360. Accessed February 19, 2021.
- Wilson, Gloria J. (2018). Construction of the Blackademic: An Arts-Based Tale of Identity in and through Academia. *Visual Inquiry: Learning & Teaching Art*. 7.3:213-26.
- Wilson, Gloria J. and Pamela Harris Lawton, 2019. Critical Portraiture: Black/Women/Artists/Educators/Research. *Visual Arts Research*. 45.1:83-9.



A Material Culture Approach to Academic Writing: Protests, Pandemic, and Community-Engaged Pedagogy

by Incoronata Inserra

In this article, I reflect on ways that my folklore-studies approach to the college writing classroom enables Virginia Commonwealth University's diverse student population, and especially historically marginalized groups, to create and appreciate cultural texts. In particular, I illustrate how a “material culture” course theme can convey the importance of folklore in the writing classroom as a tool to explore locally engaged and community-driven topics. My examples include racial and social justice, gentrification, and environmental and cultural sustainability to help students practice college-level research and writing skills. I argue that this is especially useful as students make sense of the 2020 pandemic and Black Lives Matter protests that deeply affected their connection to the VCU campus (and to Richmond city) and their emotional wellbeing. I share several pedagogical tools and discuss the role that each plays in the organization of my material culture course to engage students in analyzing, evaluating, and creating both written and digital texts.

Given VCU’s diverse student population, and especially Richmond’s problematic legacy of enslavement and white supremacy, a focus on material culture can become a powerful writing tool to help marginalized students find their voice and speak up against past and present injustices within the Commonwealth. In turn, such pedagogical practices can help us folklore-trained instructors practice decolonizing the college writing classroom.

Pedagogical Framework

VCU’s focus on community-engaged teaching and learning reflects a larger trend within both folklore studies and education.¹ VCU’s Focused Inquiry Program, which I joined in the fall of 2017, brings together faculty from a variety of disciplines and offers seminar-style classes for first- and second-year students as part of the core curriculum. The program’s mission is “to foster curiosity

Marcus-David Peters memorial at the Lee Statue in Richmond, Virginia. All photos courtesy of the author.

about the world at large through inquiry-based, community-engaged, and experiential learning” (Department of Focused Inquiry). Here I draw on my experience in the classroom as well as pedagogical resources that I have created or adapted for my students, particularly within the context of the 2020 pandemic and BLM protests.² I have structured this article according to the basic principles of most academic writing courses: textual analysis, research, and writing.

As early as 1975, Andrew Badger encouraged college instructors to adopt the use of folklore in writing classes, as “folklore is a source for writing which will involve the student in doing what all honest writers do—that is, write something which they know about to an audience which actually exists” (288). However, writing in 2014, Jennifer Curtis reminds us how the value of students’ homegrown knowledge is still dismissed in formal education, especially when it comes to non-dominant groups. Moreover, she observes how “...interdisciplinary information may be limited by discipline boundaries or discipline-specific conferences and journals where the results are not generally known within the field of composition, especially by first-year teachers” (Curtis). As a folklore-trained writing instructor, then, my goal is to share my teaching experience and resources not only with fellow folklorists who teach writing intensive courses at the college level, but also with fellow writing instructors, hoping to raise awareness about the benefits of folklore studies in the college writing classroom.

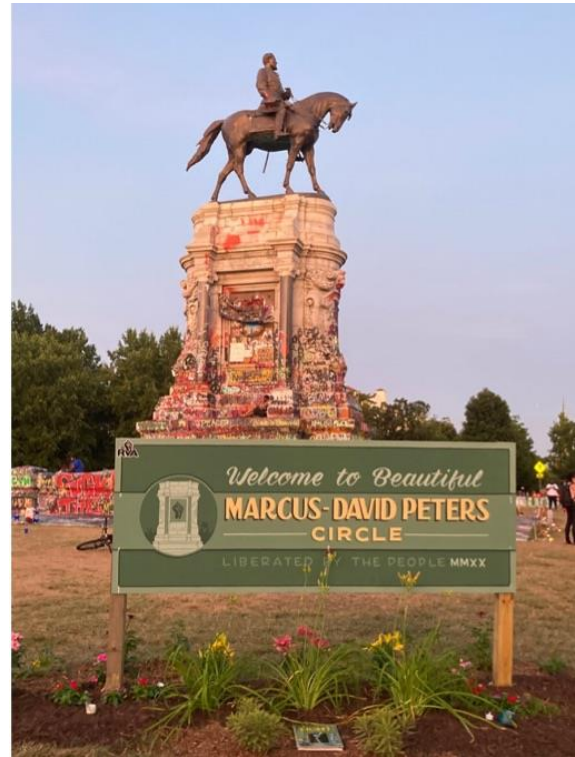
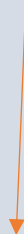
In adopting a folklore-studies approach to the teaching of community-driven and locally engaged topics, I am reminded, with Kara Rogers Thomas, how such endeavors “[do] not require folklorists to reinvent themselves and take on new academic identities. The best collaboration allows us to draw deeply from the well of folklore studies” (64). Both the inherent interdisciplinarity of folklore and its attention to the vernacular fit well with the increasingly strong focus on situated knowledge and place-based learning within current college education curricula (Bowman 2004, 385). Indeed, the benefits of a folklore-studies approach to education lie not only in what Paddy Bowman calls “valuing the ordinary,” (2004, 385) but also in the use of ethnographic methodology, which allows for a “close observation, reflection on, and documentation of cultural expressions and processes” (2006, 74).

Textual Analysis: Appreciating Material Culture Texts

A material culture framework naturally lends itself to exploration of place-based and community-engaged topics, especially considering the complex history of Richmond, Virginia, as the former Capital of the Confederacy.³ As the Confederate legacy has been openly questioned in the last few years, and especially during the Summer 2020 BLM protests, the urban structure of Richmond has become a platform from which to observe directly historical events happening both locally and globally. Paddy Bowman and Lisa Rathje (2017) argue that “...folklore-in-education tools make more visible the cultural texts that students know and illuminate how dominant sociocultural narratives work and are perpetuated.” By studying material culture, then, VCU students are able to pay attention to the many cultural texts surrounding them on and off campus and reflect on how these texts reveal larger issues of racial and social injustice.⁴ My experience sharing these texts so far revealed that most of my students are very familiar with the legacy of enslavement and the Confederacy in Richmond and elsewhere in the United States and that many are personally invested in the BLM cause; however, they are not trained to observe material culture objects closely and use their observations to gain a deeper understanding of those social and racial justice

issues. As Anne Pryor and Paddy Bowman remind us, “the field of folklore offers tools, strategies, and resources to help educators understand how culture influences ways of learning...” (2016, 444). My goal, then, is to help students make connections between racial and social justice issues that they are already familiar with and ways that these issues are embedded in the material culture framework of the communities they inhabit.

Tip: Click on the exercise headings that follow to go directly to the assignment prompts and worksheets.



Material Culture Observation and Interviewing Exercise* Since I joined the Focused Inquiry’s Richmond as Text Faculty Learning Community, I have created or adapted various class assignments that aim at familiarizing students with material culture analysis as a way to explore Richmond’s city space. In preparation, students read and discuss local journalist Michael Paul Williams’ article “We Remain Two Richmonds,” which describes the city as divided into two distinct entities: “Richmond” refers to the city’s historical core, African American cultural heritage, and disenfranchised neighborhoods, while “RVA” refers to the tourist and creative rebranding of the city, which in turn is linked to the current process of (white) gentrification (Williams 2017). Students have also discussed the genesis of the RVA advertising label ([RVA Creates](#)) and its white and outsider representation of the city, as well as the more recent [BLKRVA initiative](#), which aims at reclaiming and promoting African American history, culture, and business. With this framework in mind, students are asked to observe their campus/off-campus surroundings in search of elements that could be interpreted as “Richmond,” “RVA,” or “BLKRVA” (or all). As part of their observational tour, students collect and bring to class a material object—a flyer, magazine, menu item, gadget, logo, item of clothing, food item, etc., or a photo of the actual object—as a token of their findings. We use these objects in class to practice linking close observation, interpretation, and hypothesis formulation.

While the Richmond/RVA hypothesis can easily be replaced with a different one, I find the basic structure of this exercise useful in that it allows students to practice close observation and analysis and familiarize themselves with interviewing techniques, which they can implement in research projects later in the semester. The post-interview reflection in particular invites students to assess the quality of their interview questions and ways to improve their interviewing.⁵ From the perspective of material culture pedagogy, by using their observation findings to formulate hypotheses related to Richmond/RVA/BLKRVA, students can look for direct links between the

material objects that they collect and the ideological framework often embedded in those very objects, as historical and current planning visions for the city of Richmond.

Visual Analysis Exercise. Following the summer of 2020, I started to incorporate photo documentation of Richmond's protests into my class activities on material culture analysis,⁶ particularly documentation regarding the almost daily changes to the Robert E. Lee Statue on Monument Avenue as protesters inscribed their voices in many media on the statue. One image that I use was taken by the freelance photographer Julia Rendleman for Reuters June 5, 2020, during the height of the protests. It shows two young African American ballerinas, Kennedy George and Ava Holloway, wearing matching black tutus and posing in front of the statue with their fists aloft. [This image](#) is particularly useful because it contains elements of both material (statue) and nonmaterial (dance) culture, which helps me reiterate the differences between the two in class, and especially because it offers students an opportunity to reflect both on the statue and on the photo itself.

As they complete this exercise, students reflect on the material culture surrounding Richmond's protests while practicing visual analysis skills. In doing so, students build observational and analytical skills that they can use later in the semester to explore Richmond's monuments and other examples of material culture locally or within their own communities. Most student interpretations of the image focus on the ballerinas as "powerful and confident," "standing tall and proud," "commanding respect," "showing strength and resilience," and illustrating "determination" and "seriousness" through their facial expressions and body positions. Students also note how this feeling of power and resilience is possible through the juxtaposition between the dancers and the monument behind them; for example, "the two dancers can be thought of as contrasting with the graffiti because they represent grace in this image, but they have their fists raised, which has been a symbol of the BLM movement. Their black costumes also contrast with the color of the graffiti which really makes them stand out." While most students agree that "the two ballerinas are there to show not only their support for their community, but also demonstrating an act of 'taking back power' from the spot most African Americans avoided due to its racist history," several also believe that the image can "represent struggles of female empowerment (especially the empowerment of black women)."⁷ Therefore, as students formulate their interpretations by attaching a narrative to each object represented in the image, I am reminded by Rossina Liu and Bonnie Sunstein that "writing... gives shape to stories that the artifacts carry and in so doing reshapes the artifacts themselves...Indeed, writing has the power to turn objects into stories and stories into objects" (Liu and Sunstein 2016).

The last set of questions in the exercise focuses on the role of cultural texts, both material and nonmaterial, in helping build individual and collective narratives. I am also asking whether new information retrieved through contextual evidence helped students confirm or challenge initial thoughts about the photo. One student notes how this exercise "gave [her] a clear image on how powerful the photo is to recent news, and how much one photo can have a change on people," while another writes that "the context confirms [her] original impression of the photo, which was the idea that art can be an incredibly powerful and vital form of protest. The Lee statue couldn't be torn down, so art was used to overpower it. In a way, the overwhelming amount of pro-BLM and anti-police graffiti, coupled with the two ballerinas giving the black power fist, work to effectively muffle the statue's message of oppression."

While focusing mainly on the photo and the material culture represented in it, this exercise is also an opportunity for students to share (in class or as homework) what they already knew about the 2020 protests and how this exercise helped confirm their understanding or rethink the protests from a new perspective. I believe that leaving students free to interpret these cultural texts on their own and offering a space for discussion afterward is especially important when considering the politically charged nature of the protests and their direct impact on the material structure of the VCU campus and of Richmond as a whole. This approach became particularly useful as I strove to keep my classroom an unbiased, safe space in the fall of 2020 leading up to the presidential elections.

Research: Ethnographic Observation within and beyond the Pandemic

A focus on material culture in the first part of the semester enables students to learn first about local culture from the perspective of its tangible objects and then combine their ethnographic findings with bibliographic research in the second part of the semester, as they write their research papers. To that end, I engage students in ethnographic observation through walking or bus tours of the VCU campus as well as class or individual visits to Richmond's Arts District and mural collection; I also ask students to visit local museum exhibitions and report observations by completing an analysis and reflection exercise.

When the VCU campus shut down on March 16, 2020, my students had just formulated their research projects on Richmond-related topics, such as Black-owned businesses, socially engaged art, Confederate monuments, and African American cemeteries. In our initial Zoom meeting, students were evidently overwhelmed by the sudden changes in their personal and academic lives. Even for those who could continue participating in class discussions and doing classwork (about half the class), their new living situations would make it very difficult to conduct in-depth local research on Richmond, especially firsthand observation. My main goal then was to make sure that all my students, regardless of location and access to technology, could complete coursework. The following assignment reflects my pedagogical challenges at the time and ways that I adjusted my ethnographic approach accordingly.

Neighborhood Observation Tour. Students are asked to tour an area of Richmond that they already know or the neighborhood where they live. In preparation, they have learned about current social justice issues in Richmond and discussed the article "Viewpoint: Walk This Way" (2020), in which the author William Littman reflects on the importance of walking as a strategy for ethnographic observation. Students conduct their own walking tours, take notes and photos of what they observe, reflect on the experience, and present the experience to the class as a PowerPoint/Google Slide presentation⁸. The main goal is for students to practice ethnographic observation as Littman did in his study and analyze the data that they observe; in doing so, students apply what we learned in class about Richmond to what they observed firsthand, making direct connections between material culture examples surrounding them and the racial and social justice issues that we explored as a class. For example, students identified concrete evidence of VCU's push for cultural diversity in the area, with "a bunch of local businesses such as the Village Market and Kuba Kuba," but had to reconcile that discovery with the presence of "larger retail stores [...] such as Barnes and Nobles and Kroger," thereby meaningfully testing VCU's, and their own, definition of diversity as necessarily more inclusive. This observation tour also gave them an

opportunity to expand their definitions of diversity (which for many remained rooted in ethnicity), especially given “the mix of students, well to do and emerging families, a few homeless people within the area.”⁹ As he walked around the VCU area, another student noted that “as the safety increased the inclusivity dropped,” since he observed the highest safety measures in predominantly white gated areas. This reflection opens the door to thinking more critically about subject position and how a student’s fieldwork observations are influenced by their own cultural identity and cultural knowledge.

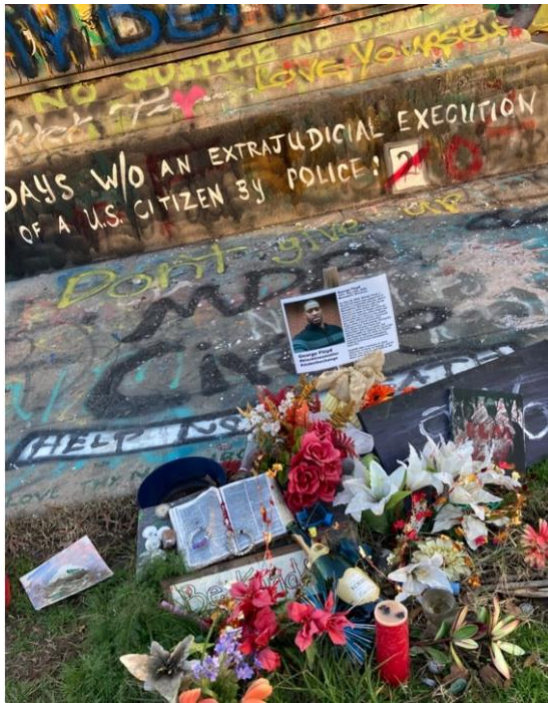
Once students share their walking experience in class, we discuss how ethnographic research allows us to draw on various perspectives and combine data from published sources with direct observation. I find this method useful even if students’ chosen research topics are related to other aspects of material culture other than urban landscape.

The 2020 pandemic certainly limited assignment options so I replaced Richmond with students’ own neighborhoods in this assignment. The task of walking rather than taking the bus also seemed like a safer option during a pandemic, although both work to encourage students to look past their perceptions while driving.¹⁰ Yet another challenge was that this assignment called for special safety recommendations, described in the lesson plan. Finally, while in previous classes I would ask students to incorporate their ethnographic findings into their final research paper, I decided to grade the ethnographic observation assignment separately to break the course into several short assignments. This option is more likely to help students in distress complete the bulk of the coursework and pass the course.

Shifting the focus to students’ neighborhoods in Richmond or elsewhere worked well for most students, since many had left campus or Richmond altogether and moved home; this ultimately confirmed the benefits of focusing on students’ own “ordinary” or homegrown knowledge as we teach ethnographic research whenever actual local research is not possible. While walking around the town of Sandston, Virginia, where she currently lives, one student noted a clear lack of cultural diversity and healthy food options, limited walking/biking and public transportation options, and scarce environmental awareness compared with Richmond’s college neighborhoods, particularly around the VCU campus. She also pointed out how “marginalized people would find this area exclusive because there are a lot of Blue Lives Matters flags and people not wearing masks. I can’t imagine people of color would feel safe walking here.” I found this exercise beneficial to my students even beyond the pandemic since they could turn “the ethnographic lens inward to their own families, homes, and neighborhoods” (Stephano 2020), practicing the kind of student-centered learning that we strive for in the college writing class (Pryor and Bowman 2016, 444).

Writing: Creating Material Culture Texts

Once students have practiced analyzing material culture texts and ethnographic observation, they are ready to produce their own material culture texts. While the bulk of student writing in my courses involves a research-based, argumentative paper, a focus on creating material culture texts earlier in the semester allows students to practice writing and argumentation using different media, while solidifying the notion of material culture.



Memorial Building Exercise. This assignment includes a hands-on memorial-building component, a documentation component (photo), and a reflective writing component in the form of a photo essay.¹¹ In preparation, I introduce the notion of grassroots memorials by illustrating examples, starting with local ones such as the memorials set up at Marcus-David Peters Circle (formerly known as Lee Monument) next to the Lee statue in the summer of 2020.¹² Once students familiarize themselves with the idea of memorials, they start building their own memorial display and showcase it somewhere in their apartment, house, garden, or a public place of their choice. One potential issue to consider is that this assignment might be too triggering for some students; I find the last two questions in Section 4 of the assignment important because they offer students an opportunity to share and reflect on potential triggers.¹³

Given the particularly difficult circumstances of the pandemic, I believe that this project has the potential to help students not only cement the notion of material culture and learn about the cultural and social narratives embedded in local material objects, but also find a mindful moment in their everyday lives. For example, one student in my Food for Thought course put together an elaborate memorial display in memory of her Ajja or paternal grandfather, who passed away five years ago and was her “closest link to [her] Konkani heritage.” Reflecting on the assignment, the student writes how she “learned that [she] still feels a great sense of loss for [her] Ajja, and through a conversation with [her] mum, that [they] share a lot more traits than what [she] remembered.” She also “found the symbolism of each object and dish to be the most interesting because it allowed [her] to think about memories [she doesn’t] usually recall” and she “learned how food, rituals, and memorials are a really important aspect of [her] family, and are significantly tied with [her] memories, experiences, values, and heritage.” Moreover, the exercise encourages students to reflect on emotional events in their lives through the combination of reflective writing and a hands-on activity as healing from pandemic, protest, and school-related stress, including Zoom fatigue. In her reflective essay, another student writes how she “learned that memorials can make you pause from life for a minute and take a time to be thankful and think about something that maybe you don’t want to think about in order to show them or yourself that they meant something to your life.”

Decolonizing the Classroom

Students choose a material culture topic for final essays through brainstorming, library research, and scaffolding exercises.¹⁴ Reflections on their research journey throughout the semester reveal their urge to write about what they know—especially in the midst of the pandemic and BLM protests—and remind me of my commitment to enable my students to speak out against social and racial injustice in Richmond and beyond. Writing about African American hairstyles, one student points out how “[g]rowing up as a Black girl with type 4 hair, [she] was always conflicted over [her] hair and whether it was beautiful. [She] would often hear kids refer to type 4 hair as ugly,

unmanageable, and nappy. Up until the age of 17, [she] rarely wore [her] natural hair out of fear of being judged and persecuted. Eventually [she] began to embrace [her] hair and love [her]self. However, in the year 2021 as an adult, jobs and institutions are telling [her] the exact same things that [she] used to hear when [she] was growing up.” In her research proposal, another student explains how she chose to write about museums because “[i]n Richmond, Virginia, there are historical sites that portray Indigenous people and people of color’s known history.” “For a long time,” the student continues, “I imagined museums as a way of showcasing information but never realized the effect they had on Indigenous people and people of color until I wondered how museums obtained these objects.” After researching this topic throughout the semester, the student decided to “examine the responses that museums have taken to outline the consumption and misrepresentation of Native artifacts” to “showcas[e] how to culturally appreciate a culture instead of culturally appropriating one.” The personal and rhetorical growth that students achieve by writing about the material cultural objects around them is evident in the way that this student’s intentions progressed from initial proposal to final paper. These examples show the kind of social and cultural self-awareness that as a folklorist and a teacher I aspire to see more and more in the writing classroom. This reminds us how folklore can equip educators with tools and resources to engage diverse students and audiences more fully in the process of making and appreciating creative texts.

***Incoronata (Nadia) Inserra** is an assistant professor at Virginia Commonwealth University, where she teaches interdisciplinary writing courses as part of the core curriculum. She received a PhD in English from the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa with focus on Folklore and Cultural Studies. Her research interests include folklore as community engagement, community-engaged pedagogy, and place studies. She is the author of *Global Tarantella: Reinventing Southern Italian Folk Music and Dances* (Illinois Press, 2017).*

Endnotes

¹ VCU is one of 54 universities designated as community-engaged by the Carnegie Foundation (VCU Office of the Provost); the VCU Division of Community Engagement currently supports development of service-learning courses across the curriculum and a variety of community-engaged research projects, while VCU’s strategic plan for 2018-2025 features “collective urban and regional transformation” among its main themes (VCU Inclusive Excellence).

² The Department offers several courses designated as service-learning, while helping organize and actively participating in the VCU Common Book Program (VCU’s version of the nationally recognized Summer Reading Program) as well as engaging in a shared learner-centered curriculum focused on diversity, equity, and inclusivity. In particular, our 2018-20 course theme—space and place—provided a great opportunity for me to share community-engaged resources with my colleagues and students and research and teach material culture topics. As a member of the Richmond as Text Faculty Learning Community, I have also been able to consolidate my community-engaged approach by sharing and discussing Richmond-related resources and relevant pedagogical material with fellow community members.

³ Both Richmond’s Confederate history and its current rewriting within the BLM Movement are embedded in the city landscape and evident to any observer who would take even a short walk along Monument Avenue and search for the (mostly) still-standing Confederate statues or read street names (both old and renamed ones). Beyond this history, Richmond’s white supremacist legacy is evident from how the city is currently divided into neighborhoods, which in turn correspond to historically segregated white and Black neighborhoods and are also the result of decades of racist housing policies (Campbell). This sharp division is still evident today in the uneven distribution of healthy food options (Vaughan), public transportation (Jordan), and green space in the city (Plumer and Pokovich), while many see a direct continuity between Richmond’s history and the current process of gentrification (Williams). More importantly, VCU administration has been criticized for being directly involved in this process of gentrification by contributing to rising housing prices and therefore to the forced relocation of historically marginalized communities (Smith).

⁴ Such texts include, but are not limited to, Richmond's monuments (both Confederate and more recent ones representing African American heroes), enslaved trails, neglected African American cemeteries that are now being restored (Palmer), a growing (and often politically charged) mural collection, as well as various museum collections and exhibits, whose expansion has been spurred, among other things, by VCU's renowned art program.

⁵ As a writing instructor, I also find that material culture analysis helps students practice close-ended questions, which students will then use for their research topic brainstorming and library search activities and review the difference between open and closed questions as they put together their own research questions.

⁶ This exercise was inspired by a material culture analysis workshop held by my colleague Elizabeth Fagan, who specializes in history and archeology (Fagan), as well as by fellow folklorist Lee Timreck's class visit and lecture on "Visualizing Emancipation: An Artistic Narrative of the African American Emancipation Experience" (Timreck).

⁷ Students' quotes in this section are from my UNIV 200 Inquiry and the Craft of Argument course in Fall 2020.

⁸ I am grateful to folklorist and material culture scholar Laura Ruberto for sharing Littman's article. One caveat is that some students might be unable to conduct the walk physically; that is something I share with them at the beginning of the course to give myself time to devise an alternative assignment for those students who need it.

⁹ Students' quotes in this section are from my UNIV 200 course in Spring 2021.

¹⁰ As one student notes, "While the cobblestone path [in Richmond] is a fun and interesting feature while walking, it is frankly just annoying while you're driving. Also you can't stop to enjoy the natural beauty or architectural beauty while driving. I really get to pull in the details and connect to the area around me while walking. While driving I'm just trying to get somewhere."

¹¹ Here I focus on the memorial building and photo documentation component. Students are also invited to share the project in class as a PowerPoint/Google Slide presentation or record a VoiceThread presentation.

¹² In my food class, we also discuss several food-centered memorial traditions from around the world, including the Mexican *ofrenda* tradition as well as the Southern Italian tradition of St. Joseph's Table, to offer a variety of examples and models.

¹³ I let students know that they have the choice to come up with an alternative assignment together with me (although I usually provide an option from the get-go). Another way is to let students pre-record a VoiceThread presentation, which works as a good alternative for those who feel too triggered to share this assignment live to the class and more generally for those students who tend to be shyer about presenting in class. Another problem I encountered is that students have a lot of freedom in building their own memorial and, as a result, their displays range from very complex to very simplistic. I tried to solve this issue by adding strict building requirements, but students' feedback showed me that keeping the memorial design flexible is important to let students enjoy the process. In the future, I plan to leave students free to explore the memorial design as they see fit, while also asking them to elaborate on their final products in more detail in their photo essay.

¹⁴ I leave students free to choose among a variety of material culture objects that they are able to observe on or off campus—not only monuments, statues, and murals, but also African American hair braiding, ethnic fashion, or tattoos, for example.

Embedded URLs

RVA Creates link: <http://rvacreates.com/>

BLKRVA Initiative: <https://www.visitblkrva.com>

Rendleman Photo: <https://www.reuters.com/news/picture/photos-of-the-week-idUSRTS3CROP>

Works Cited

Badger, Andrew. 1975. Folklore: A Source for Composition. *College Composition and Communication*. 26.3:285–88.

Bowman, Paddy. 2004. "Oh, that's just folklore": Valuing the Ordinary as an Extraordinary Teaching Tool. *Language Arts*. 81.5:385-95.

---. 2006. Standing at the Crossroads of Folklore and Education. *Journal of American Folklore*. 119.471:66–79.

Bowman, Paddy and Lisa Rathje. 2017. Introduction. *Journal of Folklore and Education*. 4:5-6. accessed June 1, 2021, <https://www.locallearningnetwork.org/journal-of-folklore-and-education/current-and-past-issues/jfe-vol-4-2017/introduction-2017>.

Campbell, Benjamin. 2012. *Richmond's Unhealed History*. Richmond: Brandylane Publishers.

- Curtis, Jennifer O. 2014. Captivating Culture and Composition: Life Writing, Storytelling, Folklore, and Heritage Literacy Connections to First-Year Composition. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing. Accessed June 1, 2021, <https://www.proquest.com/docview/1640916514?pq-origsite=primo>.
- Department of Focused Inquiry. About Us and Mission Statement. Accessed June 1, 2021, <https://focusedinquiry.vcu.edu/our-department>.
- Fagan, Elizabeth. 2019. Visual and Material Culture Analysis. Focused Inquiry Symposium at Virginia Commonwealth University. November.
- Jordan, Rachel M. 2019. *Transit Access Equity in Richmond, VA*. Masters of Urban and Regional Planning Thesis. Richmond: Virginia Commonwealth University.
- Littman, William. 2020. Viewpoint: Walk this Way. Reconsidering Walking for the Study of Cultural Landscapes. *Buildings & Landscapes: Journal of the Vernacular Architecture Forum*. 27.1:3-16.
- Liu, Rossina Zamora and Bonnie Stone Sunstein. 2016. Writing as Alchemy: Turning Objects into Stories, Stories into Objects. *Journal of Folklore and Education*. 3:60-76. Accessed July 12, 2021, <https://www.locallearningnetwork.org/journal-of-folklore-and-education/current-and-past-issues/journal-of-folklore-and-education-volume-3-2016/writing-as-alchemy-turning-objects-into-stories-stories-into-objects>.
- Local Learning. 2019. More than the Right Questions: A Workshop on Interviewing for Learning and Engagement. *American Folklore Society Annual Meeting*. October.
- Naming the Lost. Accessed June 1, 2021, <https://namingthelost.com>.
- Palmer, Brian. 2017. For the Forgotten African-American Dead. *New York Times*, January 7. Accessed June 1, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/07/opinion/sunday/for-the-forgotten-african-american-dead.html>.
- Plumer, Brad and Nadja Popovich. 2020. How Decades of Racist Housing Policy Left Neighborhoods Sweltering. *New York Times*, August 24. Accessed July 12, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/08/24/climate/racism-redlining-cities-global-warming.html>.
- Pryor, Anne and Paddy Bowman. 2016. Folklore and Education: A Short History of a Long Endeavor. *Journal of American Folklore*. 129.514:436-58.
- Rendleman, Julia. 2020. *Reuters*, June 30. Accessed June 1, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/news/picture/photos-of-the-month-june-idUSRTS3FWZW>.
- Rogers Thomas, Kara. 2018. Rubbing Shoulders or Elbowing In: Lessons Learned from a Folklorist's Contribution to Interdisciplinary Scholarship. *Journal of Folklore and Education*. 5:1:64-70, <https://www.locallearningnetwork.org/journal-of-folklore-and-education/current-and-past-issues/jfe-vol-5-2018/journal-of-folklore-and-education-volume-5-issue-1/rubbing-shoulders-or-elbowing-in>.
- RVA Creates. Overview. Accessed June 1, 2021, <http://rvacreates.com/overview.php>.
- Smith, Camryn. 2020. One VCU Master Plan: The Anatomy of Gentrification and VCU. *Ink Magazine*, April. Accessed June 1, 2021, <https://www.inkmagazinevcu.com/one-vcu-master-plan-the-anatomy-of-gentrification-and-vcu>.
- Stefano, Michelle. 2020. On Remote Fieldwork and "Shifting Gears." *Folklife Today*, May.
- Timreck, Lee. 2019. Visualizing Emancipation: An Artistic Narrative of the African American Emancipation Experience. Class lecture. Virginia Commonwealth University. February.
- Virginia Commonwealth University Inclusive Excellence. About Us. Accessed June 2, 2021, <https://inclusive.vcu.edu/about>.
- Virginia Commonwealth University Office of the Provost. Facts and Figures. Accessed June 2, 2021, <https://irds.vcu.edu/facts-and-figures>.
- Living in a Food Desert*. 2015. Virginia State University Documentary. Directed by Jesse Vaughan. Jesse Vaughan and Cedric Owens producers, Petersburg, VA. Accessed July 12, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jicYbi-8ZNU>.
- Williams, Michael Paul. 2017. We Remain Two Richmonds. *Richmond Times Dispatch*, July 24. Accessed June 1, 2021, https://richmond.com/news/local/williams-we-remain-two-richmonds---rva-blossomed-while-richmond-is-being-left-further/article_2c9d466f-c300-55fd-9ddb-7ba85bef339b.html.

Classroom Connection:

*Material Culture Observation and Interviewing Exercise**

Students observe their campus/off-campus surroundings in search of elements that could be interpreted as “Richmond,” “RVA,” or “BLKRVA” (or all). As part of their observational tour, students collect a material object—a flyer, magazine, menu item, gadget, logo, item of clothing, food item, etc., or a photo of the actual object—as a token of their findings. Each student offers one object in class to practice linking close observation, interpretation, and hypothesis formulation.

Prompts

- **Exchange your object with another student without giving each other any information about the actual object.** (If you took a photo, your object/evidence will be the object itself, not the photo.)
- **Spend a few minutes observing the object and writing down your findings.** What is it made of? What does it look like (color, shape, size)? What would most people call this object? Is it a common object that you’ve seen before? If so, where? Where could it be from? Does the object tell you a story or represent an idea? If so, what story/idea? What are other unique and noteworthy details? **(5 min.)**
- **Based on your initial observation, what else would you like to know about this object/evidence that is not immediately clear from your observation?** Write down a list of questions for your interviewee. **(5 min.)**
- **Interview your partner using the questions in your list. (10 min.)**
- **Write down what you learned from the interview. (5-10 min.)**
 - What new facts did you learn about that specific object/piece of evidence?
 - What hypotheses can you make about the role and significance of this type of object in the context of Richmond/RVA? *(For example, such objects might represent Richmond/RVA/Black RVA because....)*
 - What did you learn about your partner (and possibly your partner’s relation to Richmond/ RVA) during this exercise? **(optional)**
- **Share your interview experience with the class. (10-15 min.)**
- **Post-interview reflection (homework assignment)**
 - Did the interview answer all your questions? Did it clarify any doubts you might have about the object/evidence? Why/why not?
 - Decide whether you could have asked different questions or phrased your questions differently.
 - Did you ever feel that you jumped to a conclusion based on your observation? Did the interview help you see some assumptions you might have made?

*Lesson adapted from Bonnie Stone Sunstein’s *Collaborative Artifact Exchange* (see Liu, Rossina Zamora and Bonnie Stone Sunstein. 2016. “Writing as Alchemy: Turning Objects into Stories, Stories into Objects.” *Journal of Folklore and Education*. 3:60-76).

Visual Analysis Exercise

This exercise is in two parts, as the main pedagogical goal is to have students practice close observation before rushing to interpretation. In Part 1, share the Reuters image of two Black ballerinas posing on the Robert E. Lee statue without offering any contextual information*. Then put students in groups (or Zoom breakout rooms) and ask them to observe and reflect on the image. In Part 2, ask students to retrieve contextual information for the image and combine what they learned from their initial analysis with what they found through research.

*Note: This photo may contain language inappropriate for younger students. You may identify another image to substitute for it to do this exercise.

Prompts

PART 1

- **Describe the photo in all its detail.** (Main subject/s, composition, arrangement, color, lighting, camera angle, scale, location, text, anything else that strikes your attention)
 - *Stick to what you see, don't interpret just yet.*
- **Describe the photo background in all its detail, starting with the statue.**
- **Describe the main subjects in detail.** (What are they wearing? What are they doing? What are their facial and body expressions? Approximate age? Anything else worthy of notice?)
- **Describe the emotions that the image conveys to you.**
- **Decide what elements in the image help convey those emotions.** (Subjects' positions, attire, or pose? Lighting? Camera angle? Anything else?)
- **Decide what main idea or message the image conveys based on your observations.** (An image can convey several and sometimes conflicting messages or connotations, but one meaning or idea usually stands out.)
 - This is where your interpretation comes in—make sure you base your interpretation on concrete evidence you observed in the image.
 - Is anything about the image actually unclear or contradictory? Might there be multiple messages? Is anything left to personal interpretation?
- **If the image offers more than one meaning or idea, what are some other connotations?**

PART 2

- Find out what the context for this photo is—where was the picture taken, when, how, and by whom. (Date, location, photographer, more details.)
- Based on the new information, decide what the purpose and audience are and why.
- Based on the new information, decide what the purpose for including the two ballerinas. What might be the dancers' goals in participating in this project? What do you want to ask them?
- Based on the new information, can you confirm your initial thoughts about this photo and its contents? Did you come up with new ideas or meanings? If so, what are they?
 - After answering these questions in small groups, students discuss their answers with the rest of the class.

Neighborhood Observation Tour

Introduce this exercise by reading and discussing Walter Littman's 2020 article. Viewpoint: Walk this Way. Reconsidering Walking for the Study of Cultural Landscapes. *Buildings & Landscapes: Journal of the Vernacular Architecture Forum*. 27.1:3-16. Ask students to answer the following questions in groups.

Prompts

PART 1

- How did walking help the author learn about the places he walked around? What did he learn? Provide at least one example from the text to support your points.
- According to the author, how does our walking perception of a city differ from our perception while looking at a map? What are the added benefits of walking?
- In what ways can walking become a form of research according to the author? What did he research while walking?

PART 2

- What do you think (as a group) is the most interesting fact, example, or idea in the article and why?
- In your opinion (as a group), how does your walking perception of your own city, neighborhood, or campus differ from your perception while driving? What can you observe while walking that you cannot observe while driving? Provide at least one example.
- List at least three examples of material culture that you can observe through walking versus driving around VCU campus. (Browse through our material culture object working list for examples.)

Walking Tour Prompts

1. Observe

- Street names, types of buildings, building names, types of businesses, food options, grocery options, presence of green space, presence of sidewalks, ramps, bike parking, car parking, bus stops, trash collection, care and maintenance of common areas, diversity of the population, age/gender/ethnicity/appearance of people in the street or working
- Note:** This exercise does not mandate physical contact with other people; you should practice social distance at all times, wear a mask, and carry sanitizer with you.

2. Document

- Take photos of everything you observe. (Avoid taking close-up photos of people without asking permission.)

3. Reflect

- Did you notice any recent changes in the socioeconomic structure of the neighborhood? (For example, gentrification, changes in business ownerships)
- What are dining options?
- What are grocery options?
- What kinds of businesses do you see?
- What kinds of people do you see (students, professionals, families, etc.)?

Journal of Folklore and Education (2021: Vol. 8)

- How walkable is the area?
- Can you easily move around using public transportation?
- Based on your answers so far, is this a rich/poor neighborhood? (examples)
- How diverse and inclusive is it?
- How safe?
- Is the area environmentally friendly?
- Is there anything else you never noted before?
- Do you think you might find the neighborhood to be less safe/diverse/inclusive/walkable if you went there at a different time of the day or drove your car/biked/rode the bus?
- Do you think others might find the neighborhood to be less safe/diverse/inclusive/walkable/? Who would that be?
- Overall, what have you learned about the neighborhood through this exercise?
- How does your perspective of this area through walking differ from your perception while driving or taking the bus?

Memorial Building Exercise

Students build and display a memorial so others can see it, albeit just family, roommates, or friends. They may honor a family member, a pet, or friend who recently passed; a Covid-19 victim they knew personally; a specific group who were victims of the pandemic, such as healthcare workers; a recent victim of police brutality; someone who died because of social/racial injustice and discrimination; or a famous person whose recent death particularly affected them. They can create the display using any kind of design or material. In planning the memorial, ask students to follow these guidelines.



Memorial created for Marcus-David Peters's birthday at the Lee Circle (also known as Marcus-David Peters circle) in Richmond.

Prompts

Building. The display should include the following elements:

- At least one photo/image of the person to whom the memorial is dedicated
- At least a couple of objects representing the person's life experiences, values, beliefs, lifestyle, worldview, etc.
- Flowers, plants, or other objects of décor (This may or may not represent your connection with the person.)

- (Optional) A dish or meal that represents your connection with the person such as shared preferences or values, or the memory of a shared meal
 - *For example*, an athlete devoting the memorial to a fellow athlete might choose a food that is staple in an athlete's diet.
 - *Note* that someone can prepare the meal from scratch, together with family/friends or buy it.

Documenting. Once students create their memorial displays, ask them to prepare photo documentation illustrating the following:

- The creation process (This helps build a narrative for the project. What did you have in mind? From where did you start, and where did your idea take you?)
- The final product
- Specific details they want to draw attention to

Writing. The final writing component should include the following elements:

1. **A description of the display** (using both texts and photos where relevant):
 - For whom is this memorial and why?
 - How did you decide on the location for your display?
 - What elements did you include and why? How do they represent the person? How do they represent your connection with the person?
 - How did you design the layout?
 - What main idea (or argument) are you trying to convey?
 - What personal/family/social/cultural values does your display reflect?
2. **A brief description of the memorial-making process** (using both text and photos where relevant)
3. **(Optional) A description of the dish or meal**
 - Main ingredients, cultural/family origins if relevant, reason for choosing the dish
 - A brief description of the process of making the food—grocery shopping, ingredients, cooking (for home-cooked meals).
4. **Reflection.**
 - What did you find most interesting about this assignment and why?
 - If you prepared the meal yourself, what did you think of this experience?
 - How triggering was this assignment, especially if your subject was related to the pandemic or another topic you find difficult?
 - How useful did you find this assignment from a mindfulness perspective?



Inspired by *Calaveras*: Involving Middle-School Students in Writing about *el Día de los Muertos* during the Covid-19 Pandemic

by Ethan Sharp with Carolina Quiroga
and Ashlee Collins

Beginning in the late 1800s and early 1900s, broadsheets by Mexican lithographer José Guadalupe Posada popularized the imagery of *calaveras*, in which skeletons dress and act as if they were living humans, often in scenes satirizing aspects of Mexican society. In turn, the imagery of *calaveras* intertwined with traditional and popular culture associated with *el Día de los Muertos*, the Day of the Dead (Pérez 2020). In the United States, however, Posada's broadsides featuring poems of different lengths alongside his illustrations are not well known. The poems, referred to as *calaveras literarias*, or literary *calaveras*, are rooted in and blend oral and literary traditions. Many people in Mexico and Latinx artists in the U.S. continue to write and perform *calaveras*. Often, these verses make fun of living people by eulogizing them as if they have died, but the term *calavera* may apply to any verse about death or a person who has actually died.

As fascination with *el Día de los Muertos* has grown in the U.S., the number of arts organizations and museums organizing public events for it increases every year, and in many cases, organizations are more committed to providing an entertainment experience rather than educating audiences about a traditional ritual.¹ Amid these developments, the practice of reading and writing literary *calaveras* can refocus attention on the deeper meanings, traditions, and creative possibilities of the festival. This article describes the collaboration of Carolina Quiroga, a Colombian-born professional storyteller, with Ashlee Collins, an arts educator at the Living Arts and Science Center (LASC) in Lexington, Kentucky, myself, and other members of LASC's administrative team. Our project guided a diverse group of Title I middle-school students in one of LASC's after-school programs through educational activities related to *el Día de los Muertos* in the fall of 2020. Because we launched the project during the Covid-19 pandemic, Carolina and Ashlee interacted

Figure 1. An *ofrenda* created by local Latinx artists and educators for display at LASC in Lexington, Kentucky, 2015. Photograph by Ethan Sharp. Used by permission of LASC.

with students in a virtual classroom on Zoom. We were surprised that one of the most successful activities was a lesson that introduced students to the poetry of *calaveras* and involved the students in writing their own.

Drawing on observations of the after-school activities and interviews with Carolina and Ashlee, this article addresses how the project originated, what we learned from it, and how it can inspire further study and use of *calaveras* in museum educational programs. We believe that programs involving *calaveras* can enrich the experience of *el Día de los Muertos* by inspiring different forms of vernacular creativity, providing more occasions for reflection, and building relationships between museum educators, students, and local communities.



Figure 2. Performers of Mexican *folklórico* dance pose at LASC's annual celebration of *el Día de los Muertos* in Lexington, Kentucky, 2017.

Photograph by James Shambhu. Used by permission of LASC.

***El Día de los Muertos* in Lexington, Kentucky**

In the 1970s, Chicana artists and activists began organizing events for *el Día de los Muertos* in public venues in the U.S. (Marchi 2009, 47). These events typically involved re-creations of *ofrendas*, the colorful, multilayered altars that Mexicans and Mexican Americans traditionally create to remember and commune with deceased loved ones as both political and artistic expressions. By the 1990s, the festival moved beyond Chicana spaces, as arts organizations and museums across the U.S. began organizing displays of *ofrendas* and related programs for largely white audiences (Davis-Undiano 2017, 138). In addition, K–12 educators began introducing students to *el Día de los Muertos* and in the process contributed to an erasure of the religious and traditional significance of the festival. This growth in popularity coincided with an increase in the 1990s of immigrants from Mexico settling in new destinations with relatively small Latinx populations, like Lexington, Kentucky. Some motivations behind cultural organizations' involvement in *el Día de los Muertos* have been to engage new and growing Latinx communities. Unfortunately, organizations do not always make a deep commitment to collaborate with Latinx

communities, research the festival's traditions and meanings, or honor the festival's importance to traditional practitioners (Gwyneira, Bojorquez, and Nichols 2012).

Founded in 1968 in one of Lexington's lowest-income neighborhoods, LASC functions as an arts organization and science center. In the 2000s, LASC staff began *el Día de los Muertos* activities, and by the 2010s, LASC's celebration was the organization's largest, best-known annual event. It drew thousands of participants from across Central Kentucky, and featured a variety of *ofrendas* created by community groups, including Latinx university and high school student organizations, local artist groups, and teacher-led elementary and middle school groups (Figure 1). LASC staff, largely white with no Latinx members, was concerned with ensuring that the growing number of Mexican immigrants in Lexington recognized the celebration as authentic and worked closely with artists and educators of Mexican descent in planning the event. For example, LASC always held the celebration November 1, regardless of the day of the week on which it fell; offered a variety of activities leading up to and in preparation for the event, such as making sugar skulls; and used a nearby historic cemetery to display community *ofrendas*. In the 2010s, LASC staff began collaborating with the Casa de la Cultura KY, a nonprofit run by Mexican immigrants, to offer educational programs primarily for immigrants and their children, and Casa de la Cultura KY added *folklórico* dance and mariachi performances to the celebration (Figure 2).

While LASC has remained committed to collaboration, it has generated a more frenetic festival atmosphere of displays, activities, performances, and foods, with limited possibilities for dialogue within the celebration or the development of new educational programs about the traditions and innovations that animate the festival. In my role as grant program manager for LASC, I interviewed a small but diverse selection of people involved in creating *ofrendas* for the 2019 celebration and explored with them ideas for additions and changes. I found support for incorporating more opportunities to share stories and educational programs that featured Latinx artists and appealed to Latinx students.

One person clearly illustrated the potential of storytelling within the celebration. Milton Mezas, a young Latino activist, created an *ofrenda* with Kentucky Dream Coalition high-school students dedicated to advocating for immigrants' rights. Milton explained that they dedicated their *ofrenda* to their grandparents, because "for a lot of undocumented immigrants, when loved ones die, they can't go back to see them. That was the case for my mom.... The altar was for the loved ones who died and the people who don't have the ability to go back to visit them." In the process of creating the *ofrenda*, which featured photographs, foods, and other items associated with their grandparents, they shared stories among themselves. Once the *ofrenda* was on display, they shared their stories with visitors to LASC. Milton was impressed with their receptivity and remembered a woman responding, "Wow, I didn't realize that this was an actual reality."

Based on my interviews with Milton and others, I collaborated with LASC staff on a proposal to bring to Lexington a Latinx storyteller who could facilitate storytelling and dialogue during *el Día de los Muertos*. We reached out to Carolina for help. She was born and spent much of her early life in Cali, Colombia. Inspired by the stories of her mother, Carolina took up storytelling as a hobby and at age 30 moved to Tennessee to study for a master's in storytelling at East Tennessee State University. After earning her degree, she started a career as a professional storyteller and educator specializing in traditional Latin American stories. Carolina explained her interest in

Journal of Folklore and Education (2021: Vol. 8)

Inspired by Calaveras: Involving Middle-School Students in Writing about el Día de los Muertos during the Covid-19 Pandemic 124

by Ethan Sharp with Carolina Quiroga and Ashlee Collins

traditional stories: “They teach us creative ways to approach things and critical thinking...I wanted to just do traditional stories because I believe that there is so much potential for education, for connection, and even for transforming those stories into your own personal story.”

In 2014, Carolina moved with her husband to San Antonio, Texas, where she facilitated an education program for Say Sí, an arts and youth development organization. Carolina led ten Saturday workshops for middle-school students, culminating in an event with Carolina and students sharing stories about death and loved ones who had died. This coincided with Say Sí’s popular annual celebration of *el Día de los Muertos*. Although Carolina did not grow up celebrating *el Día de los Muertos* as it is often celebrated in Mexico or Latinx communities in the U.S., she had been telling traditional stories related to *el Día de los Muertos* and was eager to find a way to contribute to the festival. We believed that Carolina could provide an impetus for changes in LASC’s festival. She could engage English- and Spanish-speaking audiences and had ties to the Southeast, and because of her experience in San Antonio, she recognized a need to slow down activities surrounding *el Día de los Muertos* and shared our vision of creating opportunities for sharing and learning about the festival’s rich traditions. Carolina observed:

El Día de los Muertos is very huge in San Antonio; there’s the decorations and the music and the food, of course, but the whole celebration didn’t seem to have a storytelling component. It was missing the reflection. You’re either working putting an altar together, or you have to put a lot of work into cooking. And if you’re not the one putting the stuff together, you are the one attending it, and if you’re attending it, you just come in, take pictures, look a little bit here and there, and then you’re out.

Transitions to Virtual Programs

In 2020, with support of the Casa de la Cultura KY, LASC received an NEA Folk and Traditional Arts grant that included funds to bring Carolina to LASC for a week-long residency. The proposal was that her residency would occur a few weeks before *el Día de los Muertos*, and she would facilitate a workshop to prepare students and community members to share stories about *ofrendas*. Because of the pandemic and the closing of LASC to the public and cancellation of events, not until summer could staff reorganize and begin planning fall programs.

One educational program that LASC staff was committed to providing, by adapting it to a virtual format, was an after-school program for students enrolled in the Lexington Traditional Magnet School (LTMS), a nearby Title I middle school. Despite its name, only a small percentage of LTMS students are enrolled in the magnet program, and the school draws most students from the surrounding neighborhood. The after-school program provides enrichment through interactive 90-minute sessions three times a week. From 2018 through early 2020, an average of 20 students attended each session and established good rapport with Ashlee. Ashlee explained: “The students that come are from this neighborhood. A lot of the times we see them walking home after school. The majority are on the free and reduced lunch program. [They’re from] multigenerational homes, a lot of times, night-working parents.” Most are African American, and there is a growing number of Latinx students.

As she was working on the fall schedule for the LTMS after-school program, Ashlee met with Carolina, and Carolina agreed to collaborate with Ashlee and her students via Zoom on *el Día de los Muertos* activities. In addition, Carolina created three 30-minute videos that LASC staff shared on its website and social media channels. In each, Carolina describes an aspect of *el Día de los Muertos*, tells a story, and guides viewers through a simple activity. In one video, for example, she demonstrates how to make *cempasúchil* flowers with tissue paper. Carolina speaks primarily in English in the videos, but they incorporate Spanish subtitles. To facilitate virtual engagement with the festival, LASC staff created and shared [a short video](#) that documented diverse community members creating *ofrendas* in LASC's gallery and telling what the festival means to them.

As a specialist in theatre arts, Ashlee explored different forms of storytelling in the LTMS after-school program in the fall. She originally planned to have Carolina lead workshops culminating in a virtual storytelling event but realized this plan would not work. "As the semester went on, we learned that teaching virtually was more difficult than we anticipated for different reasons. Students had been online for many hours because schools had not returned to in-person instruction." She found many live in multigenerational homes, with younger siblings and cousins, and felt uncomfortable turning on their cameras and microphones for virtual sessions. Only four or five students actively participated in each session, and those who participated were not the same from week to week. So, Carolina and Ashlee adjusted their plans to offer one-off lessons, concluding with a lesson on literary *calaveras*.

This lesson began with Ashlee displaying the texts of short *calaveras* on the Zoom screen and Carolina and Ashlee taking turns reading each aloud. Then Ashlee displayed examples of Posada's illustrations, and they guided students in examining scenes with skeletons dressed in the style of Posada's era (Figure 3). Asking, "What are some of the little things we see? How do they tie humor into Day of the Dead?" they gave students five minutes to write a verse about the scene. Students shared their verses in the chat box.

Carolina and Ashlee were surprised at how well the lesson went. Ashlee commented, "We didn't plan to spend too much time on the *calaveras*. We were going to introduce them and how they play into Day of the Dead, but they got into it, so we just played with what they were interested in." Although the virtual format limited activities, it was ideally suited to keeping students engaged throughout the lesson on literary *calaveras* and allowing them to experience the accomplishment of quickly writing and sharing verses. Students focused

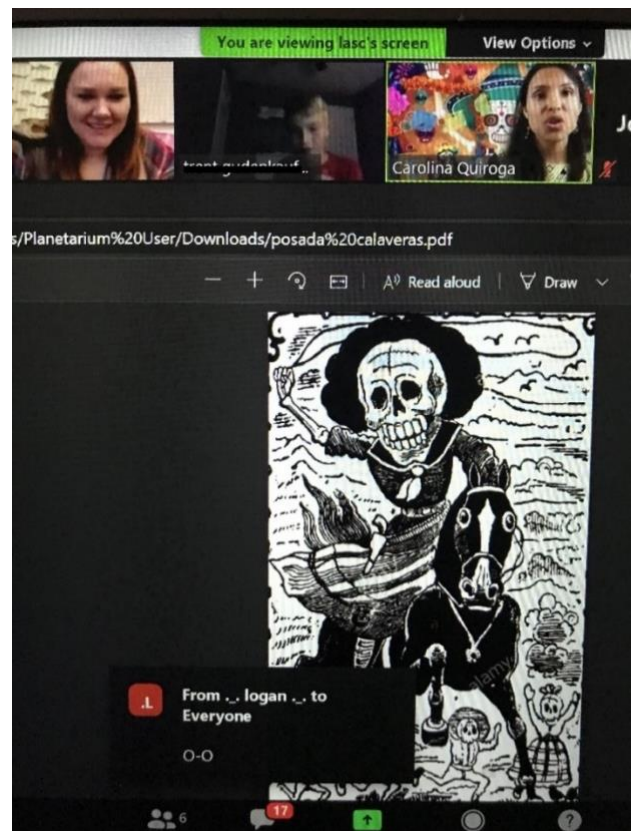


Figure 3. Carolina and Ashlee introducing José Guadalupe Posada's illustrations in the LASC virtual classroom, 2020. Photograph by Ethan Sharp. Used by permission of LASC.

together on a series of images on the screen and interacted in the chat box, making it easier for students who did not turn on their cameras and microphones to participate. As students commented on Posada's illustrations and shared verses in the chat box, Carolina and Ashlee offered commentary and clarified comments and ideas.

A Closer Examination of *Calaveras*

When we were exploring ideas for deepening the celebration of *el Día de los Muertos* in 2019, we had not considered literary *calaveras* as a potential element, but observing Carolina and Ashlee's lesson, we found that the poetry of *calaveras* holds advantages over other forms of narrative expressions that we sought to promote. The practice of writing verses about death, the dead, and living people and things as if they had died was common before Posada began printing his broadsides, and it has developed over many years and connects with several important aspects of *el Día de los Muertos*. Carolina noted:

[Writing] *calaveras* with the kids... that was new to me. I hadn't done it before. Once I began performing in San Antonio, people began telling me about the literary *calaveras* and how they would do it in Mexico. I came in contact with this amazing book [*Digging the Days of the Dead* by Juanita Garciagodoy] and [learned more about the] *calavera* writing contests in schools in Mexico. At the same time, I didn't know how to approach it because some of those *calavera* contests, they write about someone that is alive, but as if they had passed. And here in the U.S., when you bring up the concept of death, and then when you're trying to make fun of that or talk about that person that is in front of you as if they were dead, people might take it as an insult or will not take it lightly. I was like, "How can I work around this in a way that no one feels threatened?" So, I think there is still work to do on this. There's so much potential [with literary *calaveras*].

Anthropologist Stanley Brandes notes that *calaveras* may have originated with *pasquines*, the "mocking verses scrawled on walls to which passing readers added their own lines," from earlier centuries (Brandes 2006, 116). However, it seems more likely that the practice of writing *calaveras* was initially inspired by and drew on material from oral tradition, and the practice continued to develop in the 20th century as it intertwined with other traditions of *el Día de los Muertos*. These traditions included writing and reciting *calaveras* in honor of friends or family members in private settings (Brandes 2006, 116), inscribing brief verses on sugar skulls given to friends and family members (Carmichael and Sayer 1992, 115), and writing and displaying the text of a *calavera* in an *ofrenda* (Garciagodoy 1998, 288).² Across the different contexts in which it appears, the poetry of *calaveras* expresses a playful approach to death and life and is often a vehicle of social criticism.

By reading examples of *calaveras* at the beginning of the lesson, Carolina and Ashlee introduced students to some of the common themes of *calaveras*, the tone they usually employ, and the ways they comment on relationships and society. By reading short *calaveras* and *calaveras* with a simple rhyming scheme or an open form, they also showed students how they could easily write *calaveras*. The first example was a translation of a traditional Mexican children's verse. Although it does not address or reference a living or dead person, it personifies death as the skeleton of a poor woman and pokes fun at death, exhibiting playfulness and social criticism.

Dry death
was sitting on a dump
eating hard tortillas
to see if she could grow plump.

Dry death
was sitting among the reeds
eating hard tortillas
and unsalted little beans. (Garciaodoy 1998, 233)

The last example was addressed to a young person who died, in the voice of a friend.

Angel, when you come back
I bet you'll come back on your black cruiser
moving slowly with a lit sweet swisher cigar in your mouth
you'll be wearing a black buttoned up shirt with a collar
But only buttoned up halfway
and baggy jeans
and your iPod will be playing Tupac loud enough so everyone can hear.

When you come back, Angel
me you and Hans will skate together out at UCSB
and maybe the skate park.
We'll just ride around
you'll say "Whas up den?"
and I'll tell you
we are good friends
like I meant to do
I guess I did
when you were here. (Latin American and Iberian Institute, N.D., 32)³

This example, which uses an open or free-verse form relatively easy to replicate, illustrates the conjuring power of the language of *calaveras* to bridge the divide between the dead and the living and create a figurative space in which the dead and the living can commune. This power complements the work done through *ofrendas* and traditional celebrations for *el Día de los Muertos*, which help to maintain and strengthen relationships among the living, as they reestablish connections between the dead and the living. As Carolina shared:

Just as I am somewhat interpreting *el Día de los Muertos* for other people, for the audience, that does not mean that [what I say] is exactly how every person in Mexico will practice *el Día de los Muertos*. In the end, I think the message that goes through the whole thing is just how to honor your ancestors. You honor them when you welcome them with a fiesta, you remember them. And how do you remember them? Through their things, things that they love to wear, through the

things that they love to eat, through the flowers, through the stories, through the pictures.

By moving from reading examples to examining Posada's images, Carolina and Ashlee continued to emphasize the role of humor, ensuring students incorporated humor into their verses. Although the illustrations were in black and white and the original messages were largely lost on students, they provided ample material for students to comment on as they were writing their verses. For example, in response to Posada's illustration of *La Adelita* or *La Soldadera*, the woman on horseback with a whip, which the students are examining in Figure 3, one student wrote the following and posted it in the chat box:

Kissing Kate never stopped
Fighting off bandits with her whip that pops!
The thieves fled because of the dead
and never came back up top

La Adelita is a representation of the women soldiers who fought in the Mexican Revolution from 1910 to 1920 and helped topple a dictator. In response to a scene in which skeletons are sweeping the street, likely after a major festival, and a skeleton dressed as a police officer directs the street sweepers (Figure 4), one student wrote:

The road was paved
With dirt and dust
Tommy decided that
Staying clean was a must.
He told his friends
You see...I broke my wrist
In a past life
And never learned to sweep
Thanks to my loving wife.



Figure 4. Broadsheet featuring street sweepers by Posada, N.D. Public Domain.

In this scene, a form of social criticism is at work because Posada is depicting the figures playing different roles, with different statuses, while continuing to poke fun and insist that all people are basically skeletons. As the literary scholar Juanita Garciagodoy notes, the imagery of *calaveras* generally carries a critique of hierarchies and capitalist systems (1998, 204, 272). It was not necessary for Carolina and Ashlee to bring up these details, but the student homed in on why one figure in the scene is not sweeping and others are sweeping. The student's verse suggests that there is potential in exploring with students how both visual and literary *calaveras* question social structures and expose corruption and injustice.

Conclusion

During the Covid-19 pandemic, educators around the world had to adapt their lesson plans for Zoom and struggled with engaging students and facilitating dialogue and collaboration in a virtual classroom environment. Educators who were primarily working for or with arts organizations and museums faced the additional challenges of rebuilding educational programs amid the loss of revenue, steep cuts in staff, and an uncertain future, which required educators to acquire new knowledge and skills and be innovative. At LASC, Ashlee and other staff members built on LASC's practice of collaborating with community members and expanding programs about *el Día de los Muertos* by working with Carolina and offering virtual programs that explored underappreciated aspects of the festival. Carolina and Ashlee re-centered their approaches and began to address the problem of superficial engagement with the festival. Ashlee summarized: "I think with [*el Día de los Muertos*] in years past, it is such a huge range of people with a huge range of knowledge coming in that we kind of have to cater to people who don't know much and give them a taste of the culture, but this really let us dive in to the history and how it has evolved over the years, and how it became more popular."

In the process of making virtual programs as engaging and as effective as possible, we discovered literary *calaveras*. Our experience is limited, but the study and writing of *calaveras* in educational programs in the U.S. is relatively uncharted territory. I have found only one article that describes an example (Leija 2020), so we offer here what we have learned. We hope that our project will encourage experimentation with writing and performing *calaveras* and serve as a point of reference for additional innovations in museum educational programs and greater reflection about *el Día de los Muertos*.

In sum, amid the challenging circumstances of the pandemic, we found that students were remarkably adept at writing *calaveras* and *calaveras* can provide valuable new perspectives on the imagery, humor, and meanings of traditions surrounding *el Día de los Muertos*.⁴ LASC staff and Carolina plan to continue collaborating and involve more students in studying Posada's illustrations and writing *calaveras* in their work. Carolina and Ashlee's collaboration and the students' *calaveras* demonstrate creativity and offer valuable lessons that will bring greater opportunities for dialogue, improvements in representation, and a deeper appreciation of the diversity of practices and beliefs surrounding death in the Americas.

Ethan Sharp is an independent folklorist and freelance grant writer in Lexington, Kentucky. From 2017 to 2020, he contributed to the expansion of programs for K–12 students and families as the grant program manager at the Living Arts and Science Center. In 2020, with an Archie Green fellowship from the American Folklife Center, he began documenting the growth of the peer support profession in response to the opioid epidemic in Central and Eastern Kentucky. Ethan holds a PhD in Folklore and an MA in Latin American and Caribbean Studies from Indiana University.

URLs

LASC video <https://youtu.be/YiW1FDipVlc>

Endnotes

¹ In Mexican cities and sites that attract many tourists, *el Día de los Muertos* has similarly become an occasion for spectacle and entertainment. The Mexican popular culture critic Néstor García Canclini describes the festival in touristy Janitzio in the State of Michoacán as a “giant make-believe” experience (García Canclini 2010, 96).

² There may also be linkages between writing and performing literary *calaveras* and other forms of improvised oral poetry in Latin America, such as the *décima* (Armistead 2003) or the verses employed in musical duels in *huapango arribeño* (Chávez 2017).

³ This example originally appeared in educational materials compiled by the Santa Barbara Museum of Art and was reprinted by the University of New Mexico Latin American and Iberian Institute with permission from the museum.

⁴ Students who participated in the *calavera* writing exercises were a mix of African American, Latinx, and white students. As one of the anonymous reviewers for this article pointed out, students’ familiarity with hip hop may have been a factor in their composing *calaveras* so quickly since hip hop often improvises verses that use rhythm and rhyme in complex ways.

Works Cited

- Armistead, Samuel. 2003. Pan Hispanic Oral Tradition. *Oral Tradition*. 18.2:154–56.
- Brandes, Stanley. 2006. *Skulls to the Living, Bread to the Dead: Celebrations of Death in Mexico and Beyond*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.
- Carmichael, Elizabeth and Chloe Sayer. 1992. *Skeleton at the Feast: The Day of the Dead in Mexico*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Chávez, Alex E. 2017. *Sounds of Crossing: Music, Migration, and the Aural Poetics of Huapango Arribeño*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Davis-Undiano, Robert Con. 2017. *Mestizos Come Home! Making and Claiming Mexican-American Identity*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.
- García Canclini, Nestor. 2010. *Transforming Modernity: Popular Culture in Mexico*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Garciagodoy, Juanita. 1998. *Digging the Days of the Dead: A Reading of Mexico’s Days of the Dead*. Niwot: University Press of Colorado.
- Gwyneira, Isaac, April Bojorquez, and Catherine Nichols. 2012. Dying to Be Represented: Museums and Día de los Muertos Collaborations. *Collaborative Anthropologies*. 5:28–63.
- Latin American and Iberian Institute. N.D. *Día de los Muertos K-12 Education Guide*. Albuquerque: Latin American and Iberian Institute, University of New Mexico.
- Leija, María G. 2020. Día de los Muertos: Opportunities to Foster Writing and Reflect Students’ Cultural Practices. *The Reading Teacher*. 73.4: 543–48.
- Marchi, Regina. 2009. *Day of the Dead in the USA: The Migration and Transformation of a Cultural Phenomenon*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Pérez, Laura. 2020. Fashioning Decolonial Optics: Days of the Dead Walking Altars and Calavera Fashion Shows in Latina/o Los Angeles. In *MeXicana Fashions: Politics, Self-Adornment, and Identity Construction*, eds. Aída Hurtado and Norma Cantú. Austin: University of Texas Press, 191–215.

Classroom Connection: Guiding Questions for Writing *Calaveras*

While it is common in Mexico to write a literary *calavera* that pokes fun at a living person as if the person has died, *calaveras* can also be generally about death or a loved one who has died. These two exercises and guiding questions will help students in middle or high school experiment with writing *calaveras* in English by turning a story about one of Posada's illustrations, or a story about a friend or family member who has died, into a *calavera*.

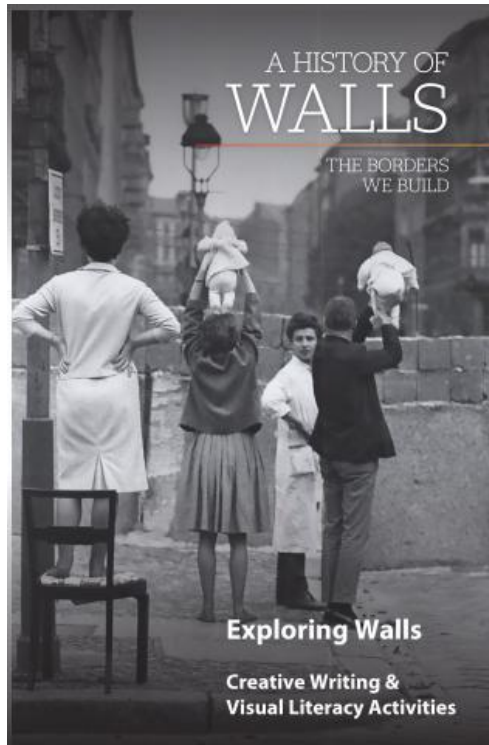
1

Choose one of Posada's illustrations (you can find some of his images and links to other sites with images at <https://blogs.loc.gov/picturethis/2017/11/breathing-life-into-the-day-of-the-dead-the-calaveras-of-jos-guadalupe-posada>) and consider the following questions: Who are the characters? What are they doing? How are they interacting? What is distinctive about each? What do you think each backstory is? What are potential nicknames for the characters? What are some funny, interesting, or puzzling details in the scene that you did not notice at first? Does one character look more powerful or important than the others, and why? What message do you think Posada is trying to convey? Why are characters portrayed as skeletons?

Brainstorm a short, silly story about the scene; then write a short verse of four lines or more, with a simple rhyming scene based on this story. You do not have to retell the story in verse form; you can just use the story as inspiration. It might be helpful to make a list of rhyming words that you associate with the scene or story before you begin writing the verse.

2

Think of a friend, family member, or public person who has died. What were some activities they liked to do? What were some of their habits? What was their favorite food or drink? How did they usually dress and wear their hair? What are some specific things that you connect with this person (a musical instrument, plant, tool, or personal item, for example), and why? What are some phrases or words that they often said? How would you describe their personality and general attitude toward life? What is something that this person gave you or taught you? What are other features about this person that you admire? Think of a true, humorous story that summarizes what was special or unique about this person. Then write a verse that summarizes the story. You can write the verse in an open form, meaning that it does not follow a rhyming scheme or a particular pattern, or you can write a rhymed verse. Choose words that really resonate with your memories and feelings. If you like, you can write the verse as if it were going to be placed on an *ofrenda* in honor of the person, where it would be read by people who gather around the *ofrenda*, and may give some insight into the items, such as special food and drink, placed on the *ofrenda*.



Walls Are Not Black and White: Student Exploration of Border Walls through Creative Writing

by Lisa Falk and Marge Pellegrino

What comes to mind when you hear the word “wall”?

What do you know about border walls?

We live 65 miles from the U.S.-Mexico border and the Wall looms large in our psyche. But the U.S. wall is not the lone border wall; walls to separate and contain, protect and imperil, have been built in many different geographies and eras across world history. Facts about their construction and financial, human, and environmental costs are plentiful, but deeper understanding and empathy come when you join these facts with expressive works that reflect lived experiences.

In early March 2019, the Arizona State Museum mounted a traveling exhibition, *A History of Walls: The Borders We Build*, and received funding from Arizona Humanities to develop related programming. With the Covid-19 pandemic, ASM closed. Few people could see the exhibition, and programming had to be reconsidered. Lectures easily transferred to Zoom, but an interactive family program that generated and presented youth voices about the border was more challenging to transfer. Lisa Falk, ASM’s head of community engagement, reached out to all the program collaborators. Marge Pellegrino, award-winning teaching artist and author of [Neon Words](#), jumped at the opportunity to join Lisa in thinking creatively about how to engage youth virtually with the exhibit.

With grant funding already extended and due to end in April 2021, we rolled up our sleeves and developed a writing and visual literacy workshop series for high school students. As we worked, we endeavored to:

- build an experience that invites students to think about big political actions and physical structures imposed by government authorities;

Image of Berlin Wall, courtesy Overland Exhibits. Learn more at
<https://statemuseum.arizona.edu/education/education-materials/exploring-walls>

- have students go beyond articles, history books, and statistics when researching;
- encourage students to delve into peoples' stories to better understand the impact of walls on communities and individuals;
- inspire students to link these stories to their lives and communities, sort out their mixed-up feelings, and express their understandings and emotions about politically constructed and metaphorical walls in a compelling format.

Using ASM's K-12 email list, we recruited three high school teachers interested in using the theme of walls as a springboard for creative writing in their digital classrooms. Funding for teacher honoraria and timing limited this opportunity to three classrooms. Teachers committed to:

- a six-session interactive Zoom workshop in early 2021
- participating with their students for each 75–90 minute session
- facilitating sessions for student research
- providing the Zoom classroom, using [Padlet](#), and saving the Chat entries
- securing permission for recording and sharing the collaborative poem

Grant funding allowed ASM to provide honoraria to Marge for co-developing the curriculum and co-facilitating the workshops. It also provided honoraria to the teachers, acknowledging their participation as important. One teacher used her honorarium to print a chapbook of her students' writings.

Methodology

Both Lisa and Marge have experience engaging young people in various writing activities that connect them to museum objects, place, identity, and action. Marge has observed the magic of the writing process in building resilience and confidence in youth. As we developed the curriculum, we applied the successful visual literacy and writing tools that we knew could prompt student excitement in exploring and expressing their thoughts on this complex topic. Ultimately, we hoped they would realize that their ideas, emotions, and words matter. We also wanted to create a conduit for their voices to be heard. Reflecting on the research done by James Pennenbaker that documents how creative writing supports individuals' physiological, emotional, and academic lives, we were excited by the potential of our multidisciplinary curriculum (2014).

Workshop Intentions

Intentions for students

- Learn about and compare the history of four border walls (China, Berlin, Israel-Palestine, and U.S.-Mexico) from multiple perspectives
- Explore the complexity of people's relationships with walls
- Discover research resources and creative responses to border walls
- Gain skills in visual literacy to promote deeper seeing and analysis
- Use creative writing tools to build writing skills, including collaborative approaches
- Create and facilitate group presentations in a virtual environment

Intentions for teachers

- Experience interactive creative writing and visual literacy through virtual processes
- Understand that creative writing benefits from the use of a variety of prompts to build a final piece
- Experience how research feeds students' creative writing

In developing a methodology that would support a safe space, we considered students' age, Zoom delivery, and the nature of the material. For some students the border wall is an internal part of their being, defining who they are and challenging them and their families almost daily. For others it was just an abstraction without an intimate connection. Realizing that this topic could be traumatizing, we had to devise safe ways to encourage participation. At one classroom teacher's suggestion, some students submitted their comments through her and she entered them into the Chat anonymously. Everyone's thoughts were valuable to the process. Everyone could contribute without risk. Although sharing was optional, we reminded participants that their ideas hold the power to inspire others and highly encouraged sharing. Throughout we let them know when what they said caused us to add something to our list or helped us remember a detail. All their sharing was met with gratitude.

We opened each session with an individual online search to find a quote about the session theme, such as creative writing, walls, listening, writer's voice, or collaboration. The intention was threefold: activate students immediately, set an inclusive tone, and foster thinking about the theme. Researching and offering a quote allowed students to contribute easily, safely, and productively to the conversation. Reading quotes aloud focused and inspired us as we moved into the heart of that session.

The content and different perspectives offered during our work screamed for time to begin processing before we hit the Leave Meeting button at the end of class. A quick reflection that we asked was, "Today I am thinking about..." which elicited:

Different perspectives and emotions people have on walls

How different each of the walls we learned about are

How walls were built for a reason, positive or negative

How there's more to walls than what we see

Why the wall started to be patrolled more

How I felt the emotion rush through me

The extremities of separation mentally and physically by walls

Teacher responses to prompts validated students' efforts, provided a different point of view, and offered a reframing that students could trust. For example, in one session a teacher responded to a prompt with, "I have faith that tomorrow the world will be better in your capable hands."

Workshop Sessions

Pre-Session: Introducing Creative Writing

We offered an introductory 15-minute session to excite students about the power of writing. Marge explained how writing is her superpower: It helps her to process, build her understanding, problem solve, center, and have fun. Lisa introduced the walls topic for our writing explorations and the

Arizona State Museum. We introduced writing tools like lists and rapid writing along with the notion that students would be the boss of how they responded. Mimicking how we would run the workshop sessions, students used the Zoom Chat to share their expressive superpowers and experience how their thoughts would be received. They met us and heard our enthusiasm, setting a positive tone for subsequent sessions.

Session 1: Introducing Walls through Visual Literacy

To make students comfortable with the subject and to create a foundation based on what they already know, we posed the positioning question: What comes to mind when you hear the word “wall”? Most students responded by looking at personal walls or the function of walls.

Walls keep my family and me safe from the chaos our world has started. They also are obstacles in my life, they keep me in, they keep me from exploring.

I think of something you can hang out on, lean on, cry on, or just think.

A defending mechanism where we tend to "wall up" our emotions with certain interactions with others.

I think about something holding me back. I also think about it as memories whether I put stuff up or take stuff down. I think of an obstacle that is unbearably difficult to overcome, but not impossible.

What comes to mind is loneliness: a disconnection, an empty, colorless feeling that sneaks its way in you—especially when it's a wall that is put up between you and someone else you care for.

Barriers are like a stop to what you want to reach for or accomplish and they stop you from achieving your goal.

Walls most times separate things or people. Walls are what keep us from truly knowing oneself.

Students shared their ideas by posting them on a Padlet. Padlet entries are like Post-it Notes. In this way they could see what had bubbled up across the class. Simply by reading each comment aloud, we validated their ideas. Many comments pointed to metaphorical walls—walls we build around ourselves for protection, or barriers that confine and cut off people from those they love. This led to reflections on the impact of political border walls on the people who live with their consequences.

With this start of our study of walls and validation of ideas, we introduced the four border walls we would examine in the workshop: The Great Wall of China, Berlin Wall, Israel-Palestine barrier wall, and the U.S.-Mexico border wall.

We presented a PowerPoint overview of the introduction to [*A History of Walls*](#) as a poem. Stanzas started with “History loves a wall” and provided examples of how walls serve as a “demarcation

of the ending of one thing and the beginning of another.” We introduced the line, “But for the people who live with these walls, the relationship is more complicated,” and used it as a refrain between contrasting viewpoints. The introduction ended with Josh Begley’s idea that “Borders begin as fictions....But the stories borders tell—about those who reinforce them, protect them, subvert them, try to cross them, live in their shadow—are real....Borders...are performed. They are lines drawn in the sand, spaces that bend and break and make exceptions for certain kinds of bodies” (2016). Uncovering those stories drove students’ research over the next sessions.

The idea of borders being “fiction” that is “performed” introduced walls as places for expression, or as Uruguayan writer Eduardo Galeano stated, “The walls are the publishers of the poor.” We showed images of murals interpreting borders in the U.S. and Ireland and of cross-border crop art of fish skewered, or swimming unimpeded, over the border demarcation between Poland and Ukraine. Then we used techniques from the Harvard [Project Zero Thinking Routines Toolbox](#) to facilitate students’ reading of two photographs. These strategies help students look closely for details, which are often missed because of the assault of visual stimuli in our lives. This method helps students hone visual literacy skills.

The first [photograph](#) documented a corrugated metal wall splitting a vast desert landscape with a U.S. Border Patrol vehicle on one side and a small community on the other. Students listed five specific details they saw (not analyzing, *but* rather naming actual things) and posted them in the Chat so others could see what everyone noticed. We repeated this exercise several times with the same image, helping them to build their observation skills. They also listed what thoughts and wonderings the image evoked. We facilitated the same routine with a second image. This [photograph](#) showed a metal sculpture adhered to a portion of the U.S.-Mexico border wall depicting migrants carrying objects and painted with symbols representing where migrants journey from, what they endure, and hopes they bring with them. Finally, we pushed students’ analyses, asking them to consider the two photos as one and write a title for this combination. Examples included:

Same Obstacles, Different Meanings

Seeing What You Want to See

Different Sides of the Same Story

We finished the session by returning to their own experiences. Students divided a piece of paper into three columns. In the first they listed the walls in their lives. In the second they shared how the walls serve them. And in the third they described how they interact with them. A student reflection that first bubbled up here, and was echoed by many students in the remaining sessions, was:

*The walls in my life are the ones who protect me and the obstacles that I run into.
The purpose of a wall is to keep you inside of its barrier. We go through walls, we
jump over walls, and we break them down.*

Session 2: Introducing Sources

Session 2 introduced the role of research in creative writing. Students were divided into groups to research the four walls. They began by using the online *A History of Walls* exhibition script focusing on the panel text, photos, and maps for each wall. To create student-directed questions, we brainstormed questions based on what they thought was important to know about border walls and questions they wanted to hold in mind as they conducted research.

After 15 minutes of initial research, we reconvened. Using Padlet, we asked students to share what popped in their research, what resonated or surprised them, and what new questions research evoked. By organizing the Padlet by each wall, students saw what others in their group found interesting and made cross-wall comparisons. The ensuing discussion set up additional questions to investigate when conducting the next round of deeper research.

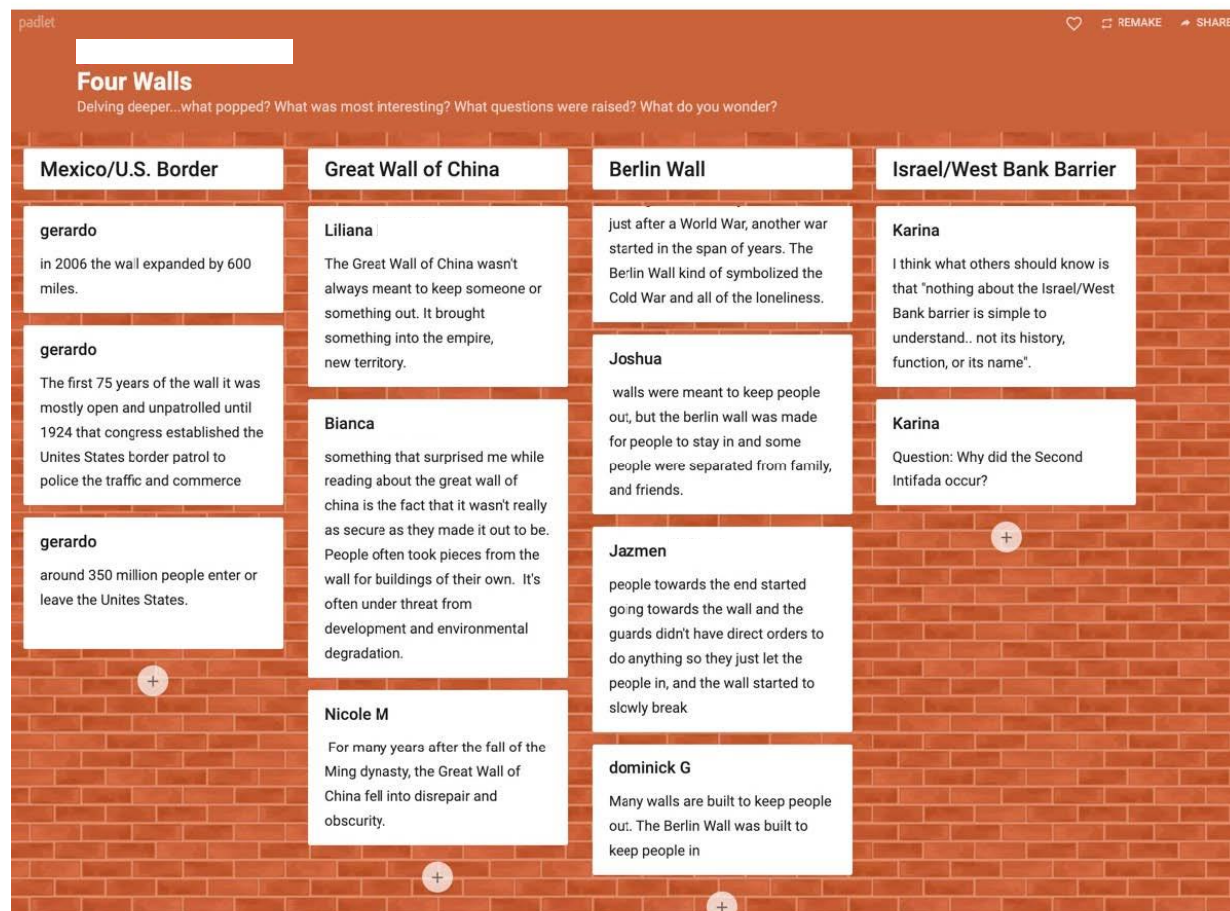


Image courtesy Lisa Falk and Marge Pellegrino.

To get beyond “facts,” we introduced the concept of being a museum curator who is responsible for finding materials to tell a story that will incite a connection with viewers. Exhibits often include objects, photographs, documents, maps, artworks, videos, oral histories, soundscapes, songs, quotes, and poetry to tell their story.

To illustrate how different modalities can evoke emotion and bring the viewer/listener into the story, we showed them the work of two artists—Alejandro Santiago in Mexico and Alvaro Enciso in the U.S. Borderlands.

We intended student “exhibits” to be a creative gestalt about the meaning of their assigned walls. The only parameters were that they be short and lean toward creative nonfiction: more like a poem or dance with the truth they found rather than a litany of facts. They were charged with making us care. Their research presentations would give them additional details and understandings to layer with their personal feelings in subsequent creative writing work, which would lead to writing a collaborative poem in the last session.

Upon returning to his village in Mexico from a fellowship in Europe, sculptor Alejandro Santiago felt like he entered a ghost town. In response to the emptiness created by the migration of the village’s youth, Alejandro created 2,501 life-sized clay figures to represent the 2,501 community members who had left. The [video](#) excerpt we shared about his project made visceral the magnitude of that loss and a desire to know the journey stories the people represented.

Alvaro Enciso’s art reflects the tragedy and broken dreams that he sees weekly while hiking remote desert migrant trails with the humanitarian group Tucson Samaritans to leave water to prevent migrant deaths. We showed pictures of his work *Donde mueren los sueños (Where Dreams Die)*, a project that uses “secular” crosses to mark locations where migrant remains have been recovered. He explains, “I have planted nearly 1,000 crosses to bring attention to the more than 3,000 people that have died in southern Arizona while crossing the desert to find their place in the U.S., to find their piece of the ‘American dream’” (*Donde mueren los sueños Artist Statement*, provided by Alvaro Enciso, 5/24/21).

Session 3: Researching and Creating Presentations

Session 3 was devoted to students’ research on their own and during class time facilitated by their teachers. We provided weblinks for a variety of resources ([below](#)) to start their exploration. Each student contributed slides highlighting their findings about their assigned wall for their group presentations at our next meeting.

Session 4: Sharing Discoveries and Listening with Intention

Before starting group presentations, we brainstormed strategies for active listening so students would engage and think critically about the information their peers presented (instead of zoning out in the comfort of their bedrooms). The artifacts the students shared included video clips, songs, poetry, images of mural art, and stories. These gave insights into the feelings of the people affected and illustrated creative resistance and accommodation to a wall imposed on them. Information that most resonated with students from the presentations included:

A story of ingenuity that drew on the Trojan horse legend. In East Berlin, some clever builders created a hollow space covered with the hide of a cow. The first few riders escaped to the West, but after someone tipped the border guards, a young woman trying to unite with her boyfriend was caught and the cow became legend.

A Palestinian poem expressed the limitations and complex emotions the Israel-Palestine wall caused the writer and his family.

A legend about the Great Wall of China pointed to the sacrifice by citizens enslaved to build it. A widow's wailing cries were so loud a section of the wall crumbled, revealing her husband's remains.

People's opposition to government positions in images of mural art depicted people driving through, jumping over, or peeling back border walls.

Entrepreneurship was discussed in a story of a family business ferrying people across the Rio Grande, which the student group juxtaposed with number of river drownings by those without access to such a way to cross.

Students intermingled facts with these stories and the emotive pieces, which allowed some students to feel comfortable later sharing their stories of being separated from family by the U.S.-Mexico wall. Their presentations beautifully illustrated a statement by artist Rafael Lozano-Hemmer, "Now more than ever, when the nationalisms come in, is when art is required—is required to establish dialogue, to ask questions, to bring people together" (2021). The feelings and wondering that bubbled up included:

Uncertainty and doubt. Both for the implications that any piece of land can be crudely split and that over history that is exactly what has and is what happens.

It doesn't matter what the walls affect, they go up either way even when the public is opposed.

The Berlin wall was to keep people in. Other walls are to keep people out.

Why are countries even divided in the first place?

The images and videos opened my eyes to the struggles people of this world go through and also made me question how important these walls are that destroy humanity.

Walls can't make you feel safe, they can make you very uncomfortable.

Session 5: Finding Voice

To reinforce shared information that was most successful in connecting with an audience, we asked students to consider what stuck with them from the presentations. Marge knew from past teaching experiences that students are more likely to incorporate what they recognize as effective into their own process when they identify what pops in other people's work. Overwhelmingly what stayed with them were strong details, stories, art, poems, and details that were unusual or showed a shift in thinking.

From thinking about strong writing, we moved to voice. We asked students to compose a short line of dialogue from six points of view. They wrote what a wall might say, a wall builder, a wall crasher, an activist, someone or something affected by a wall, and what students would say to the wall.

Choosing the most powerful voice from that writing, they expanded and extended it on the page. They chose any vehicle that best amplified the voice: a letter, conversation, poem, descriptive paragraph, or song lyrics. Sharing via a Padlet, we heard what different voices had to say and observed how different each take on a particular point of view could be:

Impacted by the Wall *My roots have been cut, crushed under the weight of thousands of pounds of concrete. The sun only shines above my head, not on my sides as I'm stuck in between two lands. I will not survive.*

Wall Crasher *As I stand there staring at this wall thinking about my plan to break it down, I hear a deep melancholic voice ask, "Do you hate me that much that you want me gone?" I was startled and asked, "Who is there?" The voice erupted again, "I didn't choose to be here. I didn't want to divide." Knowing now it was the wall that was speaking, I answered, "Now I'm going to tear you down so we can cross over and rejoin our family." Then it was silent.*

Wall *sorry for the inconvenience i have made
sorry that i bound you here
it's my nature as i'm a wall*

Wall *I may just be a wall and people love and hate me, but I protect them and I shelter them. I hear everything that goes on within my walls, I hear their laughter, their cries, and I protect them from the outside world.*

Wall *People don't really know what walls are really used for, I was made to support roofs and floors, and people use me to trap people, inside or out, and I'm the bad guy?*

Wall Activist *I see the wall's intentions and I've decided I'm going to speak out against it. This slab of concrete is cutting through the natural world, our beloved earth's beauty, all for some petty human turmoil. It's not right. It doesn't feel right.*

Student *Dear world, it's me. Why build walls? Is it only to separate, or is it to build your reputation? Even then, why separate? Why break apart families and friends, and why separate lands instead of sharing? If it is to build your reputation, why not leave the world open to the many wonders that all people share? That'll surely let everyone know your name. Right now, it seems like you want to separate, with all the evil leaders in power to uphold that separation, but just imagine how lovely and wonderful it would be, if we could all rejoice again and see our loved ones, once again.*

We asked students to think about feelings that came up as they wrote, listened, and read what others had to say. A sampling of those emotions included sorrow, anger, blame, loss, sadness, determination, and surprise. Since we looked for the power in different voices, the culminating writing activity asked them to look for the power in the session and to finish the lines “Today....and Tomorrow....”

Today I will hold my ma a bit tighter.

Today the voices moved me.

Today I felt sad. Tomorrow I will look for hope.

Today I will help my community. Tomorrow I will share the love with my family.

Today I saw the different perspectives and emotions people have on walls.

Today I will smile.

Session 6: Power of Collaborative Art

In a visualization activity, we asked students to consider how a wall might transform from a barrier, keeping people apart, to a means of bringing people together. We asked them to close their eyes and visualize: What might it look like? Who is involved? What is involved? What does it sound like? What does it feel like? After opening their eyes, students via Chat shared a word or phrase that captured their ideas. We used this to introduce a series of photographs and videos of artists and activists whose work engages with border walls with the intention of creating dialogue. As an entrance to these projects, we discussed Tanya Aguiñiga’s quote, “I started thinking more and more about taking back the fence and changing it from being a place of pain and trauma into a generative place that we can reclaim” (2021). We asked students to pay attention to what popped and what feelings bubbled up as they observed the ways these people transformed walls in the following examples:

Messages on colorfully [painted metal columns](#) of a section of the U.S.-Mexico border wall expressing blessing, hopes, positive hugs, encouragement, and intentions: *Dios Sabe, Hay Sueños, Amor, Love, Vive Hoy*

A U.S. Border Patrol agent looking up at a larger-than-life [photographic cutout](#) of a Mexican baby staring down over the wall

Berlin wall [images](#) including a cartoon of someone jumping over the wall and another of a car crashing through the concrete

Two street art images on the Israel/Palestine wall: one a realistic poster-like image of a woman’s innocent face captioned [“I am not a terrorist”](#) and the other image a similar-looking woman holding a military-style weapon captioned “Don’t forget the struggle”

A [cross-border bilingual choir](#) singing “With a Little Help from My Friends”

A [soundscape](#) by Glenn Weyant using the border fence as a musical instrument, playing its metal columns with a bow and mallet

A performance art piece, [Obstruction](#), by Kimi Eisele that highlighted how the wall obstructs animals

The example that resonated most was R. Real’s performance art, [Teetertotter](#). Watching children and adults playing on a seesaw rising and falling on alternating sides of the border, and hearing their laughter, projected a sense of happiness created by their shared togetherness. After discussing the examples, Lozano-Hemmer’s insistence that “art is required to establish dialogue, to ask questions, to bring people together” became our call to action.

Students began work on a collaborative poem to capture what they believe is essential for others to know about border walls. We asked them to do a quick-write enumerating what they felt are the most important, specific things others need to understand about walls and barriers. From this, each student donated one line. Working together, we moved the lines, sharing our strategies and thinking as we grouped or separated lines until we found an order and structure that created a strong poem. Students audio recorded the final poem.

Conclusion: Our Voices Are Strong and Heard

One strength of this exploration was working from the foundation of the *A History of Walls* exhibition, which considered walls in diverse times and geographies. The exhibition, our additional materials, and artifacts from students’ research uncovered how these four sites held stories that echoed across time and place. Students experienced these time capsules in a very specific here-and-now, while the pandemic and the shutdown served as a barrier that both protected and divided us. During this epic era, we looked broadly at the past, seeking other times and places that might hold truths that we can use to reflect on our regional border wall situation as well as our metaphorical walls. The workshops met our intentions in ways that went deeper than what we anticipated.

Throughout we touched back to students’ emotional reactions. What are you feeling about this? What do you do with those feelings of empathy, emotion, and anger that surfaced? Some students reflected on their situations and growth. They found that research will support deeper understanding and can apply to more than a term paper. They discovered that border walls are not either/or; there is a complexity to understanding the value and the destructiveness of walls. They felt their own and saw others’ reactions to different understandings of walls. They saw that art could invite different perspectives and open pathways to reach over borders for connection. They hoped that writing and sharing a poem might change someone’s feelings. Many students felt more inclined to talk with family or friends about how the U.S.-Mexico border affected them, their families, and community. A few were inspired to get involved in border issues.

Students were exposed to a process, a blueprint of an approach they could use to seek a broader understanding of any complex issue they encounter. For us as educators, the most gratifying

outcome was that students felt the workshop was meaningful, they were safe to express themselves, and they were heard.

You made me open up my creative mind and question, wonder, and research about the Great Wall of China. I've learned things I would never have known. I now have a different perspective on walls. Thank you for making me wonder. –Liliana

I felt welcomed. I felt seen. I felt comfortable. I felt all the things I was expecting not to. ... [It was] an experience that has struck me in the most unexpected way and has changed me. You opened my eyes to a world I do not want to forget about anytime soon. A world of transforming old pain into new beauty, new hope, and tearing down walls of all kinds that will cross my path--starting with the one in my heart (and the one dividing our people in México from us). –Karina

Along the whole program, I felt like I was a part of something, meanwhile I was learning all this new information which I could then talk about in new ways and techniques. A part of my family was affected by borders and it hit close to my Heart. –Hector

Thank you so much for everything that was provided from knowledge to even a safe environment where each view got to be shared without criticism. –Gerardo

The workshop led students to feel the importance of human stories in fostering understanding, and it empowered their voices, as heard in these excerpted lines from the collaborative poems:

Walls are more gray than black and white.

*If you are angry at the wall, be angry.
We build walls around ourselves to block out the people around us
Meaning will change... (Barrier and a place of sorrow became a place of pride)
Walls separate us and keep many secrets,
instead of looking straight at the wall, look around it.*

*Walls never work forever.
The barrier that we create in our hearts
must be broken
to heal and grow*

*So although these walls may rob,
conquer,
and divide us all—they
cannot and will not
ever take our voice.*

Recordings of the poems from the three classes are on [ASM's website](#) along with related writing and visual literacy activities and the two radio interviews.

Lisa Falk has nearly 40 years of experience in developing, producing, and evaluating informal learning programs. As Head of Community Engagement at Arizona State Museum (University of Arizona), she is responsible for the museum's exhibits, educational programs, and outreach efforts. She wrote *Cultural Reporter* and *Bermuda Connections: A Cultural Resource Guide for Classrooms*, both awarded honorable mentions by the American Folklore Society, and serves on the *Journal of Folklore and Education* Editorial Board. In 2012, Falk's work received the Museum Association of Arizona's Award for Contribution in honor of her museum-community collaborative work.

Teaching artist **Marge Pellegrino** works with diverse audiences and leads writing and art adventures in community, library, school, and agency settings. She has conducted residencies and staff trainings in rural and urban communities. For 20 years, she facilitated programming for the Owl & Panther project, which serves refugee families. Her innovative *Word Journeys* program had a 12-year run at Pima County Public Library and won a White House Coming Up Taller Award for excellence in afterschool programming. Her recent teen book *Neon Words: 10 Brilliant Ways to Light Up Your Writing* (Magination Press, 2019) inspires others to express themselves on the page.

Works Cited

Pennebaker, James W. and John F. Evans. 2014. *Expressive Writing: Words That Heal*. Enumclaw WA: Idyll Arbor Press.

Begley, Josh. 2016. A History of Walls Introductory Panel. *Overland Exhibits*. Accessed July 13, 2021, <https://walls.overlandexhibits.com/intro>.

Art21, 2020. Season 10, Episode 3, "Borderlands." Aired 10/02/2020, https://allarts.org/programs/art21/borderlands-4m0kef/?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=012021.

URLs (In order that they appear in article)

Neon Words: https://margepellegrino.com/journal/?page_id=4

Padlet: <https://padlet.com>

A History of Walls Introduction Panel: <https://walls.overlandexhibits.com/intro>

Project Zero Thinking Routines Toolbox: <https://pz.harvard.edu/thinking-routines>

This is What the US-Mexico Border Looks Like, photographs by John Moore/Getty Images:

<https://www.cnn.com/interactive/2018/12/politics/border-wall-cnnphotos/>

"Paseo de Humanidad" (Parade of Humanity) Wall Mural in Nogales photograph by Jonathon MacIntosh:

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/tags/paseodehumanidad>

2501 Migrants: A Journey | Official Trailer: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YXAYUKBSv78>

La Fontera: Artists along the U.S.-Mexico Border: <https://borderartists.com/2018/09/27/alvaro-enciso>

The Mural of Brotherhood: <https://inhabitat.com/artists-are-turning-the-u-s-mexico-border-fence-into-the-worlds-longest-peace-themed-mural/>

Baby Kikito peers over the border fence in Tecate: <https://www.afar.com/magazine/10-border-walls-that-artists-have-turned-into-powerful-protests>

Murals on the Berlin Wall: <https://theculturetrip.com/europe/germany/articles/10-iconic-murals-on-the-berlin-wall/>

I Am Not a Terrorist: <https://travel.davidmbyrne.com/israel-west-bank-barrier-art>

Tijuana & San Diego sing 'With a Little Help From My Friends' Together: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=25U_xcqDkPA

Soundscape by Glenn Weyant: <https://borderartists.com/2013/04/03/glenn-weyant>

Obstruction by Kimi Eisele: <https://kimieisele.com/portfolio/obstruction>

Teetertotter by R. Real: https://www.instagram.com/p/B0fY2R6hfKr/?utm_source=ig_embed

Student poems and related materials: <https://statemuseum.arizona.edu/education/education-materials/exploring-walls>

Classroom Connection: Border Wall Resources
Compiled by Lisa Falk and Marge Pellegrino
Arizona State Museum, January 2021

Border Wall Photos

Check the bias of your sources! Beyond Google Image searches, you can go to news sources (newspaper archives, magazines, TV), non-profit organizations' websites, individual artist websites, etc.

Check the bias of your sources!

Look for non-commercial sites, mainstream news sites, government agencies, museums, blogs, journals, oral histories, poetry, songs, books, photographs and videos. Always note your sources and consider what their perspective is.

U.S.-Mexico

<https://www.cnn.com/interactive/2018/12/politics/border-wall-cnnphotos>

<https://michael-hyatt.com/index.php>

<https://www.stefanfalk.com>

Berlin

<https://www.theatlantic.com/photo/2019/11/photos-before-fall-berlin-wall/601714>

Israel-Palestine

<https://thegroundtruthproject.org/documenting-sides-separation-wall-israel-palestine-divide>

http://lloydwolf.com/?page_id=102

<https://www.yoavhoresh.com/aftermath-extended-text> & <https://www.yoavhoresh.com/aftermath>

Documentary Films

Check the bias of your sources! In addition to YouTube, check National Geographic, Smithsonian, Independent Lens or other indie film sites, Ted-x, news sites, etc.

U.S.-Mexico

<https://films.nationalgeographic.com/blood-on-the-wall#:~:text=From%20Academy%20Award%2Dnominated%20director,everyday%20people%20to%20find%20justice>

<https://www.indiewire.com/2019/10/border-wall-environmental-impact-documentary-1202179218>

<https://borderwallmovie.usatoday.com/#about>

Berlin

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zmRPP2WXX0U>

China

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AB4nXADdPPY>

Journal of Folklore and Education (2021: Vol. 8)

Walls Are Not Black and White: Student Exploration of Border Walls through Creative Writing
by Lisa Falk and Marge Pellegrino

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=quLhkqwtOg8>

https://www.si.edu/es/object/yt_m68zyXyeYG0

https://www.ted.com/talks/megan_campisi_and_pen_pen_chen_what_makes_the_great_wall_of_china_so_extraordinary?language=en

Songs

Check the bias of your sources! Look also for articles that discuss music on the topic, and music archives.

Smithsonian Folkways Recordings: <https://folkways.si.edu>

Library of Congress Folklife Center: <https://www.loc.gov/folklife>

US/Mexico

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ikhz-15rFZ0&t=53s>

Chew Sanchez, Martha I. 2006. *Corridos in Migrant Memory*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press.

Berlin

<https://www.houstonpress.com/music/tear-me-down-five-songs-about-the-berlin-wall-6772915>

Israel-Palestine

<https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-news/tom-waits-lends-instrumental-innocent-when-you-dream-to-banksy-hotel-121218>

<https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/the-west-bank-in-song-and-dance-a-review-of-quot-west-bank-story-quot>

Other Information

Check the bias of your sources! Look for noncommercial sites, mainstream news sites, government agencies (border patrol, immigration, archives), blogs, journals, oral histories, poetry, books, etc.

Great Wall of China

<https://www.historyextra.com/period/ancient-history/great-wall-china-facts-history-length-why-built-from-space>

<https://www.great-wall-of-china.com/the-silk-road.html>

<https://poets.org/poem/climbing-chinas-great-wall>

Berlin Wall

<https://www.berliner-mauer-gedenkstaette.de/en/index.html>

Journal of Folklore and Education (2021: Vol. 8)

Walls Are Not Black and White: Student Exploration of Border Walls through Creative Writing
by Lisa Falk and Marge Pellegrino

<https://www.berliner-mauer-gedenkstaette.de/en/stories-489.html>

<https://www.gale.com/intl/archives-explored/berlin-wall/cultural-legacy>

<https://www.the-american-interest.com/2019/11/06/voices-from-the-berlin-wall>

<https://englishberlinwall.weebly.com/poem.html>

U.S.-Mexico

<https://blog.degruyter.com/forgotten-history-us-mexico-border-wall>

<https://www.cbp.gov/border-security/along-us-borders/border-wall-system>

<https://www.brookings.edu/essay/the-wall-the-real-costs-of-a-barrier-between-the-united-states-and-mexico>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tlaZoGZ_0_k&t=2s

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GGd42rGkUeI>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SQ-_4OZuFo8

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xX-PVi2ln0&t=166s>

<https://poets.org/poem/border-double-sonnet>

Israel-Palestine

<https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/background-and-overview-of-israel-s-security-fence>

<https://www.politifact.com/factchecks/2015/oct/02/scott-walker/scott-walker-israel-says-its-wall-led-90-percent-r>

<https://jewishvoiceforpeace.org>

<https://www.pbs.org/newshour/arts/poetry/this-palestinian-poem-on-jerusalem-is-finding-new-life>

<https://www.palestinemuseum.us>

<https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2017/12/27/palestinians-hit-back-at-graffiti-tourists>

<https://www.pbs.org/newshour/arts/poetry/this-palestinian-poem-on-jerusalem-is-finding-new-life>

<https://jewishvoiceforpeace.org>

Journal of Folklore and Education (2021: Vol. 8)

Walls Are Not Black and White: Student Exploration of Border Walls through Creative Writing
by Lisa Falk and Marge Pellegrino



by Carol Ghiorso Hart

Creative arts born of protest, in the context of a museum exhibition, can instruct and inspire students by expanding notions of what art is and what it can do. The multimedia creations within the Greensboro History Museum's exhibition [*Pieces of Now: Murals, Masks, Community Stories and Conversations*](#) are both expressive individual artworks and social acts. They show how a single voice and vision can connect to larger communities and historical moments in ways that make a difference and lend agency, especially when museum and school staff listen to those voices.

In Greensboro, North Carolina, as in many cities throughout the country, the murder of George Floyd moved many community members to respond publicly. Protests in the streets of downtown, subsequent looting, and protective boarding of windows of businesses were quickly followed by the coming together of artists, protestors, and business owners to create an expansive city-space of community voices. The public art murals created on the window boards, sidewalks, and streets, as well as the associated videos and social media, connected diverse communities in the city. When the time came to remove the boards, the Greensboro History Museum responded to the need of the community to continue the conversations that started on the streets by quickly carving out time and space for an unexpected journey.

Pieces of Now created an arena for discussion and, importantly, a place to be heard and for emotions to be shared. Our *History Happening Now* documentation and preservation initiative, which had begun in March 2020 as primarily a pandemic story, pivoted in June

Mural by Haus of Lacks and the Collective GSO. All images courtesy of Greensboro History Museum.

2020 to become a Diversity, Equity, Accessibility, Inclusion project focusing on issues of racial reckoning and social justice. As we collected from and talked with protesters, artists, and business owners, we saw clearly that it was important to our African American community that they see these items and responses in the city's history museum. *Pieces of Now* was created and installed in just a few months.

There are three aspects of this project—documentation and preservation, physical and virtual exhibition, and online public/educational programming. These areas provide spaces for conversations about race, equity, and inclusion. The “museum voice,” as seen through written interpretive panels, is muted. Our community does the contextualizing and interpreting through their words and creative expressions. The artists and protestors participated not only by sharing their stories, clothing, paint brushes, and artwork, but also through a series of Zoom webinars, podcasts, and YouTube videos. This process differs from other exhibitions in the museum. It is an experiential space of empathy. It is about Now. It is also unfinished, because we are in the middle of the story. There are very few museum labels; instead, people are telling their own narratives. Long-term goals of the museum include representing many more voices and demonstrating that history is an ongoing, contentious, and often messy process. The impact of the *Pieces* project in our community was immediate and visible through media interviews, participant networks, social media posts, and the response of city government. We are making meaning together.



These varied creative folk art forms, beyond personal expression, are felt as a shared expression in conversation with each other. The space includes murals by both professional and student artists, graffiti art, Instagram videos, rap, music, protest signs, photography, over 20 video screens featuring interviews, and poetry on the floor and circling through the walls. It is a space meant for



emotional sharing, not the presentation of information. Visitors can feel the impact of the public expression of outrage, grief, fear, and unity through creative arts.

In speaking to community members and partners, we learned that it mattered very much to them to know who created the work—whether they were reacting to events or speaking from personal experience with lived pain and hurt. The artworks needed to be understood in the context of the artist; the messages received are highly dependent on who is sending it. When it became known that a curator from the Smithsonian Institution had collected a mural of George Floyd painted by a white artist, members of Greensboro's African American arts community were outraged. So, it was especially important to identify the backgrounds of the artists. There are no museum text panels with biographical information, rather there are videos with creators speaking about their lives in the moment. While there is plenty to unpack in the work itself, the artist cannot be separated from the work in this exhibition.

While recording protestors' and artists' stories, they kept thanking us for inviting them in and listening. Our staff considered community members as co-curators and collaborators, as well as audience. This project requires participation of the community to meet its goals of documenting history as it is happening. We specifically wanted to be sure we had a focused African American presence, in addition to other community members. We also want the exhibition to reflect the diversity of the communities who protested, as reflected in the signage we gathered after the protests. This included Latinx, Asian American, and the LGBTQIA+ communities.

As we developed the exhibition and the online programs, our Curator of Education Rodney Dawson, who is African American, talked with

the K-12 teachers who were part of the protest and other teachers in our school district to assess how we could provide content and help develop syllabi for school-aged children in the coming months. Many of the videos and podcasts are being filmed with that purpose in mind. Rodney also has a background in radio and media and conducted many interviews as part of his educational outreach for *Pieces*. For him, his role in helping others control their own narratives has been vital, as have been the intergenerational connections he witnesses, connections to the history of Greensboro and the nation and connections among people. He explains, “The exhibition offers paths to empathy, not a historical timeline.”

In part because of the pandemic, our online programming and digital content offerings have increased and audiences have geographically expanded. Engagement on social media, particularly creation of Instagram videos, is part of the community conversation. Impact in our wider museum community can be gauged by the national interest in the project. Schools are using the virtual tour of the exhibition for virtual field trips, and the Enrichment Fund of the Guilford County School District has funded all 22 county middle schools to participate. The unforeseen impact on our city’s workplace, after the City Manager encouraged departmental leadership to bring their staff to see the exhibition, has influenced city workplaces. The conversations among staff and leadership, which extended to the City Council, indicated that we had created a place of/for facilitated engagement. Community members continue to participate by coming forward to suggest more stories and materials that should be included.

One favorite example of how art connects people, which has been a touchstone for young students, is the mural by Marshall Lakes based on a photograph by Kevin Greene, a gifted African American photographer and local high school band teacher. It portrays the African American protestor Pastor Michael Harris holding the hand of Emory Llewellyn, a four-year-old white girl wearing a unicorn T-shirt, as they march in protest of George Floyd’s murder. On the wall in addition to the mural, *Marching Together*, is a photograph of the artist, the photographer, and the white business owner, Tinker Clayton, the artist’s friend through church (who manufactured the Covid-19 mask that city employees wore). We also collected Marshall Lakes’ brushes and paint cans; Pastor Harris and young Emory have donated what they were wearing as they marched. The story of the inspiration and creation of [*Marching Together*](#) was captured in a Zoom session with Marshall, Michael, Kevin, and Emory, which Rodney Dawson led.



Another story connecting with students is that of college student Chimeri Anazia, whose work and interview are in the exhibition. Her submission stated, “I am really glad to create something that people really connected with.... Something so beautiful came out of so much destruction, frustration, and a period of divide. Art can bring people together.” Children are particularly taken with the large red hands Anazia depicted and try to match them to their own hands. An important part of her story is how Chimeri, who had never done anything like this before, felt the need to express herself visually and was helped by experienced artists.



As we began to meet the protest leaders, we learned that many were artists. Pastor Harris helped us contact Virginia Holmes, the young African American artist who planned and led some of the protests. Virginia volunteered to donate her artwork to the museum. This work differs from most of the murals. There are no words or images, yet it is very powerful. It is now installed in our gallery, not only as an important work of art, but also as a connection to her story.

Virginia and I, a white woman from New York, have had many conversations about her perceptions of this museum. She grew up in Warnersville, the first planned African America community in this area. This community thrived for decades, until urban renewal projects of the 60s forever changed it. We had done a collaborative community exhibition on Warnersville six years ago, which gave us credibility with her. She said we were changing perceptions that we are the “white folks’ museum.” To be invited to tell her story of protest, represent her art, and seek her help to create the exhibition title graphic, means a lot to her. Virginia told me that background has taught her about persistence, not to take things personally, and she has studied her community’s history and injustices. I have learned a lot from her, for example, how she feels disconnected from some arts nonprofits that continue to box protest art into zones that are safe for them, not her. Because of Covid-19 restrictions, we were unable to host an opening party for the exhibition, but one year later, working with the Black artist cooperatives [Haus of Lacks](#) and the **Collective GSO**, Virginia took the lead working with our staff to create a public “art-in” community event.

Reflections on Pieces of Now: A History Happening was a celebration with artists, teachers, and activists reflecting on changes in the city over the past year and persistent systemic racial disparities nationwide. Many of the artists were part of the exhibition and actively participated in the day, creating art in our park as they chatted with attendees. Activities like spray chalk, large chalk drawing on our sidewalks, and written expressions of hope tied to our wishing tree were ongoing while musicians and speakers presented. The chalk work and graffiti were reminiscent of one of the most impactful works in the museum’s exhibition, a reproduction of sidewalk graffiti titled “Dear White Folks.”

This was an unsanctioned piece of public art. On the night of June 8, 2020, a 30-foot long poem, “Dear White Folks,” was spray painted on a downtown sidewalk. City Field Ops contacted us to document it before they sandblasted it away (to discourage graffiti). We photographed it and digitally stitched images together to print it on a three-quarter-lifesize runner for the exhibition. It is a powerful verse that ends in BLM. It is tagged, but although we have put many feelers, the artist/author prefers to remain anonymous. Quick literature searches have not come up with an author. One hope is that by including it in the installation, someone will tell us more about its story. It is a poem, that to some reads like a rap, that has been inspiring to students---another way to express themselves. Interestingly it is the out-of-the-norm placement, on the floor literally beneath people’s feet, that is particularly engaging to students. (Yes, you can walk the talk.)

DEAR WHITE
PEOPLE

WE HAVE TO HAVE A
CONVERSATION
ABOUT RACISM IN
OUR NATION

WE HAVE TO GO DEEP
IN OUR HEARTS
AND ROOT OUT WHAT
KEEPS US APART

WE HAVE TO OPEN
OUR EYES
TO THE PAIN, INJUSTICE
AND LIES

WE HAVE TO SUPPORT
AND LISTEN
IN ORDER TO END
THE DIVISION

WE HAVE TO PRACTICE
WHAT WE PREACH
THROUGH OUR ACTIONS
WE MUST TEACH
WE MUST GIVE OUR
MONEY & TIME
TO CAUSE A SHIFT
IN THE PARADIGM

WE HAVE TO STAND
TIRELESSLY IN SOLIDARITY
AND FACE HEAD ON
ANY DISPARITY

WHITE PEOPLE, WE HAVE
AMENDS TO MAKE
FOR ALL OF THE LIVES
WE LET THEM TAKE

WE HAVE TO KEEP OUR
WHITE PRIVILEGE IN CHECK
AND TREAT ALL POC
WITH EQUALITY, LOVE
AND RESPECT

WE HAVE TO BE STRONG
& FEARLESS IN OUR MANNER
AND SHOUT FROM
THE ROOFTOPS,
"BLACK
LIVES
MATTER"

—TGZ

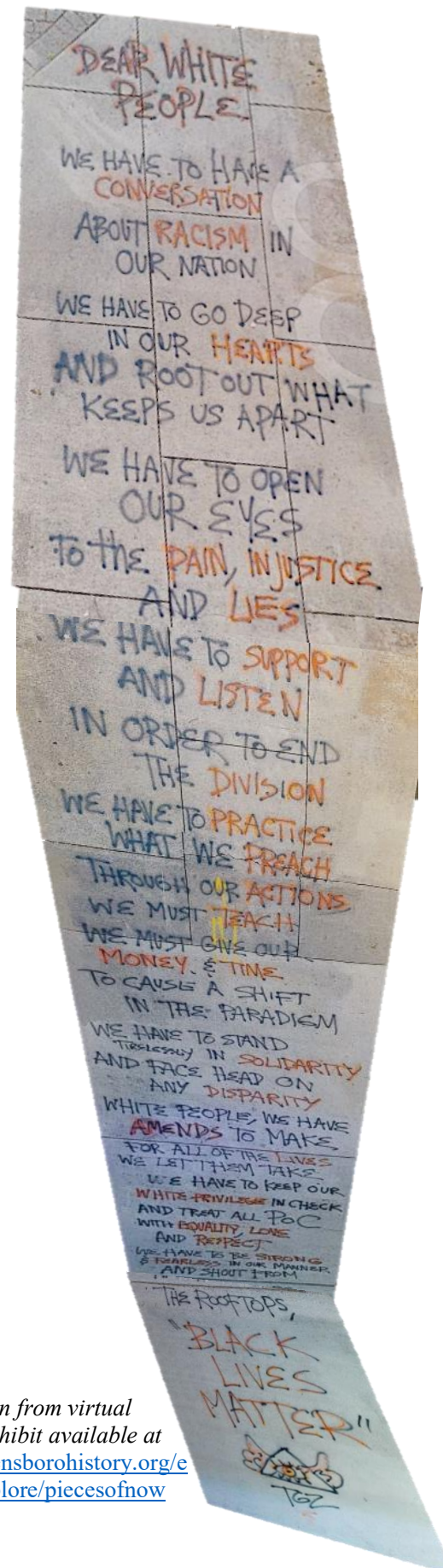


Image taken from virtual
museum exhibit available at
<https://greensborohistory.org/exhibits-explore/piecesofnow>

The other unexpected display of a poem that similarly engages visitors, is “I am Hueman,” by Nakeesha Writes. We had the idea of one strong line of words to snake through the space and keep people moving, rather than conventional interpretive panels. When we mentioned this to local musician/videographer Rasheem Pugh, whom we had hired to record an artists’ discussion, he mentioned his nonprofit, Save the Arts Foundation, and a gifted woman he works with. Within a day, Nakeesha had written and recorded a poem that curls around the walls through the rooms. Because of the pandemic, school and group programs have used our live virtual tour of *Pieces* with Zoom, Microsoft Meet, and other online resources. We are developing curricula as we gain more experience, but several themes seem to be of great interest. These include issues of identity, protest history, artistic expression, self-expression, symbolism (when was the raised fist first used?), communication, defining primary and secondary sources, and creativity in protest. Students suggest what they might do to express how they feel, which often is in the realm of the exhibition components they have experienced, but other expressions include plays, video games, a new kind of basketball game, and fashion. Students are seeing the power that the creative arts can have in making a difference in their world.

The Greensboro History Museum’s mission, in a nutshell, is to collect and connect. With the *Pieces* project, through deep listening and responding to voices of people who have not always felt represented or welcome in the formal museum space, we have connected people through the creative arts. The meanings are often very personal, but within a shared political and cultural context of Now. It is a reframing of museum public space into community space of continued conversation. Public art is seen as a medium of activism, placemaking, self-expression, community building, empathy, and translation. Through a discussion of history and artistic intention and purpose, students are inspired to reflect and explore creative expression within community.

Carol Ghiorsi Hart is Director of the Greensboro History Museum in Greensboro, North Carolina. She is originally from New York, where she was Executive Director of the Suffolk County Vanderbilt Museum & Planetarium. She has an MA, ABD from Indiana University in sociocultural anthropology with a minor in the arts and anthropology and has been an educator, curator, and adjunct professor of anthropology.

Pieces of Now Project won 2021 MUSE awards from American Alliance of Museums, Media & Technology, including Gold for research and innovation and Silver for 2020 response.

Embedded URLs

Pieces of Now: Murals, Masks, Community Stories and Conversations: <https://greensborohistory.org/exhibits-explore/piecesofnow>

Marching Together: <https://youtu.be/OJoiE9ZntuM>

Virginia Holmes, Greensboro protest against police brutality: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QkLa_IQRm4E

Haus of Lacks: [https://www.facebook.com/HausofLacks/?ref=py_c&_xts__\[0\]=68](https://www.facebook.com/HausofLacks/?ref=py_c&_xts__[0]=68)

Although not web-based, the web is an important part of our initiative and includes

<https://greensborohistory.org>

<https://greensborohistory.org/exhibits-explore/piecesofnow>

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCYyyEWzvLMYaylpBmMpvx3Q>

<https://greensborohistory.org/history-now>

<https://greensborohistory.org/podcast>

<https://greensborohistory.org/exhibits-explore/piecesofnow#images>

Journal of Folklore and Education (2021: Vol. 8)

Pieces of Now: Arts Born of Protest

by Carol Ghiorsi Hart



by Frederica Simmons, Amber Delgado, Rachel Weiher, Eve Wasylik, Adem Ojulu, Olivia Tjokrosetio, Shukrani Nangwala, Heather Shirey, Paul Lorah, and David Todd Lawrence

Introduction

The Urban Art Mapping Project at the University of St. Thomas began in the fall of 2018 to document, map, and analyze street art in St. Paul and Minneapolis, MN. Founded by Heather Shirey, Paul Lorah, and David Todd Lawrence—an art historian, a geographer, and a folklorist—the project began in the Midway neighborhood of St. Paul, moving into two adjacent neighborhoods in fall of 2019. From the beginning, we sought to understand how art functions as vernacular discourse in local communities. We understand street art to be a kind of expression, a specialized mode of communication that plays an important role in communal dynamics, particularly in times of unsettlement and crisis. Not surprisingly, when two crises arose in spring of 2020—Covid-19 and the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis—a global proliferation of street art responded to both. In particular, the murder of George Floyd, followed immediately by civil unrest and political uprising, inspired creation of a massive amount of art in the streets, from graffiti writing to Black Lives Matter (BLM) tags to stickers to light projections to large-scale murals. Art was everywhere in public spaces. In response to incidents of violence, cities across the U.S. saw thousands of plywood boards erected on public and private buildings to cover broken windows and to protect intact ones. These boards became canvases for artists to express the emotions and responses of the movement.

Because we were already documenting and mapping street art and conducting ethnographic interviews with artists, community members, and stakeholders, our team was uniquely positioned to document this explosion of artistic expression. In April of 2020 we started the Covid-19 Street Art Database, followed in June by the George Floyd and Anti-Racist Street Art Database. Both databases are crowd-sourced, relying on the public to document digitally and submit street art from the smallest sticker or tag to the largest, most colorful mural. We asked for it all. Through social

Screen capture of sample Urban Art Mapping story map. Available at <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/4885b98d4fd94be1ac4dd070c9d309cc>.

media, conventional media, and word of mouth, both databases grew over the next year. The Covid-19 database currently has over 700 individual records and the George Floyd database now contains approximately 2,400.

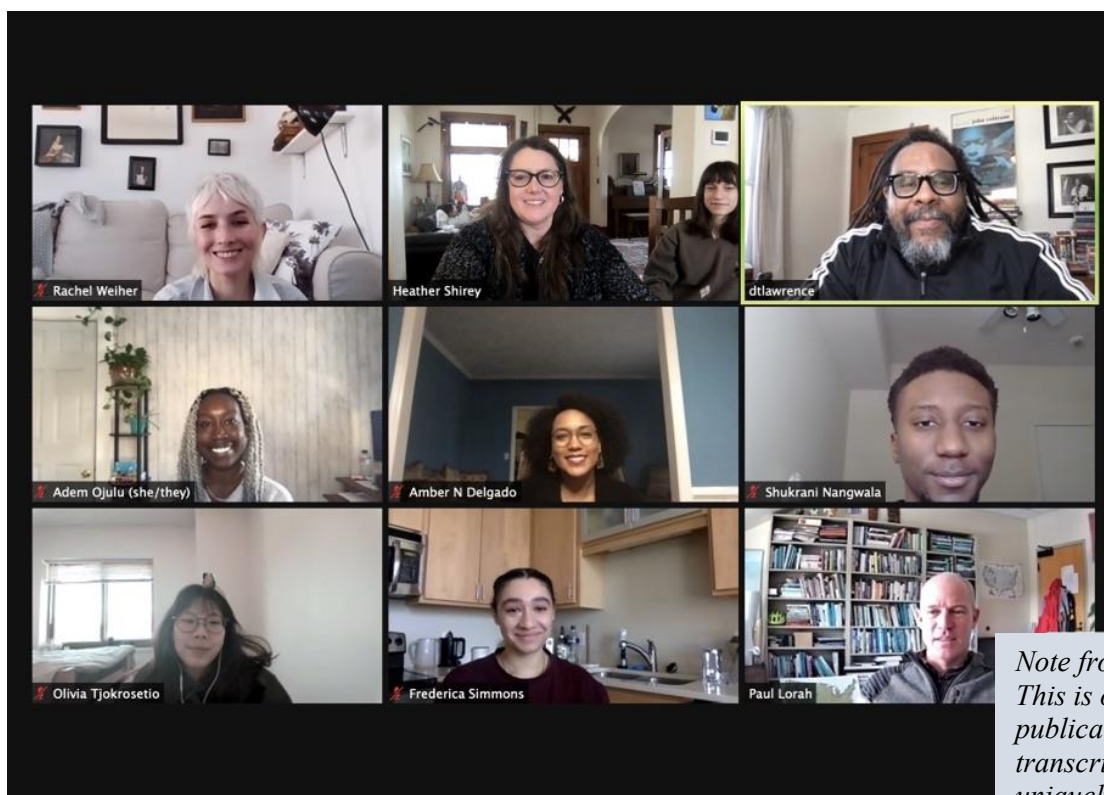
As a multidisciplinary, multigenerational, and multiracial research team, the Urban Art Mapping Project seeks to work in collaboration with and in support of community voices expressing anger, pain, trauma, resistance, solidarity, refusal, hope, and unity through vernacular art in the streets. While street art may be ephemeral and fleeting, it can reveal very immediate responses to world events in a manner that can be raw, direct, and confrontational. These vernacular artistic expressions can help make externally visible what people think, believe, or feel, individually and collectively. In the context of crisis, we argue that street art has the potential to reach a global audience, transform and activate urban space, and foster a sustained critical dialogue.

What follows is an adapted transcript of a presentation that student members of the Urban Art Mapping team shared at the Equity in Action Conference held remotely April 26, 2021. Headlined by Ibram X. Kendi, this conference was organized by the University of St. Thomas to provide a space for community members to engage in conversations around issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion and particularly to engage the concept of antiracism that is the subject of Kendi's book, *How to Be an Antiracist*. The Urban Art Mapping team's work documenting and digitally archiving street art connected to the civil uprising and sociopolitical movement that followed the murder of George Floyd by Minneapolis police officers May 25, 2020, speaks directly to these issues. We believe our work with vernacular artistic communal expression in the streets is activist in nature and provides an important tool for students, educators, and researchers seeking ways to engage with the movement for racial equity that continues to this day.

Our work is fundamentally shaped by our recognition that BIPOC voices and experiences are severely underrepresented in archives and this work of documenting voices and experiences must be done with care—without co-opting their creators' narratives. Working in collaboration with community members through crowd-sourced documentation, we seek to highlight the expression of as many voices as possible, especially those who have historically been marginalized. We believe that artists working in the streets are seeking to re-center the margins by putting art where it is not "supposed" to be.

Informed by cultural theorist Stuart Hall's call for the archive to be "not an inert museum of dead works, but a 'living archive,' whose construction must be seen as an ongoing, never-completed project" (89-92), our team has understood our work in building the George Floyd and Anti-racist Street Art Database as activist work that can help contribute to dismantling white supremacy.

The team members who speak in this transcript are graduate students, a graduate intern, undergraduate students, and a high school intern. Their insight, vision, and commitment have been invaluable. We believe that this presentation and conversation demonstrate the potential of engaging with the George Floyd and Anti-Racist Street Art Database in research and educational contexts. We hope that more community members, teachers, students, and researchers will find innovative ways to engage with the works that we have documented so far with the help of people all over the world.



The Urban Art Mapping team (left to right): First row Rachel Weiher, Heather Shirey and Eve Wasylik, David Todd Lawrence. Second row Adem Ojulu, Amber Delgado, Shukrani Nangwala. Third row Olivia Tjokrosetio, Frederica Simmons, and Paul Lorah.

Definitions and Political Framework

Frederica: I'm here to introduce you to my colleagues who are non-faculty members on the Urban Mapping team at the University of St. Thomas We're going to unpack what we mean when we're talking about this word "antiracist." But first, I'd like to take a moment to center and focus on the importance of the BIPOC perspectives and antiracist work. When we say "BIPOC," we mean "Black, Indigenous, people of color." This acronym is meant to encompass all people of color, while also particularly centering Black and Indigenous people, often the most oppressed members of the POC community. We are also "*Calling In*" our audience today. In social justice circles, we often do something that's called calling out, which usually includes someone publicly pointing out that another person is being oppressive. Calling out serves two primary purposes: It lets that person know that they're being oppressive and lets others know that that person was being oppressive. By letting others know that this person's behavior is oppressive and unacceptable, more people are able to hold them accountable. When staying silent about injustice often means being complicit in

Note from the Editors: This is our first publication of a Zoom transcript—a format uniquely situated to illuminate some of the ways we met and made community in 2020. The virtual format may also be recognized as illustrating another Creative Text | Creative Tradition. Similar to interviews published in previous issues, some edits were made for clarity, but many informal, conversational moments remain.

Student presenters featured in this transcript are Frederica Simmons, Amber Delgado, Rachel Weiher, Eve Wasylik, Adem Ojulu, Olivia Tjokrosetio, and Shukrani Nangwala.

Journal of Folklore and Education (2021: Vol. 8)

The Urban Art Mapping Project: A Discussion of Street Art Preservation and Antiracism

by Frederica Simmons, Amber Delgado, Rachel Weiher, Eve Wasylik, Adem Ojulu, Olivia Tjokrosetio, Shukrani Nangwala, Heather Shirey, Paul Lorah, and David Todd Lawrence

oppression, calling out lets someone know that what they're doing won't be condoned. Calling out aims to get this oppressive person to stop that behavior. "Calling in," however, seeks to do this with compassion, which is really our goal.

Amber: It's important to begin with centering on the limitations of antiracism and lay groundwork for how the term hasn't been as effective as it could be. To begin to imagine what cultivating an antiracist university means, it's important to ask the

questions: Who created racist universities and, therefore, who is to take on the labor of creating antiracist universities? Often within institutional spaces, there is an unspoken reliance on and expectation for BIPOC to make legible what white supremacy has rendered illegible or plainly not of importance. This unspoken expectation of BIPOC to spell out and pinpoint trauma, historically and in the present moment, creates an imbalance of existence within institutional life. There is an expectation of dual labor for BIPOC to do their own work while also salvaging the institution away from its foundational histories through translating their lived experiences. The summer of 2020 brought us to a specific moment when the performance of institutional solidarity has become incentivized. I struggle with the frequent use of "antiracism," as it's often used as an abstract term without a universal understanding of what all the term entails. This abstract term is often understood to be innately positive and aspirational. However, to achieve the changes the term implies, it's necessary to take account of the structures that perpetuate racism. Our team thinks that a serious call for structures against racism must also center abolition as well.

"I picture 'calling in' as a practice of pulling folks back in who have strayed from us. It means extending to ourselves the reality that we will and do make mistakes, we stray, and there will always be a chance for us to return. Calling in is a practice of loving each other enough to allow each other to make mistakes, a practice of loving ourselves enough to know what we're trying to do here is a radical unlearning of everything that we have been configured to believe is normal."

—Ngoc Leon Tran (2016)

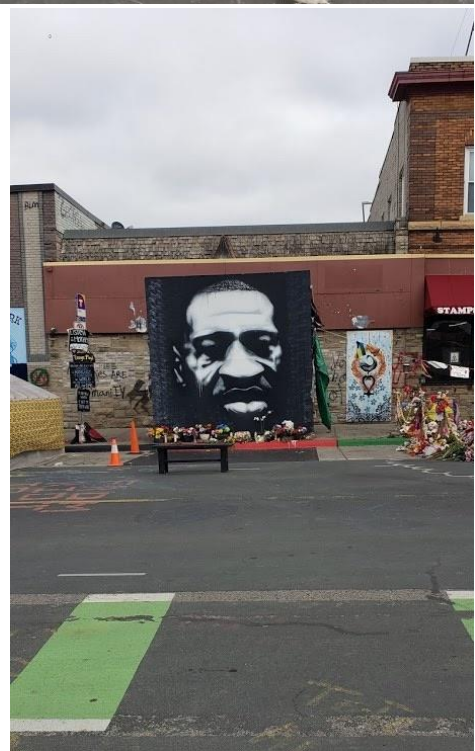
We would also like to highlight the importance of a citational practice within academic spaces. We recognize that we are in a particularly vulnerable space being students, and our ideas—increasingly so for BIPOC—can be consumed and reappropriated without our permission or consent. Our team values engagement and a citational learning practice where we respect who we learn from, specifically with regard to lived experiences, and we ask that those who attend this presentation do the same.

Social Context and the Urban Art Mapping Project

Adem: Now that we've centered our presentation around the political framework that we're working from, it's also important that we acknowledge the time that we're living in. The Twin Cities have stood witness to a year of violence against Black bodies like no other. In the wake of not only George Floyd's murder on May 2, 2020, but also Dolal Idd on December 30, 2020,¹ and Daunte Wright on April 11, 2021,² people took to the streets to create in words and images a visual record of the movement through protest art. The Urban Art Mapping team allows a diverse range of students to confront the tyranny of institutionalized brutality in the Twin Cities.

Rachel: The Urban Art Mapping Project collects images of street art in response to social inequalities. Our team consists of professors, student researchers, and interns working across disciplines to create a record of stories being told within visual landscapes across both the Twin Cities specifically and the world at large. We believe in collecting, researching, and archiving antiracist street art to dismantle systemic racism. These archived works remain open to the public while functioning as a fluid historical account of a global uprising.

Works range from documenting how pieces have changed, such as this large mural by Peyton Scott Russell in George Floyd Square,³ documented first June 15, 2020 (see right); then February 27, 2021; and last, April 11, 2021 (see below).



Peyton Scott Russell's *Icon of a Revolution* at George Floyd Square, documented by Heather Shirey, June 15, 2020 (top), and by Rachel Weiher February 27, 2021, and April 11, 2021 (bottom images).

Journal of Folklore and Education (2021: Vol. 8)

The Urban Art Mapping Project: A Discussion of Street Art Preservation and Antiracism
by Frederica Simmons, Amber Delgado, Rachel Weiher, Eve Wasylik, Adem Ojulu, Olivia Tjokrosetio, Shukrani Nangwala, Heather Shirey, Paul Lorah, and David Todd Lawrence



Unknown, *Mama*, documented by Heather Shirey, June 2, 2020, University Ave. West, St. Paul.

And lastly, we are documenting reactivated works by Black-led organizations such as Visual Black Justice and Memorialize the Movement. These are pictures that we have documented of the murals being reactivated March 8, 2021, the first day of jury selection for the trial of Derek Chauvin at the Hennepin County Courthouse.

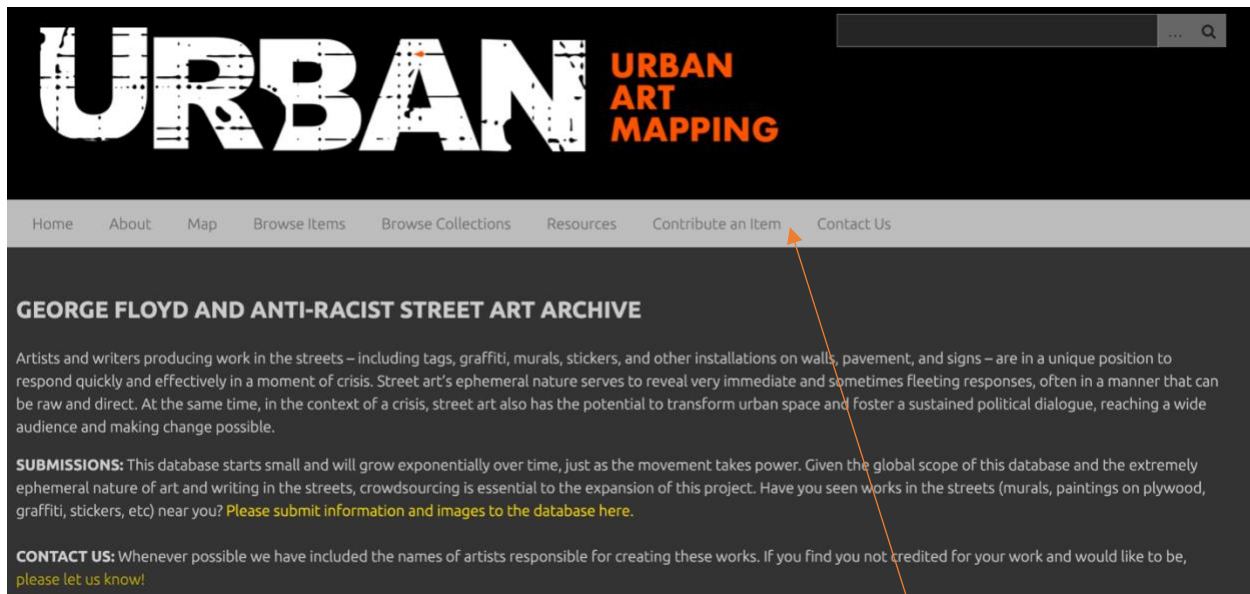
Some hugely impactful graffiti is only understood within the contextualization of George Floyd's murder, such as this anonymous writing, "Mama," recorded in St. Paul June 2, 2020.



Murals reactivated March 8, 2021, the first day of jury selection for the Derrick Chauvin trial, in front of the Hennepin County Government Center, Minneapolis, documented by Heather Shirey.

Talking a bit about the ethical archiving of public art—documenting while respecting space—is especially applicable when visiting sacred spaces such as George Floyd Square or other sites where BIPOC individuals have been murdered. This means that we're only taking pictures when necessary, and we are respecting the rules and the space in general.

Documenting while respecting privacy is also important—this includes privacy of homes and of individuals. This is especially relevant when we're looking at protests and not including any faces that could be further implicated. We see this project as an act of resistance. We are documenting things that the city would maybe rather we not document and keep as a historical archive of what's happening. And last, continued group discussions and accountability are necessary. We meet weekly or more, if needed, to talk about what we're doing, why it's important, and ways that we can better ourselves.



Screen capture of the George Floyd and Anti-Racist Street Art Database home page.

About the Database

Eve: The George Floyd and Anti-racist Street Art database preserves and analyzes street art from around the world combating systemic racism and demanding equality and justice. It uses metadata such as the date of documentation, geolocations, and theme descriptions. It is freely available as a resource for students, educators, activists, and artists. While the project has its roots in the Twin Cities, we are actively collecting submissions from around the world. For example, images of George Floyd, accompanied by the text “I Can’t Breathe” have appeared on walls from Brazil to Syria, as have text and images criticizing the militarization of the police, memorializing names of the countless victims of racially motivated violence, calling for structural change, social justice, and an end to racism.

The ephemeral nature of street art gives it the unique ability to be adapted by artists and community members, changing with new events. A piece entered into the database multiple times can reflect what happened in the world around it. Preserving these reactions and actions gives evidence to parts of history that

How to submit your image to the Omeka database

When opening the database, find the “contribute an item” button on the top menu navigation. Descriptions of your submission should be detailed but will vary depending on what is being contributed. An entry of a detailed set of plywood boards would need more description and possibly more contextual information than a piece of written BLM graffiti. If the artist’s name isn’t known, you can move on to the next field. The title of your entry doesn’t have to be creative or original, it serves as another description or summary of the entry. When entering the address where your picture was taken, it is very important to follow this order so the entry can be mapped correctly: street address, city, state, and country. When available, enter the contact information of the artist so they may be contacted about the use of their work in the database. Artists are informed about the educational purposes of the database, and their artwork would be removed at any point if its place in the database was against their wishes. This contact information can include social media if known.

Journal of Folklore and Education (2021: Vol. 8)

The Urban Art Mapping Project: A Discussion of Street Art Preservation and Antiracism
by Frederica Simmons, Amber Delgado, Rachel Weiher, Eve Wasylik, Adem Ojulu, Olivia Tjokrosetio,
Shukrani Nangwala, Heather Shirey, Paul Lorah, and David Todd Lawrence

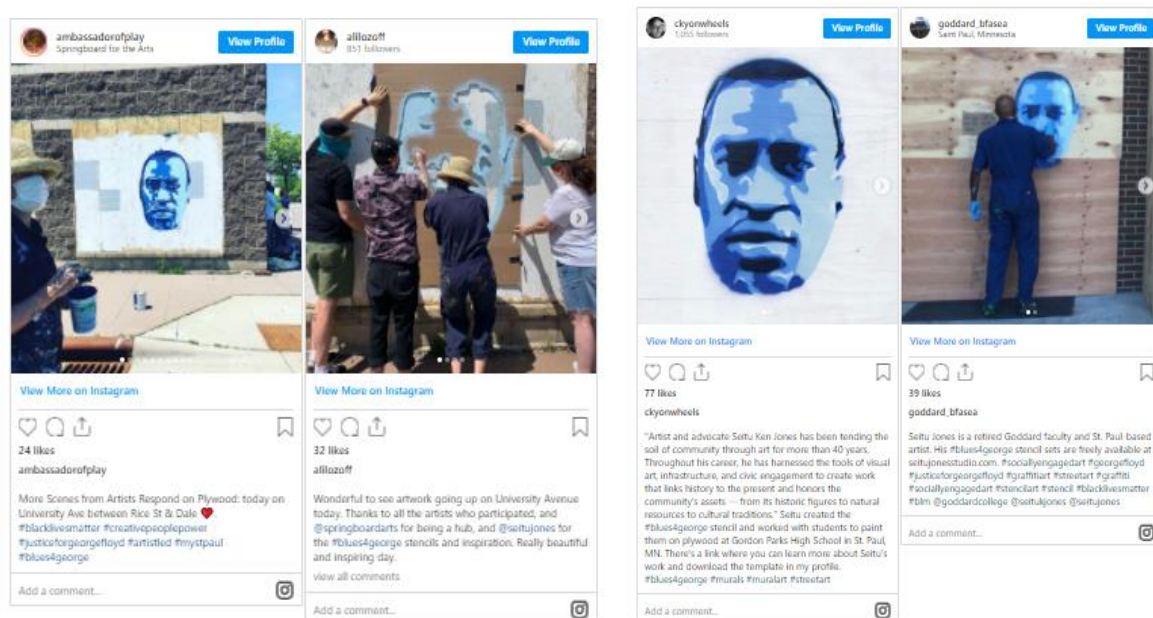
may be lost with the physical art were it not documented. This is why the date of documentation is so important.

Spatial Analysis and Highlighting Community Stories

Shukrani: Understanding communities through street art—we're able to do this by interviewing artists in the community about the work they produce and why they do so.

One artist we interviewed was Seitu Jones about what happened last year during the pandemic and the George Floyd incident. He enacted a social movement by bringing people together to work and produce art. He offered a blue stencil of George Floyd people could download and post it wherever they wanted. You can see in this Instagram post that he gathered a lot of support. In addition to the work that he was trying to support with “Blues for George,” he made a comment that really stood out to me: “One of the tenets of the many different philosophies that I glommed onto in the 60s and 70s...is that you should leave your community more beautiful than you've found it—and that's what I strive for in all of my work, wherever that work is.”

What he said really stuck out to me as an artist as well because it showed why antiracist street art is not only just talking to individuals who don't agree with you. It's also about trying to make the communities where you live more livable and highlighting the stories within them.



Screen capture of Instagram posts of #BluesforGeorge stencil in use. Stencil and instructions can be found at <https://seitujonesstudio.com/blues4george>.

Olivia: I'd like to talk about the impact of story maps and why we use story maps. You can see on the right side there's a screen grab of a current story map that that my professors and I are working on for the team. Story maps have three main contributions. First, they combine elements and storytelling with interviews and maps as well as images into a cohesive big picture. Second, story maps provide a visual representation of artworks combined with bite-sized information for

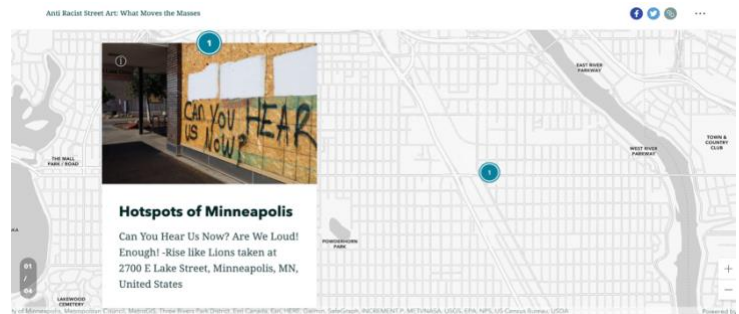
Journal of Folklore and Education (2021: Vol. 8)

The Urban Art Mapping Project: A Discussion of Street Art Preservation and Antiracism

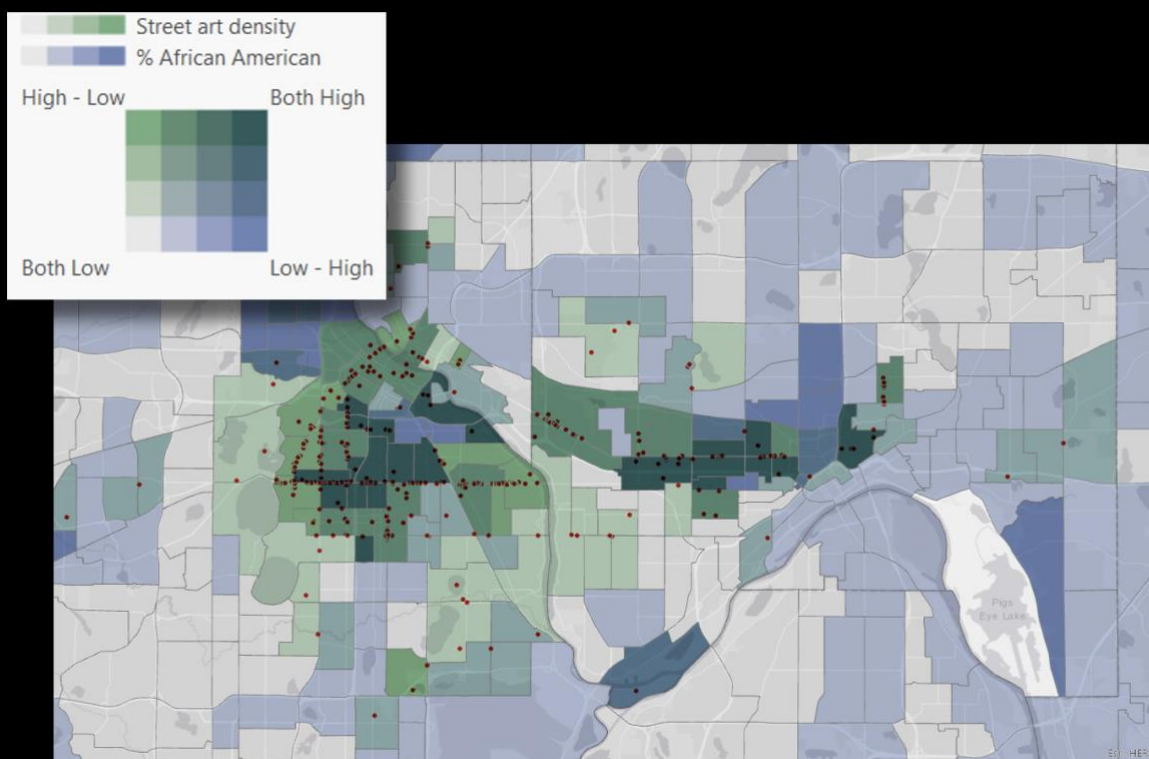
by Frederica Simmons, Amber Delgado, Rachel Weiher, Eve Wasylik, Adem Ojulu, Olivia Tjokrosetio, Shukrani Nangwala, Heather Shirey, Paul Lorah, and David Todd Lawrence

viewers. And third, they bridge the gap between the academic and the informal and this allows us to engage in discourse.

Because our database is so big, it's difficult to see or connect ideas or variables together, and story maps bring all these interesting nuances with artists and street art together. You can see on the next image an example of qualitative analysis of artwork in Black and white neighborhoods.



Professor Lorah, one of the faculty directors of our team, created this map. There is a difference in the amount of street art in Black and white neighborhoods. Now, we can analyze this in a way where we look at the amount of street art in these neighborhoods, as well as the type and tone of messages of these artworks in areas of government-centered places and at the epicenter of George Floyd's death, like 38th and Chicago and at the Hennepin County Government Center where Derek Chauvin's trial was held.



Map showing street art density and percentage of African American residency by neighborhood in the Twin Cities metro area. Map created by Paul Lorah.

In the next images, we can also see further analysis—pictures that have also been taken from our story map, where hot spots in Black and white neighborhoods differ. In the first picture is the Sherwin-Williams paint store at the border between Black and white neighborhoods. The message says, “reform united in love,” and the second picture underneath a storefront located a Black neighborhood says, “Mama, I can't breathe,” and “Don't let them change the narrative.”

We can very clearly see the difference in tone between these two pictures. The first calls for solidarity and unity together, while the second is direct in its call for change.



Sherwin-Williams store on Lake Street in Minneapolis, documented by Froukje Akkerman, June 6, 2020.



Hook Fish and Chicken on Lake Street in Minneapolis, documented by Sally Pemberton, July 1, 2020.



Poster on the south side of Cup Foods at George Floyd Square (L). Documented by Lisa Keith, June 5, 2020.



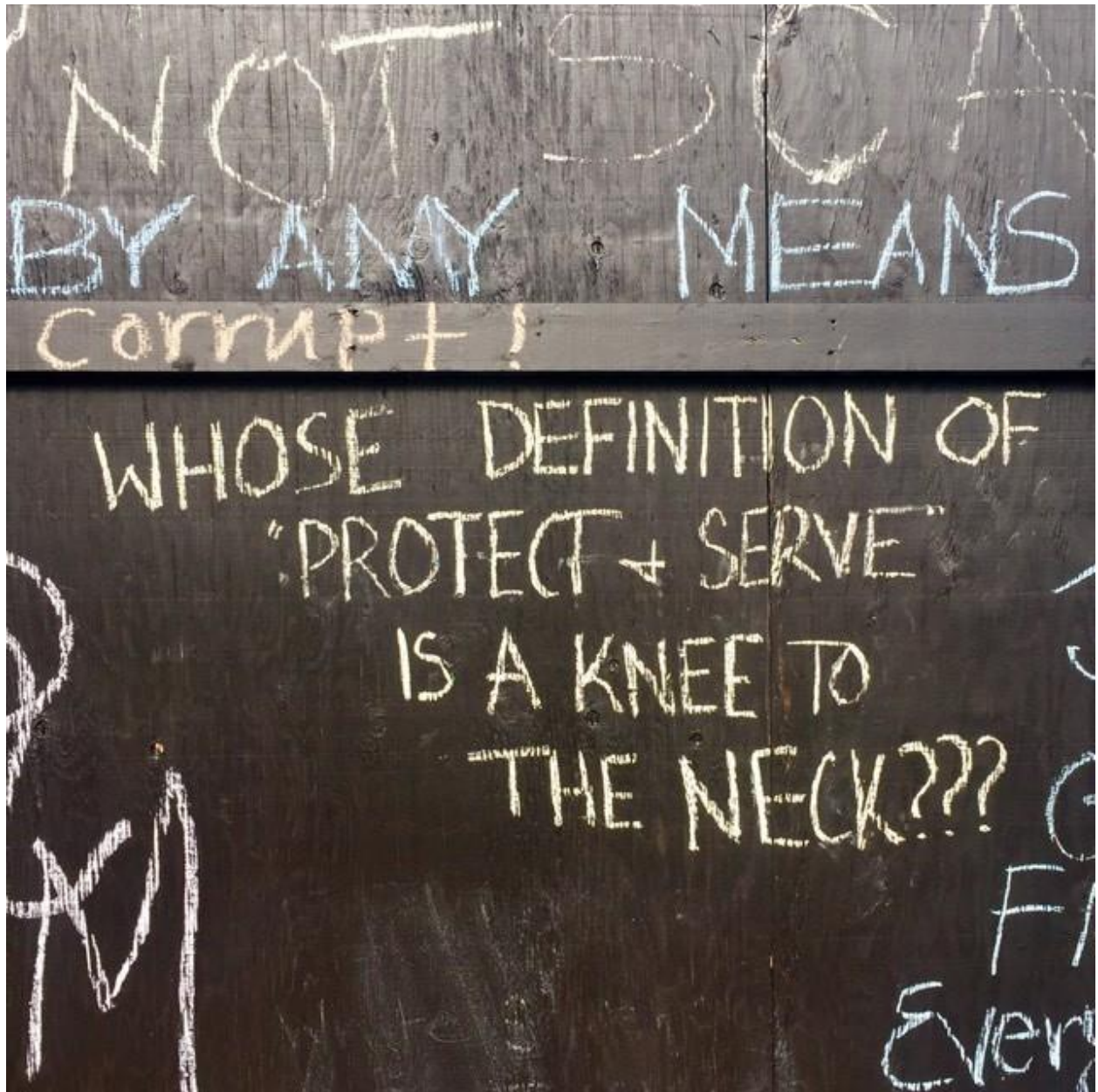
Ana Freeberg (artist), *George Floyd-Father*, propped against a signpost at George Floyd Square (R). Documented by Sally Pemberton, June 4, 2020.

Next, we highlight two pictures documented around George Floyd Square. The messages call for change and also take on a tone that is not passive. There is a need for this kind of intersectional activism and a striving for change. What story maps can do is highlight important individual pieces in the database that allow viewers to engage with those pieces in greater context.

Shukrani: I can share the trends we noticed in the database. One of the coolest things we are able to see—which is not cool, but sad actually. You can notice the difference in income level between the neighborhoods where you find the art. If you're in North Minneapolis or uptown, the art is very pretty. It's very empowering, lots of beautiful colors. If you go to areas like Midway or where it's less and less income compared to uptown, you begin to see that the messaging and the colors are very gritty. It even tells in a more realistic way what's going on in that area as opposed to other areas that are not being affected by oppression. These trends continue, and, like Olivia touched upon in her story map, you can even show the dramatic change in messaging across different areas.

Olivia: Looking through pictures from the database you can really see the differences in the tone of the messages, the emotion that comes through. The important thing to note is the immediate, visceral response that viewers have to these works. It could be as simple as a scrawl on chalkboard, like the one that said “corrupt” with an exclamation point. It was light pink against a black background.

And it was just one word, but it was so impactful. It's like you could feel all the anger and frustration that this person wrote into the word. I don't think this is extrapolating. I just feel that when it comes to street art, because it's so raw, because it's so emotional, and because it's so immediate, it is what it is, and there's no pretense. There's nothing quote/unquote pretty about it. It's just out there for you to see, for you to feel, for you to acknowledge. That's what really stood out to me as we've all been documenting these works of art.



Writing in chalk on a barricade outside the Hennepin County Government Center, documented by Sally Pemberton, March 3, 2021.



Urban Art Mapping and Memorialize the Movement teams.

Community Partnerships and the Importance of Core Values

Frederica: When thinking about how to strive for authenticity when building community partnerships, an issue that often arises in institutions built on a foundation of white supremacy—whether it be implicit or explicit—when attempting to become antiracist, lies in the efforts that follow the initiation of that endeavor. It's more than fair to say that once an institution has realized that it has been racist, and would now like to become antiracist, it seeks to activate its programming initiatives to fall in line with this

goal. This often means that institutions will blindly seek diversity but ultimately fail to attain it. This is most common when it comes to hiring initiatives, but it's also frequently seen when institutions are governed by their position as public-facing organizations that value the perception of only certain communities. These institutions often maintain the pretense that they are community-facing, which should mean that they not only value community feedback, but that they also exist to serve the entire community. It is easy for institutions, even with the best intentions, however, to fall back into white supremacist tendencies when seeking culturally and racially diverse partnerships, often to the point that they perpetuate further harm instead of bringing forward the positive change that they intend, but again, fail to execute. We, the Urban Art Mapping team, strive to develop authentic partnerships within the community, watering the seeds of connection through our commitment to the work and following the growth wherever it leads.

Adem: Our community partner is Memorialize the Movement,⁴ founded by Leesa Kelly. Memorialize the Movement began during a Minneapolis Global Shapers meeting when Leesa was brainstorming how the group could contribute to the response following the murder of George Floyd last spring and the uprising that followed. It took shape as a grassroots organization with the mission of collecting and preserving plywood artwork created in the wake of that difficult spring. With the help and guidance of the Minnesota African American Heritage Museum and Gallery and through the partnership with Save the Boards, Memorialize the Movement's growing team of volunteers around the Twin Cities began to collect many plywood murals from businesses and artists to save and collect as many as possible.

Since July of 2020, they have collected over 750 boards, now stored in a climate-controlled space at the Northrup-King Building, a large arts complex, until they establish a more permanent space. Their long-term plan is to build a public memorial space so that this Black narrative is preserved and accessible to the public. The partnership between the Urban Art Mapping Project and Memorialize the Movement began in January 2021, when the Urban Art Mapping team came out to support them in digitally archiving their boards.

Journal of Folklore and Education (2021: Vol. 8)

The Urban Art Mapping Project: A Discussion of Street Art Preservation and Antiracism
by Frederica Simmons, Amber Delgado, Rachel Weiher, Eve Wasylik, Adem Ojulu, Olivia Tjokrosetio,
Shukrani Nangwala, Heather Shirey, Paul Lorah, and David Todd Lawrence

In February 2021, three of us on the graduate team began supporting Leesa more directly on her dream of creating an exhibit ([learn more](#)). They've been working to showcase all the different works that folks have created within the past year. What's important to note with this partnership specifically is the organic nature of the collections that we've created. Both parties benefit from the work that we're able to do together. And through this process, we've been able to create a strong foundation of trust that will be really important as we continue this work in the future.

We have listed the core values to highlight how they dovetail with the Urban Art Mapping team's values. Often, we as academics have many ideas that we would like to go ahead and run with but don't look to the community to see what folks are doing already on the ground. This partnership is a great example in that we're able to uplift an organization and help embolden their voice rather than speak over them.

Audience Question: I have a question...my family is from up north, and on Facebook I'm getting a lot of, you know, thin blue line—stand with the police, that kind of posts. Have there been those kinds of street art messages almost as a counter to the George Floyd?

Frederica: I'm sure that there are instances of street art supporting that more racist/pro-police stance. In our work, I don't think that it's possible for us to have an antiracist society while still having police. Abolition is necessary. Therefore, there are no pro-police related works in the antiracist street art database. That's not in line with the goals. Although we are encompassing all antiracist street art in this work, it originated with George Floyd and George Floyd was murdered by a police officer who was acting on his duty.

Rachel: We do encounter racist graffiti and murals have been defaced. This recently happened in Minneapolis where offensive language was written over a George Floyd mural. We document those changes. However, we do not publish those racist works, but we make sure that we have that information because that is a part of what's happening in our nation right now. That's not what this database publicly archives. We have that information because part of what we look at is change. And change in our work doesn't necessarily mean something that's hopeful or positive.

The Personal and Educational Impact of the Database

Audience Question: I'm a St. Thomas alum and live out of state and I'm an art teacher. I'd like to contribute some things. Do I need to contact the artist beforehand, since it's an actual database? And do I need to research the description of it from the artist's words?

Memorialize the Movement

Core Values:

- Racial Justice
- Equitable Access
- Transparency
- Historical Preservation
- Community
- Uplifting Black Artists and Arts Organizations

IG: @memorializethemovement
memorializethemovement.com

Frederica: We don't require anyone submitting a piece to the database to have secured the artist's permission or approval themselves. There are a couple of reasons for this. Often what you'll see if you go through the database are a lot of works that are really simple tags that aren't a whole elaborate mural, but just a brief moment of someone writing something and continuing to move forward. And in that instance, you wouldn't be able to identify the artist. But the more data, the better. The more exposure we can give these artists, the better. So, if you are able to find them, great. We'd love for you to include that, but I don't want people to feel discouraged from sharing just because they don't know who created it.

Rachel: We double back and make sure that the archive does support those artists and that we have their permission to include the works. When you submit a work, it is marked as private until we publicly put that out there. We double check information. You do not need to ask an artist to provide a description. We've found it's a great educational tool to have students create their own descriptions. I know that Dr. Shirey has activated this educational tool with other universities and projects to make sure that people are able to create work and create their own labels and their own language and submit that to the database. So, we absolutely encourage you to use that as an educational tool and as a way to engage the community.

Shukrani: I would say another cool thing I have learned from this whole project is how to notice tones and nuances within street art. When it comes to using this database in the classroom, I have experience taking a class that focused on highlighting the stylistic similarities in art pieces and literary pieces from the same era. So, with this database what you could essentially do is compare works in it to news headlines, stories, and social media posts from 2020 to uncover intriguing similarities.

What has been the personal impact you have experienced as students doing this archival work?

Frederica: I am born and raised in Minneapolis. I am biracial, and from a very young age, my father would express to me that Minnesota was the most racist place that he has ever lived. And as a child, I didn't understand what that meant... So, I had always been acutely aware that there was a problem, but I have the privilege of being light skinned, and I'll fully acknowledge that this is absolutely something that protected me from racism for a long time. To know that this racism has always existed here and plagued the people who matter the most to me and have to have the intersection where George Floyd was murdered be so directly close to home shook me to my core in a way that I still can't fully verbalize. So, for me, this project means being able to preserve a movement that nobody wants to acknowledge and to have the opportunity to share our stories and make them widely accessible... it means the world to me.

Shukrani: This project has been a very eye-opening experience because I'm an international student from Tanzania. Most of us have dark skin color so I'm used to seeing myself everywhere. To come to a country and become the minority was a new experience to me. By coming to this project, I got firsthand experience in the streets, interviewing people and hearing stories that I had not had access to. By gaining all this context, I now have an understanding that there are stories that need to be heard, and there are also forces working to suppress these stories.

After that, you could guide your students through an individual or collective journey that leads them through a visual and literary timeline that shines light on the tones and nuances found within the stories in the George Floyd movement. This could consist of a timeline with news, art from the database, and stories from various publications reacting to the movement. As a result, your students will finish this experience with an in-depth personal and contextual takeaway of the importance of the movement.

Frederica: We're working toward putting as much context as possible on all our records. That's a retroactive endeavor so it's going to take us quite some time. But, for example, if a work is referencing Breonna Taylor, we want to include in our description a concise but clear explanation of what happened to Breonna. We want to make sure that we are highlighting these stories and including them as part of our narrative. So that's not just, *oh, look at the art*, but *what is this art talking about?*

Conclusion

This conversation is similar to those our team has been having with students and teachers all across the country and around the world. We always envisioned this project as a collaborative one that relies on the contributions of community partners, organizations, and individuals. The ongoing success of the Urban Art Mapping Project depends on regular everyday people—community members, students, teachers, researchers, and others—seeing art in the streets and responding to the critical discourse that street art offers. It also depends on people's willingness to take street art seriously and understand it as an important mode of communication and expression. Our project is driven by a recognition of the importance of vernacular expression rooted in community identity, practices, and beliefs. We believe that walls speak and that we all should be listening, paying attention to art in public places that activates space and reveals critical conversations of voices that often go unheard or ignored.

Most importantly, this conversation demonstrates the educational and transformational potential that comes from encouraging students to engage with vernacular art and expression. Members of our team, from our high school intern to our graduate student researchers, have been profoundly affected by this work. In addition to members of our team, we have engaged with students and teachers from high schools and colleges in the Twin Cities and across the nation, inviting them to conduct research using our databases and to help us in our work of documenting and archiving street art. It is our hope that opportunities to share and connect with students and teachers across the country will lead to more people being influenced by the amazing work of street artists, trained and untrained, whose creative texts serve as a critical discourse accompanying an ongoing movement for racial equity and justice.

We further invite readers to join us by being on the lookout for street art including BLM tags, graffiti writing, stickers, spray-painted images, light projections, wheat-paste posters, or murals. Anything painted on, projected, or affixed to the built environment that addresses police violence or antiracism is of interest. If you notice any art in the streets, snap a picture on your phone and upload it to our database at GeorgeFloydstreetart@omeka.net. In documenting this moment, we can all help to memorialize expression that might otherwise be buffed, painted over, or lost to time. Our work is activist, seeking to highlight those voices and not let anyone “change the narrative.”

David Todd Lawrence (he/his) is Associate Professor of English at the University of St. Thomas in St. Paul, MN, where he teaches African American literature and expressive culture, folklore studies, and cultural studies. He co-directs the Urban Art Mapping Project along with Heather Shirey and Paul Lorah.

Rachel Weiher (she/her) is a graduate student at the University of St. Thomas in the Art History and Museum Studies Department. Previously she received her Masters in Counseling through the University of Minnesota and is passionate about anti-colonial and trauma informed community care in art history.

Frederica Simmons (she/her) is a graduate student pursuing degrees in Art History and Museum Studies at St. Thomas. Her research and praxis center on historical and contemporary BIPOC artists, feminist theory, and challenging the art historical canon.

Adem Ojulu (they/she) is a graduate student in the Art History and Museum Studies department at St. Thomas. They are an abolitionist with an interest in community engagement and public history.

Olivia Tjokrosetio (she/her) is an undergraduate student in the Psychology and Family Studies department at the University of St Thomas. She is interested in understanding the complex racial climate here in the United States and as an international student, seeks to advocate for the BIPOC community.

Heather Shirey (she/her) is Professor of Art History at the University of St. Thomas in Saint Paul, Minnesota. Her teaching and research focus on race and identity, migrations and diasporas, and street art and its communities. Together with Todd Lawrence and Paul Lorah, she co-directs the Urban Art Mapping Project.

Amber Delgado (they/she) is a graduate student at the University of Minnesota pursuing a Masters Degree in Heritage Studies and Public History. Their research interests include Black feminist theory, gentrification, and the politics of public space.

Paul Lorah (he/his) is an Associate Professor of Geography at the University of Saint Thomas in the department of Earth, Environment and Society. His teaching and research interests range from environmental economics to the geography of street art. He co-directs the Urban Art Mapping Project along with Heather Shirey and Todd Lawrence.

Shukrani Nangwala (he/his) recently graduated from the University of St. Thomas with a Bachelor's in Marketing and a minor in Data Analytics. His interests include photography, videography and economics.

Eve Wasylik (she/her) is a junior attending high school in St. Paul, and has been a student research collaborator with Urban Art Mapping since November 2020. She is passionate about queer history, theory and musical composition.

Endnotes

¹ Somali American Dolal Idd, age 23, was killed by Minneapolis police officers at a gas station in South Minneapolis December 3, 2020. According to police, officers stopped Idd in his car and had probable cause to suspect he was in possession of an illegal gun. His killing quickly became a rallying point for protests and vigils at the gas station where the incident occurred. Idd was the first person killed by Minneapolis police following the murder of George Floyd six months earlier. See Yuen, Moini, and Feshir, “Here’s What We Know About the Fatal Shooting Outside a Minneapolis Gas Station,” <https://www.mprnews.org/story/2021/01/01/heres-what-we-know-about-the-fatal-police-shooting-outside-a-minneapolis-gas-station>.

² Daunte Wright was killed by Brooklyn Center police officers April 11, 2021. Brooklyn Center is a suburb of Minneapolis about 14 miles north of George Floyd Square (38th St. and Chicago Ave.). Wright was also killed during a traffic stop. While on the phone with his mother during the stop he told her he believed he had been stopped for having an air freshener hanging from his rearview mirror. He was shot by an officer during a struggle in which she claimed to have mistakenly fired her gun instead of her taser. The killing of Daunte Wright was followed by weeks of demonstrations and protests at the site of his killing and at the Brooklyn Center police department building. For more, see: <https://www.nytimes.com/article/daunte-wright-death-minnesota.html>.

³ George Floyd Square is a spontaneous memorial honoring George Floyd at the intersection of 38th St. and Chicago Ave. in Minneapolis, the site where George Floyd was murdered. The intersection has been blocked off to traffic since people started to gather, bring offerings, and create art. Today George Floyd Square is a site of memorialization, community gathering, social justice and mutual aid work, artistic expression, and ongoing protest. Volunteers tend to the site daily, led by Jeanelle Austin, a native of Minneapolis who returned to her neighborhood to care for the site. For more, see Carlson, “Improbable Joy,” <https://nationsmedia.org/improbable-joy-jeanelle-austin-speaks-out-about-george-floyd> and Ajasa, “‘It’s for the People’: How George Floyd Square Became a Symbol of Resistance--And Healing,” <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2021/mar/27/its-for-the-people-how-george-floyd-square-became-a-symbol-of-resistance-and-healing>.

⁴ Kenda Zellner-Smith and Leesa Kelly started the organizations Save the Boards and Memorialize the Movement separately to collect and preserve plywood boards following the George Floyd Uprising. They eventually joined together to form Save the Boards to Memorialize the Movement and collected over 900 boards. Recently they have decided to pursue their work as separate organizations.

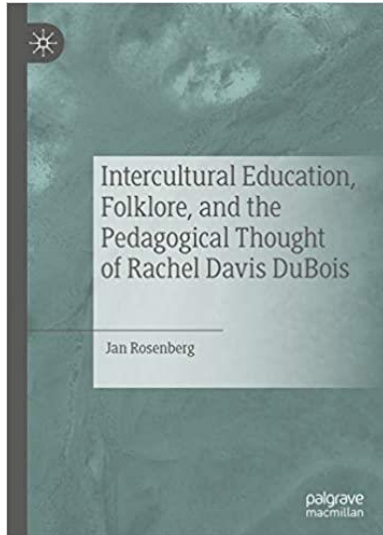
Embedded URLs

<https://www.memorializethemovement.com/2021-exhibition>

Works Cited

- Ajasa, Amudalat. 2021 “It’s For the People”: How George Floyd Square Became a Symbol of Resistance—and Healing.” *The Guardian*, March 28, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2021/mar/27/its-for-the-people-how-george-floyd-square-became-a-symbol-of-resistance-and-healing>. Accessed May 17, 2021.
- Carlson, Joseph. Improbable Joy: Jeanelle Austin Speaks about George Floyd, Racial Justice, and the Discipline of Hope. *Nations*, June 28, <https://nationsmedia.org/improbable-joy-jeanelle-austin-speaks-out-about-george-floyd>. Accessed May 17, 2021.
- Hall, Stuart. Constituting an Archive. 2001. *Third Text*. 54.15:89-92.
- Jones, Seitu. Personal Interview. August 11, 2020.
- Tran, Ngoc Loan. 2016. Calling IN: A Less Disposable Way of Holding Each Other Accountable. In *The Solidarity Struggle: How People of Color Succeed and Fail At Showing Up For Each Other In the Fight For Freedom*, ed. Mia McKenzie. BGD Press, 59-63.
- What to Know About the Death of Daunte Wright. 2021 *New York Times*, April 23, <https://www.nytimes.com/article/daunte-wright-death-minnesota.html>. Accessed May, 17, 2021.
- Yuen, Laura, Nina Moini, and Riham Feshir. 2021. Here’s What We Know about the Fatal Police Shooting Outside a Minneapolis Gas Station. MPR News, January 1, <https://www.mprnews.org/story/2021/01/01/heres-what-we-know-about-the-fatal-police-shooting-outside-a-minneapolis-gas-station>. Accessed May 17, 2021.

Journal of Folklore and Education Reviews



Intercultural Education, Folklore, and the Pedagogical Thought of Rachel Davis DuBois, by Jan Rosenberg
(Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019, xvii + 147 pp.)

James I. Deutsch is a curator and editor with the Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage in Washington, DC.

Rachel Davis DuBois (1892–1993) was a pioneering figure who worked to promote better understanding among peoples of different faiths, races, and cultures. Although she did not identify herself as a folklorist, her contributions and legacy are especially relevant for folklorists working in education today, as Jan Rosenberg demonstrates in this highly useful volume.

As someone who has worked in the field of folklore and education since 1980, Rosenberg seems ideally suited to the task. Although she first encountered DuBois' work following the completion of her dissertation in the mid-1980s, Rosenberg did not immediately pursue the topic in depth. She candidly admits, "I was prejudiced, feeling that folklore and education as folklorists were practicing it like I did in the 1980s/1990s was better than what Rachel was doing" (12). It was not until 2009 that Rosenberg "realized just how wrong I was. Rachel was an innovator who knew how to work the education system, and she understood the need to develop a variety of programs that would impact the students, adults, administrators, and community members as equals" (12).

Following years of additional research in primary and secondary sources, the published result is "an account of one person's ideals, ideas, and practices aimed to develop critical thinking over a period of time" (6). One of the book's highlights is seeing some of the parallels between the careers and contributions of DuBois and Rosenberg. As the latter explains, "FAIE [folk arts in education] as I do it mirrors in part Intercultural Education as Rachel ultimately saw it: as a means by which to encourage social justice in a pluralistic world through tight and respectful coordination" (73). Similarly, Rosenberg observes that "the work of the folklorist in the schools requires the wearing of different hats and the ability to use those hats at any given moment" (74), just as DuBois was extraordinarily versatile: an educator (teaching high school for many years), writer, social reformer, Quaker, and passionate advocate for interracial and interfaith dialogue, diversity training, pacifism, ethnic awareness, and intercultural education.

Intercultural education, as defined by Rosenberg, involves "celebrating through exploration 'heaven on earth' peopled with culturally different individuals whose heterogeneity possessed qualities of similarity that could be foregrounded in such a way that difference blended into homogeneity that didn't threaten the individual or the group" (17). The syntax of this sentence—even knowing that the term "heaven on earth" comes from Quaker belief—may perplex some

readers. It also exposes the book's primary shortcoming: the lack of thorough copyediting and fact-checking. Moreover, several instances of quoted material and page citations are incorrect.

Nevertheless, the book's benefits certainly outweigh these shortcomings. Folklorists working in education should find much value in DuBois's insights and pedagogical methods, thanks to Rosenberg's recognition of those assets and their intersections with contemporary efforts to promote folklore in education, folk artists in the schools, and folk arts in education. DuBois' championing of cultural democracy seems especially prescient and pertinent at this time. Writing in 1941, DuBois observed that "the total defense of our democracy" requires "a recognition of the part each group has played in the building of our country . . . sharing with each other the best of our traditions, customs, and folkways" (107). *Intercultural Education, Folklore, and the Pedagogical Thought of Rachel Davis DuBois* animates the goals that DuBois sought throughout her life: "eradicating prejudice," "building friendship," and developing "a feeling that we are parts of all humanity and its accomplishments" (106-7).



Teaching Gloria E. Anzaldúa: Pedagogy and Practice for Our Classrooms and Communities. Margaret Cantú-Sánchez, Candace de León-Zepeda, and Norma E. Cantú, eds. (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2020, 341 pp.)

Jennifer Barajas is Associate Professor of Spanish and Linguistics, Bradley University.

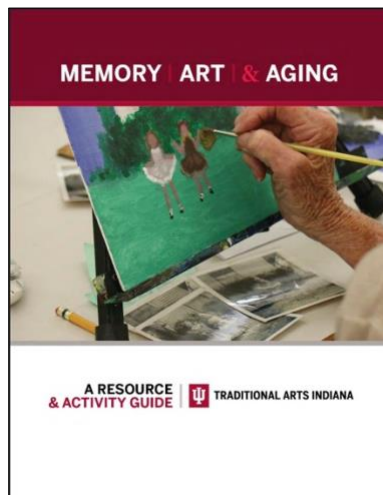
Teaching Gloria E. Anzaldúa is a masterful collection of the myriad of ways in which educators from a variety of fields can incorporate the insights and ideas of Anzaldúa. From composition to philosophy courses, the authors present creative pedagogies that support all students, with a special focus on the cultural competence of our most marginalized students, and encourage educators to "do work that matters," to use Anzaldúa's own words.

Part I is organized into six chapters that propose interdisciplinary approaches to curriculum design and specific classroom strategies that move away from the idea that students should simply quietly *receive* knowledge. Instead, by introducing Anzaldúa's concepts such as *Nepantla* ("a liminal space where transformations can occur" [18]), *testimonios* (personal narratives, typically from marginalized people), path of *conocimiento* (spiritual inquiry, the quest for knowledge beyond your own perceptions), and linguistic terrorism (discrimination based on your language or accent), the authors are able to challenge conventional ways of thinking. For example, in Chapter 5, Eli Ramirez describes an assignment in which students analyze the language used in varying situations within their own communities. As a result, "Students often take away a newfound respect for the beautiful power of language in our own lives and in society at large, realizing that as young adults they now are on the precipice of being able to demand, inform, and influence changes in the world" (84).

The eight chapters in Part II highlight current systems of oppression and recommend pedagogy and praxis that inspire students to answer the call for social justice. From classrooms in México to the United States, civilians to military students, and even by relating Anzaldúa to popular cultural icons such as Beyoncé, the authors demonstrate Anzaldúa’s multidisciplinary relevance. Students can produce compositions, poems, art, photography, and video reflections—just to name a few of the outcomes—while “asking the larger questions about race and class” (187). Indeed, in Chapter 11, García and Bleyer explain that by using primary materials from Anzaldúa’s collection, students without obvious ties to the geographical border “recognize the ways that others have been oppressed or, more profoundly, that they, too, have experienced this sense of borders in their own lives or family histories” (187). Thus, it is clear that educators, at the high school and university level, in disciplines such as English, Creative Writing, Languages, Art, Sociology, Women’s and Gender Studies (to name a few), will benefit immensely from the pedagogical ideas presented.

The five chapters in Part III offer decolonizing pedagogies, an approach that many educators across higher education are interested in integrating into their classrooms. For example, in Chapter 17, Wilson teaches about “oppression on both personal and social levels” (275) and shares detailed lessons and step-by-step action plans for the classroom. In these chapters we also see the use of pre-writing and free writing as ways to move away from standard edited American English to include students’ own voices and lived experiences.

Overall, the editors have incorporated the diverse work of wonderful scholars and included specific lessons and curricula into this collection that will serve as an indispensable guide for educators in a number of disciplines. Even those who have not read Anzaldúa’s works will be inspired to read and then incorporate her teachings into their classrooms.



Memory, Art and Aging: A Resource and Activity Guide. Jon Kay, Project Director and Principal Investigator (Bloomington: Traditional Arts Indiana. 2020, 71 pp. Licensed under Creative Commons. Web version at <https://traditionalarts.indiana.edu/Resources/Memory-Art-Aging-lowres.pdf>)

Susan Eleuterio is an independent folklorist and educator and adjunct faculty member in the Master's in Cultural Sustainability Program at Goucher College.

This colorful guide, available both in print and as an online PDF, is a collaborative project of Traditional Arts Indiana (TAI) along with Indiana University’s Center for Rural Engagement, Museum of Archeology and Anthropology, Arts and Humanities Council, and Department of Folklore and Ethnomusicology. TAI Director Jon Kay notes its purpose is to “leverage folk arts to improve the quality of life for older adults,” particularly by using “community-based, culturally appropriate strategies” to help address what William H. Thomas, MD, author of *What Are Old People For?* (2004. St. Louis: Vanderwyk & Burnham) has called the three plagues of aging: *isolation, boredom, and*

helplessness. As a former high school teacher, I encourage classroom teachers along with those in higher education to look at this guide for inspiration and ideas for addressing the same plagues which have affected so many of our students during this pandemic year.

While the stated purpose is to provide examples of creative expression for individual older adults as well as caregivers, elder-care professionals, and community organizations, including activity directors in group settings, many of the narratives and exercises could be used intergenerationally by families as well as schools interested in increasing family involvement. Eight units are divided into *Folklife and Later Life*, *Memory Art*, *Connecting through Music*, *Quilting and Community*, *Foodways*, *Generativity* (described as passing on traditions), *Daily Practice*, and *Show and Tell*. Each unit features specific artists and practitioners along with hands-on activities that include things to consider and/or a list of materials needed. The profiles almost always include a link to a podcast, an interview, or a video to provide additional information and context about the highlighted artist, although links in the PDF are not live. The guide has good geographical representation of Indiana, including both rural and urban cultures, although I found it surprising that there were no Hispanic/Latino individuals included since these communities represent over seven percent of the state's total population, especially in the northwest portion of the state.

Having worked with seniors for a decade as a volunteer workshop leader, I would have encouraged larger photos and less text and perhaps a place in each unit for users to write down their own responses immediately. The activities include suggestions for artists who hope to engage with seniors such as "Performing Music for Older Adults" and "Hosting a Music Jam," as well as activities family members or senior center/nursing home activity directors can use, such as listening to TAI's "Second Servings" podcasts to share memories of food. One particularly creative suggestion provides digital images of 85 quilts made by the Fort Wayne Sisters of the Cloth Quilting Guild to use for prompting discussions of colors, patterns, and images. (I would add asking participants if they still or used to sew, and if they have or had family quilts or other textiles.)

For those folklorists and educators interested in using this guide to create educational programs for seniors, I encourage using it in combination with *Sundogs and Sunflowers: An Art for Life Program Guide for Creative Aging, Health, and Wellness*, by Troyd A. Geist (2017), which not only references Jon Kay's work on Life Story Objects and Life Story Review (both of which are included in this guide) but also provides data and research about the value of this work, particularly on the role of folklore and folk art in fostering what Geist calls "creative aging." Together, these guides provide specific examples of how to engage seniors in documenting and celebrating their own lives and excellent examples of how better to connect them with their communities, including students of all ages.

Review of Digital Resources: *Belouga*, *Oddizzi*, and *Touchable Earth*

Belouga. <https://belouga.org>

Oddizzi. <https://www.oddizzi.com>

Touchable Earth. <https://www.touchableearth.org>

Sarah McCartt-Jackson is an Independent Folklorist and K-5 Educator.

The concept of global citizenship has enjoyed resurgence through the recent pandemic, as schooling shifted to an online format and as students continue to grapple with a global issue. Global citizenship requires students to explore and understand global issues from multiple perspectives; foster belonging, understanding, and respect among different cultures and beliefs; understand their place in their community; and create actionable solutions for our world. The United Nations defines global citizenship as “the umbrella term for social, political, environmental, and economic actions of globally minded individuals and communities on a worldwide scale” and includes global citizenship within its Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) (2021). Although the ways in which global citizenship are bound to folklore work are obvious, resources for those working at the intersection of folklore and education can be elusive. More specifically, *digital* resources in global citizenship for K-5 classrooms are rare and run the Goldilocks gamut between too much and too little, rarely hitting just right. Searching for digital resources for folklorists interested in using global citizenship to bring folklore into K-5 classrooms, I review three web-based resources: *Touchable Earth*, *Belouga*, and *Oddizzi*.

Two resources that offer a self-directed learning model are *Touchable Earth* and *Belouga*. In this model, asynchronous lessons are created for teachers to assign students based on student need and interest. The benefits of self-directed learning are that students learn at their own pace; students may pursue their interests; and teachers can track student progress digitally. As an educator, I find drawbacks to this model. Having students choose their own topics can hinder the student’s exposure to new topics, thereby expanding the student’s knowledge gap. Moreover, accountability for online-only learning is difficult at best. Both *Touchable Earth* and *Belouga* are websites (*Touchable Earth* also claims to have an app that I was unable to locate and download on any of my devices) whose primary goals are providing curriculum rooted in the United Nations’ SDG. I use “curriculum” loosely because the quality and type vary.

Touchable Earth was founded in 2012 by a New Zealand attorney. Interestingly, the site’s People page does not list anyone in education. The primary goal is “to promote tolerance in gender, culture, and identity.” It does this through free videos “where kids teach kids about the world.” Students start exploring by choosing one of nine geographic locations on the home page. This takes them to a series of videos ranging from 10 seconds to 4 minutes featuring young people speaking on a topic. Students can click through the videos or use the dropdown menu to navigate to a specific topic: Friends, Culture, Facts, Family, Play, and School. Although the format might appeal to young people, the short videos give the viewer barely a glimpse of the culture featured. The kids-teaching-kids model has advantages, like developing empathy and interest, but lacks important hallmarks of effective lesson planning such as pacing, scaffolding, and delivery. With its spare “curriculum,” *Touchable Earth* doesn’t live up to its lofty goal of “developing critical thinking skills essential to a lifetime of learning.”

Similarly, but more robustly, *Belouga* offers lessons based on the U.N.'s SDGs in which students learn about topics via video and create actionable plans as global citizens. Founded in 2017, *Belouga* provides lessons about topics like climate change, design thinking, and STEM through an online classroom that can be used in real time and asynchronous lessons that consist of scrolling through text, photos, and videos. Free registration includes limited lesson plans for teachers, although the "lesson plans" are simply videos with some accompanying text, while registering at \$14.99 per month allows access to the library of units and video conferencing software for live lessons and connecting with other classrooms throughout the world. The lessons are short videos (3-10 minutes) narrated by students and young people. Again, while this kids-teaching-kids model can be engaging for students, as an educational tool it has its aforementioned drawbacks. Additionally, the videos have no scaffolding or suggestions for connections to other topics. This means an elementary student who is interested in food and farming might click into that category and end up watching a video on advanced genetics. The Deep Dive Series, however, are multi-episodic and do scaffold with an ordered playlist.

Although *Belouga* provides the actionable step of global citizenship that *Touchable Earth* lacks, both websites are limited in their global scope as far as locations and cultures go and in their content.

A more complete resource for the educator (although maybe not the folklorist) in K-5 classrooms is the website *Oddizzi*. This website focuses on global citizenship through the lens of geography, and its mission is "to put geography back on the map." This resource is subscription-based, and costs £125 per year (about \$173) after a seven-day free trial. The subscription includes downloadable teacher materials such as lesson plans, assessment grids, presentations, reading packs, and interactive quizzes. Unlike the previous resources, the lesson plans are rich in detail and content and are separated by grade levels. The plans are standards-aligned, although U.K.-centric. Students and teachers can "Explore the World" through six topics: Places, Physical Features, Country Close Up, Food and Farming, Weather and Climate, and Global Knowledge. At least one content entry is listed for each continent, with "Country Close Ups" featuring Australia, Brazil, China, Egypt, France, Greece, India, Mexico, St. Lucia, Scotland, and England. "Close Ups" are divided into topics: Getting There, Compare Facts, Landscape, Climate, Animal Life, Plant Life, Living, and Tourism. Although the website offers comprehensive lesson plans that I appreciate as an educator, the website is text-heavy with stock images that often do not enrich the topic. Moreover, although teacher materials are arranged by knowledge/grade level, the website is not. Overall, the website accomplishes its goal in bringing geography into the classroom digitally, but it does not overtly address global citizenship.

In our search to expand our digital resources for folklore in K-5 classrooms, the benefits we reap primarily depend on our goal. In other words: To find the just-right resource, you first need to define your just-right purpose. Are you looking to create a workshop for K-5 students that introduces them to Chinese folk music? Are you trying to figure out new ways to connect live with students across the world to showcase an aspect of folk culture? Or are you simply looking for a quick way to help students develop their own interests? In a world glutted with apps and websites, tracking down the just-right fit for your purpose is overwhelming at the least. But at its best, the journey could end with a folklorist helping to create a resource on global citizenship that's just right for folklorists and educators alike.

2022 *Journal of Folklore and Education*

Death, Loss, and Remembrance Across Cultures: A Role for Folklore in Education

A Call for Submissions | Mark E. Helmsing and Bretton A. Varga, Guest Editors

Initial drafts due April 1, 2022.

What happens when educators have the opportunity to teach/learn about death, loss, and remembrance? Do they acknowledge or ignore these realities and experiences, including social and emotional needs of learners who encounter death, loss, and remembrance? What are the implications of avoiding or embracing opportunities to teach and learn about death and loss? How do lessons about death, loss, and remembrance unfold in educationally constructive ways across cultures and communities?

This issue aims to gather the diverse practices, approaches, and examples of people learning about death, loss, and remembrance on behalf of educators. Folklore is rich with examples of how to engage with death, loss, and remembrance. For instance, folklorist Solimar Otero describes her godmother Tomasa's saints and *orichas*, the presence of which reminded Otero of her deceased family members. Through folk practices of remembrance, this encounter touched Otero's life "in both ephemeral and tangible ways" (Otero and Martinez-Rivera, 2021, 5). Otero's example of remembrance of the deceased offers an entry point to learning about identities, histories, and communities through traditions, rituals, and culture.

In the wake of the global Covid-19 pandemic and ongoing humanitarian, ecological, and racial crises, considering ways to teach about and through death, loss, and remembrance is especially timely. Educators are seeking culturally responsive tools and approaches to help process trauma and harm. The arts and humanities can be used pedagogically, with folk arts particularly attentive to communities' life cycles and cultural rituals. Folklore includes the traditions, arts, and stories that make cultural communities unique and strengthen our social bonds. The methods of folklore—such as observation, identifying important traditions and rituals, and deep listening to diverse narratives through interviews—create opportunities for educational equity in classrooms because the study of folklife centers on students' linguistic, cultural, and social pluralities. Folklore can be a resource in helping heal from the trauma of loss and death while also aiding ongoing efforts to reckon with historical trauma from our shared histories. Such healing and reflection on loss and death can occur through cultural practices of remembrance. Across cultures, loss and absence are customarily observed through special rituals, creating and sharing stories, poems, and songs; artistic and expressive performances; and private and public displays of mourning, such as remembering loved ones with bodily tattoos or written displays on automobiles.

Studies in cultural memory suggest how ghosts and hauntings can help educators, students, artists, and folklorists become more attuned to the interconnectedness of death, loss, and remembrance. As Eve Ewing (2018) claims in her account of school closures in Chicago, "[g]host stories serve as an important counter-story; a ghost story says *something you thought was gone is still happening here*; a ghost story says *those who are dead will not be forgotten*" (154).

Learning from literature, art, music, folklore, and folklife can include experiences with touching the past, feeling the ephemerality of the present, and contemplating the future. This special issue invites contributions demonstrating cultural practices such as how communities respond to death and loss, perform memorialization and remembrance, and refer to ghosts/hauntings to communicate what is lost but not forgotten.

Essential questions that contributors may use to inspire their writing, interviews, or media submissions include questions that:

Consider traditions, art, and rituals of death, loss, and remembrance through a cultural framework

- How do various cultures and religions display, create, and promote notions of ephemerality, disappearance, and mourning to understand and attend to remembrance?
- How does art intersect with death, loss, and remembrance through exhibits and public displays within the context of social injustice (e.g., the murder of George Floyd)?
- The exploration of death through a cultural lens may include both opportunities and pitfalls for students. What frameworks and models can help in examining this topic productively and sensitively? Topics may include the role of representation in memorialization, the techniques of cultural appropriation, and the pedagogy of trauma-informed care.

Explore how ghosts and hauntings can be generative in (re)conceptualizing the world around us

- How can resources/archives juxtapose different temporal representations as rephotographs, soundscapes, and interactive documentaries (e.g., [Welcome to Pine Point](#)) as ghostly traces of memory enabling us to make sense of that which we cannot touch, yet nonetheless touches us?
- How can ghosts and hauntings help learners interrogate lasting conditions (re)producing and upholding structures of oppression (e.g., colonialism, racism, social and ecological injustice, white supremacy)?
- How might ghosts and hauntings be productive in unveiling new angles of inquiry relating to public mis/representations of history (e.g., statues, monuments, placards) perpetuating historical injustices and intolerance?
- Culturally responsive teaching asks educators to recognize students' cultural displays of learning and meaning-making (see Gloria Ladson-Billings). Culturally sustaining teaching sees culture more deeply as an asset that should be explicitly supported (see Django Paris). How can educators pair the concept of ghosts and hauntings with folklore to foster productive, compassionate spaces of cultural connectivity and sustainability?

Works Cited

- Ewing, Eve. 2018. *Ghosts in the Schoolyard: Racism and School Closings on Chicago's South Side*. University of Chicago Press.
- Otero, Solimar, and M.A. Martinez-Rivera, eds. 2021. How Does Folklore Find Its Voice in the Twenty-first Century? An Offering/Invitation from the Margins. In Solimar Otero and M.A. Martinez-Rivera, eds. *Theorizing Folklore from the Margins: Critical and Ethical Approaches*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 3-21.
-

The Journal of Folklore and Education (ISSN 2573-2072) is a publication of Local Learning: The National Network for Folk Arts in Education. Please share this announcement with colleagues and educators in your community. This endeavor is supported by the National Endowment for the Arts and donors who are interested in keeping this a free resource to educators around the world.

Guest Editors for this special issue:

Mark E. Helmsing, PhD, is Assistant Professor in the School of Education and Affiliate Faculty in the Folklore Studies Program and Department of History and Art History at George Mason University. His research works within public pedagogy, historical culture, and vernacular histories to examine how people feel about the past and how the past makes them feel. He has conducted fieldwork in schools, museums, and public spaces throughout the United States, such as the Arab-American National Museum, the American Museum of Natural History, the Smithsonian's National Museum of African American History and Culture, and National Museum of the American Indian, and internationally with learning about the Holocaust in Germany and Poland and contested public histories and memories in Cyprus.

Bretton A. Varga, PhD, is Assistant Professor of History-Social Science at California State University, Chico. His research works with(in) critical posthuman theories of race, art, and temporality to explore how visual methods and artistic mediums can be used to unveil historically marginalized perspectives and layers (upon layers) of history that haunt the world around us.

We are grateful to our Advisory Committee for their input on this special issue:

Vonzell Agosto Associate Professor of Curriculum Studies in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies, University of South Florida-Tampa

Karen Canning Founding Director, GLOW Traditions

Kaitlyn Kinney George Mason University

Lynne S. McNeill Folklore Program Chair, Utah State University

Willow Mullins American Culture Studies, Washington University in St. Louis,

Shanendra Nowell Associate Professor of Secondary Education in the School of Teaching and Curriculum Leadership, Oklahoma State University-Stillwater

Kay Turner New York University

Cathryn van Kessel Associate Professor of Social Studies and Curriculum Studies in the Faculty of Education at the University of Alberta

Monique Verdin Multimedia artist and author and member of the United Houma Nation

More about Submissions: We seek submissions of articles, model projects, multimedia products, teaching applications, and student work accompanied by critical writing that connects to the larger frameworks of this theme. We particularly welcome submissions inclusive of perspectives and voices from underrepresented communities. Co-authored articles that include teachers, students, administrators, artists, or community members offer opportunities for multiple points of view on an educational program or a curriculum. We publish articles that share best practices, offer specific guides or plans for implementing folklore in education, and articulate theoretical and critical frameworks. We invite educators to share shorter pieces for "Notes from the Field." Nonconventional formats are also welcomed, such as lesson plans, worksheets, and classroom exercises. Media submissions, including short film and audio clips, will also be considered. When considering a submission, we recommend reviewing [previous issues of JFE](#). We encourage authors to contact the editors at www.locallearningnetwork.org/contact-us with ideas for stories, features, lessons, and media productions. Research-based writing that theorizes, evaluates, or assesses programs that use folklore in education tools and practice are also welcomed. These research articles may intersect with the theme, but all submissions with a research component will be considered. We expect that, regardless of the format, all projects presented in submissions will have appropriate institutional permissions for public dissemination before submission to JFE, including approval from Institutional Review Boards (IRBs) and/or data licensing for the acquisition of existing data, as may be required. See the protocol for publishing a study used by [ArtsEdSearch](#) for guidance.

Format: Articles should be 1,500–4,500 words, submitted as a Word document. We use a modified Chicago style (not APA) and parenthetical citations. All URL links hyperlinked in the document should also be referenced, in order, at the end of the article in a URL list for offline readers. Images should have a dpi of at least 300. Be in touch with the editors to discuss submission and media ideas and to learn formatting, technical specifications, and citation style. You may also request a citation style template.

The *Journal of Folklore and Education* (ISSN 2573-2072) is a publication of



Local Learning: The National Network for Folk Arts in Education

Local Learning connects folklorists, artists, and educators across the nation and advocates for the full inclusion of folklife and folk arts in education to transform learning, build intercultural understanding, and create stronger communities.

SUBSCRIBE

Sign up for the quarterly Local Learning E-Bulletin for news, resources, model projects, job announcements, and updates.

FACEBOOK

“Like us” on Facebook to stay connected.

DONATE

Please support *The Journal of Folklore and Education* so that we can continue to provide this free resource.

We are grateful to our Advisory Committee for **Creative Texts | Creative Traditions**.

Betty Belanus, *Author and Education Specialist and Curator at the Smithsonian Center for Folklore and Cultural Heritage*

Kimi V Eisele, *Award-winning author and editor of Borderlore at Southwest Folklife Alliance*

Nadia Inserra, *Department of Focused Inquiry, Virginia Commonwealth University*

Rick Kearns-Morales, *Award-winning poet and freelance writer*

Sarah McCartt Jackson, *Teacher, award-winning poet, and folklorist*

Andy Kolovos, *Vermont Cartooning and Culture Project, and Associate Director and Archivist of Vermont Folklife Center*

Sahar Muradi, *Director of Education at City Lore, poet, author, and educator*

Mark Miyake, *Assistant Professor of Music and Society, Western Washington University*

Christine J. Widmayer, *Co-editor for Gazing Grain Press, an inclusive feminist chapbook press, MFA in Creative Writing, and current PhD student in Folklore*

Langston Collin Wilkins, *Director of the Center for Washington Cultural Traditions*

Steve Zeitlin, *Poet, author, and Director at City Lore*

About the Editors

Paddy Bowman is Founding Director of Local Learning and creator of numerous folklore and education resources. She co-edited *Through the Schoolhouse Door: Folklore, Community, Curriculum* (2011) and taught for Lesley University's *Integrated Teaching through the Arts* masters program for a decade. She was awarded the Benjamin A. Botkin Prize for Lifetime Achievement in Public Folklore and is a Fellow of the American Folklore Society.

Reach her at pbbowman@gmail.com.

Lisa Rathje is Executive Director of Local Learning. She also teaches in the Goucher College Masters in Cultural Sustainability Program. She currently serves on the Arts Education Partnership Equity and Higher Education Working Groups.

Reach her at lisa@locallearningnetwork.org.