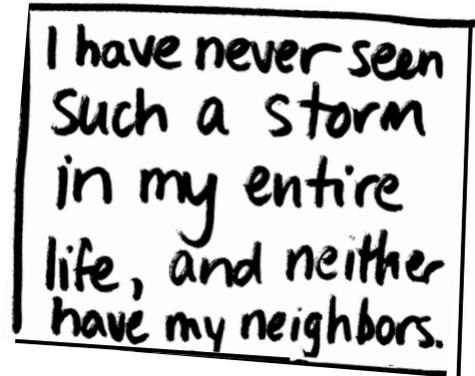


Derecho Days, or Navigating Disaster Through Vernacular Comic Art

by Nic Hartmann

Derecho Days is an experimental, personal comic art piece that navigates the aftermath of enduring the August 2020 derecho: an inland hurricane that, in 14 hours, led to \$11 billion in damage, caused 25 tornadoes from Nebraska to Ohio, and destroyed 70 percent of the tree canopy in Cedar Rapids, Iowa.



Derecho Days, a 30-day, once-daily task taken on as part of an online sketch project, *Live & Active Culture*, consisted of a spontaneous, improvised expression of the day's events to serve the following roles:

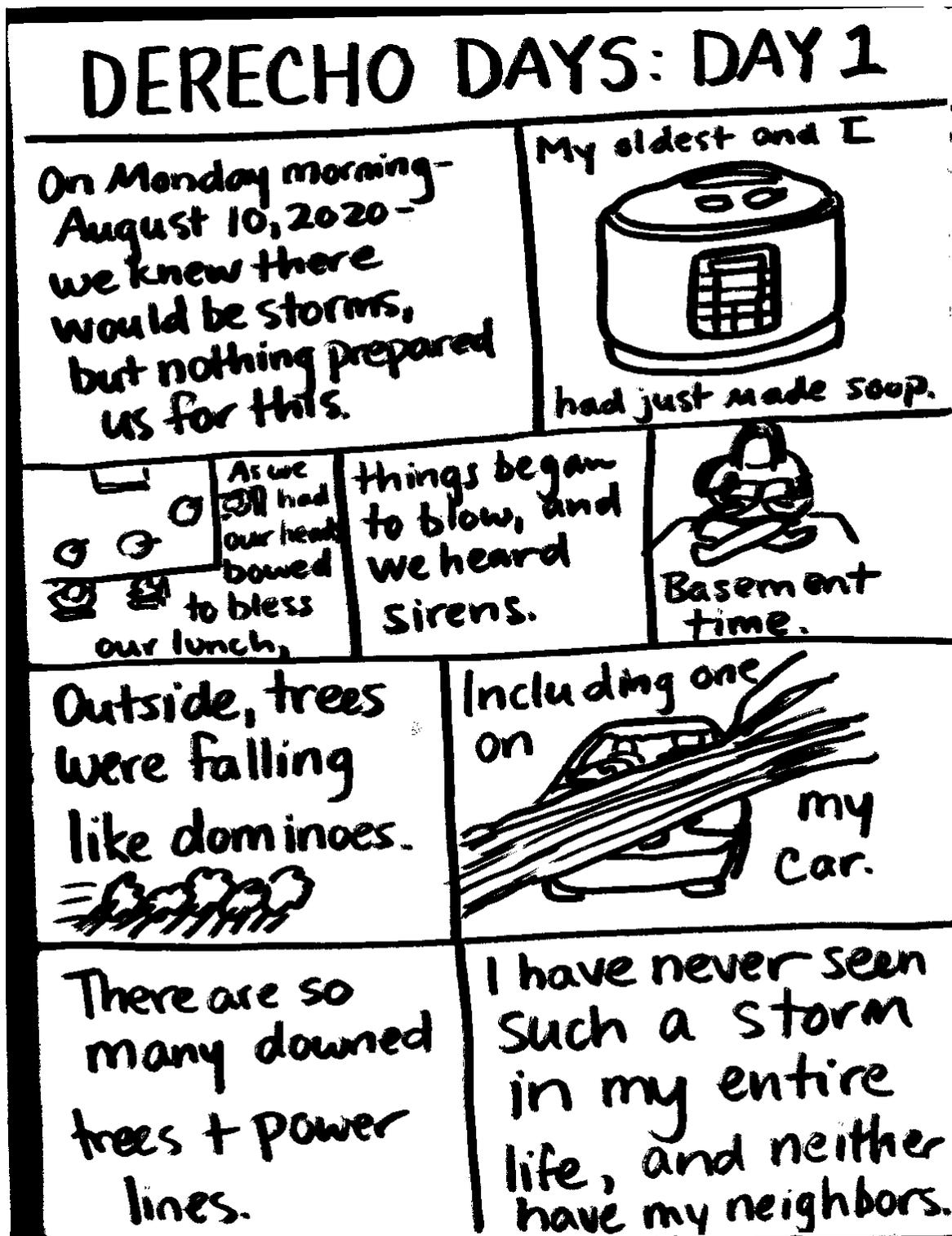
- To share the recovery and relief process with a wider audience, most of whom lived outside the disaster area;
- To celebrate the efforts of those who worked to return the disaster area to a more stable (albeit wildly different) condition for living;
- To navigate the personal trauma of being a disaster survivor by documenting its large-scale and small-scale phenomena for others.

The first part of the series was constructed outside the disaster area, as family medical needs required our family to leave Iowa to stay with family in Indiana. Being away from home (and, at the time, laid off because of pandemic cuts in the cultural sector), the project served as a way to process the experience creatively. Upon returning to the Cedar Rapids area, it became a fieldwork experience, documenting relief efforts, the process of restoring power and utilities to the area, and the emotions that many faced. This disaster was intensified by the fact that Cedar Rapiidians had endured two previous floods (2008 and 2016) in the 12 years preceding the derecho.

The second part dealt with the community response to the disaster and how people were working to assist others, especially those who lacked access to the same level of resources as the majority of the community. This is where derecho folklife emerges, where local heroes come into play, and where the culture around the disaster begins to materialize.

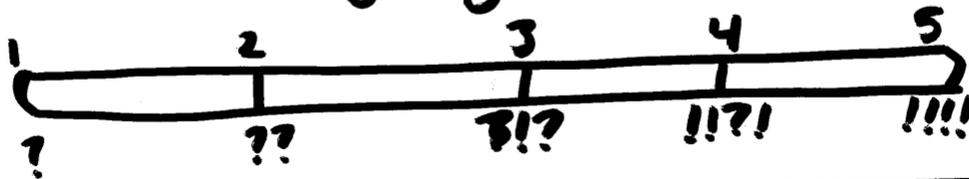
The final part deals with the gradual fade-out of disaster relief from outside communities, the emotions left behind with the damage, and the things that Cedar Rapiidians (and members of the surrounding communities) faced.

As a pedagogical tool, this series offers learners of all ages opportunities to draw from a wide variety of experiences in constructing their own creative project; to learn how to balance the personal and communal in a limited spatial setting; and to use existing skills, as they are, as a foundation for community storytelling.

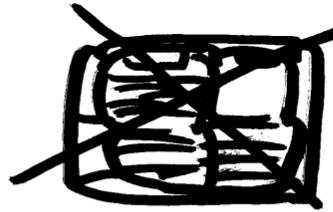


DERECHO DAYS: DAY 3

The estimate for power returning is all over the place, with some saying 1-2 weeks and rumors of 3-4 going around.



There are no gas cans, chain saws, or generators left.



We had to truck some ice from Cedar Falls.



We are part of a 20-county disaster area along US 30 + I-80.
marsh. cr
DSM K

The magnitude only gets bigger + bigger.

DERECHO DAYS, DAY 22

THERE IS STILL TOO MUCH
THAT NEEDS SHARING.



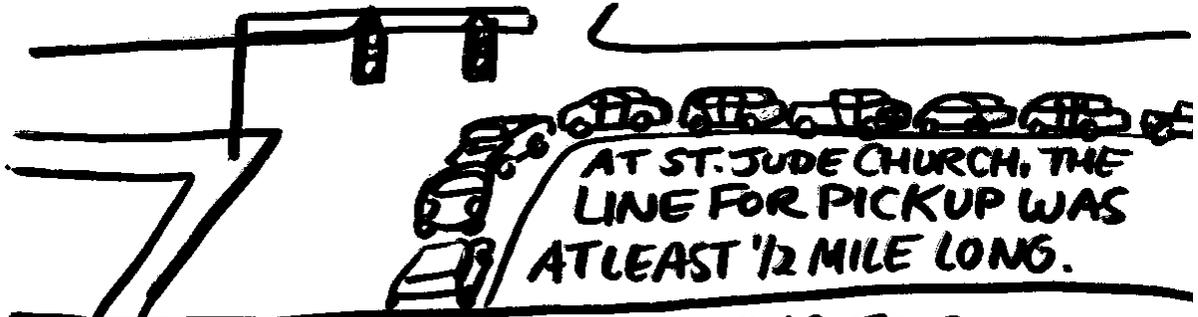
SO I'M BACK TO IT.

THERE ARE PEOPLE WHO
STILL DON'T HAVE POWER,



DUE TO LANDLORDS
MAKING EXCUSES.

PEOPLE ARE FLOCKING TO GET FOOD BOXES;
THE USDA SENT 8 SEMIS TODAY.

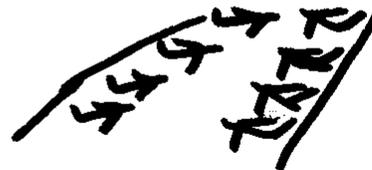


MY KIDS WANTED TO
HEAR THE COME FROM
AWAY SOUNDTRACK
TODAY IN THE
CAR.



IT'S A BROADWAY
MUSICAL.

LISTENING TO SONGS
ABOUT 9/11 PASSENGERS
DIVERTED TO GANDER,
AND PEOPLE RALLYING,

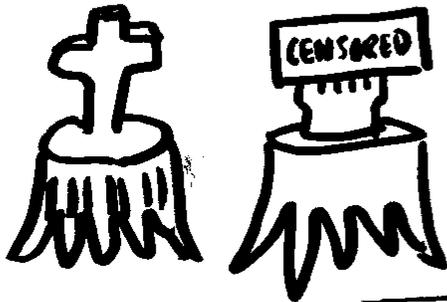


HIT WAY TOO CLOSE TO
HOME. AND I LOST
IT DRIVING.

DERECHO DAYS, DAY 27

The Iowa Derecho Storm Resource Page is filled with questions like "How do you argue [with insurance] about repair costs for a house?"

A lot of folks are making stump art.



Some of it feels a certain way towards 2020.

A lot of folks are getting less than 1/2 of what they need.

Willie got a day off.

The community foundation in CR has raised nearly \$1M in recovery funds.

Meanwhile, people in more rural counties wish their voices were also heard.

Lost crops, farm houses, equipment + broken bins have put already stressed out farmers into further struggle.

DERECHO DAYS, DAY 31

The storm hit corn
+ soybean farmers
hard.



Silos were bent like
paper cups.

Most, if not all,
of the 10 million
acres of lost crops
were already
being grown at
a rate lower
than crop prices.

More and more,
climate events
are happening,
and people say,

"Oh, it's just weather."

2008 Flood
2016 Flood
2019 Flood
2020 derecho

Read CIVIL EATS: "IOWA FARMERS
FACE CLIMATE-FUELED DESTRUCTION,
WHILE THE INDUSTRY SAYS IT'S
"JUST WEATHER"

How many "just weathers" can happen
before it's changed?

READ EMILY STOGHL'S HUFFPOST ARTICLE "WHAT IT'S LIKE TO LIVE IN A CITY
THAT'S HAD 3 'ONCE IN A LIFETIME' DISASTERS IN 12 YEARS" - @brumeanddaisy

Classroom Connections: Questions for Sketching Disaster

In using this series of panels, educators at any level can choose from the following questions:

How do you think comics can help tell stories of loss and disaster, like that of a storm, earthquake, or flood? What do they help people understand?

How are community members discussed in this piece? How can art highlight the stories of others who may not be in a position to share their stories?

What is the role of outside help in dealing with this disaster? What are the advantages and disadvantages of getting help from outside your group or community?

How does the Internet play a role in helping people in the community find support?

Who do you turn to in times of trouble and struggle in your community?

What kinds of things are being focused on, or talked about, a lot in the comic panels? Who do you think is missing from this story? How would you talk about a disaster like this if this happened to you?

What would happen if you didn't have as much time to sketch this? How would you share your stories of survival and endurance with others?



Panels like this are also a way to introduce the notion of trauma, including how disasters constitute trauma; the differences between personal and collective trauma; and how trauma is experienced differently depending on one's personal community, cultural connections, and experiences. In preparing to teach content like this in the classroom, teachers should personally reflect on the following questions:

What do you think of when you think of the word "trauma"?

How is a natural disaster a form of trauma?

What sorts of factors play a role in how people understand trauma?

This is a sensitive matter. Many students personally experience trauma. To minimize impact on students, speak generally and do not mandate students to provide any personal experiences.

Revisiting Disaster on Ink and Paper: The Making of *Derecho Days*

Nearly two years after the 2020 derecho, I constructed a second series of panels about the process of drawing out *Derecho Days* to look back constructively at the following ideas:

- How personal folk tradition shapes people's expression of their disaster experience;
- How each account is community-shaped, but individually expressed;
- How engaging in such forms of storytelling has both short-term and long-term effects on the creator.

DERECHO DAYS, OR HOW DISASTER IS NAVIGATED THROUGH UERNACULAR COMIC ART
Nic Hartmann
Live+Active Culture

At the 2012 AFS Annual Meeting in New Orleans, I listened to stories of how American and Japanese disaster survivors navigated life after losing an incredible amount.

The themes were strong: the intangible remains, and in those moments of loss, we are called to use our skills to do good.
*Carl Lindahl's wisdom

Eight years later, I never imagined that I would be taking such advice to heart.
2012 2013 2014 2015 2016 2017 2018 2019 2020

In the months leading up to 2020, I developed a personal way to be a field-worker and note-taker, by live-drawing things.

It was part of a family creative tradition of sketching out community life around us.
GRANDPA GEN 1 | UNCLE GEN 2 | GEN 3
GLENN CURTIS | TODD CURTIS | ME

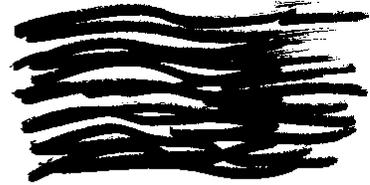
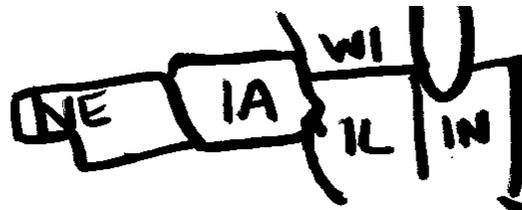
Working under the guidance of comic artist Marek Bennett, I began impressionistic observations + prompts surrounding folk life and community culture.

The day I talked about storm lore was the day that changed it all.

It was the day I harvested the basil plant, which I cultivated during the pandemic as a healing tool.

Winds
peaking

140 mph -



August 10

August 11, 2020

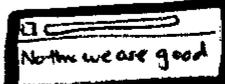
the strength of Katrina - tore through
our city in less than one hour.

Cedar Rapids lost
70 percent of its
trees.



OF ALL
CORN +
SOYBEAN
CROPS IN
2020.
66%
14 million acres of
crops... damaged.

Disaster response
was slowed by
poor leadership
decisions...



... and the area
not just one part -
took a massive
beating.

Worse than the
2008 flood.

We had to leave town
and stay in Waterloo.



Not knowing what
to do, I started
drawing my
thoughts out.

I read social media,
touched base with
friends, and just
started drawing
bits + pieces of
what I saw.

And
just
like
that,

DERECHO DAYS. DAY 3

The estimate for powering up again
is all over the place, with some
saying 1-2 weeks and rumors of 3-4
going around

1	2	3	4	5
?	??	???	!!!!	!!!!

There are no gas cans, chainsaws,
or generators left.

We had to
truck ice
from Cedar
Falls.

We are part
of a 20-county
disaster
area along
US 30 + I-80

The magnitude
gets bigger

Derecho
Days
was
born.

It was a way to document a slice of life when a disaster strikes.



But it was also a healing practice

after you can't chop any more.



Add having to leave for my home state of Indiana for a week,



being laid off at the time due to COVID-19,

and having a lot of time to kill (without being able to help),

and you have a lot of potential to vent.



When you can't physically remove debris, you can at least tell about those who did.

It was a creative response to a lot of trauma.

I started writing down stats,
like the number of
outages,



and tracked
them each
day.

I spread the
news of CR
residents'
needs, such as



the
refugee
community
living in
their
lawn.

I kept an eye
on local heroes
like rib-master Willie Ray Fairley,
who I later helped serve food.

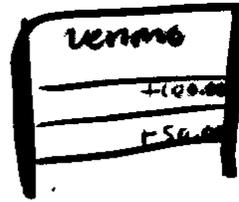


And I tracked
derecho humor
and digital



folk life, like chainsaw art.

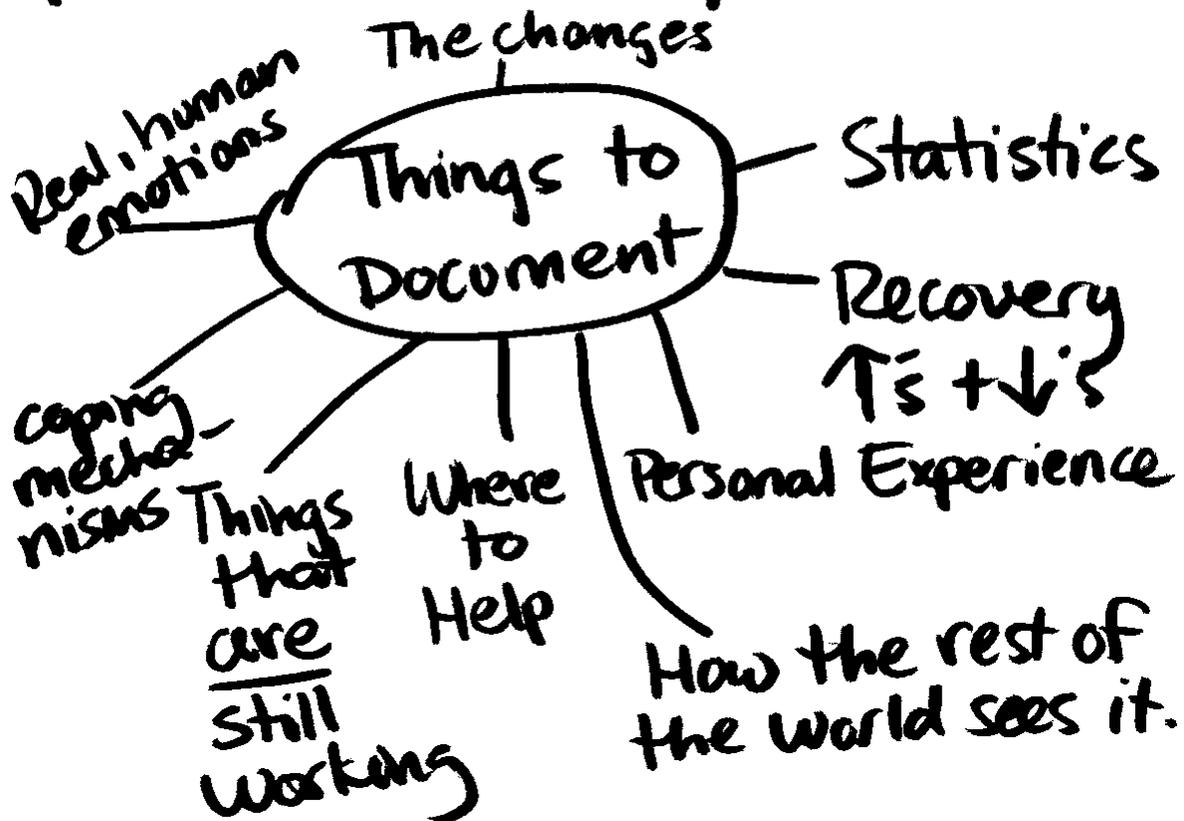
It was a way to share the experience with non-locals, who responded with cash + supply support.



But it was also a way to live-draw a city - already suffering due to COVID-19 and the effects of racial injustice - as it dealt with its third major natural disaster in 12 years.

2008	2016	2020
		
31.1' Flood waters	23' flood waters	Derecho

There are endless possibilities.



Later, in retrospect, we can consider the following:

How did the disaster change you?

What happened after the documentation stopped?

What should have been documented (that wasn't)?

I can offer the following tips.

1. Respond rapidly.
Capture things in
(relatively) real
time.

2. Use simple tools,
+ stick with them.



(one small notepad, one pen or marker)

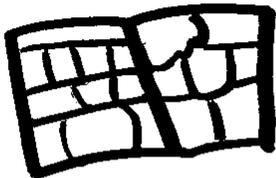
3. Scour the variety
of voices to
ensure balance.

4. Document the



boring stuff, too.
Like) long lines.

5. One page a day.



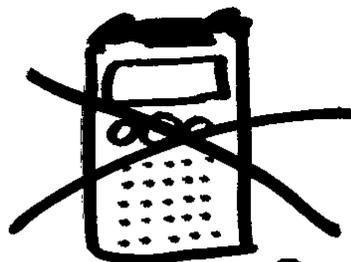
It ensures more
focus on what is
most
compelling.

6. Don't doubt
your sketches...
they are snap-
shots of a
moment that
is now past.





I had hoped to do an emergency ethnographic project, but there were many in town doing that type of work



What ended up happening was that I ended up taking on relief work, which led to human services work at a housing nonprofit.

This is a prime skill for those looking to use stories to demonstrate community.

If developing slices of life to tell a community story can do something for a better world,

then folklorists have an incredible toolkit in which they can transcend the boundaries of the discipline.

NH. 2022.

Classroom Connections: Discussion Questions for The Making of *Derecho Days*

For students who may be looking at disaster documentation, and its long-term effects, educators may consider the following questions in a classroom setting:

What types of things are still talked about, even two years later? What things are omitted, or de-emphasized? How would you go about asking someone about what they chose to focus on?

How does the creator discuss their personal style? If you were given the duty of documenting a disaster, how might you prepare for interviewing, documenting and sharing your work in a respectful manner?

What kinds of skills does this type of work require?

How do you think you might build relationships with others through drawing and documenting events like natural disasters?

What types of creative projects could you create using field notes or comics? What type of project would you do with the skills you have?

Nic Hartmann is Director of Donor Relations for Cornell College in Mount Vernon, Iowa and Visiting Assistant Professor of Anthropology at the University of Iowa, where he teaches courses in the Museum Studies Certificate program. A folklorist, writer, and third-generation comic artist, Nic's research and practice interests include occupational folklife, museum education, and folklife as a tool for nonprofit leadership.  ORCID 0000-0002-0104-1838

Comic Art and Visual Journaling Resources

- Lynda Barry's books *Syllabus* and *What It Is* include lesson plans, methods, and activities for finding and using a creative voice.
- Marek Bennett, Andy Kolovos, Teresa Mares, and Julia Grand Doucet's *The Most Costly Journey* is a graphic novel featuring stories of migrant farmworkers in Vermont, <https://www.vermontfolklifecenter.org/elviajemascaro>.
- Sally Campbell Galman's *Shane the Lone Ethnographer* is a comic-book introduction to ethnography, the core methodology for folklore in education as well as anthropology and other social science courses.
- Julie Pearson-Little Thunder, Johnnie Diacon, and Jerry Bennett wrote *Chilocco Indian School: A Generational Story*, a graphic novel for educational use published by the Chilocco History Project, <https://shareok.org/handle/11244/335900>. Find a Project Based Learning module by Lisa Lynn Brooks at <https://chilocco.library.okstate.edu/pbl>.