



# Death, Loss, and Remembrance Across Cultures

## A Role for Folklore in Education

Bretton A. Varga and Mark E. Helmsing, Guest Editors

Journal of Folklore and Education | 2022: Volume 9



**About the Cover Photos:** (L-R) Marjorie Lucy Neddeau (Te-Quah) in Neddeau, Map held by Jeanette Hunt by Sean Scheidt in Minner, Jocelyn Jones at Thomas Indian School by Hayden Haynes in Stahlman and Haynes, Grave Offerings by Ray Huang in Lei, and Gertie Lopez by Meckler in Eisele.

*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 Editors: Bretton A. Varga and Mark E. Helmsing  
Review Editor: Taylor Dooley Burden

Design: Lisa Rathje

The *Journal of Folklore and Education* (JFE) 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: Chris Antonsen, Betty Belanus, Norma Cantú, Robert Forloney, Bror Marcus Leal Cederström, Lisa Falk, Incoronata Inserra, Sarah McCartt-Jackson, 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 at <https://JFEpublications.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](mailto:lisa@locallearningnetwork.org)  
Paddy Bowman, Founding Director, [pbbowman@gmail.com](mailto:pbbowman@gmail.com)

The Local Learning Board:

Maribel Alvarez, University of Arizona  
Halle Butvin, 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

<https://locallearningnetwork.org>



*The Journal of Folklore and Education is supported in part by an award from the National Endowment for the Arts. Any views, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed by authors are their own.*

*Journal of Folklore and Education* (2022: Vol. 9)

# Table of Contents

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

Bretton A. Varga and Mark E. Helmsing, Guest Editors ~ 2022: Volume 9

### **(RE)TRACINGS OF WHAT WAS ONCE PRESENT/ABSENT**

by Bretton A. Varga and Mark E. Helmsing, Guest Editors

1

### **TIME, TEMPORALITY, AND ENTANGLEMENT IN THE FACE OF PARALLEL REALITIES**

by Cory Wright-Maley

8

*Critiquing the notion of time as consistent, linear, and calculable, the author calls upon social studies teachers to rethink and expand how we teach with and about time.*

### **RIDING WITH JAMES: MORE THAN A MAP**

by Ashley Minner

25

*“Baltimore is totally haunted,” Ashley Minner writes. “Every absence points to a presence.” Using maps, family stories, and place-based research, Minner explores her American Indian community in Baltimore to counter erasure from the landscape and from public memory.*

### **Classroom Connections: More Than a Map**

35

### **A CONVERSATION WITH NOKMES (MY GRANDMOTHER) IN POETRY**

by Browning Neddeau

36

*Exploring the poem as conversation with his grandmother who has walked on, the author invites readers to explore “Gnimedimen [We Dance]” and think of their ancestors. He asks: “If you could ask your ancestors one question, what would it be?”*

### **Gnimedimen (We Dance)**

39

### **“I’M A FELLOW TRAVELER ON A RELIGIOUS JOURNEY”: A CONVERSATION WITH KEVIN J. BURKE**

by Bretton A. Varga and Kevin J. Burke

41

*This interview explores secular concepts and religious frameworks, ranging from themes of transcendence and religious traditionality to how visual ethnography (PhotoVoice) might be a productive tool for spatial engagement with death, loss, and remembrance.*

### **GOING ON THE JOURNEY OF LEARNING TO RESPECT OUR ELDERS**

by Biaohua Lei

50

*Using a multiyear vertical curriculum model, this teacher presents the history and traditions of the Tomb Sweeping Festival—清明节 Qing Ming Jie—to engage instructional topics on traditions about death, as well as remembrance, and the worldview values they reinforce.*

<b>DÍA DE LOS MUERTOS ALTARS: BRIDGES TO REMEMBRANCE, HEALING, AND COMMUNITY</b>	
by Ofelia Esparza	61
<i>As Día de los Muertos celebrations grow ever more popular, this article shares a perspective grounded in the East L.A. Chicano community from National Heritage Fellow Ofelia Esparza. A former school teacher, her classroom activities offer teachers important resources and lessons.</i>	
<b>Classroom Connections</b>	
DAY OF THE DEAD AND HALLOWEEN	66
FAMILY STORIES	67
CULMINATING PROJECTS	68
RESOURCES	68
 <b>TO GATHER AND TO GRIEVE: MAKING SPACE FOR MOURNING AT A FOLKLIFE FESTIVAL</b>	
by Kimi Eisele	70
<i>The Tucson Meet Yourself Folklife Festival's Loss and Remembrance Tent gave participants a place to feel what they were feeling, to recognize the reality of loss through their own visceral experience, and to acknowledge and make space for the weight of death and remembrance.</i>	
<b>Classroom Connections: Wall of Loss</b>	79
 <b>ENGAGING WITH DISCOMFORT: THANATOLOGICAL SOCIAL MOVEMENTS AND PUBLIC DEATH EDUCATION</b>	
by Kaitlyn L. Kinney	80
<i>This brief survey of thanatological social movements offers a potential starting point for researching the U.S. deathscape and, for educators, four resources that can be incorporated into classroom work.</i>	
 <b>WHO GETS (TO BE) REMEMBERED IN LIFE</b>	
by Amy Mungur	85
<i>Preservice teachers must navigate the challenges of U.S.-centered representations that extend beyond textbooks and other curricular materials. Using Life magazine photo essays proves a particularly compelling, and powerfully instructive, source for critical analysis.</i>	
 <b>THE THOMAS INDIAN SCHOOL—NARRATIVE SOVEREIGNTY AND HEALING</b>	
by Joe Stahlman and Hayden Haynes with Jocelyn Jones	94
<i>A photo essay and exhibition proves powerful for a community looking at the aftereffects of one Indian Boarding School. An essay outlining the history of the Thomas Indian School follows.</i>	
<b>Hënödeyësdahgwa'geh wa'öki'jö' ögwahsä's. Onëh I:' jögwadögwea:je'</b>	96
<b>We Were at the School. We Were There. We Remember.</b>	
<b>Classroom Connections: See, Think, Wonder</b>	102
<b>Close to Home - The Thomas Indian School: History of a Native American Residential Boarding School</b>	103



**DERECHO DAYS, OR NAVIGATING DISASTER THROUGH VERNACULAR COMIC ART**

by Nic Hartmann

110

*Derecho Days is an experimental, personal comic art piece that navigates the aftermath of a natural disaster. It reflects upon the short-term and long-term effects of this storytelling medium on the creator.*

**Classroom Connections: Questions for Sketching Disaster**

116

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

117

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

125

**DOCUMENTATION AS REMEMBRANCE: A CLASSROOM ACTIVITY**

by Paddy Bowman

126

*This activity uses a primary set source from the Library of Congress to model how documentation of the Covid-19 pandemic can amplify students' voices.*

**HISTORIAS DE UNA PANDEMIA: DOCUMENTING LATINA/O/X STORIES DURING COVID-19 THROUGH PERFORMED STORYTELLING**

by Elena Foulis

128

*Using oral histories and narratives collected during the Covid-19 pandemic, a student-led performance invites consideration about the role of language, cultural, and social pluralities in creating a socially just world.*

**“AN ELECTROMAGNETIC TENDERNESS OF REMEMBERING”**

by Mark Helmsing with Derek Piotr

138

*This interview underscores a commitment in teaching and research to better understand how people feel about the past and how the past makes people. Music, recorded sounds, and recollected memories become rich and vibrant materials for feeling the past.*

**“IL REPOSE ICP”: A CENTURY OF DEATH, LOSS, AND REMEMBRANCE FOLLOWING THE GREAT OCTOBER STORM OF 1893**

by John P. Doucet, Annie Doucet, and Windell Curole

147

*Natural disasters, like hurricanes, are great forces that enter and alter people's lives as well as their perceptions of reality. This article offers a model for community education events based on history, culture, and lore using the centennial of the Great October Storm of 1893 in Louisiana as a case study.*

**STORIES FOR CHANGE: SOLASTALGIA, CLIMATE GRIEF, AND RE-STORYING OURSELVES**

by Rick Fisher and Maggie Bourque

161

*Examining how the solace of “home” is undercut with anxiety and—for many more—grief, the authors consider how folklore education can fill an important gap in present cultural engagement with climate change.*

**Classroom Connections — Stories for Change: Exploring Climate Death, Loss, and Remembrance Through Folklore**

165

**Activity Companion: Climate Facts for Discussion**

168

*Journal of Folklore and Education* (2022: Vol. 9)

**JOURNAL OF FOLKLORE AND EDUCATION REVIEWS**

<b><i>Advancing Folkloristics.</i></b> Jesse A. Fivecoate, Kristina Downs, and Meredith A. E. McGriff, eds. Martha Sims	<b>172</b>
<b><i>What Folklorists Do: Professional Possibilities in Folklore Studies.</i></b> Timothy Lloyd, ed. Timothy H. Evans	<b>174</b>
<b><i>Critical Perspectives on Teaching in the Southern United States.</i></b> Tori K. Flint and Natalie Keefer, eds. Mary L. Sellers	<b>176</b>
<b><i>Theorizing Folklore from the Margins: Critical and Ethical Approaches.</i></b> Solimar Otero and Mintzi Auanda Martínez-Rivera, eds. Julián Antonio Carrillo	<b>177</b>
<b><i>Engaging the African Diaspora in K-12 Education.</i></b> Kia Lilly Caldwell and Emily Susanna Chávez, eds. Kennedi Johnson	<b>179</b>
<b>2023 JOURNAL OF FOLKLORE AND EDUCATION</b> <b>TEACHING WITH ETHNOGRAPHIC AND FOLK ARTS COLLECTIONS: CHALLENGING HISTORY</b> A Call for Submissions   Alexandra Antohin, <i>Guest Editor</i>	<b>182</b>





## (Re)tracings of What Was Once Present/Absent

by Bretton A. Varga and Mark E. Helmsing, Guest Editors

*we were going to be elders  
just because we were still around  
and i was going to listen to you on a panel  
we didn't feel qualified for and hear you talk about your guilt  
for still being alive  
when so many of your friends were taken  
by suicide  
by AIDS  
by racist police  
and jealous ex-lovers  
and poverty  
and no access to health care  
and how you had a stable job you suffered at until the weekend  
how you avoided the drama  
and only went to the club at pride  
and so here you were with no one to dance with anymore*

—Alexis Pauline Gumbs, “Pulse”

For as long as I (Bretton) can remember, I have been fascinated with Gothic and macabre entities and stories around death. Whether it was slipping a purple Skeletor action figure into my backpack before I left for elementary school every morning; staying awake deep into the night and early morning during my teens to watch the HBO television series *Tales from the Crypt*; or traveling to Transylvania, Romania, to visit Dracula's castle after I graduated from college, narrative contexts imbued with death have indelibly shaped my understanding of and interest in the world. On January 17, 2017, my relationship to death changed with the physical transition of my mother. Even as we write this Introduction to this JFE issue centered on the theme of Death, Loss, and Remembrance Across Cultures: A Role for Folklore in Education, I viscerally recall the bleeps, dings, chirps, and hums of machines inside the room sustaining her final breaths. I remember a nurse turning on an audio device that played ocean waves breaking across an unidentified shoreline, dulling the machinic soundscape reverberating throughout the room. My mother loved the sea and I like to think that—in her mind—she was able to live out her last moments somewhere serene, sandy, and warm near the ocean. I distinctly remember the walls of the hospital room being



A family photo, with Bretton as a youth.

beige, sandy even, and wondering about the intersections of tranquility, death, place, space, and sound. Shortly after the (sound) waves were turned on, I looked outside the hospital window and noticed a thick layer of San Francisco fog hovering in the distance. Perhaps the fog was gently approaching. Perhaps not. Regardless, the loss of my mother, Pamela Varga, has significantly affected how I consider the category of death as generative and vital for educators, students, researchers, and folklorists in that it affords unique opportunities to (re)trace cultural registers and sensibilities by helping us make sense of that which we cannot immediately touch, yet nonetheless continues to touch us.

---

For as long as I (Mark) can remember, I have had an uneasy relationship with death and loss. My first growing awareness of loss and remembrance was in learning retrospectively

about the life and death of my cousin Chris, who died shortly before my second birthday. In the small rural community where both Chris and I lived, news of death travels at the speed of light, and his death reverberated all through the community and continues to do so whenever I have conversations with people in my hometown who remember my cousin. Chris, a senior in high school, was killed in a drunk driving accident while driving home from his shift at a local restaurant late one evening shortly before Christmas in 1982. A driver in the other lane, impaired by alcohol, crossed the center line and collided into my cousin's car, killing him instantly. I have no memories of Chris as I was not yet two years old at the time of his death. I wish I could tap into some deep recess of my memory to visualize what I would later grow up to learn was his fondness for me as a baby, how he would often stop by my parents' house to hold me and feed me, including the night of the high school's annual winter dance when he and his girlfriend stopped by to take a picture holding me on their way to the dance, a week before his death. Part of the remembrance of Chris takes shape in certain cultural ways we remember and commemorate loss and death. Chris won a staggering number of awards as a high school tennis player in Indiana and throughout the country. In a small town of only 1,000 residents, accolades such as this take on a significant role in the cultural memory of the community. While I grew up hearing my family members often speak mournfully and longingly about my cousin, and his death, the ways in which his death are remembered were never far from me. The high school where Chris attended (and from which I graduated two decades later) named its tennis courts in memory of Chris, with an honorary placard commemorating his life, his prowess as an athlete, and his death, which remains displayed prominently on the entrance to the courts. As mentioned in the accompanying image of his newspaper obituary (itself a genre of folk narrative) the memorial service for Chris was held in the



high school gymnasium. The unease I have had with death in part relates to the unease I felt at wishing I could remember my cousin, and instead only being able to feel his presence in my high school all those years later, walking onto the tennis courts bearing his name and imagining the gymnasium, packed to capacity, for his memorial service, spaces I saw every day while I was a student in the same high school.

---

Death and education are never far removed. When we (Bretton and Mark) approached the *Journal of Folklore and Education* to ask about submitting a piece on folklore, education, and death, we were both engaged in writing about death as a curricular and pedagogical topic for educators as the Covid-19 pandemic unfolded in its first year. Along with two of our colleagues, we had been creating spaces in journals, books, conferences, and classrooms for educators to contemplate how to approach, relate to, and teach through concepts and feelings of grief and loss. Our hope—then and now—has been for educators to see grief as a way of relating to the world. Grief and loss can help learners consider conditions that contribute to the (re)shaping of how we should feel about losses of life within/outside our cultural worldview, especially when such losses of life animate many lessons/topics in our curricula, from war and genocide to colonialism and imperialism to epidemics and natural disasters. We see loss and grief as an educational practice in “deepening, attending and listening” to one’s self, culture, community, and world, an educational engagement across cultural contexts “rooted in love and compassion” (Weller 2015).

As educators, we have had numerous occasions to teach through and with death and grief with our students. As a college student learning to teach, I (Mark) was observing a social studies teacher teach his high school economics classes on September 11, 2001. Both the teacher and I felt ill-equipped in the minutes, days, and weeks that followed to talk openly with students about the thousands of deaths that transpired that day. A few years later, teaching in my own high school classroom, the devastation of Hurricane Katrina entered my midwestern school and community when students suddenly arrived, displaced from their homes and relocated to Indiana from Louisiana, forced to attend schools with no one they knew while they grieved, often imperceptibly to me and other students in the class, the loss of their homes, their communities, and the life they knew before

### Chris Lee Helmsing

CAMBRIDGE CITY — Chris Lee Helmsing, 17, 414 W. Maple St., Cambridge City, died Wednesday in a traffic accident on U.S. 40, west of Centerville.

He was a senior at Lincoln High School, a member of the National Honor Society and vice president of the Key Club.

Playing No. 1 singles, Helmsing led the Lincoln tennis team to its third straight Tri-Eastern Conference championship as well as its first

Chris Helmsing sectional and regional titles. He was the all-conference selection in No. 1 singles and was undefeated in four years of regular-season singles.

He received honorable mention on the all-state team named by the Indiana High School Tennis Coaches Association. This past summer he entered tournaments in Bloomington, Indianapolis, Carmel and Anderson, and won two Richmond city championships. He also played basketball and varsity baseball. He was employed at Dinnie's Restaurant in Richmond.

Survivors include his parents, Larry and Pat Huntsman. He is also the son of Larry Helmsing of Richmond. Other survivors are his sister, Nancy Kate, at home; maternal grandmother, Frances Ballard of St. Joseph, Ill.; paternal grandmother, Faye Coffey of Richmond; several aunts, uncles and cousins.

Funeral service for Chris Lee Helmsing will be at 2 p.m. Monday in the Lincoln High School gymnasium, with the Rev. Gordon Mehaffey, Cambridge City Christian Church, officiating. Burial will be in Riverside Cemetery.

Friends may call from 1 to 9 p.m.



the storm. In my (Bretton) experience teaching in Florida, hurricanes played a significant role in how students came to understand their relationship to materials of the world and injustices relating to mobility and loss. I will always remember Hurricane Irma and how it not only destroyed sections of the community but also caused trauma for my students as they followed the deathly destructive path of the hurricane on the news. For both of us (Bretton and Mark), helping our students contemplate loss of this magnitude was challenging. One thing September 11 and Hurricane Katrina have in common, along with many examples that appear in this issue, is how such events challenge the ways particular communities, societies, or cultures mourn loss and relate to those who have died and the experience of death, up through and continuing with the Covid-19 pandemic.

While we each hold a distinct relationship to death, importantly, this issue has been assembled against the backdrop of countless unfolding deathscapes that include climate catastrophe, a global pandemic, and continued enactments of unjust death upon marginalized communities. As a portion of Alexis Pauline Gumb's poem "Pulse" at the beginning of this Introduction indicates, in the U.S.—sadly, and all too frequently—death holds hands with injustice<sup>1</sup> and disproportionately affects the lives of those deemed "Other." Essential to our engagements with death, loss, and remembrance in this issue is the need to recognize the violent conditions underpinning life in this country. Extending this perspective to events of 2020, Madaha Kinsey-Lamb (2020) wrote in the *Journal of Folklore and Education*:

I am writing this in The Time of Corona.... We all know people who contracted the virus, were initially turned away from hospitals, died, or survived; or joined their fears and astonishment with ours at the fast pace of upheaval and devastation. In the weeks since the start of this article, however, it has also become The Time of George Floyd—of tears, outrage, tear gas, fires, and marches to quiet feelings of powerlessness. (2020, 9)

Despite these contexts of death and injustice, Gloria Ladson-Billings reminds us that the "hard reset demanded by the Covid-19 and anti-Black pandemics of 2020 require us to engage in culturally relevant pedagogy that takes into account the conditions of students' lives these occurrences set in motion" (2021, 73). In particular, culturally relevant pedagogy is concerned with three aspects of education: student learning/growth, cultural competence, and critical consciousness (Ladson-Billings 1995). Ultimately, Ladson-Billings' framework works to engage students in the variegated ways that different people experience life—and, we would argue, death. We see natural connections between culturally relevant pedagogy and folklore: Both are emergent; involve authentic narratives, experiences, and (re)imaginings of the past and future; and aim to enhance knowledge and equity through a multicultural lens (Morales 2020). Ladson-Billings points out that "all students will be thrust into a diverse, multicultural world where they will need to understand the culture of those different from themselves" (2021, 71). From this perspective, we argue that culturally relevant framings of death, loss, and remembrance contain rich possibilities for substantive educational change and deeper, more complex understandings across social and cultural contexts.



Death in the pandemic made the ritual of mourning more visible. Acts of love and arts of memorialization that happened within a tradition and without special notice became something reinvented—sharing values with past traditions yet looking and feeling different as many reconciled the loss of coming together and the abnegation of community-sanctioned ritual. Our usual ways of relating to death—most often mediated through personal relationships of a family member or friend who has died—become conditioned differently through mass events of death, loss, and remembrance. In all instances of death as an experience, education mediates for us through learning—thus creating opportunities to approach such instances with traditions, rituals, and practices passed along to us. This becomes the space in which folklore and folkloristic aspects of death, loss, and remembrance offer a role for folklore and education. Invoking the urgency to “unlearn” and rethink the politics of knowledge in light of the Covid-19 pandemic, the folklorist Charles L. Briggs suggests that because folklore involves “documenting the social lives of stories, objects, and other cultural forms and tracking how they circulate and are transformed as they move through time and place,” folklore enables educators to teach unique ways of knowing, acting, and relating to death, loss, and remembrance as a form of agency—a means of making one’s place in life while being in the midst of loss all around us (Briggs 2021, 320).

Folklore is rich with examples of how to engage with death, loss, and remembrance. To take one instance, the 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. As another example, the folklorist Willow Mullins engages with the online interactive film [\*Welcome to Pine Point\*](#) to disrupt “some of the most ingrained assumptions of the field—that folklore *should* be preserved; that groups are organic and natural; that folklore itself is about cultural presence” (2019, 136). The film, produced by Michale Simons and Paul Shoebridge in 2011, explores the intersections of memory and materiality by (re)tracing “a productiveness that follows a death, as if to fill in the hole left by the thing that is now gone that simultaneously references and grows out of that absence” (Mullins 2019, 139). To which, we ask, how might educators *further* leverage folklore to attend to the nuanced absences endured by their students to foster productive, compassionate spaces of cultural connectivity and sustainability? And, perhaps paradoxically, what is (or are we) *missing*?

This collection of articles works toward answering these questions by traversing temporal and cultural demarcations relating to how time alternatively affects and frames the sensibilities of people within different communities. To this point, stories and novels, poems and legends, film and television, song and art about death, loss, and remembrance continue to be (re)animated through ghostly figurations blurring delineations of time and space (i.e., pastpresentfuture [Varga 2022]). Such experiences of touching the past and feeling the ephemerality of life help explain death and loss across social imaginations. As scholar and artist Eve Ewing argues, “[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*” (2018, 154). Ewing’s work signals that engagements with in-between-ness are more than just memories of that past, they

hold narrative agency and are committed to disrupting master narratives of history, (in)justice, and community (i.e., counternarratives, see also Cook and Dixon 2013, Solorzano and Yosso 2002).

What if education embraced an orientation suggesting that embedded within the present are traces of the past demanding justice(s) of the future (Derrida 1994)? How might hauntological framings calling “into question the fixed-ness of historical accounts of injustice, thus unlocking *interlocking* and unaccounted for spaces of hopefulness, amelioration, and atonement” (Varga and Monreal 2021, 84) challenge education—specifically (through) folklore—to think differently about how imbrications of artistic representations and cultural practices can work toward the rupture of (educational) injustice(s) (e.g., Varga and Helmsing, in press)? Eroding temporal boundaries allows us (e.g., educators, researchers, folklorists) capacity to contemplate a future enlivened with cultural traces of the pastpresent. As Derrida noted:

No justice...seems possible or thinkable without the principle of some responsibility, beyond all living present, within that which disjoins the living present, before the ghosts of those who are not yet born or who are already dead... Without this non-contemporaneity with itself of the living present...without this responsibility and this respect for justice concerning those who are not there, of those who are no longer or who are not yet present and living, what sense would there be to ask the question “where?” “where tomorrow?” “whither?” (1994, xix)

At its core, this issue is about justice *through* the lens of death, loss, and remembrance. This collection of scholarship establishes an alternative register to cultural mutings embedded within educational contexts and narratives; that is, working within liminal spaces to make the absent, present (once more). Each article grapples with temporality—and thus ephemerality—across a broad spectrum of contexts (climate, communal health, disaster, history, mortality, narrative sovereignty, photography, place, religion, ritual, and sound). Articles also foreground how the tools of folklore enable fuller, deeper sources of cultural expressions to emerge and take shape, existing potentially as resources for hope, survivance, and love in the face of loss and grief as authors recount. As guest editors, we see this collection as a means for subverting dominant narratives and demonstrating how powerful culturally relevant approaches are in educational contexts and beyond. We believe that this rich resource offers many perspectives of death and loss that can be generative for educators and artists to engage in discourses around remembrance.

In conclusion, both folklorists and educators can add *life* through educative acts of remembrance, commemoration, tradition, and mourning. The folklorist Betty Belanus describes curation as “adding life” to an object, story, narrative, experience, or place (Belanus 2021). Although it may seem a paradox for an issue focusing on death to exemplify practices of “adding life,” moments of folklorists and educators adding life to the items, objects, and practices surrounding us help make visible the complex in-between-ness of life and death. We hope that this issue of the *Journal of Folklore and Education* will prompt readers to consider their own complex and complicated relationship(s) to death and contemplate how intersections of death, loss, and remembrance influence how people come to understand themselves, each other, and the world(s) around them. It is our sincerest wish that readers find the articles featuring art, stories, knowledge, resources, and experiences beneficial for (re)tracing what was once present/absent. After all, and as Donna

Haraway suggests, “without sustained remembrance, we cannot learn to live with ghosts and so cannot think” (2016, 39).

---

## Endnotes

1. To acknowledge injustice—specifically white supremacy—in educational research writing and publishing, white (and west) have been left uncapitalized. This editorial decision upholds JFE’s long-standing tradition of combating oppression through textual measure. Language (and text) matter. We understand that this stylistic decision does little to change these injustices, but we remain hopeful that acknowledging the pervasiveness of whiteness in education and in academic texts will encourage readers to consider ways to disrupt its presence in contexts of writing, reading, artmaking, and teaching.

## Works Cited

- Belanus, Betty J. 2021. Folklorists as Curators: Exploring the 4 C’s. In *Advancing Folkloristics*, eds. Jesse A. Fivecoate, Kristina Downs, and Meredith A. E. McGriff. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 125-40.
- Briggs, Charles L. 2021. *Unlearning: Rethinking Poetics, Pandemics, and the Politics of Knowledge*. Logan: Utah State University Press.
- Cook, Daniella A. and Andrienne D. Dixon. 2013. Writing Critical Race Theory and Method: A Composite Counterstory on the Experiences of Black Teachers in New Orleans Post-Katrina. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*. 26.10:1238-58.
- Derrida, Jacques. 1994. *Specters of Marx*. London: Routledge.
- Ewing, Eve L. 2018. *Ghosts in the Schoolyard*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Gumbs, Alexis Pauline. 2017. Pulse. *Qualitative Inquiry*. 23.7:505-8.
- Haraway, Donna J. 2016. *Staying with the Trouble*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Journal of Folklore and Education. 2020. Front matter, Vol. 7, <https://jfepublications.org/journal/vol-7>.
- Kinsey-Lamb, Madaha. 2020. We Are All Essential: Is the Heart the Last Frontier? *Journal of Folklore and Education*. 7:9-19, <https://jfepublications.org/article/we-are-all-essential>.
- Ladson-Billings, Gloria. 1995. Toward a Theory of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy. *American Educational Research Journal*. 35.1:465-91.
- . 2021. I’m Here for the Hard Reset: Post Pandemic Pedagogy to Preserve Our Culture. *Equity and Excellence in Education*. 54.1:68-78.
- Morales, Selina. 2020. Folk Culture: A Vessel for Equity in Education. *Journal of Folklore and Education*. 7:1-8, <https://jfepublications.org/article/folk-culture>.
- Mullins, Willow G. 2019. A Folkloristics of Death: Group, Sustainability, and Absence in the Film “Welcome to Pine Point.” In *Implied Nowhere: Absence in Folklore Studies*, eds. Shelley Ingram, Willow G. Mullins, Todd Richardson, and Anand Prahlad. Oxford: University of Mississippi Press, 135-56.
- Otero, Solimar and Mintzi Auanda Martinez-Rivera. 2021. *Theorizing Folklore from the Margins*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Rutter, Emily Ruth, Sequoia Maner, Tiffany Austin, and darlene anita scott. 2020. *Revisiting the Elegy in the Black Lives Matter Era*. London: Routledge.
- Solórzano, Daniel G. and Tara J. Yosso. 2002. Critical Race Methodology: Counter-Storytelling as an Analytical Framework for Education Research. *Qualitative Inquiry*. 8.1:23–44.
- Varga, Bretton A. 2022. Posthuman Figurations and Hauntological Graspings of Historical Consciousness/Thinking Through (Re)photography. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*. Advance online publication, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09518398.2022.2098402>.
- Varga, Bretton A. and Mark E. Helmsing. In press. Hauntology. *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods*. London. Routledge.
- Weller, Frances. 2015. *The Wild Edge of Sorrow: Rituals of Renewal and the Sacred Work of Grief*. Berkeley: North Atlantic Books.



# Time, Temporality, and Entanglement in the Face of Parallel Realities

by Cory Wright-Maley

## Introduction

Time is a complicated phenomenon. While mathematicians and physicists can attest to the ways time makes impossible all kinds of calculations (see Gribbin 2005), anyone who has experienced flow (Csikszentmihalyi 1990) or boredom (Danckert and Allman 2005) can attest to the way accounting for time is made difficult by the nature of the activities. Still, our mainstream western understanding of time and our relationship to it, *temporality*, in other words, holds to the view that time is consistent, linear, and calculable (i.e., that each minute, hour, day, year, etc., is equally spaced apart from the next). Or, as Mark Rifkin (2017) called it, “settler time.” However, Mark Helmsing and Annie Witlock (2018) have called upon social studies teachers to rethink and expand how we teach with and about time.

Bretton Varga (2020) adds texture to this argument by identifying one of the central temporal failings of social studies teaching: the lack of concern “with exposing a fluid relationship between past, present, *and* future that extends beyond the traditional humanist trappings of the past” (5). The profession has relied heavily upon the certitudes provided by evidentiary historical epistemologies—the system of knowledge that separates fact and opinion, including what counts as valid evidence—at the expense of the haunting elements that challenge our historical mastery over the past. In so doing, it reifies epistemological dominance “instead of interrogating productive difference” where disagreements emerge (Varga and Monreal 2021, 96). Such differences are exacerbated by our temporal rigidity, which forecloses the possibility that the narrative self/ves are located elsewhere in time. Sadeq Rahimi and Byron J. Good (2019) describe how disciplinary understandings of self have been able to liberate the individual from space (i.e., who we are and what we experience can transcend the spatial boundaries of our physical location). At the same time, the discipline has failed to do the same for the subjectivities of self from time (i.e., who we are and what we experience “too often remain confined to a temporal *now*” (409). Indeed, they argue that this failure to recognize that “history is present in ways much more powerful than memory, psychological genealogy, or even traumatic impact seems increasingly inadequate” and leaves us vulnerable to “emergent patterns of social and political affect that are becoming not only increasingly observable but more and more concretely impactful on our political and social realities” (409).



In this article, I seek to challenge readers' presupposed notions of time as a temporal form of measurement with other temporal ontologies—the constellation of beliefs that govern how we understand the nature of reality itself—whose purposes seek instead to reveal how we come to derive insight about and create realities in common. In doing so, I will help to illuminate why historical and non-factive folk knowledge enter into conflict and why non-factive histories continue to haunt public renderings of history despite the social studies' best efforts to dispel non-factive realities with factive interventions. I define historical knowledge as epistemological beliefs that rely primarily on evidentiary records to articulate what has occurred (i.e., factive truths rooted in disciplinary procedures). In contrast, I define folk knowledge as epistemological beliefs that rely primarily on experiential reasoning, which can either be factive or non-factive truths rooted in socially approved narratives (Gerken 2017, den Heyer 2011, Gerken 2020, and Mercier 2010). I argue here that historical and folk epistemologies rely upon different temporal ontologies, in which truth lies in differing relationships in time between the past, present, and future. The former imposes linearity upon reality. The latter evokes relationships to time that are mediated by affective structures of feeling (i.e., viscerally experienced truth revealed by one's emotional reaction) in the present to co-locate the past and future within the present (see Rahimi and Good 2019). Memory, upon which folklore is predicated, works similarly. Bruce Perry and Maia Szalavitz (2017) wrote that memory "is the capacity to carry forward in time some element of an experience" to compose whom we are by constructing a sense of continuity between the past, through the present, and into the future. This occurs personally but also collectively. In his recently published account on national memory, James V. Wertsch (2021), drawing upon the work of Boyer (2018), points out that "even though 'groupism' and 'folk sociology' are misguided in strictly scientific terms, they retain a 'tenacious hold' on us in practice" (37). Indeed, he continues,

Specifically, narratives used as equipment for living provide a means for understanding the folk sociology that—however misguided and theoretically indefensible it may be from the perspective of a genuinely scientific account of human action—guides national memory in general and makes it possible for different national communities to be so strongly committed to different accounts of the past. (38-9)

Thus, the mechanisms for generating knowledge from the past to inform the present—or, as equipment for living, as Wertsch puts it—give rise to parallel experiences of reality. Here Wertsch is likely drawing from a long line of scholars building upon Kenneth Burke's (1938) thesis that literature serves this same purpose. Given the strength of these commitments, so strong as to be immune to disconfirmation, I would argue that they are, in fact, distinct and parallel realities.

To illustrate this claim, I draw from a recent, particularly extreme example. I begin with the conflicting interpretations of the U.S. Capitol Insurrection on January 6, 2021. I will illuminate how different temporal logics can give rise to parallel realities that are distinct both epistemologically vis-à-vis the information they draw from and ontologically vis-à-vis how their presents are mediated temporally. To explain the underlying mechanisms of these bifurcated realities and to identify avenues for integration, I borrow insights from quantum mechanics and Indigenous temporalities. From the former, I draw from the idea of entanglement to help the reader recognize the processes by which contradictory realities can come into existence. Concerning the

latter, I use Blackfoot and Apalech wisdom traditions as examples from which we may come to see pathways that can help us reconcile these two realities.<sup>1</sup>

Finally, I close by offering readers direction for integrating these insights to mediate the space between the epistemologically sundered realities by making suggestions to teachers about how they may seek to redress these contradictory realities. To this end, I offer ways for teachers to teach in and through temporal entanglement.

### **Insurrection**

During a now-infamous July 2020 interview with Fox News journalist Chris Wallace (2020), President Donald Trump refused to state that he would abide by the results of the fall presidential election. There was intense speculation that his refusal, even in the face of a potentially crushing defeat in November, could lead to a constitutional crisis, if not incite nationwide violence. Many viewers, both inside the United States and abroad, looked on in horror as gallows were raised, barricades protecting the Capitol Building were breached, and a crowd surged violently into the building where the results of a free election were being certified.

One interpretation of this event is that the Capitol insurrection threatened American democracy. This view is shared by a substantial majority of Americans (72 percent according to Shepherd 2022). In this view, then-President Donald Trump's supporters gathered at the Capitol Building's steps after spending months steeped in the President's delusions or lies about the election's outcome, which were echoed by a sympathetic right-wing media disinformation machine. Among these individuals were members of militant radical-right groups such as the Oath Keepers, Proud Boys, Three Percenters, and a range of other white supremacist organizations. Indictments issued from the U.S. House Select Committee on the January 6 Attack (<https://january6th.house.gov>) show that the attack represented a well-coordinated effort to undermine democracy and stop the peaceful transfer of power guaranteed by the Constitution of the United States (see *United States of America v. Nordean et al.* 2022).

Another interpretation was one promoted by the Trump Administration. Initiated months in advance of the election, Trump promulgated the idea that there was a vast government conspiracy to ensure that he would lose the election to Joe Biden because of vote rigging, ballot tampering, and ballot dumping. Soon after, these baseless accusations were joined by lies and conspiracies that should have strained the credulity of even the most fervent supporters, such as those purporting that the long-dead Hugo Chavez had tampered with voting machines. Individual Americans heard repeatedly from Administration officials, Sidney Powell and Rudy Giuliani most frequent among them, that these claims were true and would be verified in court. The ephemeral legitimacy of these arguments was further bolstered by prominent conservative talk shows such as *The Sean Hannity Show*, *Bannon's War Room*, and *The Rush Limbaugh Show*, not to mention parroted by Laura Ingram and Tucker Carlson on Fox News as well as various hosts on the One America Network (Wirtschafter and Meserole 2022). More than half of all Republican voters derived their news from these sources (Mitchell, Jurkowitz, Oliphant, and Shearer 2021) and thus had little reason to doubt the veracity of these claims.

Mainstream conservative media outlets gave credence to these erroneous claims giving air to the conspiratorial claims and actively stoking these conspiracies. At the same time, social media platforms enabled individuals and groups to bind “misleading and false claims and narratives” into a movement that “coalesced into the meta-narrative of a ‘stolen election,’ which later propelled the January 6 insurrection” (Election Integrity Partnership 2021). So, although it is baffling to some observers how 1776 could be invoked to justify the violent overthrow of the democratically elected government that was the progeny—not the target—of the American Revolution, it shouldn’t be. President Donald Trump’s rhetoric directly fed into the conceptualization of the past.<sup>2</sup> Insurrectionists and the full 25 percent of Americans who believe they were “supporting democracy” had formulated and integrated the folklore of the revolution, and bent to fit their present non-factive narrative—i.e., “when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same Object evinces a design to reduce them under absolute Despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such Government, and to provide new Guards for their future security” (Jefferson 1997). In this way, American insurrectionist folklore, bereft of fact and immune to evidence, evinces a parallel reality that threatens one based upon the evidentiary standards that most people tend to associate with reality.

This abuse of revolutionary idealism is not, interestingly, the first time 1776 has been invoked to overturn democracy in America. As Franita Tolson (2021) demonstrated, the same invocations were used by white supremacists in Wilmington, North Carolina, in 1898, as they attempted to overthrow the seated multiracial state government there. How then, might we ask, can the processes that embrace liberty and popular representation and those that embrace illiberalism and antidemocratic sentiment emerge from and draw upon a historical line to the present from the same historical moment? These parallel realities serve two different ends. One as acts of perpetuation and renewal and one as acts of destruction against the values and institutions Americans purport to stand for. How can both exist in parallel while claiming both the same lineage and guardianship of it in the present? The dissonance between the presented and re-presented pasts poses challenges—but also opportunities—for history educators, challenges that we are unfortunately ill-equipped to address.

I propose that our understanding and harnessing of what Mark Rifkin (2017) calls “settler time” limits our ability as educators to address rifts in historical and folkloric narratives that either are or appear to be incommensurate with one another. Moreover, I argue that by expanding our ontological repertoires of temporality we can become more capable of addressing historical dissonance between epistemically distinct realities. In the next section, I will begin by critiquing settler time before introducing two temporal ontologies—quantum and Indigenous temporalities—that challenge the way western education frames time.

### **The Problem with Settler Time**

In social studies, we do not so much teach about time as we do chronology. We present history as though it were past, etched in stone, dead. This is a mistake born of our often-myopic understandings of time—settler time. Typically, history instruction is rooted in a European temporal ontology. Settler time, as a concept, is located within a larger discussion of time within the western canon. And although it cannot hope to capture the full range of western ontological

notions of temporality, it helps to encapsulate certain enduring presuppositions about how temporality works in the everyday experience within western societies.

Settler time, then, can be understood as an “arrow of time” in which time flows from the past, through the present, toward the future. This framing is asymmetrical, meaning that “the cause must precede the effect” (i.e., the past can affect the present and future, but not the reverse). This asymmetry is consistent with how we perceive the normal passage of time (Eddington 2021[1927], 226). Like many western ontologies, settler time stakes its claim as the monolithic temporal orientation governing how we (should) understand the relationship between past, present, and future. This uniform conceptualization of time facilitates a certain kind of blindness to temporally divergent insights. So, while this may serve people well in the governance of their sense of historicity, it tends to hinder their ability to see value in—or learn anything from—folk histories. This is a mistake of course.

It is true that folklore, broadly construed, is predicated upon the individually accrued and collectively verified systems of knowledge often mediated by oral traditions. Further, these knowledge systems are generally not predicated on the artifices of the written record. Nevertheless, it is hubris to discount these traditions wholesale as lacking sufficient rigor to be accurate historical records. Folklore is too heterogeneous in nature to draw such a broad conclusion (Bendix 1997). Indeed, folkloric traditions can be and often are rigorously maintained, as in Indigenous teachings (e.g., Blenkinsop 2017) and in the preservation of cultural and family narratives of enslaved peoples in the Americas (e.g., dos Reis dos Santos 2018).

Still, at other times, folk knowledge is deployed in the service of the present and manifested through emotion (Ben-Amos 1971) in ways that lack historical rigor and play with the accuracy of the past to serve the purposes of the present. Stated another way, there is a distinction to be made between folklore as a practice of cultural perpetuity and folklore deployed and promulgated in the service of the present moment. It is this latter form of presentist folklore that the deployment of folkloric entanglement is of concern here. The presentist folklore of the insurrectionists that has deployed the rhetoric of the American independence movement is one example. This movement uses the past to validate the discordant presentist feelings of a disgruntled group of Americans. It is ideologically rather than culturally driven, particularly in multicultural national and transnational contexts in which a culture cannot readily be identified with the nation-state (Bendix 1997). In these contexts, the presentist deployment of folk knowledge is unconcerned, or at least not primarily concerned, with folklore as a means of cultural preservation. On the contrary, it serves as a kind of nostalgic grabbing at the past to assuage the cognitive dissonance of its adherents in the present. Put another way, historicity is functionally irrelevant to this kind of folklore. American insurrectionists’ understandings and representations of the spirit of 1776 do not depend upon and will remain untroubled by their unfaithful accounting of history.

As such, the two realities—one factive and historical and one non-factive and presentist—interact as parallel processes, existing alongside each other without intersection (Lindstrom 2022). From a certain point of view, the past is dead and gone, leaving behind the legacies and structures manifest in the present. From another point of view, the past is recurrent and recombinant. The spirit of 1776 as a *zeitgeist* has not drifted into the past but lives on in the present. Indeed, it is



created by the present. And although this spiritedness can be harnessed for good, we have seen how it may be used for ill. The past is complex and emerges unfettered by context or provenance; it haunts us in the present.

The apparent formlessness of this framing makes what occurs in presentist, insurrectionist folklore distinct from other counter-narrations of history. Whether you want to consider critical race theory, feminism, Marxist materialism, postmodernism, or modern progressivist re-narrations of the past, they rely upon the same ontological constructions of temporality that accede to an arrow-of-time construction. Where they differ is not temporality, but the interpretive lens they deploy to make sense of the past, present, and future. When one takes as a given the interpretative orientations of these histories, they can be—and are—held to the same factive standards claimed by modernist historians. Their various tellings of the past may be reconciled by considering multiple perspectives and the various positionings of self in relation to the subject of inquiry. This is not so with insurrectionist, that is, presentist, folklore.

The temporal structures of these ontologically distinct conceptions of the past work in parallel yet remain irreconcilable. Through the lens of settler time, the lore of 1776 as construed by insurrectionist sympathizers is but a gross and intentional misrepresentation of history in the service of nefarious right-wing political aims. Don't get me wrong, I agree with this position. However, the ontological tools settler time provides educators leave us unable to “see” the spectral relevance of re-presented histories, and thus unable to engage them. Instead, teachers, steeped in settler time, are limited to dismissing or disparaging insurrectionists' inchoate constructions of the past to undermine the unfaithful re-presentation of the past. By doing so we hope futilely to align these parallel processes.

This insistence that these histories be engaged with the same standards of inquiry is understandable because of how we have been socialized to experience the passage of time and to conceive of history's role across an asymmetrical temporal plane. History, one might argue, ought to be used to explain the present and provide insight into future possibilities. What is a teacher left to do when the present carries no discernable form with which to shape either history or the future?

### **The Need for Temporal Diversity in the Presentation of the Past**

A growing body of scholarship centred on quantum and Indigenous temporalities troubles the classical western assumption that settler time's claims to reality are unassailable. Further, it challenges the notion that the way we experience the passage of time reveals accurately how time functions (Dainton 2017). Indeed, quantum temporality can reveal that the past is never truly behind us and is therefore subject to re-presentation and revision. This helps to explain why nations and groups within nations continue to be haunted by their pasts. In the U.S. these hauntings are often temporally located in the events surrounding the American Revolution, the Civil War, anticommunism and antisocialism, ideas about the frontier, and the vicious racial violence that is at once a product of enslavers and engine of resurgent white nationalism, which de Tocqueville (1969) identified as a “nightmare constantly haunting the American imagination” (358). The ghosts of American history are inescapable, but they are not immutable. They persist and morph because they are at once ingrained in the foundation of the American psyche and reflections of the cultural present (see Wexler 2017).

Importantly, these revisions are not the kind that occur because of revelations brought forth by new evidence previously missing from the historical record; they shift by way of our orientations in the present to past and future times. When those orientations change, so does one's sense-making about how events from the past slot together coherently to explain the present and future (see Wexler 2017). Consequently, the historical narrative we come to present is reflective of that temporal reorientation and revision.

It is important for the sake of clarity to belabour this point. I do not mean to suggest that the interpretation of the past needn't be faithful to the historical record. On the contrary, the enterprise of history requires a fastidious dedication to its evidentiary underpinnings. Nevertheless, historical salience, or how people make sense of their history, is very much up for grabs by different groups, communities, and peoples who communicate it to one another in ways that are meaningfully received by others who identify with that community (see Levstik and Barton 1996). Thus, from a folkloric standpoint, 1776 represents an emotionally salient story, a haunting if you will, that gives rise to the collective consciousness of a community that envelopes past, present, and future as one. The past is subject to revision by the tellers of the story and known by those who hear it and who can accept as true the story for which emotional salience trumps accuracy. As such, the past is ever available in the present to all who will harness it to pursue their aims so long as it remains resonant with the people for whom these re-presentations are produced. In quantum physics, the interplay between the observer and observed—or in this case teller and receiver—is known as *entanglement* (Barad 2007, Cavalcanti 2020). It is to this temporality I now turn.

### **Quantum Mechanical Temporality**

Drawing from QBism (Fuchs, Mermin, and Schack 2014), one of several quantum-theoretical frames, I argue that reality as we perceive it is neither objectively out in the world nor internally manifested in thought. On the contrary, *reality* is the relational connection between information—we can think of information as anything that can be observed—and the observer, or recipient, of the information, neither of which precedes the other (Gefter 2015). In other words, reality requires both what is occurring in the external world to happen and for a participant to observe its happening for us to say that it has become real. Bereft of these two simultaneous conditions, we cannot say with any certainty that something is true or real, only potential, and possible.

Thus, the present is made manifest only by and for the observer, mediated by both prevailing contemporary conditions and the observer's epistemological framing of the past: Individuals' sense-making results from the context of their prior knowledge and their experiences in the present. This weaving of world-happening and world-observing is what quantum physicists refer to as entanglement (Barad 2007, Cavalcanti 2020). From a quantum perspective, an unobserved past, present, and future all remain in flux; they are not real, only possible. In this unobserved state, the past, present, and future are equally unknowable and remain so until an observer becomes entangled with a moment through observation.

The work of Karen Barad (2007) helps to elaborate on the social processes of entanglement. She goes to great pains to disabuse her readers that reality is either objectively out in the world available for observers to come across or is fully manufactured in the minds of individuals fully removed from the material world. Rather, as agents who are part of the material world we act as interlocutors

who both observe the world around us and engage in sharing our perceptions of it with other interlocutors. In this way, we are both actors in and of the world and interpreters of our experience within it, a phenomenon she refers to as “agential realism” (332). Reality, as it were, is not made manifest through the particularistic relationship between a phenomenon and a singular observer. On the contrary, it emerges from the “agential intra-actions” (333)—the multiple and ongoing interactions between different human beings, their environments, and their ideas in an iterative and ever-changing process of entanglement.

Barad’s (2007) explication helps to explain why no two observers left to their faculties alone will interpret or experience the phenomenon we call reality in precisely the same way but can nevertheless agree with a high degree of certainty on what constitutes reality. That is why, for example, two observers can watch the same thing occur in the world from virtually the same vantage point and later recount markedly different happenings but can typically reconcile their accounts when they share their experiences. The experience of the first individual is entangled with the phenomenon they observed and will remain idiosyncratic and distinct from the entangled state of the other individual. That is, unless and until they share information about their reality. This sharing of information—making it common knowledge between individuals—represents yet another instance of entanglement, so-called because the individuals’ interpretations of reality have become a single shared reality that cannot again be disentangled. This process of sharing and receiving information is the process of ever-expanding entanglement. As more individuals send and receive—or tell and accept—a particular story about reality; that reality becomes increasingly salient to the community for which this story is told.

What that means is that history and all its hauntings or traces, whether mediated through the rigours of historical analysis or the emotional salience of folklore, remain in flux until it is shared and accepted, integrated, and even co-created by the recipient, whether historian or layperson. But once it has been received and accepted, that presentation of history takes on its own reality. What is more, this reality is stable only temporarily, subject to further intra-activity (Barad 2007) in which innumerable agents play a role. This may help to explain why the past tends to continue to haunt us. People tend to continue bumping up against the past in its historical or folkloric particulars, and in doing so continue to shape the present’s relationship to the past. Through this process, ontologically delimited temporalities are brought into being—realities that function differentially in time materialize and dematerialize in response to the ongoing processes of intra-activity which bring them into being. As Barad (2007) puts it, “becoming is not an unfolding in time but the inexhaustible dynamism of the enfolding of mattering” (180). How humans construct temporal realities has much to do with what matters to those who are doing the matter-ing. The extent to which these materialized temporalities are salient to other agents matters for their emergence—through the process of entanglement—as an onto-temporal reality.

These two conceptions of reality, settler time conceptualized as linear, and quantum temporality as emergent from and receding into a state of flux, are of critical importance here. The settler-colonial understanding of time makes it difficult for teachers trained in a settler time ontology of history to consider alternative notions of temporality. This necessarily limits how sense-making about the past, present, and future can happen in the U.S. at present. It is a narrow and unwelcoming entanglement if you will. Instead of acting in the service of entangling individuals

in a singular reality, it serves to reinforce a state of discord between parallel realities that defy further entanglement because it cannot accommodate folk histories. They, therefore, become epistemologically impenetrable to the other. One is bereft of historicity and the other devoid of emotional salience. As a result, each remains to haunt the other.

In the next section, I draw from examples of Indigenous temporal ontologies to address notions of temporal dissonance that emerge from the confrontation between settler time and quantum temporality.

### **Temporal Dissonance and Indigenous Temporality**

How are we to make sense of the present if we do not share a common sense of reality? Neither quantum temporality nor settler time provides much insight into this problem. Without further mediation, social studies teachers will continue to fall into the trap of teachings that fail to disrupt “the specter [sic] (of institutional mastery over narratives)...and, in turn, safe-guards an iteration of history that is problematic, irresponsible, and dangerous” (Varga and Monreal 2021, 96). Settler temporality may allow us to recognize that there is a parallel insurrectionist reality out there in the world, even while it denies its validity. Quantum temporality, then, takes us a step further to explain how these two incommensurate realities have come into existence, and why they appear to be irreconcilable. Neither, however, offers us much insight into what is to be done. But we may be able to draw insight from Indigenous scholars whose notions of temporality are found within longstanding wisdom traditions. In what follows, I draw from Niitsitapi (Blackfoot) and Apalech wisdom traditions to help readers grasp how temporal flux—from which the past-present-future emerges—offers insight toward the reconciliation of temporal realities.

Niitsitapi scholar Leroy Little Bear writing with Ryan Heavy Head (2004) pointed out that the Blackfoot conception of reality “produce[s] experiences of fluid event manifestation, arising from and returning into a holistic state of constant flux” (23). Past, present, and future interact like temporal dancers, reacting and responding to each other, sometimes in unexpected ways. Similarly, Apalech scholar Tyson Yunkaporta (2020) explained that the Aboriginal peoples of Australia view time as a stable system always in flux. They view temporality like the laws of thermodynamics, in which “nothing is created or destroyed; it just moves and changes” (39). Yunkaporta invokes the term *Dreaming*—which he explains is a “mistranslation and misinterpretation” of a much more complicated ontology—to refer to the process of revelation of temporality as pattern formation and interpretation of the three ever-moving “ages of deep time” (39). The observer cannot so much decipher a linear relationship, but instead “can... ‘gaze’ and take it in” to reveal patterns of creation, stability, and destruction (19). In the next section, I elaborate upon what these insights offer social studies as avenues for reconciliation of incommensurate realities.

Taken together, Little Bear’s (2012) and Yunkaporta’s explications of temporal flux, emergence and recession, pattern formation and destruction offer a clear invitation to social studies teachers to challenge our understandings of time. They offer us the opportunity to view the competing insurrectionist reality as a source of revelation located variously in time, rather than as a literal construction of a linear past; as I’ve said before, the evidentiary fidelity in this telling of history is irrelevant to insurrectionist ideology. The spectre of this reality that exists in parallel to the one



inhabited by most Americans, one in which evidentiary standards are in many ways anathema to the emotionally driven non-factive truths, is nevertheless an emergent reality in a quantum sense. Taken as a source of revelation to “challenge the closedness of temporal and ontological certainties” (Varga and Monreal 2021, 96) social studies teachers may be able to discern avenues of inspiration to return to an increasingly entangled present.

These realities reveal for us, if we are wise enough to see them, possibilities for the future that may still be reconciled. How might this be? The past, conceived of through the lens of hauntology, constructs the past as a structure that is always already (e.g., van der Tuin 2011)—it is both actualized in narrative and ever waiting to be constructed in the present; ever contested; visible and yet ephemeral—but not yet—in fact never truly—ossified (Varga and Monreal 2021). As political theorists like DeLanda, Laclau, and Mouffe have argued, it is necessary to recognize the ways social formations have always been “relatively incoherent...because it is only on the basis of such an understanding that effective strategies can be enacted for democratic social change” (Gilbert 2010, 17). Currently, the social studies discipline fails to account for the ways in which the past’s hold on our present is always gossamer thin. It is fixed only temporarily, and that fixedness is tenuous in the face of a present that subject to constant flux.

The perception about the past’s fixedness that is part and parcel of settler time makes it difficult for social studies teachers to make sense of the kind of authorial divergence in the making of history that we are experiencing presently, much less give it any credence. Social studies teachers’ inclinations, then, may be to bombard this epistemological bubble with factive truths, whether oriented by critical or hegemonic frames. But facts, as we have repeatedly observed, cannot sway those who have become entangled in a non-factive narrative (e.g., Crowley 2021, Larson and Broniatowski 2021). Indeed, using the tools of factivity, such as historical analysis, to challenge non-factive narratives is both ineffective and counterproductive. The two narratives are played on different frequencies: The validity of the insurrectionist narrative is mediated by its non-factive, as opposed to factive, salience. When teachers engage in factive modes for discussing phenomena that are fundamentally emotional, they further distance themselves from the other (Gottman and DeClaire 2001). They instead reify the epistemological distance between these realities and make impossible the kind of epistemic rupture that is ultimately necessary to reconcile the two.

Further, when history educators castigate folk knowledge of this kind, we ensure that it will continue to haunt us. Derrida warns, “ghosts haunt places that exist without them; they return to where they have been excluded from” (Derrida and Dufourmantelle 2000, 152). To return briefly to the moment of insurrection and the lore that has come to surround it for some, teachers must tread carefully. It is perhaps understandable that social studies teachers would wish to dismiss students who share the claims of insurrectionists as misinformed or even to try to be corrective agents. This reasonable action is likely to be no more effective than putting an end to a haunting by denying the existence of ghosts. If social studies professionals are to draw from the insights that Yunkaporta (2020) and Little Bear and Heavy Head (2004) offer, then they must recognize that a historical pattern is emerging from the flux that remains to be exorcised from a future reality. This parallel non-factive reality will continue to haunt the factive one until what it is trying to communicate is recognized and understood such that a further, convergent entangling can begin in earnest.

The question before us remains, how might we draw insight, indeed a revelation, from that which haunts us such that we may make manifest newly emergent entanglements in the present? In the next section, I offer insight to teachers seeking avenues to reconcile these parallel, and seemingly incompatible, realities.

### **Temporal Entanglement for Teachers**

Our observations of the past become entangled when we share our observations, momentarily fixing them in place. The temporal fixedness of these entanglements depends upon our (un)willingness to challenge authoritative versions of history. When we question and interrogate histories, we cast past, present, and future back into flux, allowing us to “look again” to “re-search...and re-story ourselves” (Absolon and Dion 2017, 82-3) in the face of new and old challenges and re-envisioned futures. In his book *Our History Is Our Future*, Sioux scholar Nick Estes (2019) explained that in “Indigenous notions of time...there is no separation between past and present, meaning that an alternative future is also determined by our understanding of the past. Our history is the future” (14). By observing temporal relationships in this way together, we become entangled with our collective projection of the future and the histories that help inform our actions in the present.

Temporal ontologies provide unique sets of tools that educators may make use of to help students to make “diagnoses of the times in which we live” which in turn provide them with a vision “of what must be done to get free” (Estes 2019, 14). In my view, ‘to get free’ here has multiple implications and possible understandings. When we cannot share within our classrooms the very nature of reality, we are unable to work toward a common future, thus becoming imprisoned in the present. Our classrooms become sites of conflict, illiberal morasses, like a kind of intellectual trench warfare that becomes stagnant and fetid rather than generative and fecund. Temporal freedom is born of the ability to navigate these different notions of temporality to pull together the common threads of experience, factive and non-factive alike, to weave together a common tapestry for the future

Put another way, if social studies teachers can recognize that some students are entangled with history told as a linear factive story leading from the past and into the present while others are entangled with a history shaped more by how they feel about the present and their prospects in the future, then they can more effectively work toward integrating the contradictions that exist between the two. In so doing teachers will be in a better position to integrate the two realities. This weaving requires teachers to meaningfully facilitate integrating the demands of historical accuracy with varied affective calls for redress. Moreover, this integration is an act of temporal alignment and, simply stated, is yet another instance of entanglement; it initiates the process of entangling two previously unbounded realities in a newly entangled common reality.

### **Attending to Non-Factive Reality in the Classroom**

Teachers could be forgiven for feeling unsure about how to approach these conflicting realities, especially when one reality is bereft of evidence that would satisfy either historian or investigator. Even if they recognize the futility of confronting students with facts or the burden of providing

verifiable evidence, teachers are likely to be out of tools. What I propose instead is that teachers ask students to set aside the facts of the matter temporarily. In the void left behind when evidence is set aside, teachers must ask their students to wade into the affective realm—which I will admit, research indicates that people generally are also woefully underprepared to undertake (e.g., Brown 2021), and that the discipline itself may yet lack the nimbleness to support this work (Varga and van Kessel 2021). Nevertheless, this work represents an important first step.

I would encourage teachers to show images of the insurrectionists before asking students to imagine how those individuals must feel to be in that position because critically considering subject position and context offers tools for accessing this affective realm. The conversations from here could go in many directions, but let me offer possible questions to begin directing the discussion:

- What feelings about history would motivate a person to drive across (sometimes several) state lines to engage in these actions?
- What would it feel like to be convinced that an election was stolen, regardless of your political affiliation? How might that connect to real or imagined feelings about the role of representation in American history?
- How likely do you think it is that the people who showed up at this rally that became an insurrection were otherwise satisfied with how the country was being governed in the present in relation to their understanding of how it was governed in the past?
- What unique hauntings from the past continue to shape how Americans feel about each other such that they might make people believe the other side is playing foul?
- Is it possible that people who fundamentally disagree on what happened on January 6 might both feel like something's wrong with how they've been taught to conceive of American democracy?

Teachers are likely to find that students want to provide evidence, or at least an argument, for why the hypothetical subject in question is wrong for feeling as they do. It is up to teachers to remind them that they are not litigating the rightness or wrongness of the actions people took but trying to make sense of the underlying motivations that might propel them to act in certain ways. By helping students to deconstruct the affective propellants, teachers can act to diffuse the existential tension between these parallel realities that has more to do with how one perceives and experiences the past, present, and future than it does with the specific facts included in the narratives that are used to weave a reality in these temporal locals.

### **Fostering Future Entanglements**

Once social studies teachers are successful—if social studies professionals can be so bold as to think it possible to be—at facilitating this entanglement, they must then have an eye to the future. Teachers must be intentional about directing student agency toward shaping a future together

across differences (den Heyer 2017). If teachers fail to make social studies more “attentive to the future,” (the future we and our students shape), then our profession will also end up “failing [U.S.] citizens and the very democracy that we all so deeply cherish” (Marker 2006, 94). As students are typically taught in history classrooms, they often receive narratives of the past passively while notions of futurity are ignored or taken for granted. Teachers can change this pattern in critical and concrete ways.

In their chapter in *The Wiley International Handbook of History Teaching and Learning* Anna Clark and Maria Grever (2018) make clear that the formulation of historical consciousness is not simply knowing about the happenings of the past, but rather the result of history building—an interpretive construction of the past—that makes sense of the present in the service of a trajectory toward the future. In all temporal ontologies, there is a relationship between past and future, filtered by the lens of the immediate present—the point in time in which our individual, if not collective, thoughts, actions, and values briefly cohere across time. It is the process of coherence that is essential to the development of historical consciousness. The challenge for teachers is to support students by fostering this historical coherence.

Social studies teachers are poised to help students make sense of the present and past by taking seriously the competing entanglements that write themselves into our present’s competing realities. By providing students with the tools and opportunities to make meaning out of these competing claims to reality, mediated by teachers’ more nuanced and responsive understandings of temporality, we may lay the foundation for a future-making process that is likelier to be mutual in its entanglement.

To reorient students to the making of future potentialities, we must reorient history-making in ways that help students wrestle with time and temporality directly. Students must be equipped to navigate history by way of time mapping (see Reich 2018), such as timelines, winter counts (e.g., Scott 2006), or other forms of chronological ordering that cut across cultural bounds to demonstrate the ways chronology is used linearly even when those cultures have different temporal ontologies. At the same time, social studies teachers must help students to navigate these ontological terrains that can be frustratingly abstract with more practical approaches to future-making. One example is asking students to order and reorder the significance of historical events in relation to circumstances in the present. Who would have imagined five years ago that the 1918 Influenza Pandemic would be so salient today, or that the social conflicts that emerged in response to it would be so hauntingly similar to the past as societies attempted to navigate the Covid-19 pandemic?

Teachers can approach the process of re-presenting the future in multiple ways: using critical theory as a form of analysis (Haneda 2009), employing Afrofuturisms (e.g., Ellis, Martinek, and Donaldson 2018) and utopian thinking (e.g., Amster 2009) as means of harnessing students’ imaginative potential; engaging diverse Indigenous ways of knowing the past, present, and future as revelation (e.g., Yunkaporta 2020); and sharing in hypothesis generation that is at once critical, creative, and flexible in the face of changing conditions (Leidtka 1998). Framed in an ontologically different temporality, we might say that our students must be able to gaze at the manifold possibilities inherent in the emergent and ebbing flux of time, engage in Dreaming, seek and test




answers in the patterns of temporal flux, observe the fixedness of time alone and with others, and pivot to re-search again.

Another example is what John D. Brewer (2020) calls “remembering forwards” (37). Remembering forward is a process of working with disjunctive memory of the past that involves speaking truthfully about events as they happened; being tolerant of others’ attempts at truth-telling about the past; doing so together with those who disagree so that those who share with each other across difference may come to acknowledge those points of disagreement. The process then turns from past to future in its final two stages. First, he suggested that people can do so by engaging together in efforts to transform present conditions which invigorate ghosts of the past, thereby preventing them from haunting future presents. And second, people must commit to a common trajectory in order to build a future together. For Brewer, this trajectory commitment involves “remembering to cease to remember the divisiveness of disputed memories, reminding us not to live in the past but to remember the future” (43). Brewer’s process is a practical example of how to initiate and practice temporal entanglement in the classroom.

Such re-searching and futureneering is both urgent and essential to the human project because the myriad idiosyncratic entanglements that separate us in how we view and imagine the past, present, and future require that we continue to engage in this conscious project of mutual entanglement. The approaches I have offered provide a set of tools for teachers and students to respond to the challenges of reconciling competing temporalities and to entangle the past, present, and future mutually. This framing opens the possibility that we may offer “diagnoses of the times in which we live, and visions of what must be done to get free” (Estes 2019, 14) from the democratic tragedy that looms large before us. In so doing, we ought to revoke our claims—as teachers—upon the storying of time as only a chronological process, freeing us from the bounds of settler time and empowering our students to be agents in and of time. Thus, our role as social studies teachers would become one of fostering in our students the capacity to engage in this work while we hold for them the spaces in which they may become free from the hauntings of the past and entangled with their once and future histories—together.

---

**Cory Wright-Maley** is Associate Professor of Education at St. Mary’s University in Treaty 7 Territory on the lands of the Siksikaitsitapi in Alberta, Canada. He focuses on socioeconomic equity, political theory, simulations, and time and temporality. His professional development efforts have been focused on learning from Indigenous Elders and Traditional Knowledge Keepers.  ORCID 0000-0002-1742-5537

#### Endnotes

1. Although the hasty reader may mistakenly draw a conclusion that I intend to liken insurrectionist interpretations of the past with Indigenous temporality, or that I am arguing that Indigenous temporalities are non-factive; nothing could be further from the truth. On the contrary, my purposes are to demonstrate how western colonial constructions of time make us blind to how non-linear temporal constructions can come into existence in parallel with linear ones. It happens that the insurrectionist reality is both non-linear and non-factive. The use of quantum entanglement and Indigenous notions of temporal flux are merely lenses deployed to bring this phenomenon into focus.

2. The former President, Donald Trump established the 1776 Commission in September 2020 to develop and promote “patriotic education” and “pro-American curriculum” (Donald Trump, “Remarks by President Trump at the White House Conference on American History,” September 17, 2020). This commission was subsequently dismantled by President Joe Biden on his Inauguration Day, January 20, 2021.  
Link to Archives: <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-white-house-conference-american-history>

*A correction was made on February 24, 2023: The citation for Gabrielle Lindstrom (2022) was added to the Works Cited.*

## Works Cited

- Absolon, Kathleen and Susan Dion. 2017. Doing Indigenous Community-University Research Partnerships: A Cautionary Tale. *Engaged Scholar Journal*, 3.2:81-98. [doi.org/10.15402/esj.v3i2.334](https://doi.org/10.15402/esj.v3i2.334).
- Amster, Randall. 2009. Anarchy, Utopia, and the State of Things to Come. In *Contemporary Anarchist Studies: An Introductory Anthology of Anarchy in the Academy*, eds. Randall Amster, Luis Fernandez, Anthony J. Nocella II, and Deric Shannon. London: Routledge, 306-17.
- Barad, Karen. 2007. *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Ben-Amos, Dan. 1971. Toward a Definition of Folklore in Context. *The Journal of American Folklore* 84.331:3-15. [doi.org/10.2307/539729](https://doi.org/10.2307/539729).
- Bendix, Regina. 1997. *In Search of Authenticity: The Formation of Folklore Studies*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Blenkinsop, M. Lisa. 2017. Generational Perspectives on Community Knowledge Transfer in Nipissing First Nation. PhD dissertation. University of Guelph.
- Boyer, Pascal. 2018. *Minds Make Societies: How Cognition Explains the World Humans Create*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Brewer, John, D. 2020. Remembering Forwards: Healing the Hauntings of the Past. In *Post-Conflict Hauntings: Transforming Memories of Historical Trauma*, eds. Kim Wale, Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela, and Jeffery Prager. Cham: Palgrave MacMillan, 25-46.
- Brown, Brené. 2021. *Atlas of the Heart: Mapping Meaningful Connection and the Language of Human Experience*. New York: Random House.
- Burke, Kenneth. 1938. 1973a. Literature as Equipment for Living. *The Philosophy of Literary Form*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 293-304.
- Cavalcanti, Eric. 2020. New Quantum Paradox Throws the Foundations of Observed Reality into Question. *Space*, September 7, <https://www.space.com/quantum-paradox-throws-doubt-on-observed-reality.html>.
- Clark, Anna and Maria Grever. 2018. Historical Consciousness: Conceptualizations and Educational Applications. In *The Wiley International Handbook of History Teaching and Learning*, eds Scott Alan Metzger and Lauren McArthur Harris. Hoboken: Wiley Blackwell, 177-201.
- Crowley, Bill. 2021. Facts (Almost) Never Change Minds: Libraries and the Management of Democracy-Supportive Public Perceptions. In *Libraries and the Global Retreat of Democracy: Confronting Polarization, Misinformation, and Suppression Vol:50*, eds. Natalie Green Taylor, Karen Kettlich, Ursula Gorham, and Paul T. Jaeger. Bingley, UK: Emerald Publishing Limited.
- Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly. 1990. *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Dainton, Barry. 2017. Temporal Consciousness. *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/consciousness-temporal/#MetTemCon>.
- Danckert, James A. and Ava-Ann A. Allman. 2005. Time Flies When You're Having Fun: Temporal Estimation and the Experience of Boredom. *Brain and Cognition*. 59.3:236-45.
- de Tocqueville, Alexis. 1969. *Democracy in America*. Garden City, NJ: Anchor.
- den Heyer, Kent. 2011. History as a Disciplined “Ethic of Truths”. In *New Possibilities for the Past: Shaping History Education in Canada*, ed. Penney Clark. Vancouver: UBC Press, 154-72.
- den Heyer, Kent. 2017. Doing Better Than Just Falling Forward: Linking Subject Matter with Explicit Futures Thinking. *One World in Dialogue*. 4.1:5-10.

- Derrida, Jacques and Anne Dufourmantelle. 2000. *Of Hospitality (Cultural Memory in the Present)*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- dos Reis dos Santos, Jennifer. 2018. How African American Folklore Saved the Cultural Memory and History of Slaves. *The Conversation*, <https://theconversation.com/how-african-american-folklore-saved-the-cultural-memory-and-history-of-slaves-98427>.
- Eddington, Arthur. 1927. *The Nature of the Physical World: The Gifford Lectures*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Election Integrity Partnership (EIP). 2021. The Long Fuse: Misinformation and the 2020 Election. *Stanford University*, <https://stacks.stanford.edu/file/druid:tr171zs0069/EIP-Final-Report.pdf>.
- Ellis, Jacqueline, Jason D. Martinek, and Sonya Donaldson. 2018. Understanding the Past, Imagining the Future: Teaching Speculative Fiction and Afrofuturism. *Transformations: The Journal of Inclusive Scholarship and Pedagogy*. 28.1:111-22.
- Estes, Nick. 2019. *Our History Is the Future: Standing Rock Versus the Dakota Access Pipeline, and the Long Tradition of Indigenous Resistance*. London: Verso Books.
- Fuchs, Christopher A., N. David Mermin, and Rüdiger Schack. 2014. An Introduction to QBism with an Application to the Locality of Quantum Mechanics. *American Journal of Physics*. 82.8:749-54.
- Gefter, Amanda. 2015. A Private View of Quantum Reality. *Quanta Magazine*, <https://www.quantamagazine.org/quantum-bayesianism-explained-by-its-founder-20150604>.
- Gerken, Mikkel. 2017. *On Folk Epistemology: How We Think and Talk About Knowledge*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Gerken, Mikkel. 2020. Truth-Sensitivity and Folk Epistemology. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*. 100.1:3-25.
- Gilbert, Jeremy. 2010. Deleuzian Politics? A Survey and Some Suggestions. *New Formations*. 68:10–33. [doi.org/10.3898/newf.68.01.2009](https://doi.org/10.3898/newf.68.01.2009).
- Gottman, John Mordechai and Joan DeClaire. 2001. *The Relationship Cure: A 5-Step Guide to Strengthening Your Marriage, Family, and Friendships*. New York: Three Rivers Press.
- Gribbin, John. 2005. *Deep Simplicity: Bringing Order to Chaos and Complexity*. New York: Random House.
- Haneda, Mari. 2009. Learning About the Past and Preparing for the Future: A Longitudinal Investigation of a Grade 7 ‘Sheltered’ Social Studies Class. *Language and Education*. 23.4:335-52.
- Helmsing, Mark and Annie M. Whitlock. 2018. Time. In *Keywords in the Social Studies: Concepts and Conversations*, eds. Daniel G. Krutka, Annie McMahon, and Mark Steinberg. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 37-45.
- Jefferson, Thomas. 1997. *Declaration of Independence*. Jackson: Applewood Books.
- Larson, Heidi J. and David A. Broniatowski. 2021. Why Debunking Misinformation Is Not Enough to Change People’s Minds About Vaccines. *American Journal of Public Health*. 111.6:1058-60.
- Levstik, Linda S. and Keith C. Barton. 1996. “They Still Use Some of Their Past”: Historical Salience in Elementary Children’s Chronological Thinking. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*. 28.5:531-76.
- Liedtka, Jeanne. M. 1998. Strategic Thinking: Can It Be Taught? *Long Range Planning*. 31.1:120–29.
- Lindstrom, Gabrielle. 2022. Ethical Spaces and Parallel Processes in Higher Ed. Presentation. University of Calgary Conference on Postsecondary Learning and Teaching, Calgary, AB, Canada, May 1-3.
- Little Bear, Leroy. 2012. Traditional Knowledge and Humanities: A Perspective by a Blackfoot. *Journal of Chinese Philosophy*. 39.4:518-27.
- Little Bear, Leroy and Ryan Heavy Head. 2004. A Conceptual Anatomy of the Blackfoot Word. *Re-Vision: A Journal of Knowledge and Consciousness*. 26.3:31-8.
- Marker, Perry M. 2006. The Future Is Now in the World of 2056. In *Social Issues and The Social Studies Curriculum*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed., ed. E. Wayne Ross. Albany: State University of New York Press, 77-96.
- Mercier, Hugo. 2010. The Social Origins of Folk Epistemology. *Review of Philosophy and Psychology*. 1.4: 499-514.
- Mitchell, Amy, Mark Jurkowitz, J.Baxter Oliphant, and Elisa Shearer. 2021. How Americans Navigated the News in 2020: A Tumultuous Year in Review. *PEW Research Center*. <https://www.pewresearch.org/journalism/2021/02/22/how-americans-navigated-the-news-in-2020-a-tumultuous-year-in-review>.

- Perry, Bruce. D. and Maia Szalavitz. 2017. *The Boy Who Was Raised as a Dog: And Other Stories from a Child Psychiatrist's Notebook—What Traumatized Children Can Teach Us About Loss, Love, and Healing*. New York: Basic Books.
- Rahimi, Sadeq and Byron J. Good. 2019. Preface: Ghosts, Haunting, and Hauntology. *Ethos*. 47.4:409-10.
- Reich, Gabriel, A. 2018. Not So Fast! A Response to the Time, Continuity, and Change Section. In *Keywords in the Social Studies: Concepts and Conversations*, eds. Daniel G. Krutka, Annie McMahon, and Mark Steinberg. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 47-79.
- Rifkin, Mark. 2017. *Beyond Settler Time: Temporal Sovereignty and Indigenous Self-Determination*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Scott, Kerry M. 2006. A Contemporary Winter Count. PhD dissertation. University of Lethbridge.
- Shepherd, Brittany. 2022. Majority of Americans Think Jan. 6 Attack Threatened Democracy: POLL. *ABC News*, <https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/majority-americans-jan-attack-threatened-democracy-poll/story?id=81990555>.
- Tolson, Franita. 2021. Op-Ed: Why the Mob Thought Attacking the Capitol Was Their ‘1776 moment’. *Los Angeles Times*, January 21, <https://www.latimes.com/opinion/story/2021-01-21/insurrection-capitol-attack-patriotism-1776>.
- United States of America v. Nordean, Biggs, Rehl, Tarrio, Pezzola*, 21-cr-175 (D. D.C. 2022), <https://www.justice.gov/usao-dc/press-release/file/1510791/download>.
- Van der Tuin, Iris. 2011. The New Materialist “Always Already”: On an A-Human Humanities. *NORA-Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research*. 19.4: 285-90.
- Varga, Bretton A. 2020. Ghostly Entanglements: Exposing Temporal Matter(ing)s in Social Studies Education with (Re)Photography. PhD Dissertation. University of South Florida.
- Varga, Bretton A. and Timothy Monreal. 2021. (Re) Opening Closed/ness: Hauntological Engagements with Historical Markers in the Threshold of Mastery. *Taboo: The Journal of Culture and Education*. 20.3:6.
- Varga, Bretton A. and Cathryn van Kessel. 2021. Haunted by Hope: (Re)tracing the Complexities Embedded within Assemblages of Violence [Review]. *Theory & Research in Social Education*. Online: 1-7.
- Wallace, Chris. 2020. President Trump Goes One-On-One with Chris Wallace. *Fox News Sunday* [Video]. July 19, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W6XdpDOH1JA>.
- Wertsch, James V. 2021. *How Nations Remember: A Narrative Approach*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Wexler, Phillip. 2017. Structure, Text, and Subject: A Critical Sociology of School Knowledge. In *Cultural and Economic Reproduction in Education*, ed. Michael W. Apple. London: Routledge, 275-303.
- Wirtschafter, Valeri and Chris Meserole. 2022. Prominent Political Podcasters Played Key Role in Spreading the ‘Big Lie’. *Brookings Tech Stream*, January 4, <https://www.brookings.edu/techstream/prominent-political-podcasters-played-key-role-in-spreading-the-big-lie>.
- Yunkaporta, Tyson. 2020. *Sand Talk: How Indigenous Thinking Can Save the World*. San Francisco: HarperOne.





## Riding with James: More Than a Map

by Ashley Minner

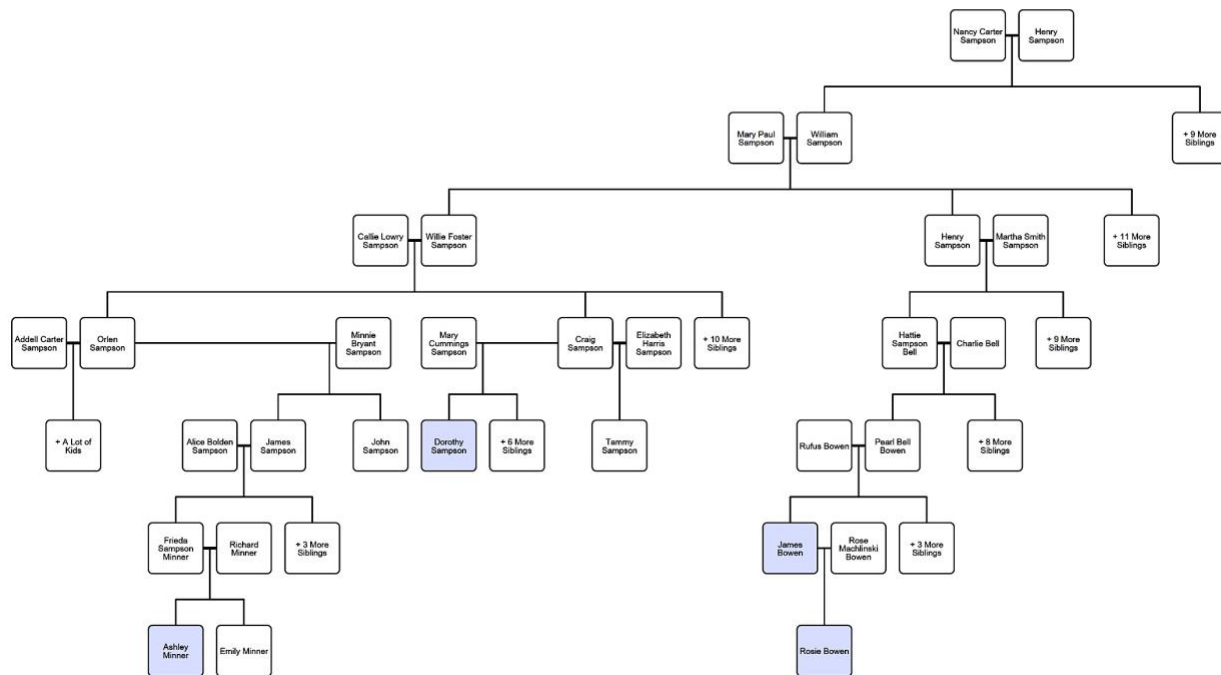
Let me tell you about my cousin James. First of all, he was almost 50 years older than me and we were actually like fourth cousins, once removed. I think. Anyway, from the time my Aunt Dorothy—who is actually not my aunt, but also a distant cousin, a couple of times removed—took me to Baltimore’s Northeast Market to visit James’ bakery as a kid, he was “my cousin James.” He saw us walking up and said, “Here come the Sampsons!” Aunt Dorothy looked at me and said, “See, here’s some of your people.”

Lumbees do this thing where we know and acknowledge distant relations right on down to umpteenth cousins, and oftentimes even just other Lumbees with no known familial ties to us, only cultural ones. “Hey Cuz!” is what we say. And, “Who’s your people?” If we don’t already know, we have this need to find out. But James really was my people.

---

About the photo: James Bowen, March 22, 2018. Courtesy Sean Scheidt.

# Sampson Family Tree



Extremely pared down Sampson family tree with persons mentioned in this story highlighted to illustrate the kinds of complex networks of Lumbee kinship we honor.

Designed using [www.familyecho.com](http://www.familyecho.com).

James was rail thin. He had close-cropped, salt and pepper hair that was more salt than pepper. If it grew out a little bit, you could tell it was wavy. He had blueish eyes. Thinking about it now, that color may have come with age. They were probably once brown. He almost always wore a ball cap and a collared shirt and nice pants with a belt and Oxford shoes but was usually covered in flour and icing from the bakery. If he was working, he wore an apron too.

His nickname was “Rat” and that’s what most people called him. He never learned to read or write, yet somehow knew everything about everything. For example, I once had occasion to visit the West Wing of the White House for work. James told me exactly how it was laid out, from memory. He knew because he had painted the Oval Office some decades before, when he worked as a painter. Before he became a baker. Before he grew old.

James was gentle and easygoing. He liked to walk. He liked to drink. He invented his own language and spoke it mostly when he was drinking. He liked to tell stories. He could “blow the fire out” of burns.<sup>1</sup>



By the time I got to be close with his daughter, my cousin Rosie who is much closer to my own age, James was in his early 70s. Rosie and I have had many adventures together over the years and James was along for most of them, but sometimes he would go off on his own. Like once, we were at the Fells Point Festival and James left us to go for a walk. We found him hours later, in a Greek bar, reminiscing on the phone with an old friend in Athens. He was just that way.

Everybody knew him. Everybody loved him. He remembered everybody from every time in his life and always wanted to know how they were doing.

Born in 1935, in Saddletree, North Carolina, in the Lumbee tribal territory, James was the son of sharecroppers. By all accounts, sharecropping was brutal. To make matters worse, there was also tri-racial segregation in that part of the world then. Imagine three separate school systems—one for white kids, one for Black kids, and one for Indians. Imagine three sections in the movie theaters. Imagine not having any time or money to go to the movies, or even school. James lived it. He came to Baltimore for the first time as a young man, in 1948. Like so many of his generation, he left home seeking work and a better quality of life.

Baltimore was the most popular destination by far. By the mid-1950s, anywhere from 2,000 to 7,000 Lumbee Indians were living in a small area on the east side of town that bridges the neighborhoods of Upper Fells Point and Washington Hill. In those days, they called it—affectionately—their [“reservation.”](#) There, they established churches and businesses and what would become the [Baltimore American Indian Center](#). They descended on businesses that already existed. They sent for their relatives, housed them, and helped them find their way when they arrived. For some decades, this part of the city functioned as a space of cultural autonomy for the Lumbee, where they could be around people who looked like them and talked like them and understood where they came from. They made it their home away from home.

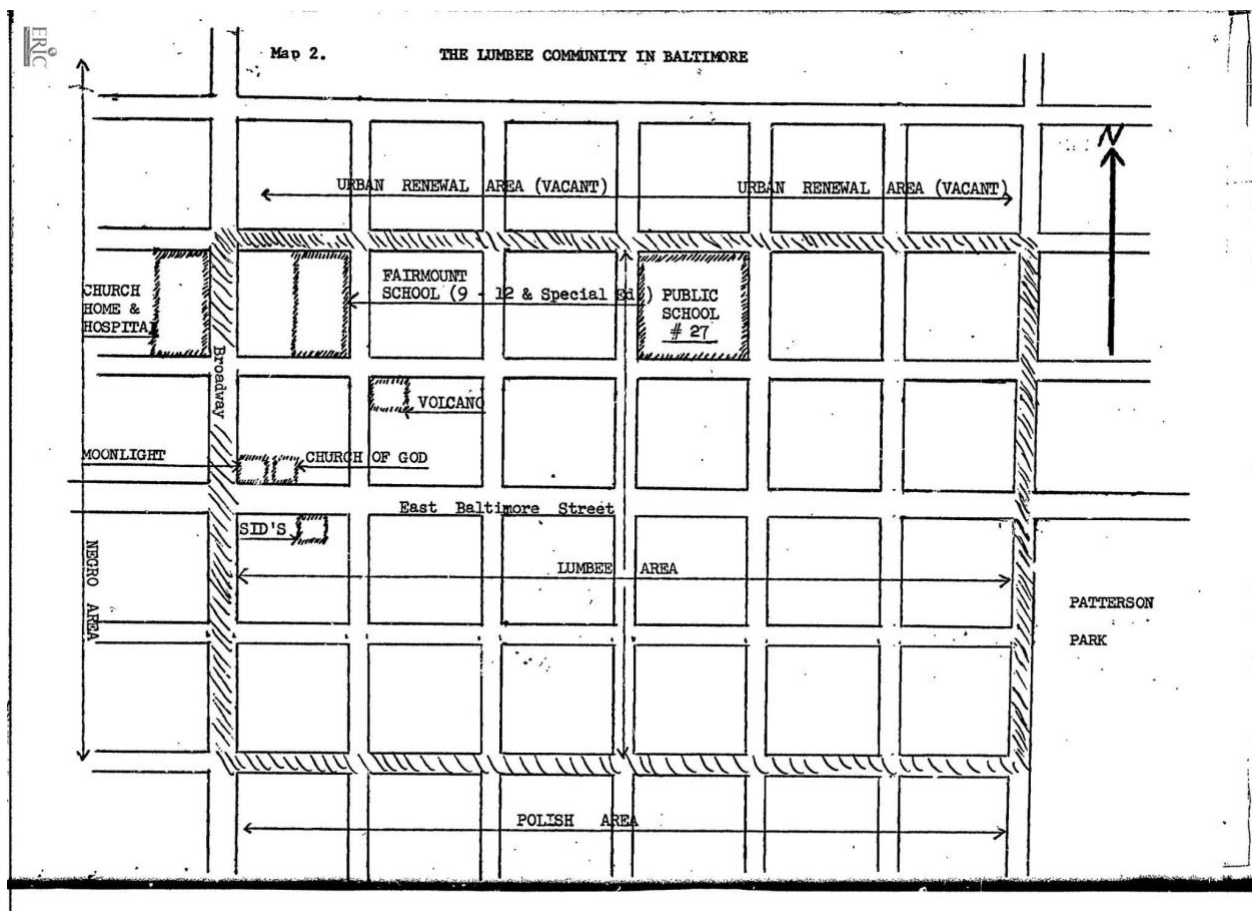
Then came the uprising in 1968, following the assassination of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Then came Urban Renewal in the early 1970s, which had already been in the works well before this Indian community was established. Of course, there was also upward mobility and other reasons folks moved away, but those two events transformed the physical landscape and marked the end of an era. Afterward, “the reservation,” as such, was no more.

To this day, Baltimore is still home to one of the largest populations of Lumbee tribal members living outside North Carolina, but most of us are scattered across southeastern Baltimore County, where I have lived since I was born, in 1983. And most Baltimoreans have no idea there ever was a “reservation” in the city or that there is an American Indian population in the area at all. The Baltimore American Indian Center and South Broadway Baptist Church, two enduring cornerstones of the community, are still open and somewhat active in the old neighborhood. Like many Baltimore Lumbees, I grew up visiting them, although we had to drive to get there.

In my lifetime, there were a couple of our places left on the former “reservation,” like the Indian Center’s daycare and Native American Senior Citizens building on Lombard, for example, which was sold in 2017. The building is still there, but it’s leased by a drug rehabilitation program now. A Native geometric design painted around the doorframe remains. Then there are places that live

on in infamy, like the Volcano bar, which used to be at the corner of Ann and Fairmount and was said to erupt (with violence) every weekend. If you go to that corner today, you can't even tell where a bar would have been. And then there are all the places my generation and those younger just wouldn't know about because they were gone before our time—from the landscape and from public memory.

Realizing that there must have been many of these places, in 2018 I convened a group of Lumbee elders to help me piece together what had been “the reservation.” I had already been handed this 1969 map entitled “The Lumbee Community in Baltimore,” drawn by a white anthropologist for a federally commissioned report.



Map of the Lumbee Community in Baltimore included in John Gregory Peck, *Education of Urban Indians: Lumbee Indians in Baltimore*, National Study of American Indian Education, Series II, no. 3. Washington, DC: Office of Education, Bureau of Research, Aug. 1969.



Lumbee elders discuss Peck's Map (l-r Howard Redell Hunt, Mattie "Ty" Fields, Jeanette Jones, Heyman Jones), March 22, 2018. Courtesy Sean Scheidt.

I was excited to share the map with the elders. I handed out copies and said, "Look, I found your reservation!" The elders did look, and they were not excited.



Jeanette Hunt looks at Peck's Map, March 22, 2018. Courtesy Sean Scheidt.

They said the map was "all wrong" because so much was missing. So I handed out pens and asked if they could make corrections, but they decided to draw their own maps instead.



Jeanette Jones leads discussion while holding a hand-drawn map of "the reservation," March 22, 2018. Courtesy Sean Scheidt.

In conversation with one another, going alley by alley and street by street, they reconstructed "the reservation" of their youth on paper.





Still, I was having a hard time correlating the information the elders were giving me to plot on the big, blank street map with the neighborhood I know from life. I told them I didn't think I was going to be able to understand where things used to be until we physically went to the neighborhood together so they could point the places out. This led to several trips to the former "reservation" with different elders, including James.

Remember him? This is a story about my cousin James.

I spent one whole day riding around with James.<sup>2</sup> We rode because, like me and most of the elders who worked on this project, James had been living in Baltimore County for years and years, miles away from the old neighborhood. Not walking distance. Also, by then, he was not as steady on his feet as he once was. He held my hand for support between the front door of his house and my car.

As he got in, we made small talk. I said, "You know, for as much time as I spent over here, I had to use the GPS to get here." He said, "Well, you ain't been here in a while."<sup>3</sup> "I know," I said. "Y'all painted the house, didn't you? It used to be white?" "Yeah," he said, "The wind blewed them shingles away and I ain't never put 'em back. I got to buy some." I laughed and asked, "Are you getting up on the roof?" "No! I don't go up there," he said. "I remember what [my wife] told me. I put a roof on that house one time and I used to climb and go. It still lingers in my mind and come back... She say, 'One day, you ain't gonna be able. You better do it while you can.' And that's true. It happens. I didn't know I was ever gonna get old. I thought I was gonna stay at one age. Don't you? Do you think about growing old?" As I reached for words, he answered for me. "Not really."

"Well, where you wanna go to?" I asked. "I'm goin' ridin with you! Anywhere you want to go. What you want to do is what we're gonna do for a while," he answered. So we headed for "the reservation."



[At this point, readers may appreciate [a map to reference.](#)]

We came in on E. Baltimore Street, took a left on Broadway and rode all the way down to the water, pausing to glance at places like old Sadie's bar, the Broadway Café—the bar his late wife's family once owned, a tire shop Indian guys had on Thames Street in the 60s, James' first apartment in the city on Ann. We rode through the neighborhood slow, again and again, different ways, as he told me all about adventures I had missed, people he used to know, more places he used to live, bars he used to drink in, buildings he had worked on, his painters' union hall. We were time traveling—moving through histories of not only our own community, but also of the English and the Germans and the Irish and African Americans and Poles and Greeks and Russian Jews who had called this place home. Hell, even the pirates and privateers are still around when you realize, as we did, that cities are just full of ghosts. Ancestors of the Piscataway who had camped here and other Indigenous peoples who had passed through left something of themselves. Baltimore is totally haunted. Every absence points to a presence.

Eventually, we branched out and found ourselves on Eastern Avenue at Washington Street. James got quiet and stared out the window like he was searching for something. A few moments passed in silence before he said, “I could get lost down here anymore.” I looked over at him and said, “You always know where you are.” “I know where I is,” he said, “but I used to know every corner place and everything down here and they all knowed me.” I said, “Seems like they still do.” James got quiet again. “They know *of* me now.” Laughing, I said, “You’re a legend!” James smiled and said, “I got a lotta friends in this town, baby.”



James Bowen drinking coffee in Sip & Bite, November 22, 2019. Photo by Ashley Minner.

When we had run out of “reservation” to revisit, it was lunchtime, so we decided to stop in at Sip & Bite, in Canton, to look for one of those friends. James had hoped to run into the semi-recently retired owner, George Vasiliades, who had started as a dishwasher in the Moonlight restaurant, in the heart of what had been “the reservation.” Unfortunately, Mr. George wasn’t there that day. We still got a good conversation in with the waitress, who asked if we were from North Carolina and proudly proclaimed she had grown up with Lumbee Indians in the city.

Later, we took a ride to South Baltimore, to visit a couple of more former Indian churches. I pulled the car up to the curb outside the Brooklyn Church of God. Baltimoreans are notoriously suspicious of strangers lingering in their neighborhoods. A woman came to the doorway and hollered out, “Can I help you?” “I used to go to church here!” James hollered back.

After that, James wasn’t ready to go home, so we made our last stop the Baltimore Museum of Industry, in Federal Hill, which, according to its website, “inspires tomorrow’s worker by celebrating yesterday’s worker. Just like these real people doing real jobs,” the Museum of Industry is “not varnished or slick or Hollywood,” but “an uncommon look at common working men and women who literally laid the groundwork for everything that Baltimore is and can be” ([Baltimore Museum of Industry](#)). Exhibits feature real tools in staged settings of trades once prominent in the city. One can visit a cannery, an umbrella factory, a print shop, a garment shop, a machine shop, a pharmacy, and an automotive exhibit with real cars on the floor of the museum.



James, who had never been to this museum before, was curious to see everything on display. Of course, having been a baker since 1979, he was particularly interested in a bakery exhibit. He proceeded to handle various tools laid out on a counter, then banged on a large, free-standing metal drum. It made a startlingly loud noise. I started to whisper about a “no touching” policy posted on the wall but stopped short. James was excitedly telling me which of the tools he once had, and which were still being used in his family’s bakery. To him, the stuff was just stuff. Who was I to tell him what to do or not do with it? Wasn’t this museum a tribute to him and his labor, after all? Once or twice, staff passed through and saw James handling the artifacts. They smiled and said nothing. If they had paused long enough, he could have taught them a thing or two.

What must it feel like when the neighborhood of your youth is transformed beyond the point of recognition, when your people move away and slip away until you don’t see anyone you know there anymore—until you, yourself, are no longer known? What must it be like when the tools of your trade become museum displays, not to be touched—when the trades themselves have passed or are passing away? What does it mean to grow old in East Baltimore when you’re a Lumbee Indian?

---




The author and James Bowen, November 7, 2019.  
Photo by Ashley Minner.

James died this year. It was a Wednesday evening. He was in hospice, but he hadn’t been there long. Rosie said he waited for me to arrive. I think that’s true because when I walked in, I said, “Hey Cuz! I’m finally here!” Then he started taking deep, gasping breaths. A few minutes later he was gone.

Except he isn’t.

How could he be? As long as we’re alive, James will be too. As long as East Baltimore stands, he’ll be present. We’re walking in his footsteps, retelling his stories, speaking his language, keeping him around. We outline the spaces he used to fill with his body and know that indeed every absence points to a presence.

---

*Ashley Minner is a community-based visual artist from Baltimore, Maryland, and an enrolled member of the Lumbee Tribe of North Carolina. She earned her MFA in Community Arts from Maryland Institute College of Art and her PhD in American Studies from University of Maryland College Park. In addition to maintaining her artistic practice, Ashley works as an Assistant Curator for History and Culture at the Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian in Washington, DC.  ORCID 0000-0002-5122-5176*

**Note Regarding Images:** Informed consent was obtained from all creators of images included in this essay, as well as those pictured.

### **Links to Resources, including Urls referenced in the article**

The Baltimore “Reservation” website <https://www.baltimorereservation.com>  
Baltimore Reservation on Instagram <https://www.instagram.com/baltimorereservation>  
Baltimore American Indian Center website <https://baltimoreamericanindiancenter.org>  
Print guide to East Baltimore’s Historic American Indian “Reservation” [https://uploads-ssl.webflow.com/60b453cbcf5d591709ab655b/6191503c5227a135e796bfd4\\_East-Baltimores-Historic-American-Indian-Reservation-Map-and-Booklet-2021.pdf](https://uploads-ssl.webflow.com/60b453cbcf5d591709ab655b/6191503c5227a135e796bfd4_East-Baltimores-Historic-American-Indian-Reservation-Map-and-Booklet-2021.pdf)  
Guide to Indigenous Baltimore cellphone walking tour app for Apple  
<https://apps.apple.com/us/app/guide-to-indigenous-baltimore/id1581162134>  
Guide to Indigenous Baltimore cellphone walking tour app for Android  
[https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.pocketsights.IndigenousBaltimore&hl=en\\_US&gl=US](https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.pocketsights.IndigenousBaltimore&hl=en_US&gl=US)  
Native Land <https://native-land.ca>  
United States Department of Arts and Culture (USDAC) Honor Native Land Initiative  
<https://usdac.us/nativeland>  
Maryland State Arts Council Land Acknowledgement Project Overview and Resource Guide  
<https://msac.org/media/760/download?inline>  
Baltimore Museum of Industry <https://www.thebmi.org>

### **Endnotes**

1. It’s exactly what it sounds like. See <https://unmaskedhistory.com/2019/09/29/folklife-the-faith-healing-tradition-of-talking-out-the-fire>.
2. The next section is an adapted excerpt of my dissertation. See Ashley Colleen Minner. 2020. Revisiting the Reservation: The Lumbee Community of East Baltimore. PhD Dissertation. University of Maryland College Park, 165–68.
3. All quotes from this conversation are excerpts of James Bowen interview with Ashley Minner, November 22, 2019, Part I, Baltimore, Maryland, transcript.

## Classroom Connections: More Than a Map

### **Questions for Discussion**

*These questions can support deeper understanding of the article “Riding with James.” They may also offer scaffolding for individual or student mapping projects in your classroom.*

What can you map from memory?

Can you map your family?

Can you map your neighborhood?

Can you draw a map without words?

How might your map differ from someone else's?

What can those differences help us understand about a family, a neighborhood, a community?

How does mapping change our understanding of relationships?

Do you have elders who could tell you more about the past? What would you like to ask them?

Do you know which Indigenous nation(s) first lived where you live?

Is there a community of Indigenous people living there today? How can you find out?

How have maps been used to alter and/or (mis)shape communal narratives?

How are maps used to create and sustain history?

# A Conversation with Nokmes (My Grandmother) in Poetry

by Browning Neddeau



Shishibeniye<sup>k</sup> ndebendagwes, I am enrolled Citizen Potawatomi Nation. In my Tribe, our cultural ways include honoring the seven generations before and after our time. My people have survived the cultural genocide of the present-day United States of America. Despite forced removals (for example, the Trail of Death in 1838) from our homelands and the U.S. failing to uphold numerous treaties (see [treaties](#) from 1832, 1834, and 1836 as examples), Potawatomi People remain steadfast in our cultural ways of knowing and doing.

As a young child, I vividly recall traveling to present-day Oklahoma to visit my paternal grandmother. She lived near our Tribe's agency, more commonly known (perhaps) as Shawnee, Oklahoma. The poem reflects back on my relationship with nokmes (my grandmother) while thinking about future generations. Because my parents were both public school teachers and ended the school year in June, we traveled to Oklahoma from present-day California during the hottest and most humid time of the year—summer. If you live on the coast where an ocean breeze is nearby and high humidity is a foreign concept, then you begin to understand my perspective of visiting Oklahoma during the summertime—where an ocean breeze is nonexistent.

---

About the photos: Marjorie Lucy Neddeau, Te-Quah and Browning Michael Neddeau, P-Nos-Wah.

Perhaps it was my naivety and simply being a child, but the summer months frequently ended much too soon. I remember enjoying watermelon on the front porch of my grandmother's home, catching fireflies—something that I did not see in California—participating in powwows. There were always so many stories to share, create, and understand by the time we had to return to California. My grandmother walked on before my teenage years. About a year ago, I sensed a need to speak with my grandmother and returned to an interest of mine: poetry. I thought I could create a poem through which I could talk with her again.

**In my Tribe, storytelling is important.** The words we use, engagement with the telling and listening, and the opportunity to learn and grow are all present in the stories we tell. Certain stories are only told during specific seasons while other stories can be shared throughout the year. The [National Storytelling Network](#) affirms these elements of storytelling and offers physical movement and active imagination among additional points in telling. I returned to how to write a poem to my grandmother that tells a story with these elements in mind.

My paternal grandmother, Marjorie Lucy Neddeau (Battese), was born April 18, 1907. Her Potawatomi name is Te-Quah. She spoke Potawatomi and English. As a proud Bodewadmi kwe (Potawatomi woman), she worked as a federal government nurse in a hospital that served patients with tuberculosis. She dedicated her service to fighting a disease that was foreign to our Potawatomi people yet impacted our tribal communities in ways that would transcend generations to come after her. In our ways, she passed her wisdom to my father, Donald LeRoy Neddeau, born October 1, 1936. As a Potawatomi person, I must keep the fire burning. Vizenor's (2009) scholarship concerning survivance is similar to fire keeping and burning. He defines survivance, in part, as a resistance to absence and nihility. To keep the fire burning, we must not only be told stories, but we must also tell stories. King (2005) reminds us that stories help us understand the world we share. I wanted to talk to my grandmother, but I also wanted to tell her story. How could I capture the importance of ancestral stories and lived experience in a poem?

When we tell a story, the words we use matter. As I planned my poem, it quickly became clear to me that I needed to find voices. I wanted readers to see the conversation I am having with my grandmother. To honor our Potawatomi language, I decided to write the poem in Potawatomi. However, I realized that not many people would be able to share in our conversation. Was my conversation to be public? I decided to add English to my poem. As I reflect on this work, I wonder if the conversation is an entry point for understanding or exploring language revitalization. Have we lost nuances in the Potawatomi language or have such nuances merely been reshaped in culturally sustaining and revitalizing ways?

The poem soon transformed into a piece that could be read in three different ways. The various ways to read it also presented new meanings. One way to read the poem is from left to right where you read the grandparent, together, and grandchild voices. A second way is to read the grandparent voice in the poem and the together voice in the reading. The third way to read the poem is the grandchild's voice and the together voice. If you read from the grandparent's voice, for example, you would read Ngot. Nish. Gowabmen. (I am watching you.) Ngot. Nish. Ngot. Nish.



As I explored the three different ways to read the poem, a moment emerged that gave me pause. What does it mean if the grandparent speaks in Potawatomi and the grandchild responds in English? What if the grandparent only knows Potawatomi and the grandchild only knows English? Alternatively, the grandparent might have experienced boarding schools where Potawatomi was not to be spoken. The grandchild's use of Potawatomi indicates a revitalization of the Potawatomi language, a reawakening of a language. Can the two voices hear each other if they are not speaking the same language?

Once I decided that I wanted to write the poem as a conversation, I wanted to relive the moments I remembered with my grandmother many years ago. One of the earliest memories that stood out to me was participating in powwows in Oklahoma. I have been to powwows my entire life. My uncle, F. Browning Pipestem, welcomed me into the powwow arena when I was about five years old. He showed me how to dance around his shag carpeted living room in Norman, Oklahoma. I remember him sharing wisdom with me and preparing me for my first dance. We practiced, we danced. When I was ready, I danced at a powwow with my grandmother watching me from her folding chair. When I dance in powwows, I dance for my ancestors. They are watching me. Thus, I decided to have this poem take place at a powwow where I am dancing and my grandmother is watching me from her folding chair, wherever she may be with it. *Gnimedimen, we dance.*

My grandmother walked on many seasons ago. "Gnimedimen [We Dance]" gives me the conversation that I yearned for with my grandmother. Additionally, it provides me with a sense of place. Ngot (one), nish (two) are the sounds of my moccasins tapping gently on Mshike Mnise (Turtle Island). The steps repeat seven times in honor of the generations before and after my time. I feel honored that each time I dance, we dance.

I invite readers to explore "Gnimedimen [We Dance]" and think of your ancestors. If you could ask your ancestors one question, what would it be? My conversation and stories continue with my grandmother from the last time my moccasins touched Mshike Mnise and for that I am grateful.

Iw (End).

***Browning Neddeau, MA, EdD (enrolled Citizen Potawatomi Nation) is a jointly appointed Associate Professor of Elementary Teacher Education and American Indian Studies at California State University, Chico. He serves as the Chair of the National Art Education Association's Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Commission. Additionally, he is on the National Advisory Council for the National Conference on Race and Ethnicity in American Higher Education.***

#### **Works Cited**

King, Thomas. 2005. *The Truth about Stories: A Native Narrative*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.  
Vizenor Gerald. 2009. *Native Liberty: Natural Reason and Cultural Survivance*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.

#### **Urls**

National Archives <https://www.archives.gov/research/native-americans/treaties/viewing-treaties>  
The National Storytelling Network <https://storynet.org>



## Gnimedimen (We Dance)

by Browning Neddeau

This poem can be read three different ways:

1. Read the poem from one side to the other as a conversation between grandparent and grandchild.
2. Read just the grandparent's side (including the "together" voices).
3. Read just the grandchild's side (including the "together" voices).

**Grandparent (mesho  
[grandfather] or nokmes  
[my grandmother])**

**Together**

**Grandchild (Noseme)**

Ngot. Nish. [x1]

Gowabmen.  
(I am watching you.)

I dance for you.  
(Nnimedi eko bwa nimediyen:  
I dance because you can't.)

Ngot. Nish. [x2]  
Ngot. Nish.

Dewegen. Dewegen.  
[sound of the heartbeat]

My moccasins move to the  
sound of the heart.  
(nMkezen mdwewenon  
gechwa wDe: My moccasins  
they sound like a heart.)

Ngot. Nish. [x3]  
Ngot. Nish.  
Ngot. Nish.

Wawyetok dewegen.  
(Circle the sound of the drum.)

I look to you.  
(Gkanabmen.)

Dewegen. Dewegen.

Ngot. Nish. [x4]  
Ngot. Nish.  
Ngot. Nish.  
Ngot. Nish.

Ngemdea  
(You sing from your heart, I  
feel your heart sing)

Nim'édiyen  
(as you dance)

Ngot. Nish. [x5]  
Ngot. Nish.  
Ngot. Nish.  
Ngot. Nish.  
Ngot. Nish.

Gowabmen.  
(I am watching you.)

Ngot. Nish. [x6]  
Ngot. Nish.  
Ngot. Nish.  
Ngot. Nish.  
Ngot. Nish.  
Ngot. Nish.

Nim'edinak ndenwenmagnek  
(Dance for all of our  
relations.)

Gowawabmen.  
(I am watching you like a  
reflection; like looking into a  
mirror.)

Ngot. Nish. [x7]  
Ngot. Nish.  
Ngot. Nish.  
Ngot. Nish.  
Ngot. Nish.  
Ngot. Nish.  
Ngot. Nish.

You sing to me, though worlds  
apart.  
(Gngemtew, nesh je bnoch  
yeyen: You sing to me, but  
you are far away.)

I dance for you.  
(Nnimedi eko bwa nimediyen:  
I dance because you can't.)

We'll never part.  
(Cho wika gwi-webnegomen:  
We will never break up.)



## “I'm a fellow traveler on a religious journey”: A Conversation with Kevin J. Burke

by Bretton A. Varga and Kevin J. Burke

This article engages with secularism in an attempt to create openings for teachers, students, folklorists, and researchers to think differently about how reverberations of death, loss, and remembrance are registered, and thus navigated, by people holding scriptural commitments. Although religious frameworks—and the concepts embedded within—serve as a kaleidoscope for engaging with worldviews orientated around perspectives of the divine, they can also be capacious for thinking about entanglements of social phenomena (e.g., the January 6 insurrection) and memory. To better understand how secular concepts intersect with the themes of this special issue of *The Journal of Folklore and Education*, I reached out to Kevin J. Burke, whom I have known several years.

Kevin earned his PhD in Curriculum, Teaching, and Educational Policy from Michigan State University and is an associate professor in the Department of Language and Literacy Education at the University of Georgia. Considering his expertise in teacher education, religion and public schools, and youth participatory action research, I thought Kevin would be the perfect person to illuminate the nuanced ways that death, loss, and remembrance are understood in religious contexts, specifically, Catholicism. He did not disappoint. What follows is the result of our conversation on temporality, transcendence, religious traditionality, and how visual ethnography (PhotoVoice) might be a productive tool for *spatial* engagements of death, loss, and remembrance. The text has been edited for length and readability.

---

About the photos: Loss is often mitigated by the real presence tied to prayer cards given in remembrance of the deceased.

Bretton Varga: Thank you for making time to hold space with me today. Let's begin by exploring what piqued your interest in the themes for this issue on death, loss, and remembrance.

Kevin Burke: You may know this from our previous conversations, but some of my work involves engaging with the ways in which education has limited itself and thinking about how to encounter people *in extremis*. While I'm not particularly interested in grief in this situation, I do think it's important. Broadly, the idea that education has limited itself, particularly in its neoliberal turn, to thinking about education as a rational endeavor means we're dealing with human beings who are inherently rationalizing irrationality. I find it most fascinating to look for different lenses to think about how people interact with education and think through education.

My work is particularly in relation to literacy and religious literacy, so that confluence that you all are writing about in this issue I find profoundly interesting in large part because it's not something that we can measure, but that which is measurable may not be particularly valuable in relation to the educational project. So, I'm always fascinated by thinking differently about how to engage education through new languages and often irrational ones.

BV: I appreciate that and thinking differently resonates with me as it is the primary impetus for our work with this issue. In one of the spaces in which my fellow guest editor Mark Helmsing and I work, think, and write—social studies education—all we do is talk about dead people and the past, yet death itself is rarely acknowledged, engaged with, and/or accounted for. We're also seeking new ways and new lenses as you mentioned. This leads me to the next idea. American history and Catholic studies scholar Robert Orsi (2016) suggested the importance of attending to the thought of “when the transcendent breaks into time” (111). Can you speak to this notion of transcendence and time in the context of death, loss, and remembrance?

KB: There are ways to engage time, in this case I'm thinking about chronological time and then kairotic time. In this way, chronological frames of temporality are linear and then kairotic time, in a religious sense, would be God's time, but it is essentially when possibility exists for new things to happen, or rather it accounts for the stopping of linear time for a more expansive sense of possibility to occur. When I think about time in relation to Orsi's work—he's writing about transcendence and immanence and the emergence of the *sacred* into the world. While I believe we have a poverty of language in educational research, curriculum studies and curriculum theorizing allow us to think with the emergence of immanence or transcendence or the sacred conceptually to consider the stopping of linear time.

So, what does it mean to *feel* time differently? This parallels themes in this issue and interests me immensely. In particular for Orsi, he's looking at Catholic manifestations of religious experience, but essentially he is suggesting that we don't necessarily have a language—his field is history but I think of it in relation to educational research—for dealing with the fact that our students and teachers—teachers in particular who are more religious than the general population—will have this potentially profound sense that God exists in the world and as God irrupts into the world, according to Orsi, we need to be able to think about and with what that means.

As I said, rationality isn't the point. The point is this aspect of experience of the emergence of the divine or the sacred into the world which cuts across religious traditions, including nonreligious ones as well. And I think that we need to know how to think with these ideas and positions in educational research.

BV: Sticking with transcendence and immanence, could you unpack those ideas a bit for readers who are not familiar with them as concepts?

KB: I mean, immanencies are really about the emergence of the divine into the world. So, a lot of what I engage with are the ways in which theologians and anthropologists have created an artificial distinction between the sacred and the profane. The idea has been that the sacred lives somewhere separate from the world and the profane is where we *are*. The anthropologist Talal Assad suggests that that's a category error, a misunderstanding of the way in which people—particularly in Christian traditions—originally understood the sacred as abiding in *worldly time*. Immanence is attending to the ways in which the *religious* exists and persists in spaces. Transcendence is related. You can think about the ways in which boundary making breaks down through transcendence. God exists beyond comprehension and thus transcends our conceptual categories. I use them interchangeably in ways that perhaps theologians wouldn't, but I find the pairing helpful because of how transcendence suggests moving across boundaries in ways that immanence doesn't, at least initially. And then the notion that those boundaries actually are artificial is really important. People have constructed and continue to construct them in our understandings of the world—particularly in relation to secularism—and we could deconstruct them if we wanted to. That is, if we wanted to attend to the sacred as it continues to be emergent.

BV: Yes, and I think, especially considering the context of death, loss, and remembrance, the notion of eroding boundaries, borders, and barriers is significant. Generally, Mark Helmsing and I write about hauntings in ways that are less concerned about paranormal framings and more concerned with attending to the spaces of *in-between-ness* that are so often unaccounted for in educational contexts. And in our work we argue that these liminal spaces can be constructive in getting us to think about the world in different ways. I see transcendence as an adjacent concept—movement between life, death, the unknown, and so forth. Fascinating stuff.

Narrowing the focus here, how do the sacred, the secular, and the transcendent offer different ways of thinking about death, loss, and remembrance? And how might these concepts help teachers attend to local productions of knowledge of death, loss, and remembrance?

KB: Let's take the pending Supreme Court case *Kennedy v. Bremerton School District*. This is the school prayer case that could possibly undo 70 years or so of jurisprudence around adults praying in schools and opens up new modes of religious proselytizing. The assumption and error that I would suggest the progressive left has accepted as a framing from the religious right, is that public schools have become secular spaces over time. As a result of this elimination of religion in schools, this frame suggests, adults have been circumscribed from praying actively in front of their students. And thus, the schools have become secular because religion has, somehow, been eliminated from schools. However, there are multiple secularisms that exist and they exist in particular relation to

the religions with which they co-develop. So, secularisms are inherently religious endeavors because of the way in which they become shaped by the sacred traditions around them.

The larger question, in relation to thinking about teachers in schools and loss and death, for me is that we have lost a sense that the sacred always already exists in education in large part because of the people who are in that space. Also, because *how* we talk about education cultivates this bounded space featuring a strict set of ideals as opposed to a quotidian day-to-day range and battle of ideologies. Attending to the transcendent probably pulls us away from that sort of lofty language regarding the strict ideals embedded in education and pulls us back to the notion that this is an everyday quotidian endeavor of people being with kids in spaces. This is not inherently a secular space, nor a sacred space. Or rather, the space contains, or is contained by, both. It's just a matter of taking lenses to attend to it. That strikes me as *deeply* transcendent. For example, if you're to take seriously the notion that there are people in public school spaces who assume that God, like my mother who grew up Catholic and had to leave space for like angels on her chair, exists, we could also think about how in ignoring these worldviews, we lose a great deal. Here I am speaking pedagogically—or rather that it's not inherently a religious orientation to account for religious practice or belief, so much as it is an acknowledgement that these religions and secularisms sit nested together.

We can do vital work by using transcendence a little bit differently. We can use transcendent work to think about how those spaces, as you talked of earlier about hauntings, contain boundaries that aren't neat and clean. It's actually within *in-between-ness* that we are able to find really interesting possibilities. I don't know how that gets us out of the current white Christian nationalist movement, which is quite frightening. But it does allow us different tools to think with kids and teachers who come to us with certain kinds of beliefs. Otherwise, we lose the possibility to communicate with people deeply convicted to their religion who emerge from particular faith traditions.

BV: I think that is a really important thought and it resonates a lot with me, just this idea of thinking with the theories behind those concepts as a mean for opening up spaces in education. I think that we both would probably agree that *openness* is lacking in education. Specifically, I am thinking in both curricular and pedagogical contexts that are under attack by legislative efforts seeking to keep control and further manipulate critical thought in classrooms.

KB: I've been reading a lot about white Christian nationalism (CN) post-January 6 and there is an aggrieved sense of fear and loss from certain versions of white Christian America. Essentially, it's fear of status loss. And it's not irrational, as there is the possibility of status loss in large part because of the ways in which some institutions have *become* through hard work, not naturally, progressive over time. The responses to this potential status loss from practitioners of CN I think are abhorrent, but it is also true that generally speaking when we think of, for instance, Pentecostal Christianity and speaking in tongues, people who come from that faith tradition are not wrong to think that they are looked down upon by a good portion of the educational establishment. I think in the world, this is not to say that there we can't take a moral stance, but it is to say that understanding the speaking in tongues sociologically, it's something that occurs as a part of a discourse, which makes it *possible* in certain kinds of literacies. It's also important to understand that people in those faiths are experiencing the sacred, the transcendent, and the immanent



emergence of God in the world. This is not a false consciousness and it's not stupid. It's not irrational; we should be able to think with that and then also make different kinds of arguments for a political future that engages with it in serious ways. It's not a straight line from direct experiences of disdain from individual educational actors to 80 percent, or whatever, of white Evangelicals voting for Trump. And that's not saying that the reason that this happens is because teacher educators don't know how to deal with religious students, but rather it is to say that fear of condescension is in many cases a well-earned one.

BV: I'm glad you brought up events from January 6. I can't help but contemplate about how thinking with the transcendent and the secular adds an interesting layer for teachers to consider when they are unpacking remembrance around the context of both contemporary and historical events. Could you speak a little bit more about this specific event? In particular, do you have any advice for teachers who are committed to engaging with the concepts you have discussed today in the classroom? And how might a teacher grapple with these ideas and, in turn, put them together to help students think differently about the insurrection of January 6?

KB: The first thing I'd say is that there's a great deal of work for teachers that's relatively accessible that suggests that *religious practices* are *literacy practices*. You become part of a discourse community and then, thinking of Sara Ahmed's work, you have lines of orientation that make it more likely that you'll move in a certain direction based on those discourse communities. Religious ones are particularly powerful. And those were cynically manipulated in relation to January 6, but I still think they are of importance. There are genuine belief systems that are very troubling that we cannot possibly understand unless we are conversant in the theologies that people embrace. We don't get conversant in those things unless we start reading theological texts. So, from the standpoint of teachers, it's what we always do in a community—you become embedded in the community; you come to understand the kids, parents, and their families and the discourses out of which they emerge. And then you introduce them to critical tools, which may or may not be embraced, to understand texts differently.

The danger is that we also, on what you might call the political left, have a theory of conversion that is often similar to the conversion narratives that exist in religious spaces. It's the mentality that "I will introduce you to new knowledge and then all of a sudden you will have the scales fall from your eyes and suddenly you'll be different." It just doesn't work that way, nor should it. And it's very unsatisfying, because we also have these salvation narratives which we embrace that take the position that if you don't convert kids to social justice or to becoming better at standardized tests, you have failed. Your failure is because you did not work hard enough. The best advice I have is that teachers have to read the same texts that their students are engaged with, and to a certain degree, engage with students' media. From there, teachers can begin to help students think critically. I'm in Georgia. A lot of my students talk a lot about Bible study and God and, so I have lots of conversations about religion. The purpose is not to say to them, "Hey, there's a different or better religion there," but rather, "I'm a fellow traveler on a religious journey. I have a similar language."

I may think differently about problems, but it's not a satisfying hard stop. We're not going to move people away from those discourses by sneering at religion and by misunderstanding how the sacred

might exist in the world for some people. If we can't engage in parallel discourses with certain kinds of theologies, we've just given up. Multicultural education is a priority yet nobody talks about the religious backgrounds of kids. Which to me is absurd and a real loss. Which brings me back to why I was interested in writing for this issue. Between what we've *lost* and what we really have, perhaps you can mourn it as a death, we've lost the ability to have these conversations in large part because either we don't know how to engage with them ourselves as teacher educators, we refuse to engage them, or we just don't know how to train people to engage them.

BV: This is fascinating and why I was excited that you agreed to speak with me. There's so much there and it has me thinking about the anti-racist, anti-oppressive approaches to education that I work to facilitate with my teachers. Something I hear often is that our teachers are ready to change to world, but then they get in front of their classes with real human beings and they struggle with applying their learnings. Teachers then resort back to relying on materials that are whitewashed and reproduce a problematic educational narrative that we both know is extremely limited in various ways. And talking teachers through this, they mention, "I don't want to mess up," or "I don't want to say the wrong thing." I think perhaps religious and death-related contexts may also fall into this camp of trepidation. I love how you framed one of your comments about "being a fellow traveler." Moreover, I think regardless of where you're at spiritually, we are all fellow travelers in life and death. It also...

KB: I think the underlying project right now for anybody who's doing social justice work is that you are pushing actively against the white Christian nationalist project. It's 40 to 50 years of really concerted right-wing strategic organizing around religion and ideology and politics. If you cannot, other than through dismissal, engage with the religious language and the theological concepts that undergird all of that, it is a problem. By not engaging, you're missing all of the nuances for how you could argue from the inside that's troubling. Anyway, I cut you off. Sorry.

BV: You just reminded me of another situation that connects to this conversation. I've encountered teachers who may say that they are uncomfortable engaging with LGBTQIA+ histories, because it goes against their religious beliefs. And it's almost like this excuse to not do the work that needs to be done because of this secular conflict.

KB: We may think of it as an excuse, which in some sense it is, but it is more complex than that. Heidi Hadley has this wonderful book out called *Navigating Moments of Hesitation: Portraits of Evangelical English Language Arts Teachers*. Hadley looks at three Evangelical teachers and their relation to two LGBTQIA+ issues in the classroom. Bob Kunzman (2006) also writes about this in his notion of ethical dialogue and how we have to approach it as if these are genuinely deeply held beliefs. Because they, like one of the young women with whom Heidi was working, believed that if she did not do the work of conversion, if she didn't proselytize, she was consigned to hell. Like that's no joke, if you think you're going to spend eternity burning in a lake of fire.

If you believe something like Heidi's interview subject then my not engaging in religious language at all is not going to convince you of anything, nor should it, quite frankly. The strength of the moral argument that says, hey, don't discriminate against LGBTQIA+ students here just doesn't match with the strength of the moral or the religious argument that's tied to hellfire. I think people's

willingness to think that this is a satisfactory solution will vary. For example, and this is from Heidi again, there is an Evangelical teacher who has a student who's going through a transition. And the student really loves this teacher and the teacher really values that student. The student asks the teacher to use their preferred pronouns, and the teacher spends the entire year addressing the student by their name. Pronouns aren't used at all. Here you have a version of a solution that maintains the teacher's particular religious commitment while affirming the student. It's not ideal, but the *student feel supported*. Do you know Stephanie Shelton? She's at Alabama and some of her research is on allyship in early teacher educators.

BV: Yes, I have met her! We were both in a session this past year at the American Educational Research Association (AERA) conference in San Diego.

KB: Her early work involved a teacher that knew they were going to be a certain kind of LGBTQIA+ ally *before* they went into the field. And then they went into the field, and they realized that to be an ally, in that space, they needed to become a different, quieter kind of ally than they originally thought. One example is that this teacher, and I hope I'm representing Stephanie's research correctly as it's been a few years, was going to have a safe space sticker on the door but then the queer kids didn't come to the space because they thought people would stigmatize them. The teacher had to find a different way to become an ally. Often, my concern is that we send kids and even teachers out with one version of what a good ally or what a good social justice teacher looks and sounds like. And often it doesn't comport with the reality of the situation that you have to do different kinds of work. We have to prepare students to be flexible, to give up on a sense of who they would have been as a teacher, but also allow them a little bit of leeway in terms of problem-solving capabilities. The hope is to have teachers take the position that "I believe deeply in these ideas and I'm going to get embedded in this community and understand ways to intervene that are more productive and protective of my students." So, from my standpoint, in terms of how we're talking about being in a deep red state or religious space, you're going to need to know the language being used, its roots, and potential counterarguments that emerge from those roots. Then we might be able to differently reconceptualize immanence or transcendence in the classroom or religious possibility in secular spaces.

BV: I think holding transcendence in conversation with haunting might be generative. Here, I'm thinking in terms of the blurring of these very strict temporal demarcations: past, present, and future. Another observation from my end is how teachers seem to think that a safe space sticker or the fact they've been an ally for one student, makes their space *forever* safe or brave. I hold the position that safeness and braveness are *always* fleeting. They are always in flux, always contingent upon all the moving parts coming in and out of the classroom. Mark's and my work with ghosts and hauntings also attends to this idea and gives us a lens for thinking about different ways to erode closed structures and mentalities that limit possibility, which returns us to remembrance. How do we remember the pastpresent in ways that will continue to re-shape the future?

Let's shift toward research methodologies. I came across a piece that you wrote in 2018 about Photovoice and bring it up because ethnography is a key approach folklorists use. You've written in the past on visual ethnography, or PhotoVoice, to engage with youth perspectives of spatial

### **About PhotoVoice**

Using images, this Participatory Action Research methodology makes visible stories and truths, often for social change.

### **Case Studies**

[Empowering the Spirit  
Deep Center](#)

### **Practical Methodology Resource**

[Community Tool Box](#)

### **Academic Frameworks**

A Review of Research Connecting Digital Storytelling, Photovoice, and Civic Engagement. (Greene, Burke, and McKenna 2018)

*Humanizing Research: Decolonizing Qualitative Inquiry with Youth and Communities.* (Paris and Winn 2014)

*Doing Youth Participatory Action Research: Transforming Inquiry with Researchers, Educators, and Students.* (Mirra, Garcia, and Morrell 2016)

*Revolutionizing Education: Youth Participatory Action Research in Motion.* (Camarota and Fine 2008)

inequalities. Can you speak to the potential of PhotoVoice for exploring the context of this issue, specifically, the role of ethics in PhotoVoice with sensitive topics such as death and loss?

KB: In that project (Greene, Burke, and McKenna 2018) we wanted to use multiple affordances because we thought they would allow participants to talk differently about social change in various spaces. Sometimes, we'd ask them hard questions and send them out with cameras. They would then come back with no pictures, because we'd forgotten that you have to build relationships for people to feel comfortable with what you are asking them to do. So the project went from walking tours with kids and cameras to found poetry as a result of those walking tours. Then it became mapping as we found that different affordances were needed to tell different kinds of stories in those spaces. From an ethical standpoint, it is important to think about who gets represented in those photos. Which, to be perfectly honest, I don't see as markedly different from the ethical concerns we should have with any kind of qualitative research—particularly with minoritized communities or communities that are explicitly disempowered in certain ways, like youth.

I think that in terms of loss and death...I hadn't thought about PhotoVoice in relation to that context. That's super interesting to me. From the standpoint of the Catholic perspective, I can't help but think about prayer cards, and Orsi writes about this. They're primarily given out at funerals. They often have representations of saints or the Sacred Heart of Jesus or Mary on the front, and then the name of the deceased on the back along with a quote from the Bible. And, interestingly, these cards become collector's items. I have them as bookmarks all over the place in my office, which is a really weird kind of thing but still something that could be considered an everyday encounter with death and remembrance. They are almost like death trading cards. And so, it's not a photographic representation of the person, but certainly could be conceptualized as a snapshot of their life that chronicles someone's birth and death. There's no story about the person on the cards, other than "Hey, here's this moment to remember this person who you haven't thought about for a while." It's almost a reemergence of the person into a life *through* these cards. Which I know is different from what you asked about PhotoVoice, but I think it is still interesting. Returning to Orsi, what if we take seriously the connection of a person to the Sacred Heart of Jesus? And how might the encountering of these cards establish the deceased's reemergence back into our lives? I honestly think there are all sorts of different possibilities when we think about how the dead continue to exist in various ways with the living.


*Journal of Folklore and Education* (2022: Vol. 9)

"I'm a fellow traveler on a religious journey": A Conversation with Kevin J. Burke  
by Bretton A. Varga and Kevin J. Burke

BV: I think those are great questions for our readers to sit with and that this is a good stopping point. This has been wonderful and thought-provoking and I greatly appreciate your time.

KB: Thank you for reaching out.

---

**Kevin Burke** earned his PhD in Curriculum, Teaching, and Educational Policy from Michigan State University and is an associate professor in the Department of Language and Literacy Education at the University of Georgia.  ORCID 0000-0003-0941-0113

### Works Cited

- Cammarota, Julio, and Michelle Fine. 2008. *Revolutionizing Education: Youth Participatory Action Research in Motion*. London: Routledge.
- Greene, Stuart, Kevin J. Burke, and Maria K. McKenna. 2018. *A Review of Research Connecting Digital Storytelling, PhotoVoice, and Civic Engagement*. *Review of Educational Research*. 88.6:844-78. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654318794134>.
- Mirra, Nicole, Antero Garcia and Ernest Morrell. 2016. *Doing Youth Participatory Action Research: Transforming Inquiry with Researchers, Educators, and Students*. London: Routledge.
- Orsi, Robert A. 2016. *History and Presence*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Paris, Django and Maisha T. Winn, eds. 2014. *Humanizing Research: Decolonizing Qualitative Inquiry with Youth and Communities*. Los Angeles: SAGE Publications.

### Urls

- Empowering the Spirit <https://empoweringthespirit.ca/photovoice-project>
- Deep Center <https://www.deepcenter.org>
- Community Tool Box <https://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/assessment/assessing-community-needs-and-resources/photovoice/main>



# Going on the Journey of Learning to Respect Our Elders

by Biaohua Lei



Growing up in the United States, in a predominantly white neighborhood and attending predominantly white schools, I experienced an identity crisis in my youth: I wanted to be Caucasian. I wanted to disconnect myself from my Chinese roots. I perceived all Chinese cultural practices as backward and irrelevant. But since I became a mother, my perception changed drastically. I yearn to learn and introduce more Chinese cultural teachings to my children. I want them to grow up with some of the rituals that have filled my heart and mind with more love for my family and given me a deeper appreciation for life and for myself. I want to practice rituals to strengthen my children's sense of identity and their connections to people. I want my children to develop appreciation for cultural practices that stimulate sentiments and aspirations and balance their daily electronics-infused routines. This is imperative since my children are living in a society that often promotes "independence" or disconnection from others. These realizations as a mother help guide me as a teacher to what my students also need to learn, for they live in the same world as my children. Here I explain one of my family's important remembrance traditions and show how I drew from these experiences to develop a folk arts education unit for K-8 students to help them explore how they honor their elders and remember their ancestors.

---

Figure 1. Preparing for the Tomb Sweeping Festival at my mother's grave in Pennsylvania, 2020. Photograph by Ray Huang.

## Tomb Sweeping Festival

It took me a long time to embrace the Han Chinese cultural emphasis on coexisting. In this core worldview, self-worth and self-definition are linked closely to relationships with people, especially through acts of love and respect exchanged and shared within your communities—home, family, and broader communities. This is Confucius’ teaching of 孝 xiao, which has been rooted in cultural practices within China for thousands of years. 孝 xiao is believed to be the most important pillar of traditional Chinese family structures and the foundation for a harmonious family and society. A Han Chinese child is taught the duty of caring for families when they’re alive and continuing to respect them after death by keeping their tombs clean, remembering them, and carrying on their honorable good name. In his famous *Book of Rites*, Confucius gave specific examples of how to practice 孝 xiao including actions of physical care, love, respect, and obedience to parents and elders; these imply practices for the living and the dead. No matter if you’re poor or wealthy, your communities expect you to practice 孝 xiao within your financial ability; you share your wealth and glory, you don’t leave behind your parents and elders in unacceptable conditions even after death.

清明节 Qing Ming Jie (Clear and Brightness Festival, a.k.a. Tomb Sweeping Festival) is the collective public practice of 孝 xiao for ancestors and deceased loved ones. This is one of the four most important Chinese folk festivals. 清明节 Qing Ming Jie is not a day for sadness, but a day to remember and honor your heritage, to remember your roots and the struggles, successes, and hopes of your ancestors. Elders in most Chinese families carry out Tomb Sweeping religiously whether they are in China or have immigrated. Over the decades, the Chinese government made it a public three-day holiday to encourage people to practice this ritual because of a decline in younger generations caring for their elders. Unfortunately, many overseas Chinese descendants have become disconnected from the roots of this tradition and see this ritual as an amusing, backward folk practice.



Figure 2. Offering food and wine at my husband’s family member’s grave at the Tomb Sweeping Festival in China, 2018. Photograph by Ray Huang.

清明节 Qing Ming Jie falls on the 15<sup>th</sup> day after the spring equinox, around April 4 or 5. People usually pick a day close to the festival date that is convenient for family members to gather. This is the one event that all my aunts and uncles and cousins living in different parts of Pennsylvania and New York City would not hesitate to make time for and drive to be there. Across China, this is one of the busiest holidays, when millions return to hometowns. Those who can't return home participate virtually. The event usually requires advance preparation of food and related goods and can take up to a few hours. Some rituals are repeated in the fall before the winter season makes traveling to cemeteries more difficult.

Upon arrival at the grave, everyone helps to clean the tomb to rid it of weeds and trash, dust and wipe the tomb, decorate the tomb area with flowers, plant new flowers, and/or replace old artificial flowers with new ones. After the cleaning, candles are lit and placed near the tomb. Then three small cups of cooking wine along with three sets of chopsticks are set out. Other drinks that the deceased enjoyed, such as tea, a can of beer, or a sweet juice box, are opened and placed with other offerings.

A display of foods follows including fresh fruits, pastries, hardboiled eggs, roasted meat, and the deceased's favorite foods. When the market price wasn't too high, our family would order a whole roast pig, which cost \$200 to \$300. My brother would bring a Cuban cigar and coffee for our grandfather who favored those tastes after toiling many years in Cuba and Spain and place them on Grandfather's tomb. As she did for our grandmother when visiting her in the nursing home, my cousin would bring homemade pancakes and place them on Grandmother's tomb. We would also bring sweet black sesame rolls for my mother who liked to order this dish every time we went out for dim sum and place these on Mom's tomb.

Last, piles of joss paper are set out. Han Chinese traditionally believe in life after death. When your elders are alive, you're expected to take care of their needs and offer as much comfort as possible, and thus it is also expected that you continue such care for the deceased. Joss paper (spirit money) and paper goods resembling realistic necessities such as money, a house, servants, jewelry, car, computer, electronics, credit cards, clothing, etc., may be purchased and burned for the deceased. Of course, first timers and children are always fascinated with the idea of offering/burning 冥钞 ming chao money for the deceased. These 冥钞 ming chao resemble U.S. dollars and Chinese yuan and have a seal "Bank of Heaven and Earth" or "Hell Bank Notes." They come in denominations from hundreds to thousands to billions. It is believed the deceased can use this money to pay for goods, traveling, services, and bribes for favors or to escape punishment. Offering joss paper has been a part of Chinese ancestral and deity worshiping for the longest time and is commonly seen at a funeral and during any big event that needs inclusion of the ancestors.

Once the traditional materials are set out, everyone starts praying with burning incense sticks. The smoke is believed to bridge the mortal and spiritual worlds and bring the spirits of the deceased to the event. Each person lights one or three incense sticks and with both hands holding them, kowtows to the deceased three times. During that prayer, we may speak to the deceased to express gratitude, ask for blessings, and share news and updates with the deceased. Afterward, we place these incense sticks in the incense holder near the tomb.





Figure 3. Burning of joss paper at my husband's family member's grave at the Tomb Sweeping Festival in China, 2018. Photograph by Ray Huang.

Then each of us gathers a stash of joss paper, holds it with both hands, and kowtows three times to the deceased. We may say words of blessing with the joss paper like wishes for the deceased to receive the money and have a prosperous, happy life in the spiritual world. We burn the joss paper in a fire-safe metal canister so its smoke transports the money to the deceased.

Next, the elders take turns to pray and offer cups of wine to the deceased by toasting and emptying the cups onto the ground. A big picnic follows. Cutting board, butcher knife, and utensils are taken out. My uncle, a professional cook, usually chops the roast pig and a chicken for sharing. Everyone happily digs into all the food and chitchats, loudly exchanging updates. Meanwhile, passersby, unfamiliar with our tradition, usually stare in shock at the sight of the jubilant picnic around the grave, breaking local Philadelphia norms of solemn observance.

Practice helps young people get comfortable and embrace such a publicly visible distinctive cultural ritual. When I was new to motherhood, I hesitated to allow my young children to visit the cemetery, but after my mother passed, I knew it was time to introduce my children to this ritual of visiting the tombs of deceased family members. Since we lived right next to my parents, my children were dearly close with their popo. They watched her health gradually deteriorate at the end of her life. This made me realize that it was time to have those inevitable conversations about the cycles of life and death with my children, ages 2, 7, and 9. It was important to let them witness how my Chinese family traditionally mourns the passing of loved ones and how to continue honoring their spiritual existence.

Allowing my children to participate in the tomb sweeping and worship rituals remembering ancestors will help them now and throughout their lives to normalize their emotional needs to stay feeling connected with loved ones who pass. These family gatherings also provide opportunities for my children to spend time with elders and cousins and share this special family bonding ritual. And, hopefully, upon learning more stories from their elders about how their ancestors faced challenges and overcame difficulties, my children will gain more courage and strength to live their own lives. Additionally, they learn that they always have loved ones—living and spiritual—watching over them, so they should feel blessed and obligated to live well, to be happy and aspire to achieve for themselves and their ancestors.

Now my children go with me when I visit my mother's grave for casual occasions too, like birthdays, holidays, and Mother's Day. On these trips, we bring flowers or incense and say prayers to my mother. I tell my children that one day when I'm gone, they can talk to me and visit my burial site; I'll always be with them spiritually too. I want to model that even strong emotions are natural; it is healthy to miss someone and yearn to connect with the deceased. More importantly, I want my children to learn that we are social beings and naturally thrive in a caring community. Hence, folk practices and rituals that help us achieve emotional wellness are vital for building our resilience for survival and advancement.

### **Taking My Life Learnings into the Classroom**

"Children are like wet cement; whatever falls on them makes an impression." With this quote from the child psychologist Haim Ginott in mind, I am intentional when I decide what to teach (Hertel and Johnson 2015). My topics need to be relevant so that my class is meaningful. My school, the [Folk Arts-Cultural Treasures Charter School](#) (FACTS), is a public charter school with the mission to serve the immigrant community. The school is in the Philadelphia Chinatown neighborhood to be a resource for this community that lacked many public resources. Although we're in Chinatown, students are from all over Philadelphia. Our student body has a large population of Asian descendants, the most numerous are ethnically Chinese. Our founders chose to offer Mandarin Chinese language and culture as a specials class to show our support for the Chinese community and because Chinese is not typically offered in most schools.

I have been teaching Mandarin Chinese at FACTS for eight years. Prior to that, I was a general classroom teacher of math and science at FACTS for seven years. I teach Mandarin Chinese for all students—kindergarten to 8<sup>th</sup> grade. They are a mix of heritage and non-heritage students with various levels of Chinese language ability and cultural understanding. Although there are many Chinese heritage students, the majority are raised here with minimal understanding of their parents' home culture and language. One of my objectives is to be a channel for our heritage students to develop an interest in their parents' cultural upbringing and provide an opportunity to practice Chinese outside home. Simultaneously, I encourage our non-heritage students to learn about their family culture and language too. My goals are to expose all our students to Chinese culture, history, and language and strengthen interest in and appreciation for Chinese folk arts. During these investigations, I seek to nurture students' self-awareness and self-reflection—to motivate them to question and learn about the folk arts and rituals in their own lives and better understand how these traditions shape their cultural identity.



Even before the deaths from Covid-19 began affecting so many families, I believed it was relevant to provide children the space and opportunity to explore their understanding and feelings about death and to remember loved ones who passed away. The cycle of life and death is natural, and the connections with those who preceded and shaped them are important as students explore who they are. I chose to include the Tomb Sweeping Festival in my curriculum. It is a ritual that teaches traditions important in Chinese culture and naturally leads into related conversations.

### **The Tomb Sweeping Festival Unit**

Because Chinese is a specials class, I get to teach all students in the school once a week. Rather than teach lengthy units in particular grades, I use a multiyear vertical curriculum model for annually occurring traditions (Mid-Autumn Festival, Lunar New Year, and Tomb Sweeping Festival). It is structured like the FACTS spiral curriculum we developed for our folk arts residency with NEA National Heritage Fellow [Losang Samten](#), a Tibetan sand mandala artist. Within each K-8 grade level, I teach Tomb Sweeping Festival lessons for a couple of weeks. These mini-units build upon what students learned about the festival in prior years and together over nine years form the entire unit. Thus, students deepen their learning about this tradition nonrepetitively each year. I present the three instructional topics below: traditions about death, remembrance traditions and the worldview values they reinforce, and the history and tangible traditions that make up the festival. The chart indicates the topics I focus on in each grade to show how my vertical unit is structured, but the unit could also be taught as a horizontal unit in intermediate or middle school grades.

#### *Traditions About Death*

This part of the unit focuses on exploring the diversity of traditions around death that societies (primarily in China and the U.S.) have created throughout time. Students first examine examples from stories and the media of how people generally handle death. Students usually share their general understanding of types of funerals and ceremonies. I avoid asking students to tap into personal experiences surrounding funerals. If I notice any students are finding this challenging, I ask our school counselor to support them and/or guide me in supporting them. Students then think of possible reasons people anywhere at any time have funerals and ceremonies. They investigate some environmental factors that shape types and costs of burial practices in various places. Students get a general understanding of how Chinese burial practices changed from burial to cremation due to changes in population and living space issues.

#### *Remembrance Traditions and the Worldview Values They Reinforce*

This part examines remembrance, both the emotional needs and the cultural lessons that can be taught and reinforced in remembrance traditions. Students reflect on rituals practiced in their homes and/or relatives' homes to honor living elders and to remember those who have passed away. Students generate possible reasons for practices and reflect on their viewpoints of those rituals. Students are asked to ponder the significance of Cicero's quote, "The life of the dead is placed in the memory of the living." Students discuss whether they want remembrance rituals to continue in future generations and if they could change or create a new ritual for honoring the deceased, what specific activities or objects could be added or subtracted.

Students explore the worldview value that is important in Chinese remembrance traditions by learning about Confucius' teachings of 孝 xiao – filial piety through readings and videos. Students practice writing the Chinese word 孝 xiao and phrase 孝子 xiao zi – honorable child. Then students discuss their perspectives on Confucius' concept of 孝 xiao and name specific examples of actions they take that could be considered acts of 孝 xiao. To demonstrate their learning, students make poster presentations on their understanding of 孝 xiao.

### *Tomb Sweeping Festival History and Tangible Traditions*

Building upon the shared understanding of funeral and remembrance traditions, and the worldview value of 孝 xiao - filial piety, the next part focuses on 清明节 Qing Ming Jie – Tomb Sweeping Festival. Students learn the Chinese characters for all activities for this festival such as 祭祖, 拜祖先 ancestral praying and 扫墓 tomb sweeping. I share some of my family experiences of the festival and encourage heritage students to share what they know about this festival and whether they have seen it practiced in their family.

Students read about the history of 清明节 Qing Ming Jie and examine how it was created from the combination of the 寒食节 Han Shi Jie and 上巳节 Shang Si Jie. Students study classic writings like the Tang dynasty poem 清明 Qing Ming by Du Mu to learn more about the historical settings and people's emotions around this festival. Students recite the poem as an oral presentation. They also learn the story of the man who was instrumental in beginning this festival, 介子推 Jie Zi Tui, and act out his contributions in a skit.

The unit reinforces other units at FACTS that help students understand how celebrations have many components and activities, and lots of people are involved in making them happen. We look at some of the lighter, fun, family-bonding activities related to 清明节 Qing Ming Jie. Students learn about the celebration's traditional foods, and I bring in 青果 qing guo 青团 qing tuan, a green glutinous rice pastry made with mugwort juice for them to taste. They learn about the history of Chinese traditional activities such as flying kites, going on swings, hiking, and playing a soccer-like game. Students enjoy designing a simple kite and writing a wish on their kite to fly away for a blessing.

Throughout the unit, students are asked to summarize and reflect on what they have gained from learning about 清明节 Qing Ming Jie. This emphasizes Mother Teresa's teaching "love begins by taking care of the closest ones the ones at home" and in our heart.

Grade	Traditions about Death	Remembrance Traditions	Qing Ming Jie History and Traditions
K		What do you do to help remember a person special to you? Do you have a special elder in your heart who is living and/or has passed away? Name that relation.	Introduce 清明节 as a festival to honor deceased loved ones.

1		What do you do to help remember a person special to you? Do you have a special elder in your heart who is living and/or has passed away? What do you remember about the special elder or the deceased? Illustrate your favorite activity with or memory of this person.	Introduce 清明节 as a festival to honor deceased loved ones.
2	Do you know anyone who has passed away? Name the relationship of the deceased to you.	What do you remember about a special elder or a deceased relative? Do you have any special items or photos to help you remember that special person? Draw illustrations of this special object or item.	Introduce 清明节 as a festival to honor deceased loved ones.
3		Introduce 孝, 孝子 - honorable child as defined by Confucius as individual behaviors toward living elders and ancestors and remembering and doing things to honor living elders and deceased family members. List actions of filial piety described by Confucius.	Introduce 清明节 Pure and Brightness Festival to honor deceased loved ones, value those ones who came before you, and do a collective act of filial piety.
4		Discuss 孝, 孝子 - filial piety, honorable child defined by Confucius as individual behaviors toward living elders and ancestors and remembering and doing things to honor the deceased. List actions you personally take or seen done by your family that are examples of filial piety.	Introduce 清明节 Pure and Brightness Festival to honor deceased loved ones, value those ones who came before you, and do a collective act of filial piety. Discuss whether having such a festival is necessary and how you might do it differently. How would you rename such a festival? Create a poster promoting your remembrance festival.
5	How is death generally viewed in our society? In our communities? Validate that there can be many feelings around the topic of death.	Discuss 孝 filial piety, 孝子 honorable child, and the Chinese belief in a continued relationship between the living and the dead to establish and maintain order and harmony in their relationships. Describe 祠堂 family altars in homes for frequent practice of	Introduce 清明节 as a festival to honor deceased loved ones with prayers and goods. Identify food and ritual items. Examine joss paper goods purchased from Asian supermarkets. Identify

		honoring the deceased. Reflect on rituals practiced to remember the deceased in your family/home.	feelings and opinions about the joss paper goods. Design your own joss paper goods.
6	How is death viewed in our society? Identify death rituals seen in our community or media.	Discuss 孝 filial piety, 孝子 honorable child, and the Chinese belief in a continued relationship between the living and the dead to establish and maintain order and harmony in their relationships. 祠堂 Chinese family has altar in home for frequent practice of honoring the deceased. Reflect on rituals practiced to remember the deceased in your family/home. Interview family or close friends about remembrance rituals of deceased loved ones they know about or have seen.	<a href="#">Story of Jie Zi Tui</a> 介子推 started the ritual of tomb sweeping 扫墓 and cold food ritual 寒食节 to honor the deceased. Roleplay the story of Jie Zi Tui, the government official who sacrificed himself for his Duke and later was honored by the Duke, which historically started part one of this festival.
7	Research death or funeral rituals seen in our community or media. Discover types of funerals and ceremonies and influential factors. Make use of personal narratives or interviews, for example.	Research to gather information on ways people grieve and remember those who have died in different cultures. What rituals, celebrations, or traditions around remembrance do different cultures practice?	清明节 is the combination of Cold Food Festival 寒食节 and Shangsi Festival 上巳节 (naming specific foods and activities related to the festival). Students compare these two festivals.
8	Examine traditional Chinese death rituals (preparations, mourning, burial). Discuss death rituals of family and/or friends or community. Explore the relationship of personal comfort with death rituals.	What do you do to help remember a person special to you? Do you have a special elder in your heart who is living and/or has passed away? Name that relation.	Examine the <a href="#">classic poem 清明</a> from Tang dynasty by 杜牧, emotions related to 清明节, and the famous Song dynasty painting <a href="#">Along the River During the Qingming Festival</a> to view rituals of everyday people at that time.

孝 is the idea that since your parents took care of you when you were younger, you have to take care of them now that you're older. The idea of filial piety came from Confucius. He was very empathetic towards those in poverty. He believed that a ruler should be inspirational, gaining popularity and loyalty through that instead of force. Failing to find a ruler that governed by his principles, he became a philosopher and teacher in his hometown. Believing that family is the base virtue where all others come from, his ideas became very popular and it helped shape Chinese culture to how it is today.

孝 is shown by taking care of one's parents/grandparents, since they took care of you when you were younger. A while ago, most people would live with or near their parents to care for them. They would take care of their parents' medical stuff, money, house, etc. Now, a lot of people (not all) seem to have forgotten this idea of caring for one's parents. Of course, not everybody doesn't care for their parents, but there are a large number of people who don't. In some countries, there are laws that require you to care for your parents' needs and wants once you're an adult and they're a certain age.

I believe that 孝 should be practiced because if you truly love someone, then you'll make sure that they're happy and well cared for. I love my parents and want them to be happy, so I try doing things to make sure they have less to worry about. My family does this too. We visit our grandpa frequently to eat with him or just to hang out around him to make sure he's not lonely all the time. Last week, my dad came back from China after going there to take care of his father who was sick with heart problems. I would continue this idea because it seems like common decency to me and a family should take care of each other. Love is a two way street. It is unfair to expect love if you don't give any.

Figure 4. Tomb Sweeping Festival unit reflection by FACTS 6th Grader, Kayli H.

### Sharing Students' Glimpses into the Journey of Learning to Respect Elders

One of my favorite moments in teaching all year happens during the introduction of the Tomb Sweeping rituals. So often when a student tells of their family traditions, I hear excited gasps and see students' raised hands making a signal we use at our school to express commonality, shared experience, or a connection. Students act relieved and happy to know peers share the same ritual practice or similar emotions about the ritual. The topic offers the opportunity to talk about this family ritual, often not well explained by their own family members, and ask questions.



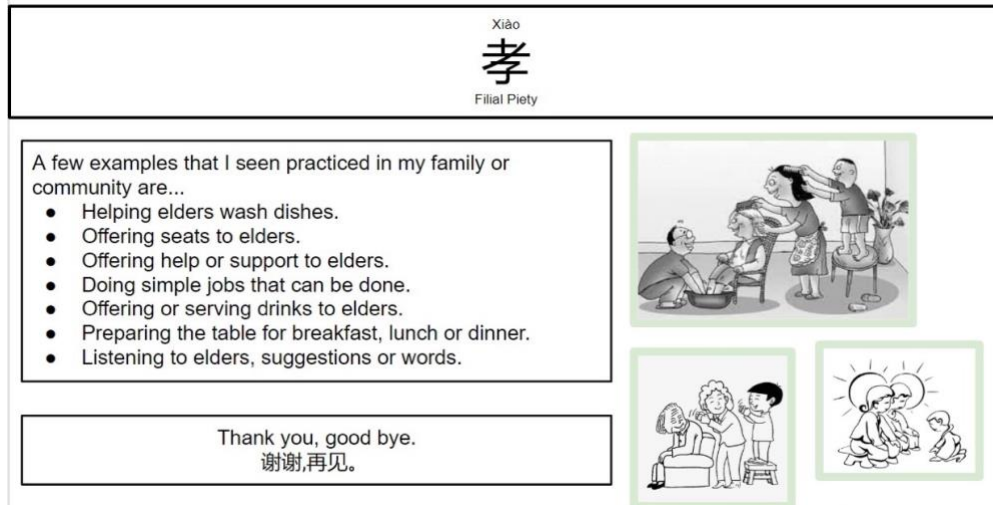


Figure 5. Tomb Sweeping Festival unit assignment by FACTS 7th Grader, Akemi L.

On the last day of school a couple of years ago, an 8<sup>th</sup> grader left me a note. He explained that Chinese class opened his mind and heart about his Chinese family. He changed to embrace his family's Chinese rituals and customs and feels closer to his parents. Before my class, seeing his parents praying daily to their ancestor's altar made him feel weird because he thought his parents were overly superstitious. As he learned about the deeper meanings that underlie their actions, his feelings changed to feelings of comfort in knowing that his hardworking parents weren't doing something strange. He now appreciated how they were making emotional connections with their ancestors daily and acting mindfully about their daily work to uphold and respect their ancestors and elders. I am grateful that I was able to help guide him, his classmates, and all the students who pass through my room on this part of this journey. All of us are connected through time to our ancestors, our elders, and those who will call us elder and then call us ancestor. Learning to live a life of respect is truly a journey, and I look forward to learning even more.

---

**Biaohua (Jeannie) Lei** is a teacher at the Folk Arts-Cultural Treasures Charter School in Philadelphia. She started at FACTS in 2005 teaching math and science and in 2015 began teaching Mandarin Chinese classes. Through her teaching, she encourages students to explore and embrace their cultural heritage and interact with elders in their families and communities. She graduated from Boston University with a BA in Liberal Arts and an MA in Elementary Education.

#### Work Cited

Hertel, Ron and Mona Johnson. 2015. Compassionate Schools: A Washington State Initiative. *Curriculum in Context Journal of the Washington State Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development*. 41.2:22-3.

#### Urls

Folk Arts Cultural Treasures Charter School <https://www.factschool.org/en/home>

Losang Samten [http://www.mastersoftraditionalarts.org/artists/290?selected\\_facets=name\\_initial\\_last\\_exact:S](http://www.mastersoftraditionalarts.org/artists/290?selected_facets=name_initial_last_exact:S)

Story of Jie Zi Tui [https://www.worddisk.com/wiki/Jie\\_Zhitui](https://www.worddisk.com/wiki/Jie_Zhitui)

Poem 清明 <https://frommetertomeaning.wordpress.com/%E6%B8%85%E6%98%8E-%E6%9D%9C%E7%89%A7-qingming-festival-du-mu>

Along the River During the Qingming Festival <https://www.comuseum.com/painting/famous-chinese-paintings/along-the-river-during-the-qingming-festival>



I always carry my mother's words with me, and I share them with everyone I teach about Día de Los Muertos. She said,

*We all suffer three deaths. The first death is the day that we give up our last breath, the day that we die. Our second death is the day we are buried, never to be seen on the face of the Earth again. But the third, the most horrible, most dreaded death of all, IS TO BE FORGOTTEN.*

—Ofelia Esparza

## Día de los Muertos Altars: Bridges to Remembrance, Healing, and Community

by Ofelia Esparza

In 1973 Day of the Dead was never observed in the United States like in Mexico and was unheard of among many in my U.S.-born, California-based Chicano community. It was known only as the holy days, November 1 (All Saints' Day) and November 2 (All Souls' Day) in the Catholic Church calendar, certainly not as days of festive color and celebration. It was introduced to the East Los Angeles Community in 1973 by a progressive Catholic nun, Sister Karen Bocalterro, and two Mexican artists, Carlos Bueno and Antonio Ibanez, at [Self Help Graphics & Art](#), a community-based art center in East Los Angeles.

---

About the photo: The altar *Mictlan Sur* honors Sister Karen Bocalterro (20'x12'x14'), 2000, by Ofelia Esparza, Self Help Graphics & Art, East Los Angeles, CA.

It was a time of great social upheaval throughout the nation. The Chicano community had just experienced a tragic, heavy-handed response from the East Los Angeles sheriffs at a peaceful demonstration against the Vietnam War and long-standing grievances of inequalities in education and representation. The artists wanted to create a project that brought unity, healing, and empowerment to the Chicano community by reclaiming its cultural self-identity and connecting the strong, positive values and cultural assets in place for generations. Bueno and Ibanez recalled Día de Los Muertos in their town in Mexico and how it was rooted in tradition, ceremony, ancestors, altars/ofrendas, and art that engaged the entire community. The Day of the Dead celebration in East L.A. began!



This altar was dedicated to the Rio Hondo College “Dreamer” students and their immigrant families living in fear of deportation and during the height of the family separations at the border detention centers in 2018. This photo was taken before the Rio Hondo students were able to add their own personal mementos and notes to the *Ofrenda Altar for Our Dreamers* (22’x5’x9’), 2018, by Ofelia Esparza and Rosanna Esparza Ahrens, Rio Hondo College. Whittier, CA.

Today, this custom of honoring ancestors that dates back more than 3,000 years to Pre-Columbian early Indigenous Mexico, has transcended time and history. The Spanish who conquered Mexico in 1519 came with the intention of reaping the rich resources of this land, especially gold. They also drove to subjugate the Indigenous people and to eradicate their religion and culture, replacing it with Christianity. The Europeans succeeded in the first two, but only almost succeeded in the latter. While many thousands converted to the new religion, many thousands kept their deep-rooted rituals and observances related to their devout, ancient relationship with nature and the cosmos—



under the guise of Catholicism. Over the expanse of the last 700 years, Catholicism as practiced by a great many in Mexico, became a meld of Christian and Indigenous religious beliefs and practices. This is manifested in the Day of the Dead altars and other practices throughout Mexico.



This two-dimensional altar was constructed entirely of paper with hand-painted watercolor images mounted on a wall. The tissue paper marigold arch is the only three-dimensional part of this installation in the children's section of the Whittier Central library.

*Recuerdos Que Nunca Mueren* (Remembrances that Never Die) (6'x16'x 5" deep), 2019, by Rosanna Esparza and Ofelia Esparza, Central Library, Whittier, CA.

### The Ofrenda

Ofrenda means offering. In Mexico, it refers to a home altar installed to honor the memory of a deceased loved one for Día de Los Muertos. It is composed of several main elements and offerings. Among these are photographs, flowers, food, and a variety of mementos and other chosen artifacts that reflect the life and spirit of the one(s) who are being remembered. Thus, the altar itself is an Ofrenda—a central element in the Day of the Dead tradition.

The Ofrenda is a powerful sacred space because it is not only created with the heart and mind of the altar maker, but it also reflects the heart and soul of the one being honored. Moreover, abstract concepts such as love, spirituality, human struggle, or one's relationship with God or Nature come into play. I regard the Ofrenda as a spiritual bridge to the ancestors that generates a sense of grounding and healing. This practice promotes the traditional arts and the importance of oral narratives that connect one generation to the next, which extend to building community and beyond. Creating an altar bridges the living with the Dead; it bridges generations; it bridges communities and even cultures.

These concepts held within the celebration of Day of the Dead are important more than ever in our present society. Therefore, presenting this celebration to students of all ages and at their level of understanding can promote better understanding of differences and similarities among diverse communities and even develop empathy and unity in the process.

Remembering loved ones or honoring our ancestors is a universal concept that touches everyone, everywhere. Just as there are many ways to build an Ofrenda in Mexico and the U.S. today, many cultures in the world also practice unique ways to remember their dead. Knowing this teaches us that we have a connection to many more people than we think. This is another important lesson for students to learn--starting with one's own family circle, learning about the ancestors—where they came from and what their life might have been—starts to unfold the significance of Día de los Muertos. Even if one thinks there is no information available, one can still imagine and learn about those from one's culture who lived and survived somehow because each of us is living proof of their existence. Of course, seeking information from an eldest living relative or someone else who can provide even the tiniest bit of a story is important.

My early learning about Día de Los Muertos and making Ofrendas came from watching my mother, Guadalupe, who was taught by her grandmother, Mama Pola, who raised her. I represent the sixth generation of altar makers of the grandmothers I can name. My mother created four altars during the year. One was displayed all year and held the photos of our ancestors. I felt intimately connected to my great-great-grandmother even though I never knew her. Through my mother's detailed and repeated stories about her I got to know her well. That is the knowledge about Ofrendas that I carried into my adulthood when I wanted to know and learn more and more.



Created for Self Help Graphics & Arts' annual Noche De Ofrenda (Eventing of the Altar) installation, this altar was dedicated to the City of Los Angeles memorializing the hundreds of loved ones who fell victim to Covid-19. Building this monumental community altar was especially personal for the Esparza family who lost five family members, including Ofelia's elder brother Rudolfo Estrada (95), his wife Lily (94), and Ofelia's sister Evangeline Jaquez (88). Although the installation was in a public space, there was no public event. People from all over the city came to add personal photos and mementos to the ofrenda.

*Monument to Our Resilience* (24'x15'x16'), 2020, by Ofelia Esparza, Rosanna Esparza Ahrens, assisted by Denise Esparza, Xavier Esparza, Grand Park Civic Center, Los Angeles, CA.



Over the years, the crux of the work I am immersed in with the practice of altar making has been the spiritual and healing aspect in creating an Ofrenda, which I believe is intrinsic to the process of Remembrance and Honoring the Dead. This has become key to my passing on this tradition and knowledge to my nine children. My daughters Rosanna, Denise, Elena, Jacqueline and my sons Xavier, Alec, Ben, and Len are known as altar makers, if not assisting or leading my own work. My mother must be so pleased to see her grandchildren carrying on this tradition. I am elated that even some of my young great-grandchildren have already made a small altar of their own. They are learning to make tissue paper marigolds, something my family has become known for and teaches to others. But most importantly, I want them to know who their grandparents were, to know about our ancestors, where they came from, and hear their stories, just as my mother did for me.

---

*Ofelia Esparza is an artist, altar maker, and educator born in 1932 in East Los Angeles, where she raised nine children and still lives. Her Day of the Dead Ofrendas have been shown nationally and internationally. A great portion of her work honors womanhood and reflects the spirituality found in nature and in the*

*dignity of the people around her. Ofelia's work celebrates her spirituality and Mexican/Indigenous heritage. Informed by her mother's altar-making traditions, her Ofrendas became integral in her art curriculum at City Terrace Elementary School, where she retired in 1999. Her role as educator extends into her community, where she sees herself as a cultural facilitator. She was conferred an honorary PhD in Humane Letters by her alma mater, California State University, Los Angeles, in 2016. With her daughter, Rosanna Esparza Ahrens, she conducts intergenerational workshops combining art, culture, and social activism as a vehicle toward wellness and personal empowerment throughout the community and at a women's correctional facility. They served as cultural advisors for the 2017 Pixar movie Coco. In 2018, Ofelia was honored as a National Heritage Fellow by the National Endowment of the Arts.*

**From the Editors:** This National Endowment for the Arts video featuring Ofelia Esparza as a National Heritage Fellow brings her story and deeply significant art to life. Click to learn from Ofelia in her own words about the process and meaning of altar making before you plan your classroom Day of the Dead learning and activities: <https://www.arts.gov/honors/heritage/ofelia-esparza>.

#### Urls

Self Help Graphics & Art: <https://www.selfhelpgraphics.com>

## Classroom Connections

### Language Arts and Visual Art

#### DAY OF THE DEAD AND HALLOWEEN

I find that students and parents LOVE Halloween. Since Day of the Dead starts right after Halloween it is important *not* to mention Day of the Dead during Halloween to avoid confusing or inter-mixing the two celebrations. One way to handle this dilemma that has worked very well with all the elementary grades I have taught is this language and vocabulary activity, which can inspire additional writing and art activities, as well.

I have students call out single words (nouns and adjectives) that describe Halloween as I write them on a large chart sheet (Option: Use colored markers and write the words randomly just to make it interesting). Words: funny, fun, candy, ghosts, witches, scary, monsters, costumes, pumpkins, zombies, cemetery, spider webs, mummy, bloody, masks, trick or treat, jack-o-lanterns, bats, mask, make-up, flashlights, cold, howling, dead, tombstone, claws, etc., etc. Then put the chart away for later use. This is important.

To introduce Day of the Dead, ask students what they know about this important celebration. Do not write this down, just accept all answers and tell them they will be finding out in the following days. Whatever artifacts or visuals you may use to display in somewhat of an altar format can spark their interest and curiosity. Depending on the grade, read or tell a story, discuss an artifact on display, show a film or short video, or share a set of images of altars. Perhaps talk about a personal experience such as making an altar. Discuss if your plan is to have students build an altar in the



I constructed a portable altar for the classroom that I used several years. It was much more helpful to introduce and discuss a traditional home altar with my own ancestors. I still use it for workshops and presentations and have refurbished it and continue to add new artifacts (all handmade by me). Creating my own mini-altar was so much fun that I taught many portable altar workshops for teachers over the years. Now my best students—my daughters—are doing this work.

*Para Mis Seres Queridos, Portable Ofrenda (12'X10''X17''), 1992-today, by Ofelia Esparza.*

classroom or somewhere on site. Keep this initial presentation simple. Announce any call for materials if they will be needed, depending upon activities. There are many resources and ideas for the classroom, some are provided here.

After all Day of The Dead lessons and activities are done, students will do the word association lesson like they did after Halloween. On a new large chart sheet of paper write students' answers (nouns and adjectives) to "what single words describe Day of the Dead?" Words: fun, family, love, ancestors, sad, candles, Catrina, bread, funny, happy, honor, grandparents, skeletons, skulls, thankful, candy, altar, flowers, puppets, colorful, photographs, food, fruits, hummingbird, tamales, corn, papel picado, face paint, cemetery, butterfly, etc. After discussion, bring in the vocabulary chart they did after Halloween. Display both charts and have students observe and discuss similarities and differences in the vocabulary that describes both celebrations. The goal of these two lessons is, "Día de Los Muertos Is NOT Mexican Halloween!" Here are many opportunities for authoring stories and making art.

### *FAMILY STORIES*

Have students interview a parent, a grandparent, an elder, or any family member who can tell the student about a grandparent or ancestor. The purpose is for the student to learn about an ancestor whom the student can write about. Ideally, there would be a photograph, if available. The ancestor writing/artifact will be added to a Day of the Dead altar or as part of a bulletin board display. The teacher can set guidelines for suggested questions for the student to ask. The parents should be informed about this assignment, and they can decide who will be the person the student will learn about. Since sensibility is important here, the assignment can be quite simple if necessary, such as a brief profile of the person who will be honored. Along with the writing (at least a short paragraph depending on the grade level) the student will make a drawing of the ancestor.



The 2019 Tucson Meet Yourself Folklife Festival collected photos from the public to memorialize their loved ones in this community altar. Over 500 photos and dedications collected were displayed on the TV screen as a looping video. During the three-day event, people brought in more photos, which they mounted and hand-embellished on paper frames, then added to the Ofrenda.

Tucson Meet Yourself Folklife Festival community altar (24"x12"x16"), 2019, by Rosanna Esparza Ahrens and Ofelia Esparza, Tucson, AZ.

*Journal of Folklore and Education* (2022: Vol. 9)

Día de los Muertos Altars: Bridges to Remembrance, Healing and Community  
by Ofelia Esparza



### CULMINATING PROJECTS

All the activities, projects, writings, artwork, and oral presentations for Day of the Dead can be presented as a culminating event in a classroom with other classes or grades or in a schoolwide program. Students can act as docents for each classroom. Parents and/or volunteers are vital. Most available parents are happy to help in their children's school events. Just reach out to them. There are always talented people willing to carry out tasks that a teacher will appreciate, such as helping preparing work to be displayed, room decorations, distributing arts and crafts materials, teaching other parents a crafting skill needed in executing a big event, directing the movement of visiting classrooms or coordinating the scheduling for visitors, etc.



*Familia Querida*, 2012, by Ofelia Esparza and Rosanna Esparza Ahrens, Self Help Graphics & Art, Los Angeles, CA

### RESOURCES

There are many more resources in English available to educators today than when I started building public altars and teaching about Day of the Dead more than 40 years ago. Those I still recommend can be found online if they are out of print. A few published later I found to be valuable, although several use excerpts from older publications. Today resources for teachers and books for children abound. Check school and public libraries as well.

*Journal of Folklore and Education* (2022: Vol. 9)

Día de los Muertos Altars: Bridges to Remembrance, Healing and Community  
by Ofelia Esparza

I find that activities for the classroom are repeated in many teaching materials. It takes teachers' innovation to create different versions or extensions of these, but teachers know how to do that. I got many ideas from looking into the wonderful Day of the Dead folk art books or at local Mexican marketplaces. The creativity found in the folk art of many cultures offers a wealth of ideas. I believe that students of all ages should have opportunities to compare and benefit from this kind of experience.

### **Ofelia Esparza's Suggested Readings**

#### **Teaching Resources**

*Artes De Mexico #62, Día de los Muertos, Ritual Serenity.* Artes de Mexico, 2002. Bilingual.

*Day of the Dead Crafts: More than 24 Projects that Celebrate Día de Los Muertos.* Kerry Arquette, Andrea Zocchi, and Jerry Vigil. Cantata Books, 2008. [A photo of Ofelia's altar is on page 15 under "What is your Ofrenda style?"]

*The Day of the Dead, El Día de Los Muertos: A Mexican Celebration Handbook.* Ann Stalcup, Four Winds Press, 2013, grades 1-5.

*Days of the Dead: Mexico's Festival of Communion with the Departed.* John Greenleigh and Rosalind Rosoff Beimler, Pomegranate, 1998. Bilingual.

*Indo-Hispanic Folk Art Traditions II.* Bobbi Salinas-Norman. Pinata Publications, 1988. Bilingual, excellent activities.

*Ofrenda: Altar Makers Create Bridges between Life and Death.* Kimi Eisele (author in this JFE issue) spoke to Ofelia and her daughter Rosanna to learn more about the commemorative practice of altar making, <https://borderlore.org/ofrenda-altar-makers-create-bridges-between-life-and-death>.

*Skeleton at the Feast: Day of the Dead in Mexico.* Elizabeth Carmichael and Chloë Sayer, University of Chicago Press, 1992.

*Through the Eyes of the Soul: Day of the Dead in Mexico,* Mary J. Andrade, La Oferta Publishing, 1999. Bilingual.

#### **Children's Books**

*Abuela.* Arthur Dorros (Author), Elisa Klevin (Illustrator), Puffin Books, 1997, ages 3-9.

*Calavera Abecedario: A Day of the Dead Alphabet Book.* Jeanette Winter (Author, Illustrator), HMH Books, 2006.

*Gift For Abuelita / Un regalo para Abuelita: Celebrating the Day of the Dead/En celebracion del Día de los Muertos.* Nancy Luenn (Author), Robert Chapman (Illustrator), 2004, Rising Moon Books Multilingual .

*I Remember Abuelita: A Day of the Dead Story.* Janice Levy (Author), Loretta Lopez (Illustrator), Miguel Arisa (Translator), Albert Whitman & Company, 2007, ages 4-8. Bilingual.

*Pablo Remembers.* Gregory Ancona (Author, Illustrator), HarperCollins, 1993, ages 6-9.

*The Spirit of Tio Fernando: A Day of the Dead Story.* Janice Levy (Author), Morella Fuenmayor (Illustrator), Teresa Mlwar (Translator), Albert Whitman & Company, 1995, ages 4-8. Bilingual.

*Uncle Monarch: The Day of the Dead.* Judy Goldman (Author), Rene King Moreno (Illustrator), Simon & Shuster, 1974, ages 6-9.

*Journal of Folklore and Education* (2022: Vol. 9)

Día de los Muertos Altars: Bridges to Remembrance, Healing and Community  
by Ofelia Esparza





## To Gather and to Grieve: Making Space for Mourning at a Folklife Festival

by Kimi Eisele

Not long before Covid-19 reached the Southwestern United States, I listened to a [podcast interview](#) with the Nigerian writer and spiritualist Bayo Akomolafe in which he spoke of grieving as ceremony, “...when we grieve, it’s not instrumental to anything but, it’s an opening<sup>1</sup>...” Too often we are rushed through it, he went on to say, told to hurry up and get back in the game. “We don’t know how to stay in the indeterminacy and the slowness of the compost.”

As someone who cries easily, I was struck by this, reminded of how I’m quick to hide my tears when grief comes. Can I cry in a café? Can I cry in the middle of a work meeting? Where is it okay to grieve openly? Who makes the rules about this? Culture? Tradition? Propriety? Capitalism? How might we change those rules?

“What if there’s a place of just sitting with the trouble of noticing that the things we’ve lost may never come back to us? What if there’s a place of just doing that?” Akomolafe asks. “What if that was an objective of UNESCO, to gather people together and to just grieve?”

---

About the photo: “Wall of Loss” in the Loss and Remembrance Tent at Tucson Meet Yourself 2021. Photo by Steven Meckler.

I thought of Akomolafe's questions many times as the tidal waves of Covid-19 brought loss after loss, grief upon grief. I thought of it again in the summer of 2021, as my colleagues at the [Southwest Folklife Alliance](#) and I initiated planning for the 48<sup>th</sup> Annual [Tucson Meet Yourself](#) (TMY) Folklife Festival in downtown Tucson in October. As a folklorist and artist, I wanted to make sure we created a space to acknowledge that grief.

Founded in 1974 by the late James "Big Jim" Griffith, TMY is a three-day annual event showcasing food, music, dance, and folk arts from the many folk traditions, ethnicities, and cultural heritages present in Southern Arizona. It's often lauded for its diverse participants and its diverse audiences, a place where people from different backgrounds can learn about one another's traditions, finding distinction, overlap, and respect. For years, as an attendee, I described it as the only place you could stand in line for churros or kielbasa or takoyaki and rub elbows with a Chicano lowrider, a Tohono O'odham grandmother, a Buddhist monk, and a Polish folk dancer.

That elbow rubbing didn't happen in 2020 because of the pandemic, when we moved the festival online, producing a month-long event of virtual programs and performances and hosting a handful of in-person, pop-up, food-to-go events. But in 2021, when it was deemed safe enough to begin to gather in outdoor space, we decided to bring the festival back to the public square.

But would we carry on with the festival as usual? Amid all the grief?

Well, yes. Because people needed to gather again. And "because community and culture are resilient," as our tagline that year would say. After all, what are the stories of folk, Indigenous, and immigrant cultures if not stories about continuation, about keeping culture alive against all odds through food, music, dance, handicrafts? This is the festival's beating heart. But what about its fragile, mourning heart?

TMY has long been a place where folklife expressions—quotidian, familiar, and often overlooked—can be seen, heard, and tasted. Traditions and expressions of who we are and where we come from go on public display, shared with pride and delight. I wondered about the grief people would surely be carrying around as they listened to corridos, songs from the popular musical genre of Mexico's oral tradition; stood in line for Greek spanakopita, Sonoran-style raspados, Egyptian masri, and pad thai; or watched African American girls dance their step traditions on a wooden stage.

Could there be a space for all that grief, too?

Yes. Because no matter the culture we claim, we all know the weight of loss. Our rituals of mourning are as varied as our rituals for celebrating.

We created the Loss and Remembrance Tent, a space within the festival to acknowledge the losses, to bring visibility to the act of mourning, to gather people together, to just grieve.

## Building on History and Context

Our idea was not without precedent. Tucson itself is a city that makes space for mourning. Mexican and Mexican American residents have long observed Día de los Muertos, the Day of the Dead, on November 1 and 2, a tradition of honoring and remembering the departed by cleaning and decorating gravesites. Mexican bakeries make and sell pan de muerto, a special sweet bread, and people set up altars in private homes, public offices, and businesses to remember those who have passed on. The region's Indigenous communities, the Tohono O'odham and the Yaqui/Yoeme people, mark the holiday by preparing foods and feasts for the dead.

The annual [All Souls Procession](#), initiated in 1990 by a local artist mourning her father and now produced by the nonprofit organization Many Mouths One Stomach, brings thousands of people together in Tucson to celebrate life and death in a public grief ritual. Although not intended as a Día de los Muertos celebration, many in the community bring the aesthetic of that holiday to the procession, and myriad other cultural and personal expressions of grief and mourning are represented at the event.

Public displays of grief have also been a part of past TMY festivals. For nearly a decade, TMY maintained a partnership with the Southern Arizona AIDS Foundation (SAAF), which held its annual AIDS Walk on the last morning of the festival weekend. The walk culminated on the festival grounds, where walkers could take advantage of festival infrastructure such as portable toilets and water. In collaboration with SAAF, TMY then created opportunities for festival goers to learn about the lore of the ongoing AIDS epidemic. A display of the [AIDS Memorial Quilt](#) created a space for remembering and mourning amidst the festival activities.

**From the Editors:**  
[Read Ofelia Esparza's article](#) in this issue about her tradition of altar making.

More recently, in 2019, the festival brought Ofelia Esparza (a [2018 National Endowment of the Arts National Heritage Fellow](#)) and her daughter, Rosanna Esparza Ahrens, both celebrated altar makers from East Los Angeles, through a partnership with the [Alliance for California Traditional Arts](#). The women built a public altar in an indoor space adjacent to the festival grounds, where visitors could witness and add photocopies of photographs of loved ones and

handmade paper flowers, created with the help of Yaqui/Yoeme artist Irene Sanchez. Over three days, the hall was imbued with reverence, memory, and homage, as visitors learned about the role of altars in personal and public life.

## The Desert Holds Miles of Grief

Unlike previous spaces for grief at the festival, the Loss and Remembrance Tent was purposeful in its neutrality. Rather than celebrating any specific cultural tradition or marking a particular grief expression, it provided a nondenominational space for multiple expressions. This felt important given the multitude of losses in 2020 and 2021—Covid-19, police brutality, racial violence, climate chaos, and more.



The Loss and Remembrance Tent evoked the Sonoran Desert landscape and offered a “sacred pause” for visitors. Photos by Steven Meckler.

For conceptual inspiration, we looked to the Sonoran Desert, where decay and death are both beautiful and regenerative. When death comes to the saguaro cactus—the iconic species of the region—it falls to the dry desert floor, where it nourishes the soil with water stored in its body and the process of its decay. Those nutrients fertilize soil in which young mesquite or palo verde trees can establish and grow into “nurse trees” that protect young saguaros from frost and heat. This cycle shows us how death, while difficult, is a natural, necessary part of being alive and sharing a planet with others.

Processes of decay and transformation happen slowly here (except in the case of sudden summer monsoon storms), so bringing a desert aesthetic to the Loss and Remembrance Tent seemed a resonant way of inviting people to pause, slow down, and contemplate their own inner landscapes of grief. We gathered skeletons of saguaro and cholla cacti, elegant “woody” structures that once held up the succulent pith and skin of the plants, as well as branches of creosote, a leafy green, fragrant plant with medicinal qualities. We designed the space with a palette of off-white, beige, and sage green to create a sense of respite amid the color and activity of the festival. We used outdoor rugs, beanbags, and round ottoman poufs and we draped fabric and twinkly lights to create a soft, inviting space.

Within this environment, we created a variety of engagement opportunities for the public, all of which intended to offer a “sacred pause” for visitors to remember and feel the impact of their losses.

### **Writing, Remembering, and Making Visible the Departed**

On walls set up throughout the installation, visitors could post written responses to prompts about their practices in grief and mourning and their methods for finding solace.

*I tend to my grief with rituals, baths/submerging in H2O, asking to be held, building ancestor or dead ones altars, making a box that symbolized my heart and asking those I love to put something inside, lighting candles, writing letters to dead ones.*



*DANCE.*

*Listening to music while swinging outside.*

*Going for a hike alone or with company. Taking the time to be present and listening to life.*

*Sharing homemade food with chosen family, candle-lit, outdoors, dogs nearby.*

*Remembering that I'm not the only one who has ever felt this way.*

*There is no time limit on my grief. Be ever gentle with myself. Comparison never helps.*

*Bookstores.*



Visitors shared traditions and practices of grief, mourning, and solace in the tent. Photo by Steven Meckler.

A Wall of Loss gathered names of those lost and by the end of the weekend, over 1,000 names were displayed. The visual impact of the wall often stopped festivalgoers enroute to food booths and live performances in their tracks, as they paused to take in the names. Those who chose to add to the wall could sit with their grief for a bit longer, as they wrote down the name of a lost loved one. Still others chose to stay to listen to music, relax on the beanbags, or speak with end-of-life doulas, professionals trained in compassionate listening and grief support.

*Journal of Folklore and Education* (2022: Vol. 9)

To Gather and to Grieve: Making Space for Mourning at a Folklife Festival  
by Kimi Eisele



## Sounds for Healing

More than 40 performing acts appeared on festival stages over its three days in 2021. Some were local school groups or affinity clubs, others were professional artists who tour nationally or internationally. We extended an additional invitation to these performers to participate in the Loss and Remembrance Tent. Ten groups accepted, including a group of Aztec ceremonial dancers, a trio of traditional musicians from Bulgaria, a Jewish folk singer, a Korean dancer, and a seven-member group playing Andean music. These artists offered 30-minute sessions of music, song, sound, or dance related to mourning or healing.

Visitors timed their arrival at the tent to listen to these acts or simply came upon them while wandering by. Some returned multiple times throughout the weekend just to hang out and listen. Music from other cultures or sung in languages other than their own allowed visitors to tap into a collective, universal feeling of connection with their individual sorrow. As guest folklorist Virginia Grise wrote in her commentary about the festival at large, “I ... let Ludo Djore [the Bulgarian trio] carry me and I wept underneath my big sunglasses, just wept. At that moment, I wish I understood more about this music, why the Bulgarians broke my heart open, how a tradition, a culture, a language you don’t even understand can have that effect on you.”

In addition to live music, a Saudade Jukebox (from the Portuguese word “saudade,” meaning longing, nostalgia, or the love that remains after someone is gone or an experience is over) provided an iPad linked to a [Spotify playlist](#) to which visitors could add songs to commemorate beloveds. The playlist link was also shared on the TMY Facebook page so people could add songs if they couldn’t attend the festival. Throughout the weekend, the tent filled with sounds from live musicians or with jukebox remembrance dedications, from The Beatles’ “P.S. I Love You” to Rocio Durcal’s “Amor Eterno” to Bette Midler’s “The Rose.”

One afternoon, five children came into the tent and right away began flinging themselves onto the beanbags, laughing at one another’s tricks. Eventually they settled in and got quiet. When I asked if they knew anyone who had recently died, one girl looked at me and nodded. “My mom,” she



Deron Lopez and Gertie Lopez of the Tohono O’odham Nation shared traditional waila music and spiritual songs of mourning and remembrance. Photo by Steven Meckler.

said. “Do you want to write her name on the wall?” I asked. She did. Then I showed her the jukebox. “Do you have a song that makes you think of her? We could play it.” She did. Jason Aldean’s “She’s Country.” As the song played, the girl’s grandmother turned to me and said, “It was a particularly hard morning for her. She was really missing her mom.” The girl swung her body back and forth to the electric guitar licks, singing along.



Tucson End-of-Life Doulas offered comfort and resources to festival-goers. Photo by Steven Meckler.

### One-on-One Support

Given the trauma that can arise when revisiting grief and loss, we invited end-of-life doulas to be on site for support. Death doulas, or death midwives as these professionals are sometimes called, provide spiritual and psychological support during dying and grieving processes and can assist with practical matters at the end of life such as creating death plans, planning memorial services, and helping families navigate complex financial and legal matters.

As visitors approached the tent, volunteers greeted them, instructing them on the activities and offerings inside and inviting them to contribute to the Wall of Loss. Some visitors would linger, clearly wanting more. While some volunteers in the tent came with specific training as counselors, many self-selected based on their own experience with grief and a strong sense of compassion for others. Those of us present in the tent learned to pay attention, reading body language to sense when people might be carrying heavy grief, inviting them to speak with a doula. Throughout the weekend, the doulas sat with hundreds of visitors, listening, offering compassionate support, and sharing resources.

### Plant Medicine

We also invited a desert herbalist to create a display of healing desert plants for the tent. As visitors viewed the exhibit, the herbalist explained the healing properties of plants like gobernadora (creosote), estafiate (Western mugwort), and gordolobo (cudweed). When she sensed someone with a particular need for healing, she offered them a sprig of estafiate, known for its powerful grounding properties.

One evening, as we were closing the tent for the day, a woman arrived, her shoulders rounding over her chest in the kind of physical manifestation of sorrow we had come to recognize. The death doulas were long gone, but one remaining volunteer, a bereavement counselor, sat with the woman for over 30 minutes letting her cry and share her story, as the rest of us tucked in the displays, packed away materials. Before she departed, the woman came to look at the healing plants display.

I offered her a sprig of estafiate, as I'd watched the herbalist do earlier in the day. "I lost a family member to homicide," the woman told me. "I didn't know how much I needed this. Thank you. Thank you." The next day she returned and sat in one of the beanbag chairs for several hours listening to music.



A display of healing plants of the Sonoran Desert. Photo by Steven Meckler.

### A Place to Feel

Although the design elements and activities of the Loss and Remembrance Tent were important, in the end what may have mattered most was simply creating a place amid the festival to hold individual and collective trauma for a little while—a place where grief was allowed to speak, sing, be seen and heard and felt. A place deeply needed, it seemed.

*[The Loss and Remembrance Tent] was highly inspiring and a source of comfort.*

*You did the community a huge service by having that tent, by moving something that can feel so isolating into the public sphere.*

*I thought a lot of our loved ones, and with all the other people there, I acknowledged that we are all not alone in losing loved ones. People's presence was healing.*

*Thank you so much for creating a sacred, intimate space for the Loss & Remembrance Tent! It was one of the highlights of TMY for me.*

Sometimes mourning needs an invitation. A song played through a makeshift jukebox or sung in a language you've never heard before. A name written on an index card and hung on a wall. A comfortable place to sit and move through the waves of sorrow, while the world moves along.

Over the last decade, the Southwest Folklife Alliance has engaged the public in various programs to help expand our understanding of cultural practices at the end of life. Through our participation with the Arizona End of Life Care Partnership, we've sponsored lectures with end-of-life specialists, held mealtime conversations in diverse cultural communities with death and dying experts, created documentary films about end-of-life practices within specific cultural traditions, and worked with ethnographers to document end-of-life rituals, beliefs, practices, and caregiving.



Calpulli Tonanztin, a group of Aztec Chichimeca Dancers offered a ritual in the space.  
Photo by Kimi Eisele.



This work has brought a folklife lens to the end-of-life field and has helped, we believe, demystify the processes of death and dying, creating space for important conversations, cultural acknowledgements, and practices that expand respect for diverse cultural traditions and beliefs. But the Loss and Remembrance Tent gave participants a place to *feel* what they were feeling, to recognize the reality of loss through their own visceral experience, to acknowledge and make space for the weight of what they were already carrying around.

And this is precisely the goal of an event that celebrates and teaches folklife: to offer up a place where we can identify, name, feel, make visible, and share with others the full range life experiences that make us who we are.

Some 2,000 people visited the Loss and Remembrance Tent during the October 2021 TMY festival. I like to think that their time there gave some shape to the indeterminacy of their grief. Not so it could be hurried along to get back to a nonexistent “normal,” but so people could integrate it into their culture, into the colorful and weighty fabric of their daily lives.

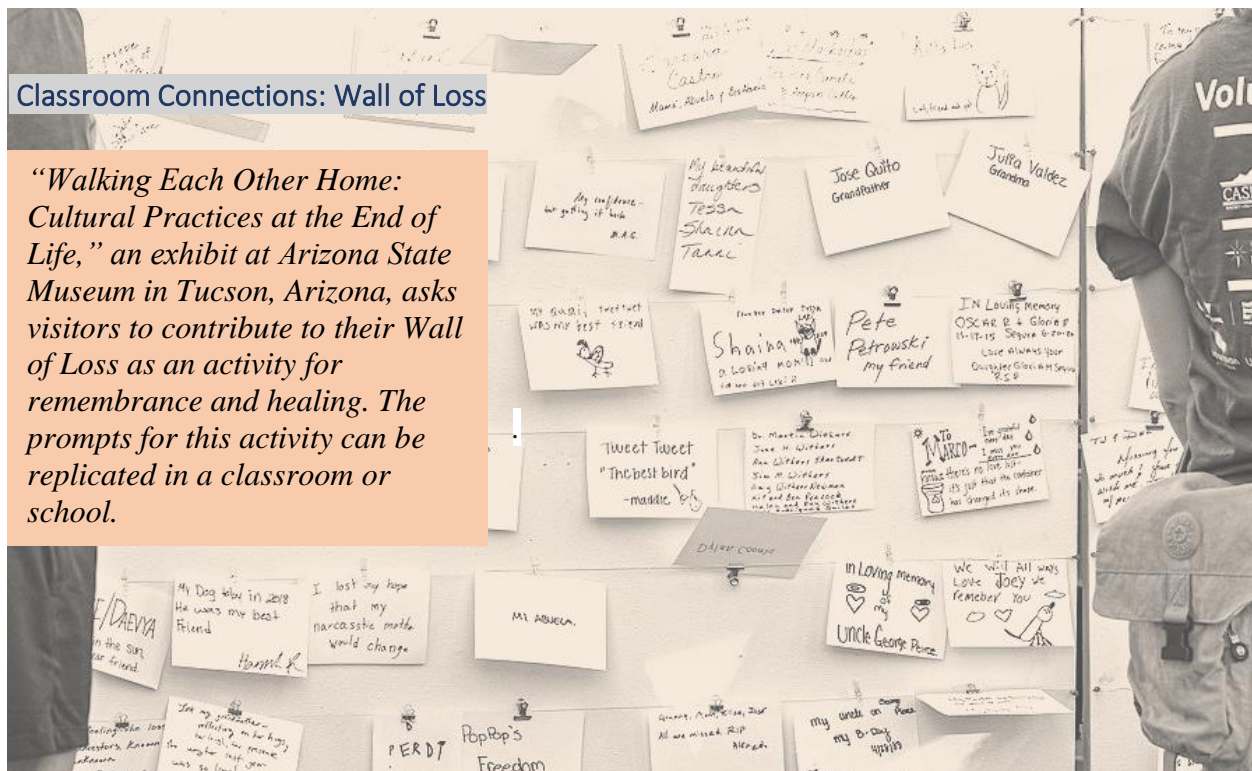
---

***Kimi Eisele*** is a folklorist, writer, and artist. She edits the monthly online journal, [BorderLore](#), with the [Southwest Folklife Alliance](#) in Tucson, Arizona. She is co-curator of an exhibit based on the Southwest Folklife Alliance’s work with the Arizona End of Life Partnership, “Walking Each Other Home: Cultural Practices at the End of Life” on display at Arizona State Museum in Tucson September 10, 2022 - February-25, 2023.

#### Endnotes

1. Dr. BAYO AKOMOLAFE on Slowing Down in Urgent Times/155. *For the Wild*. January 22, 2020, <https://forthewild.world/listen/bayo-akomolafe-on-slowing-down-in-urgent-times-155>.

*“Walking Each Other Home: Cultural Practices at the End of Life,” an exhibit at Arizona State Museum in Tucson, Arizona, asks visitors to contribute to their Wall of Loss as an activity for remembrance and healing. The prompts for this activity can be replicated in a classroom or school.*



## **Create a classroom (or school) Wall of Loss**

- Family members, friends, or neighbors who have died
- Life losses that significantly impacted or changed you or your family (loss of job, house, community, etc.)
- Other beloveds lost to you (romantic or friend breakups)
- Experiences you didn't get to have or can no longer have
- Beloved pets
- Species lost to extinction
- Places you can no longer access

We invite you to add names and experiences to the Wall of Loss. Try to be specific—that is where the poetry and power of your loss reside. May this help support you in your grief and healing.

### Instructions

1. Reflect on a loss that has most affected you.
2. Write it (or several) on an index card (or draw it).
3. Clip your card to the “loss” wall.





# Engaging with Discomfort: Thanatological Social Movements and Public Death Education

by Kaitlyn L. Kinney

Death is not just the end of life; death is also a complex and cultural phenomenon. As such, the shifting boundaries between life and death call for a reexamination of existing social norms and practices and the various educational resources surrounding death and dying in the United States. This is essential because death is not usually spoken of in our everyday lives. Instead, it is surrounded by silences that emerge from how death became displaced from vernacular discourse during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century with the creation of hospitals, funeral homes, professional death workers, and rapid advancements in medical science and technology (Cann 2014, Faust 2008, Rosenow 2015). These silences and displacements created a problematic deathscape—the places (conceptually, physically, and virtually) associated with dying and death that are imbued with various meanings and associations.<sup>1</sup>

Discontent with the contemporary U.S. deathscape serves as the catalyst for the emergence of grassroots groups, practices, and expressions that I term *thanatological social movements*. In discussing these groups, I employ “thanatological” versus “thanatocultural”. Thanatoculture broadly defined encompasses the cultures of death and dying shaped by the deathscape they resonate within. Thanatological is derived from “thanatology”—the science and study of death and dying from multiple disciplinary perspectives to educate others regarding death. Important to my framework is that an educational motivation drives these groups in their advocating for *thanatocultural* change. Thanatological social movements are folk groups whose shared beliefs and identities are situated around initiating cultural, political, and social change in the ways we communicate about, practice, and perceive death and dying. How people come to join and identify as being part of these thanatological folk groups relates directly to their everyday online interactions. Digital spaces and interactions facilitate experiential learning and connection in navigating together how to accomplish their advocacy. Folklore is uniquely equipped for contributing to this dynamism occurring within the U.S. deathscape in relation to the performance of death communication and education because our field provides a framework for acknowledging and responding to the ways death remains meaningful to people across shifting spatial and temporal contexts.

This brief survey of thanatological social movements provides folklorists useful entrée to consider the importance of the U.S. deathscape vis à vis disciplinary genres of performance and narrative (among others). This overview also shares with fieldworkers a potential starting point for researching this work and, for educators, offers four great resources that can be incorporated into classroom work. The movements outlined below indicate that death’s displacement and its silences

do not erase the cultural and personal connections we have to the deceased and dying. The increase in these communities is in part directly tied to a need for more informal death education that is public-facing and easily accessible and embraces the cultural and personal aspects of these experiences as teachable moments. In creating and using digital spaces and resources, individuals are beginning to move past the effects of institutional and professional structures that have unintentionally created silences surrounding death to mitigate this.

These digital spaces allow for the potential of verbal and nonverbal communicative interaction between and among thanatological social movement participants as death educators. These online interactions additionally facilitate the potential for these educators to connect with others outside their thanatological folk groups in their performance of public death education. The liminal nature of these virtual places allows these performers to pull from familiar communicative strategies, while also creating their own grassroots methods to speak of death in the pursuit of public death education. Through these grassroots methods, folklorists can better understand how digital engagement for education allows for the public mapping of “liminal spaces of emotion and affect” through these expressions of death communication within the changing American deathscape (Maddrell and Sidaway 2010).

The four social movements below range in scope and history spanning the past 30 years. Beginning with Death with Dignity, established in 1994, we can see how these movements create space and community for people in the U.S. in the form and performance of public death education. Thanatological social movements highlight how people work to change the deathscape, and how we can reflexively learn from the sharing of one another’s experiences. Demonstrating together, we can all learn how to engage with the discomfort of death in our everyday lives.

### **Death with Dignity (est. 1994)**

The [Death with Dignity](#) movement seeks to change the current experience of death in this country by advocating for the freedom of all terminally ill Americans to make their own end-of-life decisions (e.g., how they die; promoting death with dignity laws around the nation; and providing information, education, and support about death with dignity as an end-of-life option). This social movement presents didactic educational resources about physician-assisted death along with experiential, vernacular, and performance of personal experience narratives online through the “[Stories](#)” community archive on their website. Here participants practice “grassroots activities of documenting, recording, and exploring community heritage in which community participation, control, and ownership of the project is essential” (Flinn 2007, 153). Since 2013, Death with Dignity has successfully collected and archived 95 stories of terminally ill patients, loved ones, medical experts, and survivors. As a digital community archive, Death with Dignity connects people seeking and needing these resources. The intertwining of public education and folklore in Death with Dignity’s “Stories” archive creates an important resource for folklorists and educators because it documents the complexities of the American deathscape through the sharing of participants personal experiences.

### **Death Café (est. 2011)**

[Death Café](#) creates and provides spaces where individuals can come together and explore their anxieties and experiences of death and dying. These collectives attempt to recenter death

communication outside expert discourse with a very simple premise: Creating a space where people meet, eat, drink, and discuss death to help people “make the most of their finite lives” (About: Death Café).

Death Café also created a digital platform where one can find resources to help navigate the processes of death, dying, and grief, as well as death communication education for learning to articulate these experiences. Death Café encourages active community engagement; individuals can share death-related thoughts, resources, and links and transmit shared experiences among one another directly on the site. Like many communities over the last two years, the café shifted to online gatherings to mitigate the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic. Importantly, this move creates spaces for community members to discuss the deathscapes perpetuated by the global pandemic.

During the virtual October 2020 American Folklore Society (AFS) Annual Meeting, I organized a modified Death Café with several other folklorists who have a key interest in the intersections of folklore and death. Working closely with AFS, in our Death Café we introduced the purpose; discussed our work on the intersections of death and folklore; and opened the floor for attendees to share thoughts, reflections, and experiences. Janet Langlois, a renowned legend scholar who herself was dying from breast cancer, took the first brave step in engaging with the discomfort of discussing our own mortality stating that “Death is an intertwining, a braided connection that is personal, familial, and professional.” She used this space to openly discuss how her own encounters with death shaped her work on deathbed visions in hospice care.

Janet passed in May 2021, but the legacy she left behind as a human being will reverberate throughout time and space. The intimate sharing of her personal experiences inspired moving conversations about the ways folklore can contribute to the practice of death communication and education in relation to our own experiences, and these conversations are continuing.<sup>2</sup> The following year, in 2021, several folklorists who organized or attended the virtual AFS Death Café came together again for further discussion about death and folklore. While this was a traditional panel hosted face-to-face, the question-and-answer portion became a place to begin to speak of death in relation to our personal experiences and reflect on how we are observing these thanatocultural changes in our daily lives.

### **Death Positivity / Order of the Good Death (est. 2011)**

Death Positivity is perhaps the most well-known among the thanatological social movements. In particular, this community tackles what it means to have a good death by addressing the need for reform within the funeral industry, writing that “the public has reluctantly accepted that a funeral will mean huge expense, few opportunities for participation, and little space for grief” (The Order of the Good Death: About). Caitlin Doughty, a funeral director, is instrumental in creating [The Order of the Good Death](#). Doughty’s highly subscribed YouTube documentary series with 1.83 million followers, [Ask a Mortician](#), answers questions about death history, the funeral industry, and mortality. Understanding that death’s negative connotations within the U.S. deathscape is “not a fun, sexy topic for advocacy”; this momentum grew into the Death Positive movement (Order of the Good Death: About).

Death positivity invites an openness about death and encourages engagement. YouTube user SpaceTypo demonstrates this in their [video](#) discussing death positivity, stating that this movement does not “shame you for wanting to be curious about death and it’s okay to explore these subjects and question them” (How Death Positivity Affected Me 2020). Measuring informal engagement online with this thanatological social movement through hashtag searches on #DeathPositivity and #DeathPositive on social media platforms indicates a rise in visibility of this kind of death education. Social media practices like #DeathPositivity allow researchers and educators to analyze the vernacular communicative pathways being actively created online within these communities and to stay current with the dynamism occurring within the American deathscape. However, folklorists and other educators should also consider what skills they can learn from these thanatological social movements and their digital vernacular practices. Doing so teaches us how to better frame our own digital performances in these spaces to network with participants of these communities and directly support public death education efforts through interacting with their content.

### **Collective for Radical Death Studies (est. 2019)**

The [Collective for Radical Death Studies](#) (CRDS) is unique as a thanatological social movement. It directly addresses silences within formalized death education, highlighting how this affects everyday conceptualizations and communications. While death is often attributed to being the “great equalizer” because we will all physically die someday, CRDS acknowledges the unequal experiences of death. Death studies are often situated around white middle- and upper-class experiences; marginalized communities and *their* experiences are too often left out of this discourse. Seeking to bridge this gap, this thanatological social movement consists primarily of death scholars, students, funeral directors, skilled death workers, trained death practitioners, and activists who all see death work as social justice work, antiracism work, and work that addresses marginalized communities. Folklore is equipped to contribute to this discourse through how we are able to navigate the adaptation and performance of tradition within formalized death education and the informal public education performed by these groups online.

Digital spaces are instrumental for CRDS as they collectively work toward providing resources and online engagement in multiple ways to develop a radical death studies canon. This organization came into existence because of conversations that began on Twitter in 2018, highlighting how informal encounters online can form these thanatological communities. Death Studies advocate and historian Kami Fletcher states, “For myself and a lot of my colleagues, Twitter is a nice academic Rolodex where we can easily talk to each other, and people can engage with us who are in the field of death studies. Academia is a privileged world, and Twitter offers a way for anyone to directly engage with academics” (Allis 2020). The Twitter conversations expanding on Fletcher’s tweet resonated with many educators, resulting in CRDS’ creation. CRDS created highly accessible education resources online, such as the Death Canon—a [collection](#) of source material, blog posts, YouTube videos—and an online book club called [#RadDeathReads](#). Yet, CRDS participants also continue to use social media platforms to share their stories to navigate together how to speak of death as experienced within marginalized communities.

Thanatological social movements and their digital practices create spaces where community knowledge and vernacular death communication are jointly developed. Their performance online

highlights the importance of reflexivity to enact thanatocultural change within the American deathscape. There is more work to do for folklorists and educators to contribute to these discourses. The four thanatological social movements surveyed provide a helpful entry point for us to learn from and support public death education.

---

*Kaitlyn L. Kinney received her MA in Folklore from George Mason University in 2019. She works as an independent folklorist and is Co-founder and Communications Director of Wisefolk Productions, LLC, a digital public humanities group. Her work centers on the intersections of death and folkloristics, investigating vernacular death communication within thanatological social movements.*

### Endnotes

- 1 This definition of “deathscape” is based on cultural geographers Maddrell and Sidaway’s discussions (2010). They conceptualize deathscapes primarily in reference to places of memorialization for the dead for the living (2016, 5). I have recontextualized this definition here to be more inclusive of: 1) the ways these “places” are conceptualized and used (not just memorialization) and 2) how the persons interacting and using these deathscapes may better incorporate the perspectives of individuals who are dying.
- 2 To learn more about Janet’s life and work, please read these beautiful tributes to her from the [International Society for Contemporary Legend](https://contemporarylegend.org/2021/05/25/in-memory-of-janet-l-langlois/?fbclid=IwAR2GBRYiDJfjCAy25UEwBB8InYuSjx99UPn2pZxqHFOjuMZuvcmpl-AV3Uc) and in the [Journal of American Folklore](https://muse.jhu.edu/article/848311/pdf).

### Works Cited

- Allis, Ellary. 2020. Interview. Kami Fletcher. Is Death “The Great Equalizer?” African American Deathways and Inequality in America. *Seven Ponds Blog*, Accessed June 15, 2022, <https://blog.sevenponds.com/professional-advice/is-death-really-the-great-equalizer-african-american-deathways-and-inequality-in-america>.
- Cann, Candi K. 2014. *Virtual Afterlives: Grieving the Dead in the Twenty-First Century*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky.
- Death Café. About. Accessed May 28, 2022, <https://deathcafe.com/what>.
- Death with Dignity. About. *Death with Dignity*. Accessed June 9, 2022, <https://www.deathwithdignity.org>.
- Faust, Drew Gilpin. 2008. *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
- Flinn, Andrew. 2007. Community Histories, Community Archives: Some Opportunities and Challenges. *Journal of the Society of Archivists*. 28.2:151-76.
- Maddrell, Avril and James D. Sidaway. 2010. *Deathscapes: Spaces for Death, Dying, Mourning, and Remembrance*. Farnham, Surrey, UK: Ashgate.
- Rosenow, Michael K. 2015. *Death and Dying in the Working Class, 1865-1920*. Champaign: University of Illinois Press.
- Spacetypo. 2020. How Death Positivity Affected Me. *YouTube*. Accessed June 5, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ga0w80mBNpU>.

### Urls

- Collective for Radical Death Studies <https://radicaldeathstudies.com>
- Collective for Radical Death Studies. Death Canon <https://radicaldeathstudies.com/death-canon>
- Collective for Radical Death Studies. #RadDeathReads <https://radicaldeathstudies.com/decolonizing-death/raddeathreads>
- Death with Dignity <https://deathwithdignity.org>
- Death with Dignity. Stories <https://deathwithdignity.org/stories>
- Death Café <https://deathcafe.com>
- International Society for Contemporary Legend. Janet Langlois Obituary <https://contemporarylegend.org/2021/05/25/in-memory-of-janet-l-langlois/?fbclid=IwAR2GBRYiDJfjCAy25UEwBB8InYuSjx99UPn2pZxqHFOjuMZuvcmpl-AV3Uc>
- Journal of American Folklore*. Janet Langlois Obituary <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/848311/pdf>
- Order of the Good Death <https://www.orderofthegooddeath.com>





I began teaching secondary world history in the United States in the early 2000s after nearly two years of teaching and studying in Wuhan, China. I have no recollection of learning about China/East Asia prior to moving to Wuhan, despite the advantage of being educated at a progressive (and well-funded) high school and college in the Southern U.S., where I am from. I do recall adults, mainly family and close friends, warning me of the dangers of living abroad in such a “foreign” place, despite never having been there themselves. My schooling and theirs was one of western civilization, where Asian histories were only present in the context of reacting to the U.S., rarely, if ever, explained in the context of their own histories (Gluck 1997, 200).

In my first few years of secondary teaching, I found myself at odds with the curriculum laid out before me. What I experienced and learned while living in China was fundamentally at odds with educational resources and historical/cultural representations about China. It was in those first years that I began to use my own photographs with students, most of whom were white, like me, and from middle-class families. For those who had experienced international travel, their travels took

---

About the photo: Resting Place (Memorial Square – The Memorial Hall of the Victims in Nanjing Massacre by Japanese Invaders). Photo by Amy Mungur.

them to Europe. At the time, I wanted students to see beyond that textbook scope, to see the complexities in the historical and the contemporary. I did not have a language for that then, but my attempts were directed at disruption of what the textbook had determined as official knowledge: China has two histories—Ancient China and Communist China—although both situate China outside the tunnel of our history, where “everything seems to be a rockbound, timeless, changeless tradition” (Blaut 1993, 5). In addition, I did not have language or knowledge to discuss the supremacy the U.S. held over China through representations that upheld structures of oppression, much less to work with students as they grappled with interrogating them.

Now, as a teacher educator, I work alongside preservice teachers navigating the challenges of U.S.-centered representations that extend beyond textbooks and other curricular materials. The students I have worked with for nearly a decade in teacher education come from various racial, ethnic, and religious groups; many are first-generation college students, and most summarize their knowledge about China/East Asia in similar ways [as I would have when I was a student], primarily from TV and film<sup>1</sup>. As such, I am moved by this special issue’s attention to death, loss, and remembrance to share methods for how I engage representational practices in popular media and reflect on the sustained impact these mis/understandings have on student learning when not interrogated. My focus on remembrance comes from my experiences living in China and my years teaching world history (and preservice teachers with that focus) with specific attention on the representational imbalance of the “West over East” (Oxley and Morris 2013). How does the East get (to be) remembered? Finally, the use of photography is an access point into the past but also “a starting point for reflecting on our sense of identity” (Morris-Suzuki 2005, 118).

### **The Pedagogy of Visual Text**

A photograph’s complexity is revealed in that it assumes reality. Susan Sontag (1977) argued this complexity gives the photograph authority because not only is it “an interpretation of the real; it is also a trace, something directly stenciled off the real” (154). This authority is also its pedagogical power, allowing for participation and alienation, remembering and forgetting. Sontag’s image-world was the space created by the photographer with the photographs that they snap. Importantly, while an event/moment is captured in a photograph, the event at some point ends, but through its captured image, it lives on or still exists even after the event has ended (11). Pedagogically, images guide viewers both to remember and forget (certain events) in the presences and absences of the photographs themselves. The image also fixes content as having happened, and thus will forever happen as it did at that moment.

Photographs and the use of photographs to re/present [someone/something] are exercises in power. In one way, power is exercised by the decision to use a particular photograph to create/construct meaning. Thus, photographs are imbued with power, as they can be appropriated to give meaning to an event, or even to bring the past event to the present, to be remembered. In this way, photographs redefine reality, whereby reality becomes more about what we see in an image, (Sontag 1977, 161) than the possibilities of what reality could be captured by the naked eye or beyond what is captured in the picture. To get students to explore the possibilities obscured through images, I frequently use *Life* magazine in my courses to teach (historical) encounters between the U.S. and China. *Life*’s unique style bridged early 20<sup>th</sup>-century viewing norms—the newspaper and the picture weekly. A *Chicago Tribune* reporter noted, “*Life* photographs were there to savor, a

week at a time; *Life* photographers fanned out over the globe the way that network crews do today, but what *Life* photographers brought back was timeless” (Greene 1986, D1). Now accessible through [Google Books](#), teachers can use *Life* as a source for students not only to analyze and evaluate the American imagination as storied through a popular journal, but also to identify the power of re/presentation and the (historical) assumptions that have been in/formed by their ubiquitous use of image to story China’s hi/story.

### ***Life Magazine***

*Life* was a magazine of pictures. Tied not subtly to profit, in a 1936 proposal to advertisers, editor Henry R. Luce stated, “Pictures are faster than words....Pictures invite a look, where long texts repel. Pictures dramatize where text narrates and describes. Pictures sell” (in Kozol 1994, 36). Believing in *Life*’s power to shape popular opinion (Doss 2001, 11), the magazine aimed to tell the story of the U.S. (America), American life, and the “sure belief that the American way was the way of the world” (Doss 2001). Born in China to missionary parents, Luce hoped that China would embrace the American Way by adopting Christianity and democracy (Jespersen 1996). China moving away from that hope drives much of the coverage during the Cold War era.

The photographs in *Life* were meant to be revealing and, at times, graphic to its subscriber base—primarily “white, middle-class Americans, most of whom shared Luce’s fundamental assumptions about God and the Republican Party” (Baughman 2001, 48). In contrast to a journal like *National Geographic*, which features images idealizing the non-western world while downplaying poverty and violence (Lutz and Collins 1993), *Life*’s photojournalism was meant as “witness [to] the extraordinary events—catastrophes, victories, pioneering expeditions—that determine the flavor of an era” (Korn 1971, 20).

With preservice teachers, I try to carve space for them to consider the various points of view conveyed in photographs (of China) from the same period re/presented in different journals. For example, an image from a 1964 *National Geographic* article describes “Shadow boxers greet sunrise in Shanghai Square” (629). I will juxtapose this small color image with an image from 1966 in *Life*, “[Boxer Uprising: Inside the Besieged Legions](#).” I use these because students are drawn to the word “Boxer.” It becomes an access point to the Boxer Rebellion, which they will have to teach, but it also gives them an opportunity to consider how Boxers and the Boxer Rebellion are represented in curricular resources. At the same time, it gives me an opportunity to *hear* what they see and how/if they see variation in representation based on these two journals. What I know, and I share this with them as we work our way through the discussion, is that during the Cold War, writers, photographers, and editors at *National Geographic* had to work to represent nations like China, and the Soviet Union, in a way that positioned the representation somewhere between favorable and evil because “favorable portrayals [in *National Geographic*] of Eastern Bloc nations would have been unpatriotic; yet to dwell on their evils would violate editorial policy” (Lutz and Collins 1993, 96). Once students have thought about that driving factor, we return to the images and note what elements may be evidence of that practice.

Sometimes I work with students on advertisement/feature story juxtapositions and the meaning (that can be) made through deconstruction. I model this for them, letting them now *hear what I see*. For example, *Life*’s September 23, 1966, feature story, [is juxtaposed](#) with a telephone

advertisement. The full-page black and white AT&T advertisement (left) shows a young child seemingly playing hide and seek. Their mother, meanwhile, packs up dishes, an expression on her face corresponding to the text, “Moving can be madness. Maybe we can help a little.” Moving our gaze just slightly to the right is the feature [story](#), “100 Violent Years.” For me, it is difficult to miss the use of language and color—the **madness** of moving and the **turmoil** of Mao’s rule, CHINA in all caps and red, the only color used on both pages. As the young child in the AT&T advertisement hides in a box, the introduction to the feature photo essay, itself blocked in the shape of the Qianmen Gate, noted that China has been “a prisoner of her own history” (61). Thus, while the reader is being sold a telephone company subscription, the reader is also being sold (a version of) China.

I share my thinking with students but also note that the positioning of the advertisements in proximity to the photo-essays and editorials was often unplanned. Hales (2001) explained

In the office of the managing editor, each week the walls became vertical mock-up boards for the final version, and as the week went on, the editorial and advertising sales staffs arranged and rearranged the sequence, the size of ads and articles, the scale of individual pictures, and all the other elements that made up the finished product. (116)

What Hales meant by unplanned is that the advertisements were not selected based on the stories and photo essays. However, the arranging and rearranging suggests a system of curating, whereby decisions were intentionally and carefully made not only to present a newsworthy story but also to reinforce consumer and domestic ideologies (Kozol 1994, 36), a point of discussion that often leads into discussions of pop-up ads when scrolling through social media.

Despite *Life*’s dependence on advertising, and the juxtaposition of photo essays like “China: 100 Violent Years” with an AT&T advertisement, the photo essay was *Life*’s most prominent feature, and thus a primary representational and pedagogical practice. The combination of photographs and narratives, and the framing of each into a photo essay, worked to construct a story around the news event. The focus on photographs to tell this story aligned with Luce’s belief that photographs would be a selling point. In the context of this essay, *Life* was selling a story of China, which arguably became *the* story of China in the U.S. collective imagination, the story to remember.

Before analyzing any photographic collection in *Life* I task students with independent (or small group) work investigating Henry Luce. While I can certainly present a mini lecture on Henry Luce, having them learn on their own, taking notes and gathering information sets them up for inference making prior to engaging with the photographs. Once students have gathered some information, they share their findings, and I clear up any misconceptions or fill in any necessary gaps. I then prompt: Based on your gathered evidence of Henry Luce, what do you expect to see, know, and learn in *Life* magazine? Students write down responses, which they will return to at the end of the class or lesson.

The collection I typically use is a three-part special series *Life* published beginning with the September 23, 1966, issue on the history of China. I find this collection particularly significant

because most students I work with will encounter this content as practitioners—either directly in world history or indirectly in U.S. history discussions of immigration, exclusion, and the impact of geopolitical issues on the treatment of non-white immigrants in the U.S. My decision to use this collection is intentional and I am transparent with students why *this* content has been selected. On September 16, 1966, a week before its publication, *Life* previewed the series:

As political convulsions shake Communist China today, LIFE begins a three-part series to illuminate what is going on there. Using rare pictures, the series documents the massive events of the past 100 years, which broke up an ancient empire and brought Communist rule to the largest nation on earth—a nation imprisoned by its own history. (37)

This quote minimizes the intention and agency of *Life* editors in photograph selection. The photographs used to re/present the past 100 years were taken from a series of sources. In the [Table of Contents](#) for Part 1, the editor noted that *Life* “undertook a worldwide search for photographs which unearthed many rare pictures. Some of them have never been published” (September 23, 1966, 5). Photographic credits listed range from private personal collections like the Baroness Giovannella Grenier Collection to the Board of Missions of the United Methodist Church. Significantly, these photographs, now published in *Life*, were **collected** from a variety of sources, and pieced together, **curated**, to re/present the past 100 years of China’s history. Although the search for photographs to help cover this story was launched worldwide, the selections came from westerners (5).

The editor selected the images in the special three-part series to give the reader an experience and a chance to learn about Chinese history. This experience focused on what life was like in China, *for the westerner*, as the narrative and images center western people and perspectives. For example, in ["Boxer Uprising: inside the besieged legions"](#) (66-67) the largest image captures a group of western missionaries, a commonly assumed primary target of the Boxers<sup>2</sup>. However, the focus on the missionaries also foregrounds Luce’s own experience growing up the son of missionaries.

The following section is a sample of two images that I use with students to begin their engagement with photographic analysis toward understanding who/what gets (to be) remembered. Recognizing the limits of applying compositional interpretation alone, students with limited experience in photographic analysis may benefit at first from “looking carefully at the content, form, and experiencing of the images” (Rose 2016, 60). Drawing further upon Rose (2016), students are prompted to identify and name content, color, spatial organization, light, and expressive content, defined for students as “affective characteristics” (79).

### A Tale of Two Photographs

Part I of the series begins with the ["Boxer Uprising: inside the besieged legions."](#) Of particular interest is the page-length image, which I have entitled ["Old Glory"](#) (69). This image captures two Chinese men killed during the “rescue” mission, which was made up of people from six countries<sup>3</sup>. As a documentary photograph, it reveals “a hidden reality, that is, a reality hidden from [the photographer]” (Sontag 1977, 55). The reality, however, is also suppressed from the audience. Drawing on the familiar, the connection between the photograph and the assumed



western/American subscriber, is the American flag, described in the caption as “Old Glory floated above Japanese infantrymen at the gate of [Tianjin]” (68).

The dead Chinese men in “Old Glory” are in the foreground but not acknowledged in the caption—they are there to gaze at, but not relate to, just as the photographer gazes “on other people’s reality with curiosity, with detachment, with professionalism” (Sontag 1977, 55). The camera angle makes this point. From the vantage point of the photographer, positioned slightly above the dead Chinese men, the lighting draws the eye along the incline and fixes on the flag. In the context of the photo essay, this image was the largest on the page, yet the bodies of the dead Chinese men were not acknowledged. While the photograph brings the viewer into presence with death, looking up at the flag is a reminder of the history of the U.S., which in this case is distinctly influenced by the angles and framing of the photograph. Thus, the reader/looker is reminded not of destruction caused by war, but the strength of the U.S. The Chinese men are not honored in (their) death, and thus not remembered.

Turning the page, there is another image of death. The caption for this image, [“Fallen Soldier.”](#) explains a scene from battle:

In the gloom of the great [Qian] Men gate on the [Beijing] wall lay the flag-draped body of Capt. Henry Joseph Reily, U.S. Army, surrounded by the men of his battery. While directing fire in support of a futile, bloody American attack on the Forbidden City, he was killed by Imperial troops the day after the allies entered [Beijing] to lift the Boxer siege. (70)

We are reminded of death in both the caption and the image. Death in this image is linked with honor and sacrifice of a fallen U.S. Soldier and the U.S. flag signifying this honor and sacrifice. The camera angle puts the viewer at eye level, almost to allow participation in mourning of the fallen soldier. It is worth noting how the viewer is directed to relate to both these images, with only one prompting empathy with the dead. Through the practices of looking, when a viewer looks down on something, like on the dead Chinese soldiers in “Old Glory,” the angle gives the viewer power over what is looked down upon. When the viewer looks up at something, like up at the flag in the same image, the angle suggests a reverence, positioning viewers in some way inferior to the object they look up to (Rose 2016, 70). “Old Glory” and “Fallen Soldier” both capture scenes of death, yet death is only acknowledged for the U.S. fallen soldier, the flag-draped-coffin signifying that sacrifice. The distance between the dead Chinese soldiers and the flag itself, hovering from both above and afar, teaches and reminds us of the power that the U.S. presumes over China.

That images can work both to detach from, and connect the viewer to, what is photographed is a very important aspect in the practices of looking. The viewer only sees a fragment of what the photographer sees. The photographer is always present if only “to carry his camera and react quickly when the moment comes” (Rose 2016, 31). However, photographers are perceived absent from images because they are rarely, if ever, seen. *Life’s* images work to remove that presence, but in so doing establish the viewer as “distant and somewhat superior to what the image shows us” (31) and, most significantly, position the viewer “from the same hidden vantage point” as the

photographer. Thus, positioning the viewer to gaze upon/over the subject—to become the spectator—is a tool specifically employed by *Life* magazine (Morgan 2001, 140).


### Interrogating the Imbalance

The emphasis and significance that *Life* placed on their photo essays to report history positions *Life* as a particularly compelling, and powerfully instructive, source for learning about how China has been storied in this country. But it is not enough to analyze and evaluate photographs, although the skills employed to take up those tasks are necessary for building critical skills. Using the images of the past (in *Life*), I like to give students the opportunity to create works aimed at re/story telling. Framed as an attempt to correct the west/east imbalance and make room for the “possibilities beyond what is captured in the picture” (Sontag 1977), the creative work is solely determined by the student. In the past, students have built WikiSpaces (now discontinued), crafted their own photo essays that reframe *Life*’s China narrative, written songs that lay bare systems of power, and most recently used a [Netflix PowerPoint template](#) to articulate their vision of history teaching despite a [spate of bills](#) set to prevent them from enacting their visions.

As students taking my courses have engaged in the process of assessing, evaluating, and reflecting on the image and how it can be used to remember/forget hi/stories, I have them write an artist statement to accompany their creative works. The artist statement requires students to name the process by which they made sense of the past, including image/text selection, modality, and (where applicable) sound. Because students are preservice teachers in a teacher preparation program, they are further prompted to make recommendations for integrating in grades 6-12. The hope, from my end, is that they will implement similar student-driven creative works into their own classrooms aimed at interrogating and correcting the imbalance so evident in the curriculum, standards, and policies intent on sustaining that power.

---

*Amy Mungur, PhD, is an Assistant Professor of Curriculum and Instruction in the School of Education at Georgia Gwinnett College. Her research examines representational practices of power and privilege in both popular and educational media. As a practitioner-scholar, she uses her research to engage preservice social studies teachers in a range of theories and visual methodologies to inform their pedagogical and curricular decision-making. She is a former world history teacher and lives in Lawrenceville, GA. She may be reached at [amungur@ggc.edu](mailto:amungur@ggc.edu).*

 ORCID 0000-003-4708-3475

### Want more Visual Literacy activities?

- The Library of Congress’ Analyzing Primary Sources page includes a worksheet for photos/images: <https://www.loc.gov/programs/teachers/getting-started-with-primary-sources/guides>.
- Falk, Lisa. 2014. Expressing and Reading Identity through Photographs. *Journal of Folklore and Education*. 1:4-9, <https://jfepublications.org/article/expressing-and-reading-identity-through-photographs>.
- A hub for death related photo-essays: <https://www.talkdeath.com/the-best-photo-documentaries-on-death>

—eds.

## Endnotes

1. When I begin my lessons on Asia, I first ask students to define it using words and phrases. Students often ask which countries “belong in” or make up the Asian continent. Students overwhelmingly describe Asia as China first, followed by overpopulated, traditional, authoritarian, and “other side of the world.” Importantly, what follows are conversations of how we have accessed this “other side of the world” when nearly all students I have asked over my 20 years in teaching have never traveled to Asia.
2. The Boxers were demanding an end to the special privileges awarded to Chinese Christian converts. Their attacks soon included western missionaries, who fell into the category of “anything foreign.” When the Boxers advanced to Beijing, the Empress Dowager allied with the Boxers to keep their loyalty (Spence 1990, 231-33).
3. Great Britain, United States, Germany, Japan, Italy, and Austria.

## Works Cited

- Baughman, James. 2001. Who Read *Life*? The Circulation of America’s Favorite Magazine. In *Looking at Life Magazine*, ed. Erika Doss. Washington, DC: The Smithsonian Institution., 41-51.
- Blaut, James Morris. 1993. *The Colonizer’s Model of the World: Geographical Diffusionism and Eurocentric History*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Doss, Erika. 2001. *Looking at Life Magazine*. Washington, DC: The Smithsonian Institution.
- Greene, Bob. 1986. One of *Life*’s Lessons Is That Things Change. *Chicago Tribune*, November 12, D1.
- Gluck, Carol. 1997. Asia in World History. In *Asia in Western and World History: A Guide for Teachers*, Ainslie T. Embree and Carol Gluck. Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 199-216.
- Hales, Peter Bacon. 2001. Imagining the Atomic Age: *Life* and the Atom. In *Looking at Life Magazine*, ed. Erika Doss. Washington, DC: The Smithsonian Institution, 103-19.
- Jespersen, T. Christopher. 1996. *American Images of China, 1931-1949*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Korn, Jerry. 1971. *Life Library of Photography: Photojournalism*. New York: Time Inc.
- Kozol, Wendy. 1994. *Life’s America: Family and Nation in Postwar Journalism*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Life*. 1966. September 23.
- Lutz, Catherine A. and Jane L. Collins. 1993. *Reading National Geographic*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Oxley, Laura and Paul Morris. 2013. Global Citizenship: A Typology for Distinguishing Its Multiple Conceptions, *British Journal of Educational Studies*. 61.3:301-25. DOI [10.1080/00071005.2013.798393](https://doi.org/10.1080/00071005.2013.798393).
- Morgan, David. 2001. The Image of Religion in American *Life*, 1936-1951. In *Looking at Life Magazine*, ed. Erika Doss. Washington, DC: The Smithsonian Institution, 139-57.
- Morris-Suzuki, Tessa. 2005. *The Past Within Us: Media, Memory, History*. London: Verso.
- National Geographic*. 1964. 126.5, November.
- Rose, Gillian. 2016. *Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to Researching with Visual Materials*. London: Sage Publications.
- Sontag, Susan. 1977. *On Photography*. New York: Picador.
- Spence, Jonathan. 1990. *The Search for Modern China*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc.

## Urls

- Behind Mao’s Red Rule: The 100 Violent Years. 1966. *Life Magazine*. September 23.  
<https://books.google.com/books?id=iFUEAAAAMBAJ&lpg=PP1&lr&rview=1&pg=PA5#v=twopage&q&f=false>
- War Photographs of the Old China Days. 1966. *Life Magazine*. September 23.  
<https://books.google.com/books?id=iFUEAAAAMBAJ&lpg=PP1&lr&rview=1&pg=PA5#v=onepage&q&f=false>
- Boxer Uprising: Inside the Besieged Legions. 1966. *Life Magazine*. September 23.  
<https://books.google.com/books?id=iFUEAAAAMBAJ&lpg=PP1&lr&rview=1&pg=PA69#v=twopage&q&f=false>
- “Old Glory” [no title]. 1966. *Life Magazine*. September 23.  
<https://books.google.com/books?id=iFUEAAAAMBAJ&lpg=PP1&lr&rview=1&pg=PA69#v=onepage&q&f=false>

This exhibition,

“It’s about community,  
told by community, and  
supported by community.”

—Hayden Haynes



## The Thomas Indian School— Narrative Sovereignty and Healing

---

This photo essay by Hayden Haynes is part of the culmination of a community looking at the effects and aftereffects of one Indian Boarding School. This is not to say that this community has reached a conclusion on this matter, but it is a start. To be honest, many Native Nations, communities, and families are just beginning to come to terms with the traumatic events that surround this particular past.

Acknowledging uncomfortable histories is a position that all peoples must take to come together, discuss, and heal. Reminders will be centered on what is uncovered on former school lands over the next few years. The talking points will revolve around murdered, missing, lost, assimilated, and tormented young people, and the families’ pain surrounding their disappearance. For the survivors, we will find many, but not all. With this in mind, we must come together and resolve never to allow this to happen again to anyone.

---

About the photo: Door of the lower mission house of Thomas Indian School, Seneca-Cattaraugus Territory. Photo by Hayden Haynes with Jocelyn Jones. © 2021 Hayden Haynes and Jocelyn Jones.

Boarding schools arrived at the onset of U.S. government Indian assimilation policies from the 18<sup>th</sup> century to the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. Americans assumed Indigenous Peoples would disappear in a matter of time and ramped up the process with Institutionalized Boarding Schools to assimilate Indigenous youth before they were fully enculturated with their families' languages and cultures. Boarding School policies certainly embraced Richard H. Pratt's ideology of *kill the Indian, save the man* (1892).

The efforts of the curators and collaborators of an exhibition displayed at the Onöhsagwë:De' Cultural Center on the Seneca Nation's Allegany Territory tell part of the story of the Thomas Indian School (TIS) in Irving, NY. It is titled *Hënödeyësdahgwa'geh wa'öki'jō'ögwaḥsä's. Onëh I:' jögwadögwea:je'. We Were at the School. We Were There. We Remember*. The exhibition had two additional showings and will continue moving to keep deepening awareness of these unsolved losses. An essay outlining the history of TIS follows this section about the exhibit.

The Onöhsagwë:De' Cultural Center has been honored to host the exhibition. The story came together in a quick but deliberate curation of artifacts of TIS's history, family stories, Seneca Nation's Archives, contemporary photographs, and art made specifically for the exhibition. Although the Center had limited roles in this endeavor, the power of the exhibition lies in how Haudenosaunee People from all over Western New York offered their expertise, mementos, or newly created pieces to ensure this exhibition came to fruition. The building of the exhibition simultaneously brought awareness and education, but most importantly the acts of creation and display are a healing for all of us.

The truth is that if you are an Indigenous Person on Turtle Island, then you probably have some connection to this story. As a result of knowing all of this, you are also aware that we are not supposed to be telling this story. We were supposed to become them. That did not happen. We are still here. We invite institutions to reach out to Hayden Haynes to bring this powerful, ongoing story to your communities. Through educational sovereignty and the sharing of exhibitions that illustrate the histories that we need to tell about our places, we hope to make sure no one has to create another exhibition like this one again.

by Joe Stahlman

Director, Onöhsagwë:De' Cultural Center

#### Works Cited

Official Report of the Nineteenth Annual Conference of Charities and Correction. 1892, 46–59. Reprinted in Richard H. Pratt, *The Advantages of Mingling Indians with Whites, Americanizing the American Indians: Writings by the "Friends of the Indian" 1880–1900*. 1973. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 260–71, <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/4929>.

When people think of sovereignty they think about political sovereignty, but most do not consider the freedom to choose how they wish to educate their children. The history of the Thomas Indian School (TIS) still reverberates through our communities. Its effects manifest in many different ways for individuals and for our community as a whole.

In 2021, I made a pair of antler comb earrings in memory of the children who went to TIS. This evolved into a social media photography project to build more awareness about the "school." I asked Jocelyn Jones, a fellow Cattaraugus-Seneca and culture bearer, if she would model in traditional regalia for the



photos, and she agreed. Jocelyn owned an orange ribbon dress, which she wore for the photographs. The orange color is associated with the “Every Child Matters” movement, which aims for truth and reconciliation regarding Native American Residential Schools\*. This work serves to show the strength and fortitude of our peoples, a reminder that we survived and have thriving communities today.

Jocelyn and I visited various sites on the Cattaraugus Territory related to the Thomas Indian School. These included the “lower” mission house, Wright Memorial Church, existing structures of TIS, and the United

*\*Orange Shirt Day is recognized on September 30 in Canada and elsewhere. Find Teacher Resources developed by the First Nations Education Steering Committee and First Nations Schools Association in Canada in response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada at <https://www.orangeshirtday.org/teacher-resources.html>.*

Missions Cemetery where missionary Asher Wright and his family are buried. During our stops Jocelyn and I talked about the sites. She explored the buildings and sites and reflected on the magnitude of it all. This series of photographs captures the realness of her emotions that day, and in some ways the emotions of many people in our communities today in relation to TIS.

Very quickly, the photos evolved into an exhibition, which was funded by the community and our Native allies. The exhibition expanded to include text, two-dimensional and three-dimensional art, video, and an installation piece. The original text was written solely by Haudenosaunee scholars. It is truly a community effort, and a story that needs to be told through our voices. This exhibition is part of our healing, a statement of a history that is not fully told or acknowledged, and a call for advocacy on Indigenous sovereignty.

Nya:wëh  
Hayden Haynes, Artist  
Onödowa'ga:' (Seneca) - Deer Clan

*From the Editors: The Journal of Folklore and Education works to ensure that students can bring their whole cultural identities into the classroom. This is educational sovereignty. We honor Indigenous educators who bring their perspectives, languages, and traditional ways of knowing into learning spaces. We ask that teachers who are not Seneca realize the significance of this work and honor its specificity. Because we know one story, we do not know them all. Because we have one student, one family, or one cultural community willing to tell their story, we cannot ask them to stand in for listening to other stories. To learn more about the history of Indian Education in North America, here are some resources.*

[Chilocco Indian School: A Generational Story](#), (2022), set in present-day Oklahoma, was compiled from the experiences of real students who attended Chilocco, and their recollections were shared through oral history interviews, photographs, letters, and other archival sources. A Project Based Learning module is also available for educators.

[Healing Voices Volume 1: A Primer on American Indian and Alaska Native Boarding Schools in the U.S.](#) (2020) is designed for educators by the National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition.

[The Iroquois Genealogy Society](#) conserves the history of the Hodinöhsö:ni' people's documents and history through outreach, preservation, restoration, and research.

Selected Photos from the Exhibition

Hënödeyësdahgwa'geh wa'öki'jö' ögwahsä's. Onëh I:' jögwadögwea:je'

We Were at the School. We Were There. We Remember.

by Hayden Haynes with Jocelyn Jones



© 2021 Hayden Haynes and Jocelyn Jones.  
One of the remaining brick buildings of TIS, the old Infirmary.



© 2021 Hayden Haynes and Jocelyn Jones.  
One of the remaining brick buildings of TIS, the old Infirmary.





© 2021 Hayden Haynes and Jocelyn Jones.

In front of the old Infirmary. Colored images on right side include various teddy bears, shoes, and other items community members left in remembrance of the children who attended Indian Boarding Schools. Historical photo below is shared courtesy of the authors.





© 2021 Hayden Haynes and Jocelyn Jones.  
Wright Memorial Church in Bucktown—a neighborhood in  
Cattaraugus where Asher Wright practiced his Presbyterian services.

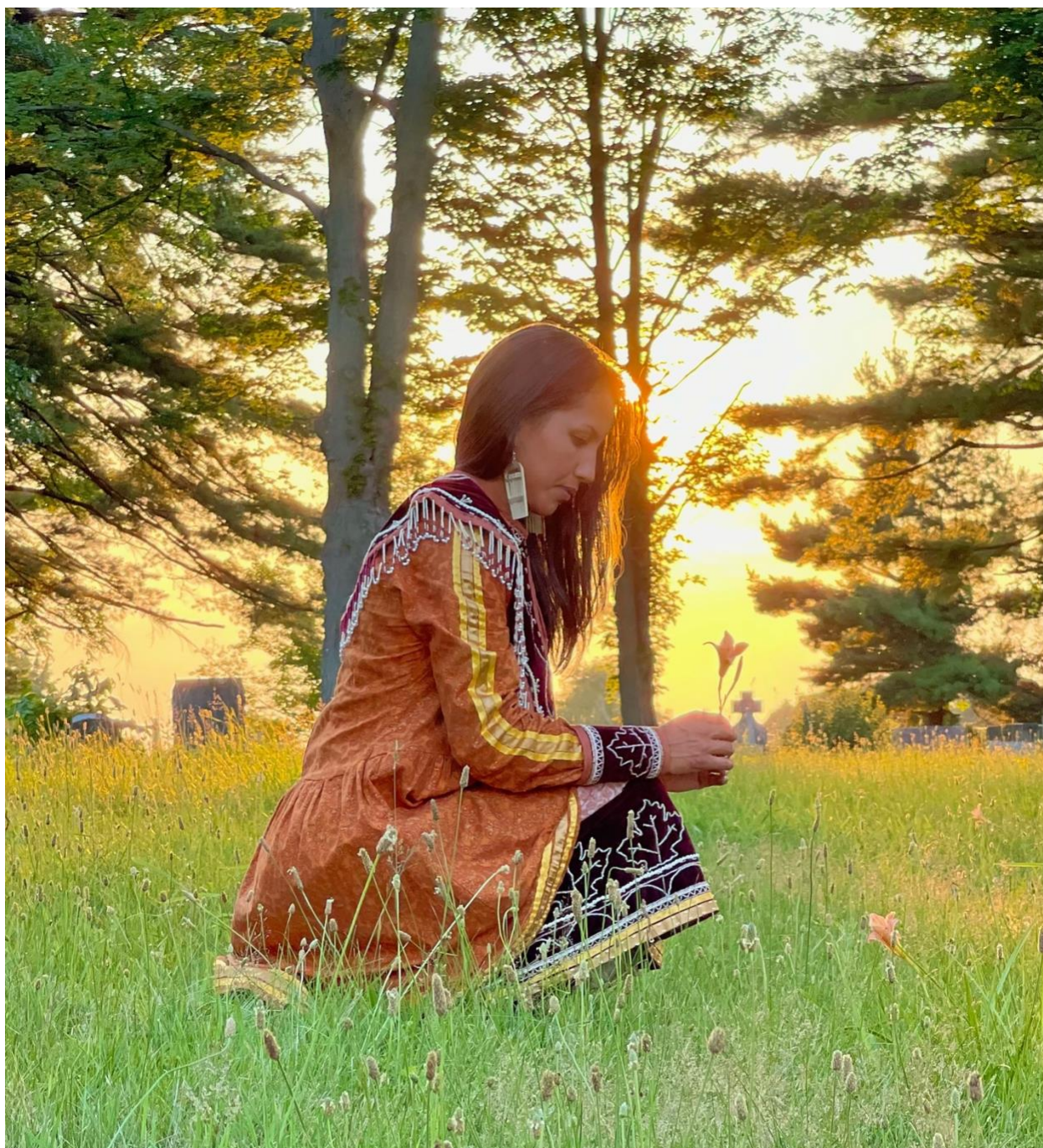




© 2021 Hayden Haynes and Jocelyn Jones.

At the gravesite of Asher Wright and his wife Laura at the United Missions Cemetery.





© 2021 Hayden Haynes and Jocelyn Jones.

Picking an orange lily that grows wild in the United Missions Cemetery.

### Classroom Connections: See, Think, Wonder

A valuable tool developed by Harvard Project Zero includes the Thinking Routine “See, Think, Wonder.” As students review the photo gallery, consider using this teaching tool to explore prior knowledge, personal assumptions, and student curiosity. *Learn more and watch a short video about Visible Thinking Routines here: <https://pz.harvard.edu/projects/visible-thinking>.*

This student worksheet could be modified for Canvas, Padlet, or other content platform.

I See...

I Think...

I Wonder...

# Close to Home - The Thomas Indian School: History of a Native American Residential Boarding School

by Joe Stahlman

During the American Revolution, the Seneca aided the British Empire. While the Seneca, like all nations in the Haudenosaunee, initially declined to participate in the conflict, eventually they chose to support the British. By 1779, this decision had devastating consequences. Following George Washington's orders, Major General John Sullivan and General James Clinton led an invasion of Haudenosaunee territory. American troops destroyed 40 towns and burned nearly 160,000 bushels of stored corn and that season's crop (Mt. Pleasant 2007). The Seneca and other Haudenosaunee had no winter stores, many towns were completely razed, and people were forced to relocate to Fort Niagara. That winter at Fort Niagara became known as "the great winter of suffering." Thousands died of exposure to the elements and starvation. In the spring of 1780, people moved away from the fort, reestablishing settlements and building new communities like Buffalo Creek.

In 1783, the British and the new Americans ended the war. Through an omission of their presence at Ghent, the Haudenosaunee were forced, separately and collectively, to sign treaties with the Americans at Fort Stanwix in 1784 (Hill and Parmenter 2018). During the following decade, Seneca and Haudenosaunee diplomats worked tirelessly to negotiate a meaningful treaty with the United States. Their efforts were rewarded in November 1794, when the Treaty at Canandaigua was signed, defining Seneca Territory as lands west of the Genesee River following the eastern shores of Lakes Erie and Ontario and returning east along the Pennsylvania state line. The 1794 treaty forever reserved the agreed-upon lands for the Seneca (Oberg 2016).

Although the Canandaigua Treaty promised to reserve Seneca lands, it also included provisions for the possible sale of lands with federal oversight and approval. In 1797, following unrelenting demands by American land speculators, the Nation's chiefs signed another treaty under duress at Big Tree. The Holland Land Company purchased the greater part of Seneca lands for \$100,000 along with annuity payments. The Seneca reserved 310 square miles of land, mostly already established settlements in the Genesee Valley, Buffalo Creek, Tonawanda, the Cattaraugus Creek, and Allegheny River regions. Pressure from land speculators continued for decades. Politicians and investors involved in the construction of the Erie Canal were eager to purchase more Seneca land. All across the growing U.S., a large number of private, state, and federal efforts were determined to extinguish title to Indigenous lands. One of the most notorious policies was Andrew Jackson's Indian Removal Act of 1830.

The Buffalo Creek Treaty of 1838, negotiated by the Ogden Land Company, purchased the remaining Seneca reservations at Allegany, Buffalo Creek, Cattaraugus, and Tonawanda for \$202,000. Because of the treaty, 200 Seneca, along with people from other regional communities, immigrated to Kansas. A year later less than half the Seneca returned. They reported that approximately half those who accepted removal died in route. Those who stayed in Indian Territory eventually formed the Seneca-Cayuga community. Traumatized by the loss of life and



betrayed by all involved, the returning Seneca contested the 1838 Buffalo Creek Treaty with the support of Presbyterians Reverend Asher Wright and his wife Laura and Quakers like Philip E. Thomas (Mt. Pleasant 2007). Their investigation uncovered acts of bribery and fraud. The Seneca, attorneys, and their allies lobbied Congress for redress and a compromise treaty that was eventually negotiated in 1842, leaving the Seneca Nation of Indians in control of the Allegany and Cattaraugus Oil Springs Territories. The Seneca living on Tonawanda lobbied for the return of those lands (Hauptman 1986).

The Seneca continued to fight for the Buffalo Creek lands; however, City of Buffalo planners and the Ogden Land Company pressured them to release their claim to Buffalo Creek. Some Buffalo Creek communities migrated to the Six Nations Tract inside British Canada; most of the Buffalo Creek community chose the Cattaraugus Territory. Reverend and Mrs. Wright, who had operated a mission at Buffalo Creek since 1831, also transplanted to Cattaraugus (SNI Archives).

### **The Creation of a Seneca Education System**

In late 1847, typhoid fever spread across Cattaraugus Territory and within six months, 70 Seneca died. The loss of life was devastating, leaving a high number of orphans without caregivers. Laura Wright and her niece Martha Hoyt cared for the orphaned children at the mission house. Laura Wright felt there was a need to aid nearly 50 children she deemed either “orphaned” or “destitute children.” The Wrights advocated for the children and the need to assist the Seneca community. Laura Wright collaborated with Seneca Nation Councilor Nathaniel J. Strong to create a resolution for the establishment of an orphan asylum for destitute orphan children (Quigley 2019; SNI Archives).

Seneca ally and Quaker Phillip E. Thomas donated \$100 to the school. Although not substantial, his contribution had a positive effect on the Board of Missions, who approved building an orphanage. Thomas also encouraged Reverend Asher Wright to personally lobby for the school. Wright found an ally in J.V.H. Clark, New York State (NYS) Assemblyman from Onondaga, Chairman of the Committee on Indian Affairs. In early 1855, the NYS Assembly passed an act incorporating the Thomas Asylum for Orphan and Destitute Children as a private institution receiving state aid. NYS appropriated \$2,000 for construction and maintenance of a suitable building on the Cattaraugus Territory. In another NYS resolution, the school was charged to receive “destitute” and “orphaned” children from territories across the state—Seneca, Cayuga, Onondaga, Oneida, Mohawk, Tuscarora, Poospatuck, Unkechaug, Shinnecock, and Abenaki. NYS regulated the school under the authority of the Department of Instruction with an allotment of \$10 for each child’s maintenance (SNI Archives).

In 1855, the Seneca Nation authorized the sale of 15 acres to the institution. In 1856, the NYS Legislature appropriated additional funds for building the asylum from the Federal Commissioner of Indian Affairs. Again, Thomas’ influence aided creation of the school. The Society of Friends held fundraisers in Buffalo to furnish the school and purchase a double wagon and three milk cows. By mid-1856, the children transferred from the old mission house into the new building. Not only did the children have a new home, but also now they were pressured to practice introduced cultural behaviors. The school’s Board of Trustees passed a resolution requiring English only (SNI Archives).

The first 20 years of the asylum provided the “inmates,” a term often applied to the children, with the foundations of elementary education. A report from 1860 states the children were plainly clad and furnished with “cheap but wholesome food.” Each day was divided between menial tasks and basic literacy. Boys’ education revolved around manual labor, including agriculture, wood chopping, stump pulling, and cow milking; girls’ education revolved around domestic work to run “civilized households,” including cleaning, food service, and child care. At 16, young men were employed as farm labor and young women as domestics in nearby non-Native communities. A typical day at the institution:

[r]ising bell at 5 am; followed by chores and morning worship at 6 am; more chores until 9 am followed by the noon dinner; school and then more chores in the afternoon; followed by evening chores and supper at 6 pm and evening worship at 7. At 8 o’clock the younger children go to bed while the older children are taught instrumental music and singing; books are read to them and on Friday night there is a special feature—the Band of Hope, a temperance organization composed of all of the older children meets. Saturday morning, after chores are done, work classes are conducted for the boys on the farm or shop and the girls in the sewing room. Saturday afternoon was devoted to the weekly bath and recreation. On Sunday—according to the laws of the Christian Sabbath—they rested, attended Sunday school, listened to sermons and attended worship service. (Quigley 2019,51)

It did not leave room for much else.

By the 1870s, the Thomas Asylum’s primary focus was manual labor. William P. Letchworth, Vice President of the State Board of Charities, stated, “The importance of inculcating habits of industry is fully recognized, and forms the principle feature of asylum training” (1876). In the same year, Lewis Seneca, President of the Board of Managers, reported that the workforce at the school consisted of nine people: the superintendent, matron, assistant matron, seamstress, housekeeper, assistant laundress, general assistant, a seasonal farmhand, and a supervisor to oversee the broom shop where the boys made brooms in the winter. Seneca noted the children performed most of the intense work at the asylum. The Thomas Asylum practiced child labor until the early decades of the 20th century, when it transitioned into an academic institution. In 1946, the federal Director of Indian Education Willard Beatty (1940) noted his surprise by the continued use of child labor.

### **New York State Control**

In 1874, when enrollment rose to 104 and three-quarters of operating funds came from New York State, the asylum faced a major challenge. A new state constitution amendment prohibited public funding for corporations, associations, or private undertakings. Letchworth appealed to Senator Daniel P. Wood to hold hearings on fixing this problem. Upon the pleas from Reverend Asher Wright, the legislature transferred ownership of the asylum to the state. As a result, residents became subject to supervision and control by the State Board of Charities. Through an act of a pen, Seneca people lost the right to care for their children (The State Board of Charities 1876). The school’s 1875 charter indicates its purpose was to furnish resident Indigenous children with “care, moral training and education, and instruction in husbandry and the arts of civilization” (Quigley

2019, 55). This directly paralleled the federal Indian boarding school legislation, which also espoused assimilation and removal of children from their homes and communities. Institutionalized education stripped children of a holistic, well-rounded upbringing, while families mourned the loss of their children. Many times, parents did not completely understand what was happening. The parents did not always fill out the application for their children; often staff did it for families. The school kept track of all the students' money. Parents regularly had to petition the institution for their child's allowance to purchase school uniforms. Instances of financial abuse were evidenced by the continued control of former students' annuities even after they graduated.

By 1905, a combination of better health care, new buildings and dormitories, improved sanitation, and an improved diet contributed to the overall health of the student body. However, the school's ledgers note a monotonous diet until the school shuttered its doors. Mary Pembleton, a student who spent her early years in the 1920s at the Thomas Indian School, recollected that the food "just wasn't good to eat. The oatmeal was wormy, the salt pork was cooked and served in its own grease and the beans and potatoes weren't done." Calvin Kettle, who lived there in the late 1930s, recalled that "at night after milking, we separated the cream from the milk. The whole milk went to the employees and teachers, the skim milk went to us kids" (Quigley 2019, 55). Lori Quigley notes how the diet was rarely attributed to the sicknesses children acquired. John H. Van Valkenburg, the school's superintendent from 1881 to 1892, blamed the children's ill health on their genetics: "We do not find in the youth of this race, at present time, the strong physical development that enables them to battle against disease and endure hardships but rather [a] weakened constitution, in which hereditary seeds of decay have been handed down" (Quigley 2019, 55).

### **Abuse and Negligence**

Van Valkenburg was the first to publish formal superintendents' reports. These reports contain moral allusions and provide important insight into his beliefs about the students at Thomas Indian School:

The old sloth, improvidence, and passion for a wild life still dominate [the children's] nature (The State Board of Charities 1900);

I have become fully convinced that the means of education and improvement will never be productive of the highest good as long as [the children's] tribal relations continued (The State Board of Charities 1903); and

...too much importance cannot be attached to the industrial training of Indian children, as they cannot hope to become valuable members of any community or hope to do away with their inherited shiftlessness." (State Board of Charities 1905)

Shortly after Van Valkenburg's tenure as superintendent, a scandal broke out. There were allegations that Van Valkenburg committed offenses ranging from illicit relations with young female students to mishandled finances. The Board of Charities investigated, and much of their proceedings were published verbatim in *The Buffalo Enquirer*. The newspaper coverage highlighted careless oversight and suggested the Board of Trustees was guilty of negligence. Headlines were sensational: "Simply Awful: Poor Indian Orphan Girls Beaten, Starved, and Horribly Ill-Treated." Newspapers also produced signed affidavits and sworn testimony from staff and children acting as witnesses for the prosecution. As witness testimonies piled up, Van

Valkenburg was located and arrested in Brockport, NY. None of that mattered, the very next day, he pleaded innocent and was released from jail (*The Buffalo Enquirer*).

Oscar Craig, President of the State Board of Charities, wrote to Attorney General Simon N. Rosendale about reports of negligence in respect to finances and supervision and that “the most grave charges made against the late superintendent allege illicit relations with girls under the age of sixteen at his institution.” The evidence uncovered painted a terrifying picture of Van Valkenburg’s treatment of the Indigenous children under his care. Newspapers continued running sensationally titled stories that printed testimonies of the substandard and, at times, rotten food as well as torturous acts, such as cold-water baths, solitary confinement, and whippings. Van Valkenburg was admitted to the Buffalo State Hospital because a Dr. Mann of Brockport judged him insane. After a lengthy investigation and thousands of pages of testimony, the case was eventually closed by mid-March 1893. After an hour of deliberation, the Commissioners of the State Board of Charities announced that due to his insanity diagnosis it was useless to continue the inquiry. The committee issued its final report to the State Board of Charities in 1893, concluding:

Material found and substantial evidence has been received on the part of the people to prove the charges in the case of [the major complainant], and other similar charges, and other improper conduct, of the late superintendent toward female inmates, and to sustain complaints of improper and insufficient food, of undue severity, of cruelty in punishment and disciplining, and in other matters... (1893)

Van Valkenburg was never brought to trial.

The impact of the scandal was enormous. The entire Board of Trustees was dismissed, and a new board appointed. The next two succeeding superintendents found themselves in similar scandals, which embarrassed New York. The State poured additional funding into a rebuilding program. In its 1900 Annual Report, the State Board of Charities wrote:

[t]he buildings of the Thomas Asylum, the education and training the institution affords have led to a greatly improved condition, morally, mentally and physically, of the children, and the asylum, through its relation with the different reservations, is quietly exerting a beneficial influence upon the adult Indians, especially upon those of the Cattaraugus reservation, upon which the asylum is located. (1900)

In 1895, NYS appointed George I. Lincoln head of the institution. During his tenure, capital improvements flourished, with the entire campus being rebuilt by 1905, in time for the school’s 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Immediately, Lincoln started a kindergarten and by 1899 the school held its first 6<sup>th</sup>-grade commencement. In 1905, 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades were added, and Lincoln received legislative approval to change the school’s name to Thomas Indian School. Athletics were incorporated into the curriculum. On paper, Thomas looked greatly improved. Warren R. Gratwick (1904), of the State Board of Charities, observed “...a liberal education is offered to the Indian children who are fortunate enough to be taken under the care of the state in this institution.” While the educational components may have expanded, Gratwick’s papers also mentioned a combined manual labor and education program; boys and girls performed the same gendered practices as before. In 1907, Lincoln died, and the head teacher, John C. Brennan, became superintendent. Until his death in 1943, Brennan maintained Lincoln’s philosophical approach in running the school (Quigley 2019).



Hardliner Hjalimar Scoe followed Brennan, who instilled assimilationist practices that included punishments for children speaking their Native languages. In 1946, Willard Beatty, Director of Indian Education, toured the school and reported his surprise “to find metal barriers in the windows which would effectively preclude their use as exits in the event of fire, and despite the superintendent’s explanation that this was to prevent the youngsters from getting out at night, seems an unnecessary precaution in view of the fact that the Indian Service operates more than sixty boarding schools in none of which we have found it necessary to bar the windows” (1940). Beatty also observed that Scoe, through his restrictions, treated the children as though they were delinquents.

## Conclusion

In 1956, Governor Averell Harriman announced the closing of the Thomas Indian School. The governor stated that the action was based on “the culmination of a program of integration through which Indian children are now being reared and educated in the community like all other children by sending them to regular public schools and placing them in family boarding homes and childcare institutions” (Hauptman 1986). This rationale for closing the school ironically mirrored the same philosophy of assimilation of Native children into the dominant society. Many former students entered the military, transferred to other U.S. government residential boarding schools for Indigenous children, or were employed as housekeepers in non-Native homes. For many of these young women, working in a wage home became their first experience living with a family apart from the institution. Most of the institution’s buildings were eventually taken down by the Seneca Nation. Today, only a few remain and were repurposed by the Seneca Nation government. The former grounds serve as the Cattaraugus campus for Seneca Nation: government buildings, a senior citizen residential home, an early childhood center, an Indian health services clinic, and a tribal library. The former infirmary is now a courthouse.

Thomas Indian School embodied both discrimination of and agency for Seneca people. There exists a diversity of experiences, attitudes, and feelings from those who attended the institution. Some claimed that the school equipped them with important skills and training to succeed in the outside world, whereas documented evidence demonstrates that others were physically and sexually abused. For descendants of the boarding school residents, remnants of multigenerational trauma are often expressed as alcohol and drug abuse, depression, and other post-traumatic stress disorder manifestations. Native communities and families touched by the residential boarding school era have been on a path toward healing. For some, they regained lost family. For others, they lost family. And many seek answers why. For others, they want to ensure it will never happen again. In Canada, First Nations peoples pursued legal action and reparations on behalf of those abused at residential schools. In the U.S., Indigenous communities are beginning to address this ongoing trauma. Awareness continues to build. We have seen an increase of films portraying the struggles of children, families, and communities in this system. Communities have started their own unique healing process that allows them to begin each day with a Good Mind\*.

---

\*“The Haudenosaunee believe peace is a state of mind obtained through a strong connection to spirit. Our Elders teach us that practicing the Good Mind will cause our spirit to grow, known as Orenda. Good Minds have strong Orenda which leads to Peace.” (From <https://ganondagan.org/learn/good-mind#>)

Nya:wëh to Lori Quigley, who contributed the early version of this article to the *Close to Home - The Thomas Indian School: A Native American Residential Boarding School* Exhibition; Alyssa Mt. Pleasant, who edited and substantially contributed to the exhibition text; and to all families who continue to mourn for those who never returned.

**Joe Stahlman** (*Tuscarora descent*) is Director at Onöhsagwë:De' Cultural Center on the Seneca Nation's Allegany Territory.

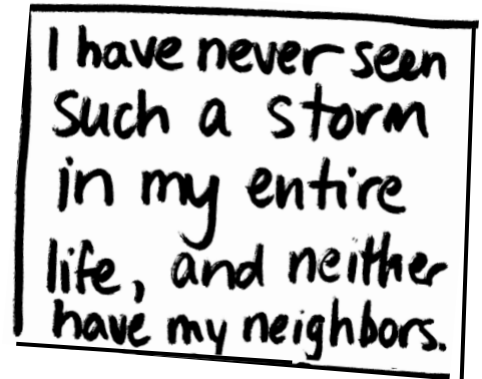
#### Works Cited

- Beatty, Willard. 1940. An Informal Report on the Thomas Indian School 1940–52. #5874-1943-210, ACC #53A, Box 1057, RG. 75, NA.
- The Board of Managers of The Thomas Asylum. The Annual Report of The Board of Managers of The Thomas Asylum for the following years: 1899 through 1905.
- The Buffalo Enquirer*. Numerous Articles. April 16, 1892; December 7, 8, and 9, 1892; February 1, 2, 3, 1893; and March 1, 2, 3, 4, and 14, 1893.
- Gratwick, Warren R. 1904. Gratwick's Reports of The Committee on The Thomas Asylum for Orphan and Destitute Indian Children. In The Annual Report of The State Board of Charities, 1903, Report of The Committee on The Investigation of The Thomas Asylum for Orphans and Destitute Indian Children.
- . 1905. Gratwick's Reports of The Committee on The Thomas Asylum for Orphan and Destitute Indian Children. In The Annual Report of The State Board of Charities, 1904, Report of The Committee on The Investigation of The Thomas Asylum for Orphans and Destitute Indian Children.
- . 1906. Gratwick's Reports of The Committee on The Thomas Asylum for Orphan and Destitute Indian Children. In The Annual Report of The State Board of Charities, 1905, Report of The Committee on The Investigation of The Thomas Asylum for Orphans and Destitute Indian Children.
- Hauptman, Laurence. M. 1986. *The Iroquois Struggle for Survival: World War II to Red Power*. Syracuse University Press.
- Hill, Matthew. J. and Jon Parmenter. 2018. *The Stanwix Treaties: An Ethnohistory of Iroquois Diplomacy and Dispossession*. Lowell, MA: Northeast Region Ethnography Program, National Park Service.
- Letchworth, William. P. 1876. Extract from the Ninth Annual Report of the State Board of Charities of the State of New York, Relating to Orphan Asylums and Other Institutions for the Care of Children. United States: Weed, Parsons and Company, Printers.
- Mt. Pleasant, Alyssa. 2007. *After the Whirlwind: Maintaining a Haudenosaunee Place at Buffalo Creek, 1780-1825*. PhD Dissertation, Cornell University.
- Official Report of the Nineteenth Annual Conference of Charities and Correction. 1892, 46–59. Reprinted in Richard H. Pratt, *The Advantages of Mingling Indians with Whites. Americanizing the American Indians: Writings by the "Friends of the Indian" 1880–1900* Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1973), 260–71, <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/4929>.
- Oberg, M. L. 2016. *Peacemakers: The Iroquois, the United States, and the Treaty of Canandaigua, 1794*. United Kingdom: Oxford University Press.
- Quigley, Lori. 2019. Thomas Indian School: Social Experiment Resulting in Traumatic Effects. *Judicial Notice: A Periodical of New York Court History*. 14:47-63.
- Seneca Nation of Indians (SNI) Archives. Accessed September 1, 2021. Onöhsagwë:De' Cultural Center, Salamanca, NY (Seneca Nation's Allegany Territory).
- The State Board of Charities. 1876. The Annual Report of The State Board of Charities, 1875, Report of The Committee on The Investigation of The Thomas Asylum for Orphans and Destitute Indian Children.
- . 1877. The Annual Report of The State Board of Charities, 1876, Report of The Committee on The Investigation of The Thomas Asylum for Orphans and Destitute Indian Children.
- . 1883. The Annual Report of The State Board of Charities, 1882, Report of The Committee on The Investigation of The Thomas Asylum for Orphans and Destitute Indian Children.
- . 1894. The Annual Report of The State Board of Charities, 1893, Report of The Committee on The Investigation of The Thomas Asylum for Orphans and Destitute Indian Children.
- . 1895. The Annual Report of The State Board of Charities, 1894, Report of The Committee on The Investigation of The Thomas Asylum for Orphans and Destitute Indian Children.

# 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:

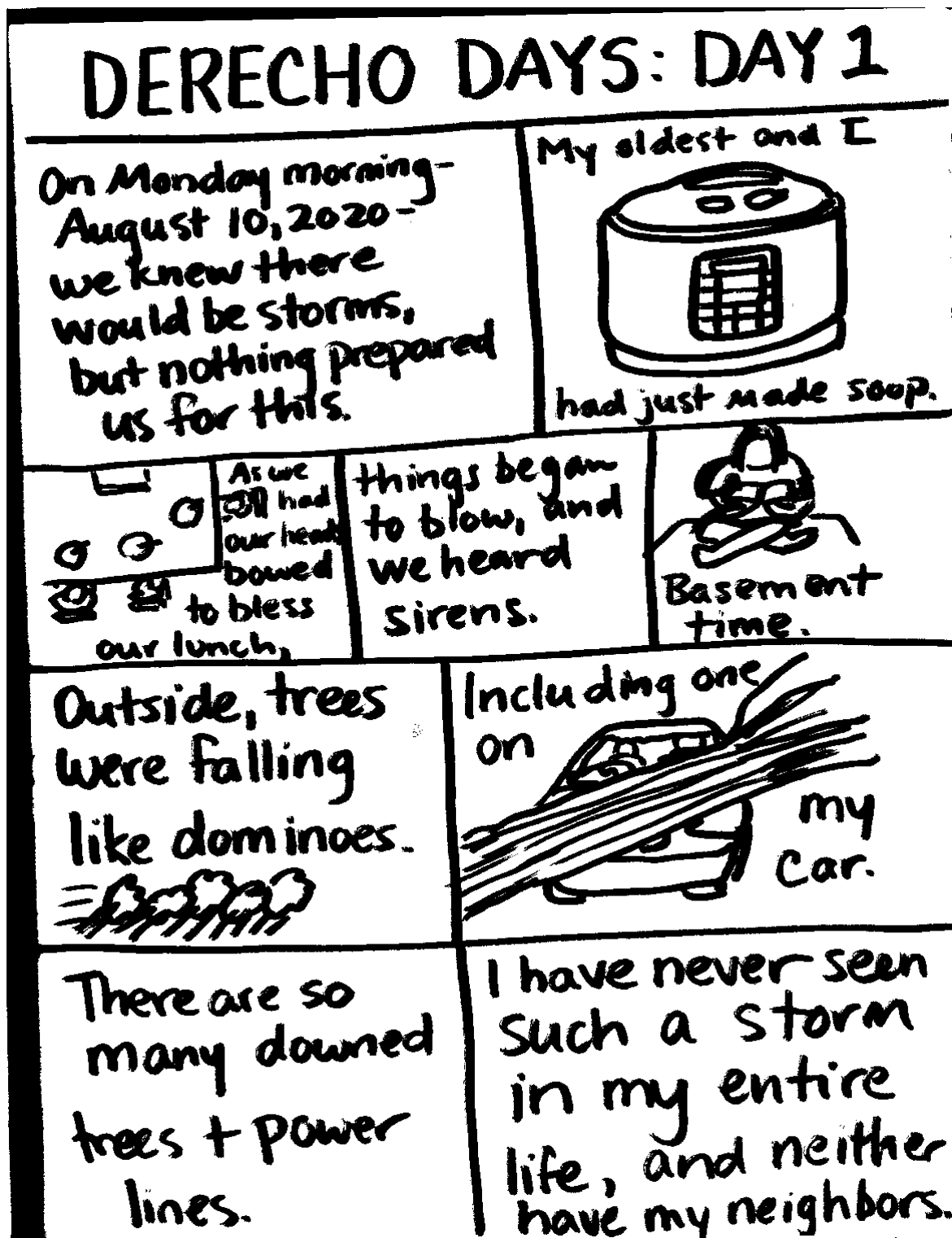
- To share the recovery and relief process with a wider audience, most of whom lived outside the disaster area;
- To celebrate the efforts of those who worked to return the disaster area to a more stable (albeit wildly different) condition for living;
- To navigate the personal trauma of being a disaster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

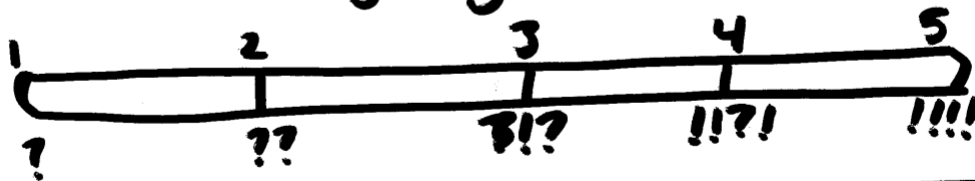
As a pedagogical tool, this series offers learners of all ages opportunities to draw from a wide variety of experiences in constructing their own creative project; to learn how to balance the personal and communal in a limited spatial setting; and to use existing skills, as they are, as a foundation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



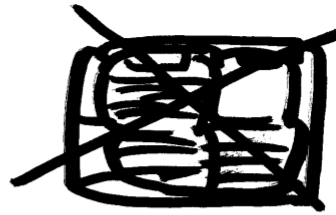


# DERECHO DAYS: DAY 3

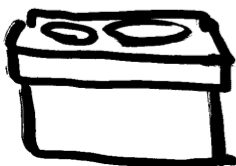
The estimate for power returning is all over the place, with some saying 1-2 weeks and rumors of 3-4 going around.



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.



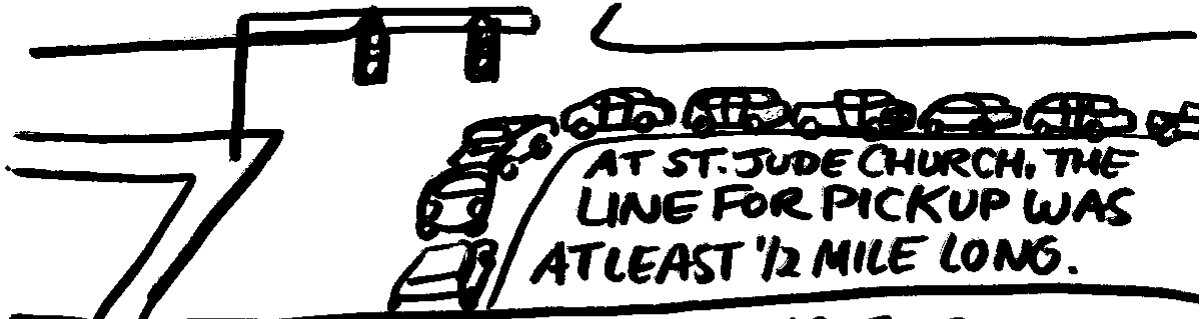
SO I'M BACK TO IT.

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.



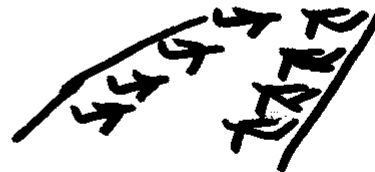
AT ST. JUDE CHURCH, THE  
LINE FOR PICKUP WAS  
AT LEAST 1/2 MILE LONG.

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,



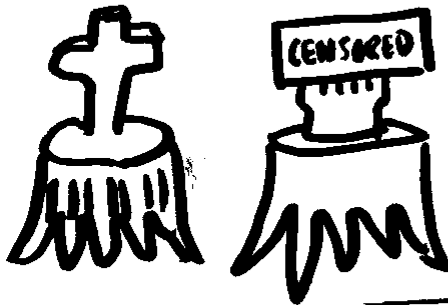
HIT WAY TOO CLOSE TO  
HOME. AND I LOST  
IT DRIVING.

# 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 getting less than 1/2 of what they need.

A lot of folks are making stump art.



Some of it feels a certain way towards 2020.

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



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 STOGBIL'S HUFFPOST ARTICLE "WHAT IT'S LIKE TO LIVE IN A CITY  
THAT'S HAD 3 'ONCE IN A LIFETIME' DISASTERS IN 12 YEARS" - @bruneanddaisy



### 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 folklife and community culture.

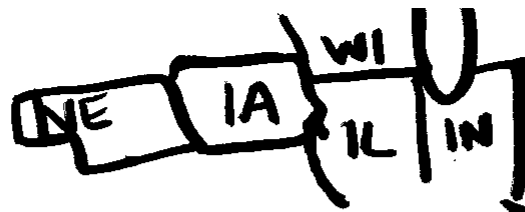
The day I talked about storm lore was the day that changed it all.

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.  
14 million acres of  
crops... damaged.

Disaster response  
was slowed by  
poor leadership  
decisions...

No time we are good

... 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 ~~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.

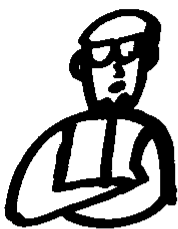
We had to  
truck ice  
from Cedar  
Falls.

We are part  
of a 20-county  
disaster  
area along  
US 30 + 280

The magnitude  
gets bigger  
+

Derecho  
Days  
was  
born.

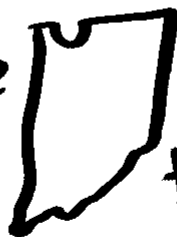
It was a way to document a slice of life when a disaster strikes.



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 lawns.

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



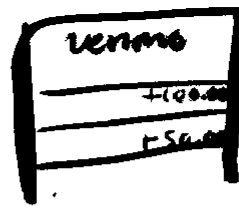
And I tracked  
derecho humor  
and digital



folklife, 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



31.1' Flood  
waters

2016



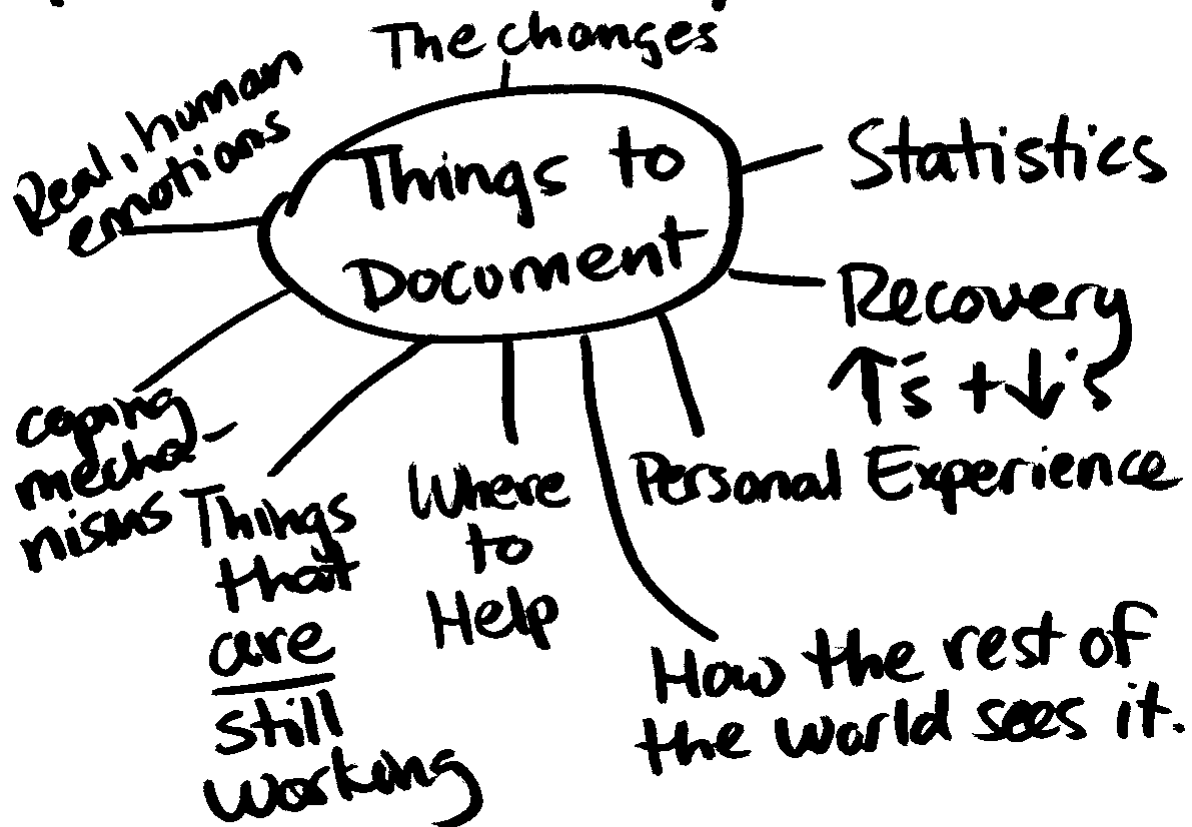
23' flood  
waters

2020



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)

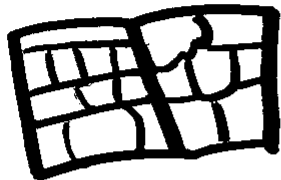
3. Scour the variety  
of voices to  
ensure balance.

4. Document the



boring stuff, too.  
Like) long lines.

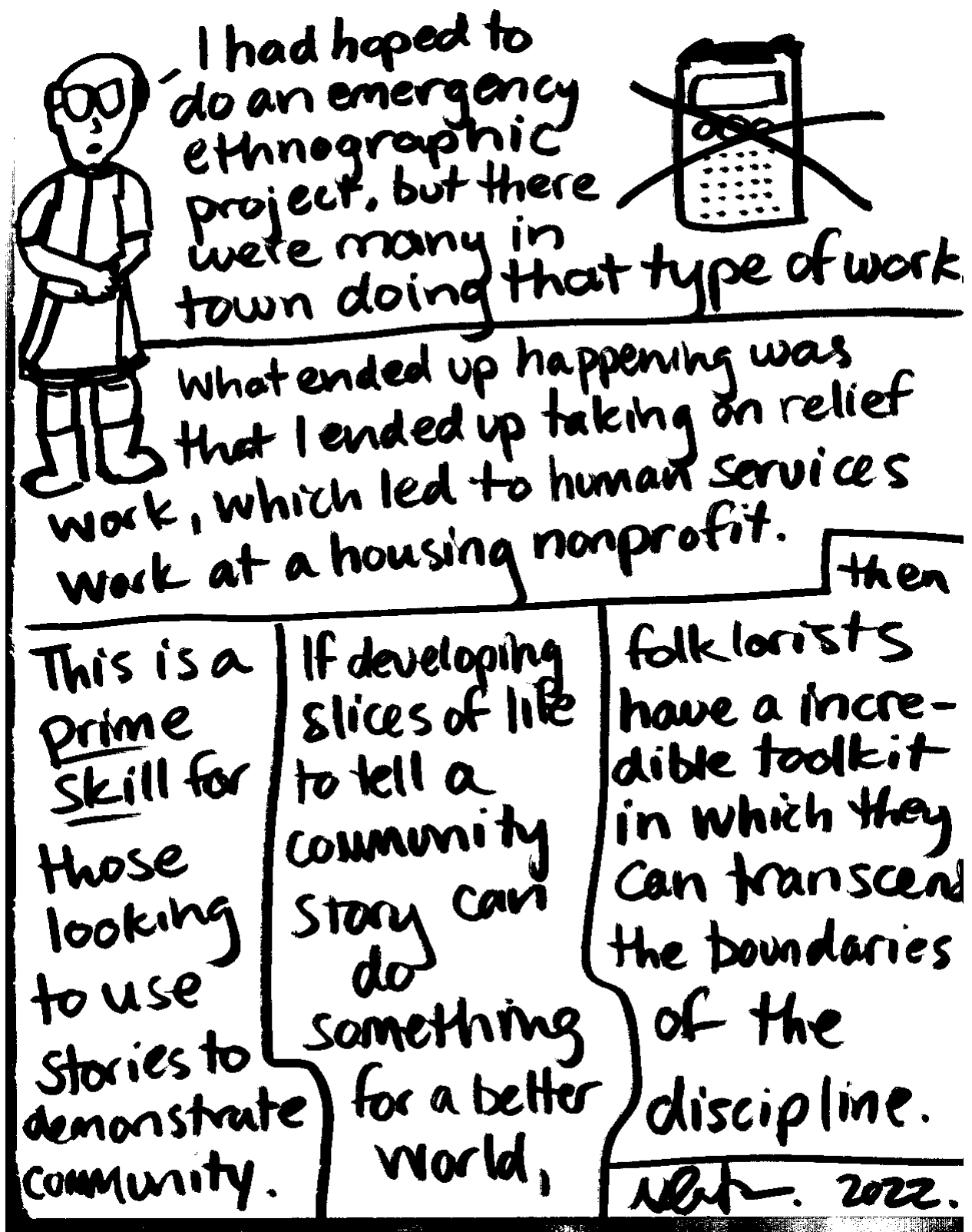
5. One page a day.



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.





### 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>.



# Documentation as Remembrance: A Classroom Activity

by Paddy Bowman

**La Teacher** 1 print; color ink jet; sheets 61 x 46 cm. (poster format) | Poster shows the smiling face of a teacher on a laptop computer screen. Behind her is a red globe of the world. Contributor: Ponce, Alfredo - Amplifier  
Date: 2020



Devastating events of the past few years, from the Covid-19 pandemic to racism, war, and environmental crises, have been universally shared by people around the world, yet individually experienced. Reflecting on responses to these challenges can include documentation of personal and local markers of remembrance. Paying attention to such responses through writing, photography, mapping, recording, and artmaking helps us to situate ourselves and our communities in a time of global and local challenges in ways that can be healing and leave a record for others to witness.

The Library of Congress is archiving how people are expressing remembrance of current events. [Posters produced through the Amplifier Art Project are one example](#). Based in Seattle, [Amplifier](#) is a nonprofit design studio that “builds art and media experiments to amplify the most important movements of our times.”

The Library of Congress archives many types of primary sources, including these posters. Archivists preserve materials for posterity and make them accessible by cataloging information such as the creator, date, location, size, materials, and keywords to make the archive searchable. They also digitize resources to make them available widely.

## A Classroom Activity

Using this poster collection as a model, invite students to reflect on their experiences of recent events and people who they are grateful to for helping and healing.

*Show the example of “La Teacher.”* The image is a commentary on ways teachers were forced into two-dimensional roles on screens during the pandemic. It also is a play on the vibrantly colored cards used to play Lotería, often called Mexican bingo. The text illustrates how the Library of Congress catalogued this poster, providing information about the maker, materials, dimensions, date, and so on.

*Ask students to unpack what they observe about this poster.*

- How did teachers’ roles change during the pandemic?
- What does this image communicate about "La Teacher"?
- What details in the image are clues to how current events affected the roles and identities of teachers?
- What is not being said in the image and how does what is missing serve as another form of communication?
- Why do you think the Library of Congress choose to archive this image?

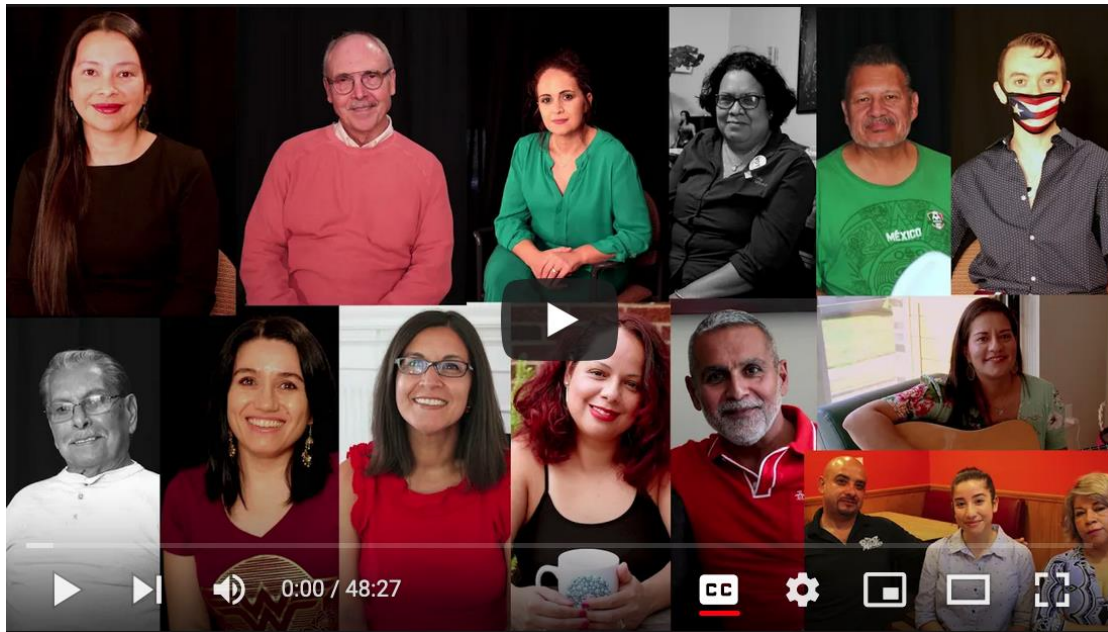
**Extension:** Ask students to consider how events of 2020-2022 affected their roles and identities. What changed? What stayed the same? What details would they include in a self-portrait to illustrate this time in their lives?

*As a way of documenting the struggles of 2020-2022, ask students to make posters depicting events or people important to them during this time.* Classmates can share their posters with one another and the school community. They can also create an archive for the classroom or the school library. Designing a template for recording information about their posters will make archiving easy and uniform.

---

### Urls

Library of Congress Amplifier Posters <https://www.loc.gov/photos/?fa=contributor:amplifier&q=amplifier>  
Amplifier Studios <https://amplifier.org>



## Historias de Una Pandemia: Documenting Latina/o/x Stories During Covid-19 Through Performed Storytelling

by Elena Foulis

Across the United States the Covid-19 pandemic presented many challenges and intensified racial tensions and health disparities in many communities, particularly minoritized communities. This public health crisis exposed and exacerbated many of the known deficiencies in the U.S. health system and highlighted enduring racial and ethnic health disparities. From the Northeast to the Southwest, the case fatality rate of African American and Latina/o/x populations outpaces that of other racial and ethnic groups (Dwyder 2020, Mays and Newman 2020). Racial disparities in disease transmission and death are multifactored, including a history of abuse from health institutions. For the BIPOC community, the failure to receive adequate care has led to mistrust of these institutions and awakened a history of collective and traumatic loss, which inevitably asks us to re-visit the past. The oral narratives, performances, and engaged pedagogy described here provide resources to educators who seek to incorporate these perspectives into their classrooms. In this article, find questions to help you and your students understand a community's access to culturally relevant information (i.e., in Spanish for Latino/a/x communities) and awareness of resources. The co-created product from our research and performance project, *PerformancerUS*,<sup>1</sup> contributed to my university students' understanding of how the virus has affected the Latina/o/x community, including how they dealt with fear about the disease and death, as well as other issues related to mental health.

---

About the photo: This screenshot comes from the [opening video](#) of the storytelling *PerformancerUS* project cowritten by students of The Ohio State University.

## Background

In New York City, Latinas/os/x accounted for over a third of all mortalities with known race and ethnicity, a picture that reflects similar outcomes across the U.S. (NYC Health 2020). The uneven impact of Covid-19 on Latina/o/x populations throughout the country is evident in an increased likelihood of succumbing to the virus and in the social and economic spillover effects of the crisis. Latinas/os/x have been shown to be the hardest hit by pay cuts and job losses and are more likely to view the crisis as a major threat to their personal health, financial situation, and day-to-day life in their local communities (Krogstad, Gonzalez-Barrera, and Lopez 2020; Krogstad, Gonzalez-Barrera, and Noe-Bustamente 2020). It is clear now that many Latina/o/x peoples who work in factories and as farmworkers were not provided timely and proper personal protective equipment, and, equally important, our community had little to no access to information and care in Spanish. As an immigrant Latina professor of Spanish, I am frustrated and angered by this lack of language access. As of 2020, Black and Latina/o/x deaths account for 34 percent of deaths from a population who represent 12 percent of the U.S. (Holmes et al. 2020). The full impact of these cumulative disparities will not be fully understood for many years.

To document this moment, a group of my former undergraduate students at The Ohio State University (OSU) and I decided to collect and transcribe personal experience narratives and oral histories of Latina/o/x peoples across Ohio about their experiences to offer a platform to our community to tell their stories and to build a performance to inform others how each story could collectively represent this very diverse community. This means that the Latina/o/x community can be bilingual, Spanish and English, or monolingual English or Spanish speakers; they are immigrants (recent or not), U.S.-born, racially and ethnically diverse, all genders, young and old. Each interview was scheduled and recorded using pandemic protocols such as use of masks, physical distancing, and centering narrators' comfort, which in some cases included recording outdoors, with masks on, or via Zoom. Narrators shared their experiences living under quarantine orders, protecting families and friends from infection, and confronting illness. The interviews expressed a collective voice that reflects unique impacts of social distancing, social and economic lockdown, and illness on Latinas/os/x daily lives. At the early stage of collection, it was evident that experiences varied primarily among professions and whether narrators spoke English.

The resulting performance draws on a unique arts and humanities methodology already in place at OSU. The collaborative co-creation of the performance engages with and added to the growing oral history archive about Latinas/os/x in Ohio, [\*Oral Narratives of Latin@s in Ohio\*](#) (ONLO). ONLO documents life stories of the Latina/o/x community across generations, decades, and heritages. ONLO began in 2014 and features narratives from throughout the state. In 2019, the archive was enriched through the addition of our performances, four to date.

## Performance and Counternarrative

Following Della Pollock, we viewed a natural link between performance and oral history, in which Pollock contends that "insofar as oral history is a process of *making history in dialogue*, it is performative" (2005, 2). The *PerformancerUS* project brings Latina/o/x personal narratives in Ohio to life through interactive performance between audience and speaker. The folklorist Richard

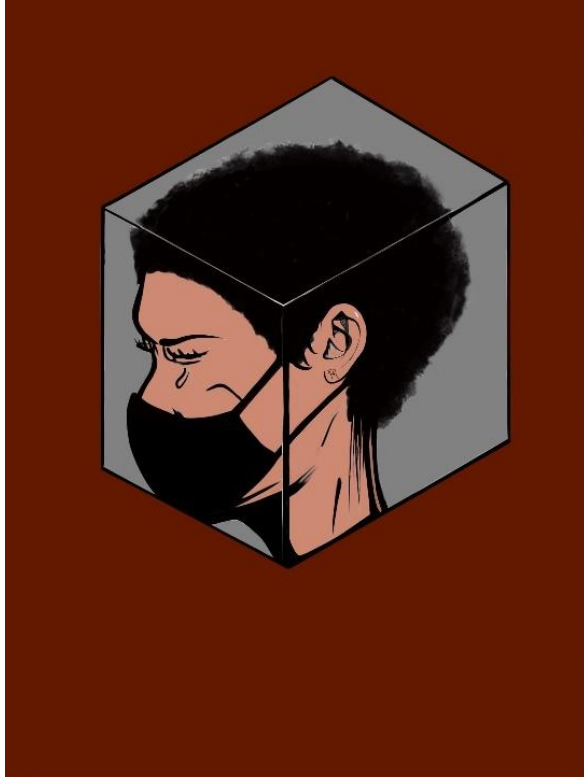


Figure 1. Mask, by Heder Ubaldo.

Bauman defined performance as “a mode of communication, a way of speaking, the essence of which resides in the assumption of responsibility to an audience for a display of communication skill, highlighting the way in which communication is carried out, above and beyond its referential content,” but performance too is an intentional and conscious decision to embody and share an experience, one that is transformative to the performer and the audience. He adds that for “the audience, the act of expression on the part of the performer is thus laid open to evaluation for the way it is done, for the relative skill and effectiveness of the performer’s display. It is also offered for the enhancement of experience, through the present appreciation for the intrinsic qualities of the act of expression itself” (1986, 3). Hence, a key component of our performance approach is to engage the audience and receive feedback, to foster a communal experience between audience and performers so that both parties feel as part of one shared expression.

The oral history/performance approach has been used successfully to unearth critical race counter stories among Latina/o/x students in the Midwest (Alex and Foulis 2020, Foulis and Alex 2021). The project applied this methodology to uncover and provide greater insights into the experience of the Covid-19 pandemic in Ohio and to share these insights with frontline health professionals and other public health entities interested in increasing access to minoritized communities. The performance is publicly available and has been shared with classes focused on health and Latina/o/x topics. The transcribed and translated narratives were the basis for a collaborative cowritten creative performance with undergraduate students for the Spring of 2021—all of us Latina/o/x. It was produced via video due to limitations on gathering in large groups. This was our second performance as a group, so although this work centers group gatherings to workshop each story and team-building activities, our meetings via Zoom worked well, since we had worked together before. Students and I worked with the transcribed narratives to identify common themes and to create a script that included words and phrases directly from the interviews while also weaving in each ensemble member’s experiences. Through our words, narrative expressions, semi-fictionalized storyline, and visual art, we expressed our community’s social isolation, mental health concerns, stay-at-home orders, death and virtual funerals that prevented or dwarfed proper burial rituals, and grief.

Our video performance added a new component to our live collaborative creation, which allowed us to create and incorporate further meaning with editing, framing, sound, graphics, pacing, and lighting. For example, we interlaced narrative segments with student-created images (see figures



1-4), words on a black screen, and silences, which added emotion and meaning through editing. If used in the classroom, the video performance will show students enrolled in Spanish, Latina/o/x Studies, and healthcare classes, such as nursing, a different way of talking about and understanding experiences of a pandemic for this community. Indeed, curating the performance and providing in-depth discussions to students who view this video offers an opportunity to document their own reactions to the performance, and widen their understanding of this community

Our collaborative scripting and creating the performance presented different opportunities for us, as listeners first and co-creators second, such as the chance to reflect on stories and experiences of our own community. Although we were all Latina/o/x, our experiences were different given our access to employment accommodations, school structures, and families, some of whom live in Latin America. The script was messy and complicated because it was difficult to see a cohesive story: We all experienced the pandemic—within the global protests on race inequality—in multiple ways. While the storyline follows a collective fictional narrator, each statistic and quote from original transcripts expressed factual numbers and original messages and experiences, including the raw nature of speech complicated by the realization that one might die alone at a hospital or have no agency in health care decisions because no one else speaks Spanish. Yet, what was always clear to us was that immigration status and language access were key determinants of health outcomes, and even the very palpable possibility of death for Latina/o/x peoples.

### Listening to the Stories

The performance begins with the following words in Spanish and English on a black screen with white letters, appearing one by one followed by our voices. Each word is pronounced.



The pace is slow, allowing the viewer to listen, read, and preview performance themes. A more concise, direct introduction follows before we begin telling the collective story of the pandemic:

La pandemia del coronavirus ha afectado a los latinos 3 veces más que a las personas blancas en los Estados Unidos. Es la comunidad con mayor índice de mortalidades. Más de 60 mil de los nuestros han muerto este año en Estados Unidos. Poco más del 70% de ellos fueron nuestros padres y madres y casi 45% fueron nuestros abuelos. Somos la comunidad que ha muerto más. Que ha muerto at a higher rate because we have no other choice. Because don't have the privilege to stay home for two weeks and not have to work. We don't have it. We never had it. And we won't have it any time soon.

Although the transcription and translation of the script is available, sharing the performance in both languages allowed us to stay true to the experiences of our narrators and ourselves. Additionally, for viewers who might not be bilingual, the need to view and read the translated script can mimic, in a small scale, the experiences of patients at hospitals that did not provide information in Spanish or an interpreter. If educators use the video performance to discuss health disparities, they may decide whether to use the transcript and translation the first time that students view it. They can also have students view the video without any translation, or have students read the transcript and translation to understand the content and then view the video later. Each approach can generate conversations regarding language access as a health equity issue and each approach will develop different levels of empathy among viewers. In addition, discussions about race as a public health issue can further explore the connection between language and race as social determinants of health outcomes.



Figure 1. I can't breathe, by Oscar Fernández.

The performance weaves the story of two women, a working-class mother and daughter, who express how each received information about the pandemic. The storyline follows their experiences with the news, misinformation, mask mandates, isolation, mental health, and more. Interwoven are the stories of other community members to show how different groups had different concerns, including the undocumented community, LGBTQ+ people, artists, and essential workers, many of whom lived with family members of multiple generations. Short clips gave data from the governor's daily press updates and information about the murder of George Floyd. At times, the interlaced stories seem chaotic—too much information, too little time to digest—but this reflects the anguish many minoritized communities were experiencing as they saw the number of cases rise, the protests, and hate crimes against the Asian community. For instance, the performance includes the following information, starting at minute 22:30:

Protests in Columbus started on May 28, 2020, demanding justice for George Floyd, killed by officer Derek Chauvin who knelt on his neck for 8 minutes and 46 seconds during an arrest the day before. The Protest continued until the end of June.”

This is followed by each ensemble member saying the words “I can’t breathe, No puedo respirar.”

Indeed, this part of the performance is a collective mourning about police brutality against Black and Brown communities and a metaphor of the effects of the virus, which in severe cases resulted in intubation and death. The performance, multiple voices, and images speak of “both ephemeral and tangible ways” (Otero and Martinez-Rivera 2021, 5), in which remembering and honoring these experiences pushes us to understand different identities, languages, and social positionalities. Indeed, each section can generate discussions of health equity, racial violence, and the possibilities for solidarity among different communities.

While this part of the performance is in constant dialogue with local and global social injustice, one of the most powerful moments is when the mother gets Covid and must go to the hospital. She expresses hesitation, but we witness her experience of isolation because no visitors were allowed and because no one cared for her in Spanish.



Figure 2. Los Contagiados, by Heder Ubaldo.

En agosto, yo fui al hospital. No quería ir, en verdad no quería ir, ya no me daba la respiración y andaba agitada. No me caía nada la comida, nada, no me llegaba el sabor, no comía, entonces, dije "¿Sabes qué? Llama al hospital." Llegué allí, luego me internaron. Y luego me hicieron el test del Covid-19, y me dijeron "Tienes Covid-19, te vas a quedar." ni modo, entonces me quedo, y dijo te vamos a checar tus pulmones. Y salió que tenía ah, este, Covid-19 en los pulmones, que se llama como neumonía, viene del Covid-19, se llama Covid-19. Y me llevaron para el cuarto, y yo decía "Pues, no, no sé el inglés." Me metieron en un cuarto todo frío, estaba frío. Y ya yo decía un poquito en inglés, decía "Eh, está cold. Tengo-" decía, "Tengo frío." Y no me entendían. Le decía "Le puedes abajar el este, el cuarto está muy frío, le puedes abajar porque no aguanto, aquí está muy frío, y no, no podemos." *No, no, no hablaban nada de español. Ni uno hablaba español. Nadie habla español. Y tenía que hacer a señas, [porque] no me entendían. No me entendían nada, y para la medicina, pues tampoco no me entendían nada. Fui al baño, no me entendían nada, nada. No...el cuarto todo oscuro, está feo estar allí, feo. Está feo estar allí.* (Italics for emphasis)

In August, I went to the hospital. I didn't want to go, really, I didn't want to. I couldn't breathe anymore and I felt agitated. Food didn't set well, not at all, I couldn't taste it. I wasn't eating, so I said, "take me to the hospital." I arrived and they admitted me. And then they tested me for Covid-19, and they told me, "You have Covid-19, you are staying." What are you going to do? So I stayed, and they told me they were checking my lungs, that it was pneumonia, from Covid-19, it was Covid-19. And they took me to the room, and I said "No, I don't know English." And they took me to the cold room. With some English phrases I said, "Um, it's cold, I am..." I said, "I am cold." But they didn't understand me. I said, "can you turn it down (the cold temperature), the room is too cold, can turn (the cold) down, I can't stand it, it's really cold here," and (they said), "no, we can't." No, no, no, they did not speak any Spanish. None did. Nobody spoke Spanish. So I have used gestures because they did not understand me. They did not understand me in the least. And the medication, well, they did not understand me either. I went to the bathroom, and they did not understand me in the least. No... the room was dark, it was scary to be there, scary. It was scary to be there. (Translation by the author)

Her recollection reflects how she came to understand her disease and had to be admitted. The cold hospital room and that no one explained what was happening in Spanish added to her isolation and despair. She continues:

Las enfermeras, *las enfermeras no me atendían.*  
 ¿Por qué no me entendían?  
 Con el doctor, tampoco. *El doctor no hablaba español.*  
 Le tenía que hablar y localizar a mi hija para decir qué es lo que está pasando.  
 Me ponían algo. Es más, imagínate, me ponían algo, y yo no sabía.  
 No sabía ni qué me ponían algo a la vena pues, no sabía ni qué preguntarles "*Oye, ¿qué me estás poniendo?*" "*¿Cuántos miligramos me estás poniendo?*" "*¿Para qué es eso?*"  
 Tú crees cómo me sentía yo. ¿Para qué es eso?  
*A lo mejor me van a poner algo, pensaba "A lo mejor me van a poner algo para morirme.* (Italics for emphasis)

The nurses, the nurses did not understand me.  
 Why didn't they understand me?  
 The doctor didn't either. The doctor did not speak Spanish.  
 I had to talk and reach me daughter to tell her what was happening.  
 They gave me something. Yes, can you believe it? They gave me something and I didn't know what it was.  
 I didn't know what they were putting in my vein, I didn't even know what to ask them, "Hey, what are you giving me? How many milligrams are you giving me? What is this for?"  
 Can you believe how I felt, what is this for?  
 Maybe they were giving me something, I thought, "maybe they are giving me something to die." (Translation by the author)

## Conclusion

The lack of language access for many meant death, or a near-death experience. Without communication patients cannot provide relevant information, nor do they receive clear information. Studies show how language access during Covid-19 had high risks due to the urgency of respiratory distress and end-of-life decisions (Aguilera 2020, Ortega et al. 2020). As Hurtado notes, “Miscommunication can pose different problems in the Covid-19 unit... especially because family members are not allowed inside. [Also,] while working in the hospital, some medical staff are culturally insensitive to patients” (Hurtado 2020). This section of the performance allows for additional discussions about language identity and language ideologies. It can also lead to talking about health care literacy, health practices—including the use of curanderos or homeopathic remedies—and diversity among cultures.

Is providing information on patients’ preferred language enough to help them make decisions about their care?

How does understanding the health care and financial literacy of patients help healthcare workers offer just and inclusive care?

How does understanding diverse decolonial health practices like curanderas/os, remedios caseros, sobadoras, and rituals, as well as the role of religion, contribute to meaningful conversations about care between Latina/o/x patients and their healthcare providers?

The performance continues with constant interjections about the pandemic, mask mandates, and views from different groups. It ends with the personal perspectives of each ensemble member and what they lost during the pandemic, including trips, graduation ceremonies, and employment. The performance is a vehicle for bringing to light the voices and stories of the Latina/o/x community, but it is also an opportunity for each ensemble member to reflect about our own experiences and that of our families.

The audience is important to this performance. We typically begin and end with audience engagement, which becomes part of the performance. We ease into the performance with simple questions such as asking the audience to come up with a word that encompasses their experiences during the pandemic, or one or two things they missed the most during the stay-at-home orders. We told the audience the performance was primarily in Spanish, but we had the translation available to follow along. Different audiences provide different feedback and perspectives. We showed the video via Zoom and talked with our audience, so we know that despite limitations of a live performance, video can be a tool for continuing these conversations in the classroom and among different people. The impact derives from engaging with a multitude of audiences as we come together to witness the stories of Latinas/os/x from different parts of the U.S., yet with a



Figure 3. Despair, by Heder Ubaldo.



common experience of living under quarantine and social distancing guidelines, and by developing cultural understanding of the challenges of being Latina/o/x in the times of a healthcare crisis.


The oral histories and narratives collected during the Covid-19 pandemic will serve as testimony that honors the lives of many who were affected socially, economically, and emotionally. The performance is a standing invitation to consider how limited English learners and minoritized population often bear the burden, and possibly fatal results, of limited access to information and an equitable healthcare system. The performance is also a vehicle for thinking about issues of equity, many centered on our understanding of Critical Race Theory—currently under attack—to engage our students and classroom in real conversations about the role of language, cultural, and social pluralities, in creating a socially just world.

### Acknowledgments

Thank you to all our narrators for providing your stories and perspectives during this difficult time. Your stories are so valuable to all of us. I want to highlight each ensemble member who collaborated with me for two years: Liz Morales, Lidia García Berelleza, Stefania Grisales Torres, Paloma Pinillos Chávez, Heder Ubaldo, Micah Unzueta, and Manuel Bautista. It was a pleasure working with each of you.

---

*Elena Foulis is Assistant Professor at Texas A&M, San Antonio and has been directing the oral history project, Oral Narratives of Latin@s in Ohio (ONLO) since 2014. The project is an ongoing collection of over 130 video narratives, some can be found in her iBook titled, [Latin@ Stories Across Ohio](#). Foulis's research explores Latina/o/x voices through oral history and performance, identity and place, ethnography and family history. She is also host and producer for [the Latin@ Stories](#) podcast, an extension of her oral history project. This podcast invites audiences to connect and learn more about the Latina/o/x experiences locally, while amplifying the voices of the community everywhere. She co-hosted the Art and Sciences podcast, [Woke Pedagogies](#). Foulis is an engaged scholar and is committed to reaching non-academic and academic audiences through her writing, presentations, and public humanities projects.*

 [ORCID 0000-0003-4184-44](#)

### Endnote

1. The word PerformancerUS is a linguistic play that integrates the idea of performers with autoperformance, to suggest that we are performing our collective histories.

### Works Cited

- Aguilera Jasmine. 2020. Coronavirus Patients Who Don't Speak English Could End Up 'Unable to Communicate in Their Last Moments of Life.' *Time*, April 15. <https://time.com/5816932/coronavirus-medical-interpreters>.
- Alex, Stacey and Elena Foulis. 2020. Be the Street: The Performative and Transformative Possibilities of Oral History. *US Latina & Latino Oral History Journal*, 4.1:45–66.

- Bauman, Richard. 1986. *Story, Performance, and Event: Contextual Studies of Oral Narrative*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Dwyder, Colin. 2020. New York City's Latinx Residents Hit Hardest by Coronavirus Deaths. NPR, April 16, <https://www.npr.org/2020/04/08/829726964/new-york-citys-latinx-residents-hit-hardest-by-coronavirus-deaths>.
- Foulis Elena and Stacey Alex. 2021. On Loss, Gain, Acceptance and Belonging: Spanish in the Midwest. *Spanish as a Heritage Language Journal*. 1.1:39–64.
- Holmes, Lauren, et al. 2020. Black-White Risk Differentials in COVID-19 (SARS-COV2) Transmission, Mortality and Case Fatality in the United States: Translational Epidemiologic Perspective and Challenges. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*. 17.12:1–18.
- Hurtado Leslie. 2020. Spanish Speakers with COVID-19 Left in the Dark About Their Care. Cicero, IL: *Cicero Independiente*, <https://www.ciceroindependiente.com/english/spanish-speakers-with-covid-19-face-extra-challenges-in-hospitals>.
- Krogstad, Jens, Ana Gonzalez-Barrera, and Mark Hugo Lopez. 2020. Hispanics More Likely Than Americans Overall to See Coronavirus as a Major Threat To Health And Finances, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/03/24/hispanics-more-likely-than-americans-overall-to-see-coronavirus-as-a-major-threat-to-health-and-finances>.
- Krogstad, Jens, Ana Gonzalez-Barrera, and Luis Noe-Bustamante. 2020. U.S. Latinos Among Hardest Hit by Pay Cuts, Job Losses Due to Coronavirus, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/04/03/u-s-latinos-among-hardest-hit-by-pay-cuts-job-losses-due-to-coronavirus>.
- Mays, Jeffrey. and Andy Newman. 2020. Virus Is Twice as Deadly for Black and Latino People Than Whites in NYC. *New York Times*, April 8, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/08/nyregion/coronavirus-race-deaths.html>.
- NYC Health. 2020. Age Adjusted Rate of Fatal Lab Confirmed COVID-19 Cases per 100,000 by Race/Ethnicity Group, : <https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/doh/downloads/pdf/imm/covid-19-deaths-race-ethnicity-04082020-1.pdf>.
- Ortega, Pilar, Glenn Martínez, and Lisa Diamond. 2020. Language and Health Equity during COVID-19: Lessons and Opportunities. *Journal of Health Care for the Poor and Underserved*. 31.:1530-35.
- Otero, Solimar and Mintzi Auanda 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.
- Pollock, Della.(2005. *Remembering: Oral History Performance*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

## Urals

Performance video [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-FDs-3bHU2I&list=PLQ\\_40nND6CAMgJwUcjKV3A9kGuBpByktQ&index=1](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-FDs-3bHU2I&list=PLQ_40nND6CAMgJwUcjKV3A9kGuBpByktQ&index=1)  
 Oral Narratives of Latin@s in Ohio <https://cfs.osu.edu/archives/collections/ONLO>



## “An Electromagnetic Tenderness of Remembering”

by Mark Helmsing with Derek Piotr

This interview engages with how one folklorist’s interests in recording spoken sounds and memories of his grandmother opened a pathway to recording the memories and sounds of living descendants of traditional Appalachian balladry. Through the processes of engaging older living people in the elicitation, recollection, and recording of personal memories and stories, we encounter emotions produced through grief, loss, and remembrance. The ghostly traces of memory appear to us through many sonic and aural forms, what the performer, author, and folklorist Derek Piotr explains in this interview by discussing recordings he collected and created from fieldwork over the past several years. Derek, whom I interviewed earlier in 2022, shares how the tenderness of remembering is transmitted through the electromagnetic pulses of audio recordings. While his examples focus on fieldwork in collecting ballads, the implications of what it means to celebrate memories with others, and to pursue the act of remembering, can inspire all educators and learners to think of whose memories they can record. By recording memories of those still living with us, we may take the tender, fragile, and fleeting elements of the act of remembrance and enable such elements to live on even after the loss of the person being recorded. These examples of memory demonstrate the linkages between past and present that are nurtured in folkloristic practices of interviewing and recording. Derek’s work is concerned with what he describes as “tenderness, fragility, beauty, and brutality.” My work is concerned with how affects and emotions such as

---

About the photo: Lena Turbyfill and family, Elk Park, NC, ca. 1962. Courtesy Pamela Dial.

tenderness and fragility, exist, circulate, and operate in spaces of learning, such as schools and museums, when learning about the past. This interview underscores my primary commitment in teaching and research to better understand how people feel about the past and how the past makes people. Music, recorded sounds, and recollected memories become rich and vibrant materials for feeling the past. This text has been edited for length and readability.

---

**Mark Helmsing:** Thank you, Derek, for meeting with me. I am eager to hear about your thinking on music, emotion, and folklore as they intersect through your personal community connections to loss and grief, especially for this special issue considering the Covid-19 pandemic and other tragic events through which we mourn in an ongoing way today. I want to keep this interview open ended so I will start by asking you to say a little bit about you, your life story, your origin story: where you are, where you are from, and what you do.

**Derek Piotr:** Primarily I'm a musician and I work with my voice. That's the elevator pitch version of who I am and what I do. A way to discuss this is through my relationship with my grandmother. When I was 15 or 16, I had begun making my own music and she was 89 at that point. She was a very vibrant person, very self-sufficient. But I think at that point I was aware she was an important figure in my life. I can't say that she co-raised me because my parents were very supportive and balanced, but she was a huge influence, more like a partner in crime. And so, I began to record her voice in 2008, at first just little bit, but formally began recording her voice, somewhat clandestinely, around 2010.

**MH:** What does that mean when you say you were recording her voice? What were these recordings like?

**DP:** So, my grandmother wasn't a singer, but she would tell outrageous jokes and stories, you know. I ended up putting some of those recordings on a record in 2019 that I'll talk about in a second, but I was aware that she was to be celebrated and that she would not be around forever when she was at the age of 89. She did last another ten years, so I ended up with ten years of recordings of jokes, stories, phone calls, directions to old places, and memories, especially memories of her past employers and some of the weird jobs that she had. I have over an hour's worth of fragment recordings of her. I was kind of pre-training myself to think about memory, voice, loss, preservation. A lot of people assume creation comes from oblivion, like nothing. But really the best creation comes from an electromagnetic tenderness of remembering. And I always loved that concept. That phrase always sticks out to me as being like "oh, someone's identified what I care about there." It was [a phrase the philosopher Timothy Morton wrote](#) in a letter to the musician and artist Björk in 2015 as part of [a special exhibition for the Museum of Modern Art](#) in New York.

**MH:** What does an "electromagnetic tenderness of remembering" look like for you?

**DP:** I feel strongly about one's transit through life. I think of [Helen Flanders](#), who was a ballad collector in Vermont. She has a quote I love in which she basically says that while we've documented so much music—all these songs and broadsides and transcripts—the individual

memories that go with them cannot be itemized, and that it's just impossible to do so. But I think that the effort to trace the spine of experience is worthwhile, which is what we're doing right now. We're attempting to trace the spine of experience and remembrance. I think the recordings of my grandmother, as dearly as I loved her, are most powerful when I listen to a recording and think "oh yeah she used to say that" and "I forgot that she..." It's the "I forgot that she..." that I'm attempting to kind of kickstart back into my brain and give a piece back to myself when I listen to these recordings. It's impossible to hold on to everything because you'd become waterlogged emotionally as a human being if you did hold on to everything. But there are certainly arenas in your life that are worth engaging in this collection process. There are things worth noticing that are worth recording and remembering.

In 2019 I put out a record titled [Avia](#), which is Latin for "grandmother." It's also Galician for the past tense of "he had," as in "he had a grandmother." The record included some of the phone calls and voicemails and other recordings of my grandmother. That was my first real interface with braiding my own creative practice with the act of celebration in remembrance of someone else. Even though I've been doing that privately, that was my first foray, and it was like pre-training to do all my folklife work and become a folklorist. I had begun working on it when my grandma passed away, and it was sort of a sort of a folky-chamber record, indebted to modern classical music such as Morton Feldman and John Cage, but it had some proto elements of the folk-thing that I was after. I stayed in Connecticut for my grandmother, as she was very important to me, and she lived to be 99. I wanted to be around for her journey. When she passed away, I felt unbounded as if I could finally kind of go anywhere. I remember being on the phone with a friend and saying that maybe I wanted to move to somewhere like West Virginia and see what that experience would be like. I kind of wanted to go off the grid and be in a slightly more rural community. I grew up in a rural community in Connecticut, and my brain was pointing me toward fieldwork and folklore even if I didn't realize it yet at the time.

**MH:** Can you share a little bit of context for me and the readers about Lena Turbyfill?

**DP:** I first heard [Lena Bare Turbyfill](#) as part of a compilation of recordings issued by the Library of Congress, and I was really struck by her voice and the content of the songs that she was singing. I sought more material of hers because of one song in particular, "[Bolakins](#)," that was recorded in 1939 by Dr. [Herbert Halpert for the WPA](#). I knew her songs would be in the Library of Congress, so I planned back in December of 2019 to visit the Library of Congress. But then Covid happened, so I couldn't go. It was interesting timing as what Covid forced me to do was do research at home on Lena, Lena's family, and Lena's repertoire. There wasn't too much else out there sonically, but then I ended up getting connected to Lena's family as a lot of her descendants were aware of Lena's experience with the WPA and her recordings by Herbert Halpert. Some of the family members were on [www.ancestry.com](#) and [www.findagrave.com](#), which allowed me to connect with them fairly quickly, which is how I got in touch with Nicola "Aunt Nicky" Pritchard, who was Lena's last surviving daughter before passing away herself in 2021. At the time, some of Lena's grandkids said, "oh well, her daughter is still alive and lives in Elk Park." That is when I made the visit to meet Nicky. So, in July of 2020 I drove to Elk Park, North Carolina, to meet "Aunt Nicky."



Nicky was welcoming and so, so loving. I was struck by the degree to which Nicky wished to celebrate memory with me; it was sort of unparalleled with some of the other folks with whom I have been working. This is not to say those folks have been uninterested, but Nicky was the youngest girl, and I think even despite that she really had a kind of tugging-at-the-skirt-hem-enthusiasm for wondering about her family: What's grandpa doing? What does “the *kiver*” mean (a dialectical British term for quilt)? Why are you going out into the woods and getting ginseng and cohosh? She really wanted to learn about her family heritage so to have someone reach out 50 years later, and be like “hey that's pretty neat,” was special. She was tickled beyond pink, tickled like fuchsia. This interest in family memory was crucial and really set the blueprint for what I wanted to begin doing in working with these informants.



Derek Piotr with Nicola “Aunt Nicky” Pritchard, Elk Park, 2020.

When I met Nicky, it was like stepping right back into the role of recording my grandmother. Nicky had a lot to say about Lena’s life, moments of Lena’s community outreach, Lena’s song repertoire, and so forth. One of the most heartening things Nicky ever said to me happened one day when we were on the phone. Nicky said, “oh honey, if I had met your grandmother, if she was still alive, I know we would have been best friends,” and I think Nicky said this because of how I would share my memories of my grandma with her. Nicky was sort of my first informant when I began doing this work. I was recording those phone calls with her and she wanted to sing for me. Because Nicky could recall these Child ballads, and these old songs, although not a singer herself, she could still sing and had a lovely voice. She would sing for me if she could remember something, even though she wasn't an active singer or performer.

**MH:** A little while ago you said, “Nicky wished to celebrate memory with me.” What would it mean to celebrate memory with someone, especially in the context of loss as in the theme of this JFE issue?

**DP:** Well, I always say that if someone called me out of the blue, and said “hey you’re Dot’s grandson, right? How's it going? What's going on?” but they didn't have a clear reason to contact me, I’d say, “it’s going ok.” However, if they called me and they said, “your grandma won blue ribbons for her tomato plants all the time at the Grange. I was a Grange member for 40 years I

really miss her,” that would be different. To give someone a direction when you reach out to celebrate someone goes a long way toward celebrating memory. The stories just start to fall out. I think if I had been vaguer, I wouldn't have gotten as far as quickly with my informants. I think to celebrate memory with someone, the nuts and bolts of that, I haven't really considered. It just sort of happens, right? But the stories do just kind of fall out of these people. You get ahead of yourself before you know it, which is why my recorder is always on. Unfortunately, a lot of this music is going away. With a lot of this music, there is a hair's difference between whether it will be here tomorrow or not. And that's down to whether the person will be alive tomorrow. A lot of this music, particularly Appalachian music, but also just oral music in general in America, is tied to memory. The children of these performers may have memories of their parents, but because they haven't maintained that tradition, their descendants may not have any idea. I think part of what I aim to do when I speak to these septuagenarian and octogenarian informants is to ask questions about their singing: When did they sing? Which sorts of things did they sing? How often would they sing? I think what I've learned through getting all these memories and details recorded is that the songs are the banner headline and the human lives underneath the songs are the article. You would obviously much rather read the article all morning; you don't want to read only the banner headline. So, in this way, the song has almost become incidental to the memory. The songs are like how Buddha says that it's just the hand pointing to the moon, and then there's the moon.

What I have become fascinated by is the ‘stuff’ of these people's lives, which is almost more valuable than the songs they performed. Many times, I will know someone was a singer, and by the breadth and dimension of the songs they sing I can kind of tell what sort of background they have. For example, some families tend toward rosier songs such as “Lord Lovel” or “Barbara Allen.” Some families tend toward songs like “the Cruel Mother” or “Bolakins.” You can kind of get a sense of what that family's emotional tenor was. My aim is normally to get as much detail about the human being behind the song. I don't feel like there's a formal approach I take with celebrating and recording memories, but certainly as I've kept going with this work, the songs almost become incidental even though they are the focus of my archiving, which now includes about 160 recordings of various people singing various songs. What I'm left with is the tenor of the person's life that they're remembering and the ability the person has of remembering this person through song. The song may be the entry point, but it then becomes about the person. I may remark that someone knew “The Virgin Mary Had a Baby Boy,” but the process of knowing that song, and carrying that song, and the voyage that they went on to even to know that song, all of that outshines the song itself.

**MH:** Can you talk a bit more about this engagement with these memories and this remembrance that you did with Nicky?

**DP:** One thing Nicky was adamant about was the remembrance of her father, George Washington Turbyfill, Lena's first husband. George had gone through World War I and was severely shell-shocked as a result. He was abusive and somewhat unbalanced and was an alcoholic. Yet, despite all that kind of hardship that he inflicted on his family, and the daughters begging Lena to leave him, Nicky told me Lena was pretty staunch that when his family went to bury him someone was to remove the flag off of George's coffin that would have been draped over it because, as Nicky remembered Lena saying, “he hated this war and it absolutely ruined him and there's no way we're

going to bury him with a flag on his coffin. It just doesn't make sense.” Lena was an advocate for emotional justice with her family, despite whatever injustice she might have endured. Nicky also could remember Lena taking George's World War I pension early on for a time. To hear Nicky recall and tell this memory, there was family living in a hollow on the outskirts of Lena's community of Elk Park that had struggled to have enough resources and food for the members of their family. Nicky can remember Lena taking a lot of George's war rations distributed as part of his pension—flower, butter, eggs, sugar—and Lena would drive these rations out to family's hollow. Lena brought them things they needed because the rest of the community had sort of shunned them. So, Nicky was able to celebrate Lena's memory with these emotional stories as well as mundane memories, such as, “Lena did laundry all the time.” It was like beginner's luck for me as a folklorist to have her be in a way my first fountain of memory because she was a source for these amazing, brilliant stories of human resiliency and resourcefulness.

**MH:** One of our keywords in this issue is loss and I'm thinking about this entry that you have on your CV called *Last Wisps of the Old Ways: North Carolina Mountain Singing*. I'm guessing that, as a project you curated, it sheds some light on this notion of loss. What is loss? How do we regain, if we can regain, something that has been lost? What would you say about that?

**DP:** Some of it's like impossible, unfortunately, I mean a lot of people died from Covid that I would love to have met. As I meet more people to interview and record, people have said, “oh I wish so and so was still around, but Covid wiped him out and he would have told you everything.” So I am very mindful that we're sort of on this precipice. When I began doing this work, many of my informants have been of “The Silent Generation” or “The Traditionalists,” meaning they were born somewhere between 1929-1935, and with great exception you may get some of “The Greatest Generation.” I did interview a woman in England who was 102, born in my grandmother's year of 1919. Working with these people, striving to collect these last wisps knowing they may not be there tomorrow, is important as I think sometimes their children tuned out anything that was going on with their grandparents. It's a little damning to call it “the last wisps” because there will always be revivalists. But as far as source-memory singers, source-memory folk-tellers, and source-memory story-givers, it's going away quickly. We're at an interesting juncture right now with people who are long-living and with links to other people who were once long-living. But once that link is gone their kids aren't going to know what these individuals were talking about when they were alive. So that's sort of why I called that compilation that.

**MH:** If you were mentoring young people to turn them on or open their possibilities to this kind of work that you do, what would you do? What kind of moves would you make in working with young people to help them think about this kind of work that you do?

**DP:** I just say: “ask your grandparents.” And I say this to everyone. I mean I've said this to people who are like, “wow, what you do is really neat, I wish I could do it.” And I'm like, “but you can, ask your grandparents. Are they still around? Go ask them something.” Sometimes they will respond back to me, “I don't think any of my family sang,” to which I will say, “right, but ask them about their wedding day. Ask them about their honeymoon. Ask them if they remember, you know the Vietnam War. Ask them anything. Ask your grandparents.” Creating a voice memo on and iPad and an iPhone makes that so easy.

And I was talking to [AGF](#), who's a performer with whom I have been friends with for almost 15 years. Her music is very electronic, and she's not really into what she calls "dead people music." We caught up for a couple of hours on Zoom and had a conversation after her father had passed away. I saw a Tweet from her a few days later that was like, "wow I really wish my grandparents or even my father was still alive as there's so much I could have asked them." I think that just getting that idea into young peoples' heads is important. Call your granny, don't simply ask her how she's doing, but ask her *what* she was doing. I think many older people turn their memories over in their heads and may say to themselves something like, "those were the days." But has anyone ever asked them "what *were* the days? What were they like?" Often when that happens these older folks are overjoyed. It was their lives and they have lived them. Just because you've got snow on top doesn't mean that the mountain isn't still there. It is shameful sometimes how we neglect the fact that a person has lived a life and are still living their lives right now.

**MH:** Yes, go out and record their lives! Allow their lives to live on through remembrance after and through death and loss.

**DP:** I did ask my parents what they can remember of their parents singing, but it's all music such as Engelbert Humperdinck, Frank Sinatra, and stuff like that. But still, that's kind of their folklore in a way. Time moves and unbroken oral tradition is a really neat thing to chase, and a really lovely chain to keep unbroken. What we're going to be left with in 50 years are records by The Monkees, The Beatles, and such. My mom sang "Here Comes the Sun" every morning when she made coffee. I just made that up, by the way, but I mean memories of music, and how we remember people through music like that, will be just as valid as the as what I'm chasing now. I am aware that I am at a very distinct crux in time in which I can get these last wisps of memories into a jar. You're going to be left with what people were exposed to, and if it's not oral tradition or old ballads, it'll be old records, or what people think of as "old" records. Then, in 200 years, someone will sing "Baby Shark" for someone, and it will get recorded. So, you kind of just gotta roll with it, right? Time just moves.

**MH:** You referenced your friend and musician who used the phrase "dead people music." What do you think that means, or what do you think they mean with that?

**DP:** I think I have opened Antye (AGF) up to the idea of "dead people music" a little bit more. I think she says that phrase more so to dismiss the old blues records her husband really likes. These records that were made in the 1930s may sound fusty, and old, and dusty, but they were what a person was doing and singing that very day. Many of these recordings were not released, they were held in repositories, so to be able to hear them for the first time may help for the public today to experience the Zeitgeist of the time to some degree. Listening to recordings of Lena, it's like Lena's in the room with you. That's a really invigorating feeling to me.

This also reminds me of [Will Ritter](#), a mutual of friend of me and my friend [Bobby McMillion](#), who was a singer, storyteller, and folklorist before he passed away last year. Will, unlike our friend Bobby, did not want to venture into the musical archives that Bobby would point us to search within. Will would rather just hear stories from Bobby while Bobby himself was still alive. Will says he is more interested in music from people with warm hands than with cold hands. I am more

of the cold hand variety. I found a woman, born in 1844, who had been recorded reading aloud memories and stories of her life. She and her first husband rafted down the Delaware and when they eventually landed that's where they moved. She was only 16 at the time. Her first husband cut his foot hauling railroad ties and bled out to death in the woods. Just fascinating cold hands stuff. Maybe I am a little more Gothic in my interests as I am more of the cold hand person. But Will made a good point getting in touch with "folks with warm hands," find them, follow them. Will was like, "I could go listen to some of Bobby's records, or go on YouTube and see what he's done, or I can just give him a call, and I'd always rather just want to call him." I do work with living informants all the time, but you know it was almost an admonishment to hear Will say that. I did talk to Bobby plenty when he was alive, so I feel like I did my warm hand duty, but I am more interested in the cold hands, in part because life was very strange even 150 years ago for Americans.

**MH:** I'm struck by a press review describing your work as "hauntingly raw folk, saved from obscurity." Each of the words in that review gesture to the theme of this issue. What does it mean for something to be saved from obscurity? What does it mean for something to be hauntingly raw?

**DP:** I think that when I play recordings of Lena and her family for her descendants, they may say things like "oh yeah that's mee-maw," and they may take in the sounds as just hearing a family member singing. But the grain and the content of the songs matter. I approached Lance Ledbetter, who founded the music and sound preservation team [Dust-to-Digital](#), about releasing the recordings I have done on a larger scale as perhaps part of a boxed set. Eventually it began to look like a lot of remastering and editing would be involved, something like what I describe as "pinning a bug to a Boy Scout swab of cotton," in how removing the creature from the context is problematic. The thing that I love so much about the music label [Death Is Not the End](#) is that its producer, Luke Owen, was up for presenting the recordings I have in exactly the way they are, presenting them sort of *in situ*. There is a really short fragment of a version of "[Cindy](#)," a song everyone knows very well. On paper, it looks terrible. Lena does about two and a half verses and then there are some distant echoes of Ben Duggar in the background singing his own, but you can't make the sounds out, and then, when Ben finally gets up to the mic and the record cuts and he's there, he just does half the chorus and the recording ends. On paper this looks terrible, but to hear these people move around a table and get up to the microphone was fantastic. For months waiting to hear Lena's recordings at the Library of Congress I was dreaming of what they would sound like, and I knew there were many people involved and that people would be moving around the table. What I had dreamed was pretty close to what the recordings sounded like, and I really wanted to preserve the sense of temporality and the sense of space in them. It is very easy to brush these things up and cut out all of that, and just have the song, but then you don't get a sense of what this person was doing. People like Lena obviously fell through the cracks, and I'm of the opinion that, if it weren't me now, someone in 10 or 15 years would come across her and try to raise her star because she's just such a fine singer and so magnetizing.

**MH:** Thank you, Derek, for sharing these thoughts and impressions. Is there anything you'd like to add or share or conclude for having the final word?

**DP:** Go call your grandparents. Everyone reading this, go call your grandparents!



---

Read more about Derek's work with the recordings of Lena Bare Turbyfill in these articles:

1. <https://www.blueridgemusicnc.com/news/entry/ever-since-weve-known-it-uncovered-recrodings-of-lena-bare-turbyfill>
2. <https://deepsouthmag.com/2022/04/20/lena-turbyfill-a-folklore-legacy>
3. <https://www.appalachianhistory.net/2020/09/songcatching-bolakins.html>
4. <https://www.fieldwork-archive.com>

#### Urls

<https://www.dazeddigital.com/music/article/25630/1/bjork-searches-for-meaning-in-these-personal-emails>  
<https://www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/1458>  
<https://umaine.edu/folklife/women-folklorists/helen-hartness-flanders>  
<https://derekpiotr.bandcamp.com/album/avia>  
<https://www.blueridgemusicnc.com/news/entry/ever-since-weve-known-it-uncovered-recrodings-of-lena-bare-turbyfill>  
<https://www.loc.gov/item/afc9999005.7532>  
<https://libraries.indiana.edu/halpert-midatlantic>  
<https://www.ancestry.com>  
<https://www.findagrave.com>  
<https://antye greie.com>  
<https://www.blueridgeheritage.com/artist/william-ritter>  
<https://libraryguides.berea.edu/c.php?g=825560>  
<https://dust-digital.com>  
<https://deathisnot.bandcamp.com>  
<https://deathisnot.bandcamp.com/track/cindy-2>



*“Il repose ici”*

## A Century of Death, Loss, and Remembrance Following the Great October Storm of 1893

by John P. Doucet, Annie Doucet, and Windell Curole

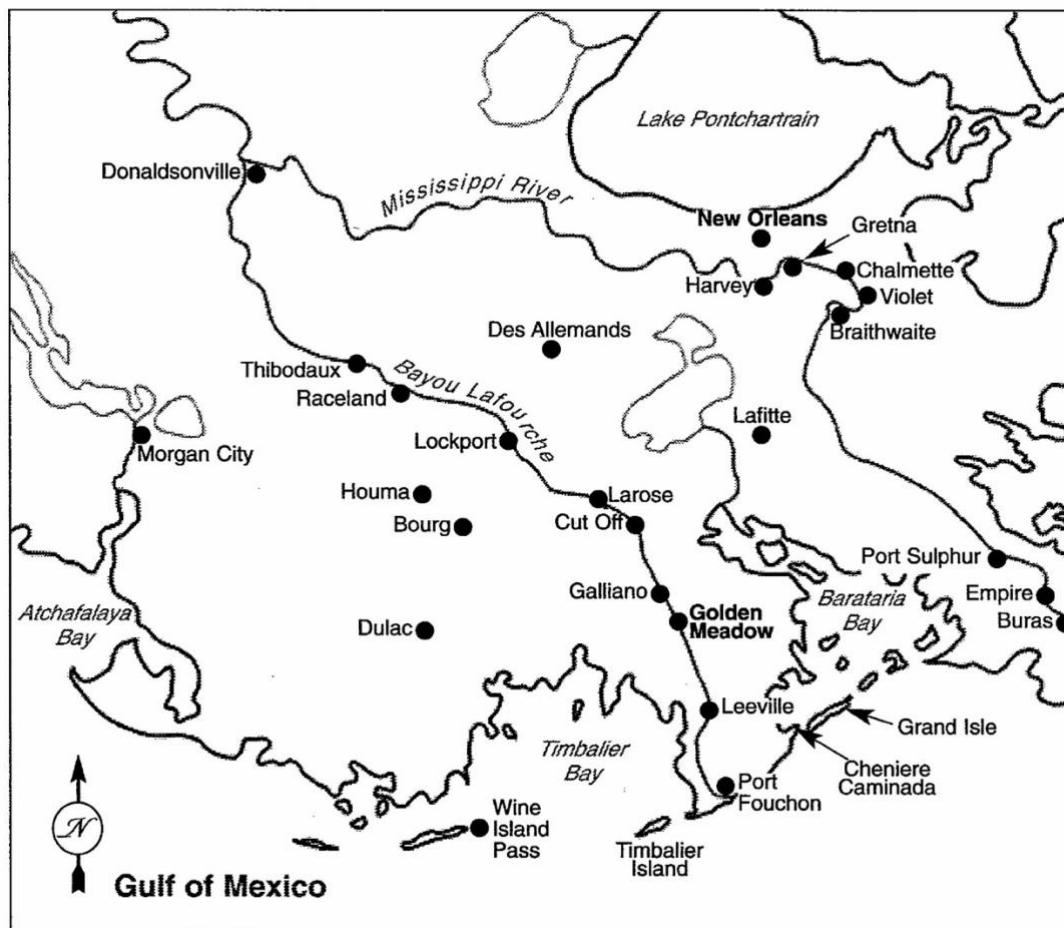
The Great October Storm of 1893, despite remaining one of the largest natural disasters in the U.S. to date, was lost to history for nearly 100 years. It remained untold in hurricane treatises and in general literature and lingered only in the colloquial memory of coastal communities in southeastern Louisiana, scattered sparsely among descendant families of survivors no more than one generation removed from it. It was spoken of rarely in the communities settled in its aftermath and then only in hushed, remorseful tones. With the 1993 efforts of a visionary, grassroots organization committed to community education, however, this tragic event was raised to its rightful place in recorded history and common remembrance. Here, from the perspective of a 30-year legacy, we share our experiences producing lasting community learning through re-creations of historical folklife centered on a natural disaster.

---

The coastline near Chênrière Caminada after the October 1 landfall of the Great October Storm of 1893, showing unearthed remnants of downed oak trees. Photograph by Mark Forrest (1894). Courtesy Cheniere Hurricane Centennial Collection.

## HISTORICAL SETTING

The Gulf Coast of Louisiana in the 19<sup>th</sup> century supported a number of fishing villages notable for providing a market living to fishermen, shrimpers, and oystermen as well as an abundance of fresh and dried seafood for subsistence. The largest, Chênère Caminada, was built atop a plain of prehistoric beachheads (“chênères”) formed over past millennia from river sediments driven westward by longshore currents. These sequential beachheads formed a peninsula, accreting to a point that rose as high as six feet above sea level, sufficient to support a grove of saltwater oaks, wooden houses, and a fishing fleet. At high tide, Chênère Caminada was essentially an island, part of the barrier island complex west of the river across southeastern coastal Louisiana, with a saltwater fishery to the south and brackish fishery to the north surrounded by marshland. On the Gulf of Mexico, at the southernmost border of Lafourche and Jefferson Parishes, the village became the major supplier of fresh seafood to restaurants and markets in New Orleans, about 50 miles sailing distance due north through Barataria Bay and bayous draining into it (Looper et al. 1993).



Map of southeastern Louisiana, including places mentioned in this article. Illustration reprinted from Falgoux (2017), with permission.

With an 1893 population of about 1,600, this multicultural but largely French-speaking wetlands settlement was formed by immigration of families of diverse nationalities interested in plying the rich fisheries of its unique position on the Gulf of Mexico. The population had doubled since the 1850 U.S. Census, creating a multigenerational settlement of mostly fishermen and their extended families (Pitre 1996). Fishing made Chênrière Caminada well-known on the Gulf as well as in villages and cities to the north, thanks in part to visiting contemporary writers. Kate Chopin, for instance, used the village as the setting for her 1894 short story “At Chênrière Caminada” and a scene in her 1899 novel, *The Awakening*, set in 1892.

Overnight, between October 1 and 2, 1893, a strong, rapidly moving hurricane crossed the Louisiana coastline without forewarning. The bustling community of Chênrière Caminada lay directly beneath its gyre and tidal surge. Front-page headlines of the October 4, 1893, edition of the New Orleans *Times-Democrat* called it “The Wind of Death.” The next day, headlines read “Two Thousand Dead” and “The Settlement of Chênrière Caminada Swept Out of Existence.” A contemporary poem by Jean Henriot<sup>1</sup> describes the aftermath:

Au lever du jour l’eau complètement retirée  
Nous laissait des cadavres, noyés, mutilés, massacrés,  
Les maisons démolies, culbutées, c’est la ruine complète.  
Les survivants n’ont plus rien, plus de butin,...

\*

At the break of day, the water, completely drawn back,  
Left bodies for us, drowned, mutilated, massacred,  
The houses demolished, knocked down, it is total ruin.  
The survivors have nothing more, no more possessions,...

The Great October Storm of 1893 is colloquially known as the Chênrière Hurricane. Forensic analysis described the storm as follows:

The hurricane produced inundation, being the most severe in history, [reported] to have engulfed everything before it, and caused a loss of life estimated at 2,000 persons. On Chênrière Caminada, adjacent to Grand Isle, 1,150 persons perished, and on Grand Isle 18 died. Immense destruction of shipping and property was caused and the damage amounted to millions of dollars. (History 1972)<sup>2</sup>

The storm destroyed most weather instruments in its path, leaving an incomplete record of winds and rain at landfall. Modern estimates describe it as a Category 4 hurricane. It battered Chênrière Caminada for 10 hours before landfall, when it reached maximum winds of 130 to 140 mph and carried a 16-foot tidal surge across the Louisiana Gulf Coast (1893 Chênrière 2022).





The cemetery at Chênère Caminada after landfall of the Great October Storm of 1893, showing fresh burials. Photograph by Mark Forrest (1894). Courtesy Cheniere Hurricane Centennial Collection.

### **DEATH, LOSS, AND LORE**

By morning on October 2, 1893, survivors witnessed a gouged and barren beach<sup>3</sup> with debris and bodies washing ashore. Of 300 homes, one remained standing. The entire fishing fleet had been demolished. Nearly half the women and children had perished. Family surnames became extinct overnight. In ensuing days, survivors struggled to bury the dead in the village cemetery, and a suspected mass grave was created to the immediate west of the cemetery property (Looper et al. 1993).<sup>4</sup>

With losses of homes, boats, and other means of subsistence, together with the burden of memory, many survivors never returned.<sup>5</sup> Some families purchased property upland in the Lafourche and Barataria Basins. The displaced population helped found the Lafourche Parish villages of Leeville, Golden Meadow, and Côte Blanche, as well as the village of Westwego in Jefferson Parish.<sup>6</sup>

Beyond post-storm burials and family relocations, several stories related to the storm and its aftermath have survived as lore through the oral tradition. Modern authors Perrin (1977) and Rogers (1985) have captured some of the more persistent tales of Chênère folklore. One prevalent



story involves the chênrière's indigenous oak trees. As a ridge of high land relative to surrounding marshland and water, chênrières support the growth of live oaks in dense, linear groves.<sup>7</sup> Historical photographs agree with lore involving the topological bareness of the 1893 Chênrière Caminada peninsula.<sup>8</sup> Oral tradition tells us that the Chênrière villagers systematically cut down their oaks and destroyed the indigenous grove so that sailing visitors and fishermen could more readily see and find their homes from a distance while sailing on the Gulf or on the back bay.<sup>9</sup> Villagers are thus blamed for community mortality by their contemporaries for having destroyed the natural arboreal protection from storm winds.

In addition to being subjected to criticism for destroying their oak grove, villagers also suffered other historical blame for their demise. Surviving opinions of the Chênrière Caminada villagers referred to them as lazy, unindustrious, and indulgent, engaging in such pastimes as card playing and dancing.<sup>10</sup> There is a pervasiveness in multiple stories handed down claiming that villagers were responsible for their mortality during the storm, which led at least one Perrin (1977) informant to report that "God didn't like us."

Another story cycle involves the church at Chênrière Caminada and its bell. These stories are supported by oral tradition and first-person written narratives left by Father Ferdinand Grimeau,<sup>11</sup> pastor of Notre Dame de Lourdes Catholic Church on 1893 Chênrière Caminada. Notre Dame, used as a setting in Chopin's fiction, was home to a tower bell that according to legend was forged from 700 pounds of silver, including pieces of pirate treasure.<sup>12</sup> The silver bell produced a peculiar pitch and peal, commonly described as "a high, hollow ping" and "a mother wailing." During the storm, the bell rang relentlessly in the darkness, buffeted by hurricane winds. According to tradition, it has been described as the most memorable experience of the great storm, a sorrowful, sickening symbol of the night of terror and destruction. Father Grimeau was traumatized by the continuous pealing, as he sought safety inside the church rectory during the storm.<sup>13</sup> Survivors often spoke about the bell's incessant clanging, and when it went silent on the morning of October 2 they knew the church had been destroyed. The bell was recovered in the aftermath, but, according to lore, disappeared after some time. One story has it discovered in 1918 some 50 miles away in the cemetery at Westwego, one of the villages founded by storm survivors. Eventually, the bell was returned to the Gulf Coast and now serves Our Lady of the Isle church in nearby Grand Isle, LA (Rouse 1979).

## REMEMBRANCE

Chopin wrote her 1894 short story "At Chênrière Caminada" soon after news of the great storm hit national newspapers. Chopin and her use of the church in her 1899 novel *The Awakening* commemorated the village she knew and admired from her summer vacationing on Grand Isle. Other authors wrote of historical Chênrière Caminada following the Great Storm but most published in 1893 or a few years afterward.<sup>14</sup> For nearly a century, there is a distinct paucity of writings on and references to the Great October Storm outside occasional periodicals published in New Orleans and locally—and then on only major anniversaries of the storm.

For first-generation survivors, however, the storm was not lost to history. The adage "Wounds cut into sand are healed by morning" applied neither physically nor psychologically. Every person

displaced to post-storm communities in 1893 inevitably lost someone they knew, and such grief was no doubt more severe in those families who assumed care of orphans or the homeless following the storm. There was a collective grief among the communities formed after the storm that remained intense in the years following, and that intensity may have contributed to keeping remembrance and discussion hushed.<sup>15</sup>

Stories of the storm that persisted to the time of the efforts of Perrin and Rogers were carried by oral tradition, but that transmission typically remained within families rather than across the community. And in later generations, the storm was largely spoken of in hushed tones and in French, diminishing understanding, appreciation, and transmission by younger generations who were taught to speak English exclusively.

Prior to 1993, most literature on hurricanes and their history fails to mention the Great October Storm either in general or in lists of most severe storms.<sup>18</sup> Locals reasoned that the story was overlooked because of the relatively low economic significance of losing a remote coastal village in Louisiana relative to more developed sites along the Gulf and Atlantic Coasts. Locals often considered this omission part of the historical disregard of wetlands Cajun culture in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and the poor, self-subsistent, uneducated, French-speaking Cajuns of southeastern Louisiana that comprised it. Nonetheless, the great storm forever changed family structures and settlement patterns, which led to new communities in Lafourche and Jefferson Parishes that emerged as state and national leaders in seafood, oil and gas exploration and servicing, and ship-building.

For the past 50 years, fishing camps on Chênière Caminada have come and gone as milder hurricanes traversed the area and reorganized real estate, damaging constructions and eroding the rapidly disappearing

In Chopin's time, summer vacationers would travel by boat through Barataria Bay to arrive at beach resorts on Grand Isle. When a state highway was established south to the coast and then east to Grand Isle in the 1920s,<sup>16</sup> however, weekend vacationing for many locals became common. The site of historic Chênière Caminada was (and remains) traversed on each highway trip to and from the public beach on Grand Isle. The authors (JPD and WC) recall such sojourns as children in the 1960s and 70s, when the once bustling Chênière land was mostly barren, home to sparse fishing camps and docks for small, private fishing vessels. To children, such trips seemed shrouded in mystery concerning the significance of place and our family history. This mysteriousness, the lack of a modern community, the sparse dwellings raised on pilings often showing scars from storms, and the pervasive odor of lingering seafood residue rendered a strong negative connotation when hearing the French word "chênière." Crossing Chênière Caminada along the highway in the family car, parents would often slow down, make the sign of the cross, murmur a brief prayer, and stare with curiosity, perhaps as homage to the drowned dead or perhaps trying to bring themselves to understand such a large disaster and tragedy. But they spoke in hushed tones without detail or explanation, perhaps avoiding thoughts about the tragedy or perhaps hoping to return home across that site before dark to avoid hauntings for disturbing the dead or experiencing frightful *feux follets*.<sup>17</sup>

coastline (Britsch and Dunbar 1993). For decades, there have been no permanent homes on the land. The historical Chênière Cemetery has fared better than other coastal cemeteries, which are largely collapsing and disappearing as coastal marshes subside and suffer incursion of saltwater (Louisiana Cemeteries 2013). Nonetheless, the Chênière Cemetery becomes inundated at high tides, and its last oak trees have died salty deaths.

### **FOLKLORE PROCESSES: THE COMMUNITY AS CLASSROOM**

Our efforts in producing a meaningful, lasting community education event regarding 19<sup>th</sup> century Chênière Caminada and the 1893 storm involved a holistic approach at creating a sense of place. In retrospect, the activities we designed parallel the Cultural Perspectives on Place and Event outlined by Howard and Sommers (2002).<sup>19</sup> In particular, we used available resources to elucidate and re-create language and dialect, foodways, geography and ecology, landscape and land use, soundscape, religion, material culture, customs, the seasonal round, oral narrative, occupational folklife, placename origins, folk groups, and settlement history. Here, we share our major planning experiences adaptable to other community education events.

*Organize Planning and Production.* A diverse, active committee with specific skillsets and networks is essential. In preparation for the centennial of the Great October Storm, a committee under leadership of one of the authors (WC) convened to discuss ways to commemorate the event that had refashioned their communities. Called the Cheniere Hurricane Centennial (CHC, which became the name of the event), the committee assumed the complex mission to commemorate a natural disaster of historic proportion, mobilize multiple local communities to recognize and remember their heritage, and return the storm to its rightful place in written history. The overarching goals of the CHC were to produce a proper memorial for the hundreds of ancestors who perished as well as an educational event for the thousands of survivors' descendants. Committee meetings and open-community discussions were held in the villages along Bayou Lafourche, particularly Golden Meadow and Côte Blanche (modern-day Cut Off), which had been established by relocated survivors. The committee decided to program a "Centennial Weekend" October 1-3, 1993. Specific days and activities included Memorial Friday, involving rededication of the Chênière Cemetery and church bell, Folklife Saturday, which manifested in a daylong folklife festival, and Reunion Sunday, including traditional church services and family gatherings.

*Produce Keepsake Literature.* By producing written keepsakes, current generations can document events important to a community and thereby encourage future generations to recognize their importance. The CHC determined it imperative to produce substantial, inexpensive, and widely available keepsake literature. One of the authors (JPD) co-authored *The Chênière Caminada Story* (1993), an 80-page paperbound book that included historical photos, a brief history of the community, the story of the hurricane and its aftermath, historical newspaper articles, a list of survivors and victims, Centennial Weekend activities, and a bibliography with further reading resources. Through writing and historical photographs, the book involved many of the cultural perspectives of Howard and Sommers (2002). And, in an effort to perpetuate community learning and remembrance, the CHC published beginning in 1994 (Réfléchir 1994) and until 2022 five popular hardbound collections of historical photographs collected from Folklife Saturday and additionally contributed by the community.

*Journal of Folklore and Education* (2022: Vol. 9)

"Il repose ici":

A Century of Death, Loss, and Remembrance Following the Great October Storm of 1893

by John P. Doucet, Annie Doucet, and Windell Curole

*Involve Press and Public Relations Efforts.* It is crucial to publicize dates and activities in advance. With the advent of the Internet and social media, this is easier than ever. In 1993, two local newspapers produced tabloid supplements on the Centennial Weekend and news articles related to the hurricane's history. Some articles found themselves in national syndication, publicizing the event to a much broader audience.

*Incorporate Community Religious Activities and Other Deeply Held Cultural Practices.* Addressing what a community deeply believes and practices helps ingrain community education across generations. Because the largely French-speaking population of 19<sup>th</sup> century Chênière Caminada was largely Roman Catholic, the committee determined that memorial religious events were in order. A multi-denominational rededication of the Chênière Caminada Cemetery was produced October 1, 1993. A large monument of engraved marble commemorating the centennial was formally aside the cemetery and facing the highway. The legendary silver bell, now in the Our Lady of the Isle belfry on Grand Isle, was rededicated. Memorial masses were followed by tours of church cemeteries in those villages formed in the storm's aftermath. Graves of survivors were marked with commemorative foam-core markers featuring the CHC logo. Many 19<sup>th</sup> century and even more modern tombs bear epitaphs beginning *Il repose ici* ("Here lies"), in the first language of those represented.

*Include Folklife Discovery and Interpretation Events.* The objectives of such community education are to elucidate, discover anew, and interpret older aspects of folklore and folklife. Ideally, this involves interactions of professional scholars with community tradition bearers. On Folklife Saturday, the CHC produced an interpretive folklife festival at the Cut Off Youth Center. The festival included discussions by scholars on music, vernacular architecture, historical wetlands occupations, and Gulf Coast literature. Other events featured music, storytelling, *Le parc aux petits* (a playground featuring historical outdoor games), a *Comment tu le dis?* stage (capturing the novel technical jargon of traditional folk occupations in the coastal marshlands), displays and exchange of historical family photographs, a genealogy research room, and an oral history room with video capture.

*Consider Re-enactments of Historical Folklife.* Perhaps the most enduring Centennial Weekend event was production of the theatrical play *Tant que Durera la Terre*.<sup>20</sup> Selected by the CHC from an open competition and written by one of the authors (JPD), the play was based on narratives of life on Chênière Caminada told through the imagined life of his great-great grandfather, a first-generation Chênière oysterman. The narrative weaves through the historical folkways and legends surrounding the storm. Opening precisely 100 years after landfall of the great storm, the play featured a large cast of local and semiprofessional actors onstage at South Lafourche High School in Galliano, LA.

Much of the history of Chênière Caminada, as well as community culture and storm lore, was told through *Tant que Durera la Terre*. Such re-enactments are challenging to effectively produce: In our case, we had not only a century-old story to convey but also one that involved emulating the sensorial experience of a hurricane. Here are some considerations that made our production successful and memorable.

*Journal of Folklore and Education* (2022: Vol. 9)

"Il repose ici":


A Century of Death, Loss, and Remembrance Following the Great October Storm of 1893

by John P. Doucet, Annie Doucet, and Windell Curole

- *Include well-known parts of history and folklife in the narrative* and thereby reinforce the sense of place. Such inclusion effectively connects prior audience knowledge with the theatrical experience.
- *Avoid lecturing.* “Show. Don’t tell.” With lots of history to convey, it is too easy to render information and notes as dialogue. Your writer(s) should carefully and cleverly develop ways to integrate educational information into character action and dialogue without those ways “seeming” to lecture to the audience.
- *Establish sense of place and sense of time.* Accurate geography and landscape are essential. Use of the vernacular is extremely effective.
- *Invoke both Melpomene and Thalia.* The mission of the stage is to entertain, no matter how tragic the story may be. Include carefully interspersed light-hearted and even comedic scenes.

# *Tant Que Durera La Terre*

An Historical Drama by John Doucet  
Based Upon Narratives of Cheniere Caminada  
during The Great October Storm of 1893



*Tant que durera la terre,  
semailles et moissons,  
froidure et chaleur,  
été et hiver,  
jour et nuit,  
ne cesseront plus.*  
La Genèse 8:22

*As long as the earth lasts,  
seedtime and harvest,  
cold and heat,  
summer and winter,  
and day and night  
shall not cease.*  
Genesis 8:22

**Produced and Directed by  
Perry Martin**  
 with original music by Leroy Martin  
 and performed by  
 Vin Bruce, Leroy Martin, & Billy Pitre


South Lafourche High School Auditorium  
 Friday, October 1st, 8 P.M.  
 Saturday, October 2nd, 8 P.M.  
 Sunday, October 3rd, 3 P.M.  
 General Admission \$6.00

**TICKETS ON SALE NOW**  
 Callais Cablevision, Golden Meadow  
 Louisiana Catalog Store, Cut Off  
 The Winner's Circle, Lockport  
 Greater Lafourche Chamber Office, Raceland  
 The New Post, Ltd., Thibodaux  
**TICKETS ALSO AVAILABLE AT THE DOOR**

In Conjunction with

## The Cheniere Hurricane Centennial

1-3 October 1993, Cut Off Youth Center



Original playbill for premiere of *Tant que Durera la Terre*, showing dates, location, and sponsorships.

## LEGACY

Over the next 20 years, *Tant que Durera la Terre* has been produced multiple times<sup>21</sup> and has renewed interest in the theatrical arts in communities along Bayou Lafourche, with creation of local troupes and new community, school, and restaurant venues. A number of grassroots organizations and individuals began to take serious stock in collecting private, historical, and cultural artefacts held by communities, particularly in light of northward population shifts due to coastal land loss and subsequent loss of economic opportunities. Gathering physical donations and loans from fellow townfolk, historical centers arose in Golden Meadow and Galliano, featuring displays and artefacts of local history and culture, with notable emphases on historical hurricanes.<sup>22</sup> The South Lafourche Public Library in Galliano archived photos and genealogy records captured by Folklife Saturday events.



The authors remain active in keeping commemoration of the Great October Storm and its impact alive. We regularly host public lectures, deliver classroom talks on rural history, deliver readings of works by period authors, and write news articles. Our university students are regularly engaged in forensic research regarding historical Chênrière Caminada for archiving at Nicholls State University (Thibodaux, LA). Multiple modern novelists have published fictional accounts of life on Chênrière Caminada relating to the great storm.<sup>23</sup>

Any study of *fin-de-siecle* Chênrière Caminada is limited by lack of documentary resources. The early Cajun community transmitted knowledge and history by oral tradition, and much of the local 19<sup>th</sup>-century population was not formally educated and not able to write.<sup>24</sup> Geographical remoteness contributed to its relative isolation from scholarly attention. It was important for the CHC to inaugurate a collection of major and minor resources to develop a comprehensive account and archive of historical Chênrière Caminada. The authors in conjunction with other scholars and writers have contributed to a growing collection and database of written and recorded resources housed in the Archives and Special Collections at Nicholls State University.

Perhaps the most profound aspect of the legacy of the CHC was producing a large, complex event of community engagement, cultural relevance, and historical significance that had resulted in widespread popularity. The event reached far beyond modern, post-Chênrière communities and the boundaries of Louisiana. Including locals, an estimated 15,000 visitors and scholars from around the U.S. and overseas, particularly Canada and France, attended Centennial Weekend. Since then, journalists and writers of nonfiction books on hurricanes and natural disasters have taken note of the Great October Storm of 1893, a phenomenon that was not frequent prior to CHC events in October 1993.<sup>25</sup>

Natural disasters, like hurricanes, are great forces that enter and alter people's lives as well as their perceptions of reality. In coastal Louisiana, hurricanes are a basis of our lifeways and settlements. They create history and lore and are a basis of our folklife. After forcing people to seek shelter in advance of landfall, they have an ironic way in their aftermaths of bringing communities together for the common good and for common grieving and rebuilding. It was thus after the Great October Storm of 1893, and it was thus after Hurricane Ida—a severe Category 4 hurricane that struck the post-Chênrière communities in late August 2021. As we have learned over the past 30 years, even 100-year-old hurricanes can mobilize a community.

---

#### **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR EDUCATORS**

The success and impact of the events of Centennial Weekend suggest a model for other community education events based on history, culture, and lore. We recognize the potential value of our experiences to educators and community event planners as well as to creating new opportunities to study folklore. We hope that our story will be useful in envisioning, planning, and producing community education events. In addition to the practical recommendations included in our article, we also recommend the following teaching resources.

*Journal of Folklore and Education* (2022: Vol. 9)

“Il repose ici”:

A Century of Death, Loss, and Remembrance Following the Great October Storm of 1893

by John P. Doucet, Annie Doucet, and Windell Curole

### **Written in Stone, by History Detectives**

<https://www.pbs.org/opb/historydetectives/educators/technique-guide/written-in-stone>

Cemeteries often provide useful historical information and insight into folkways. Epitaphs themselves are intrinsically informative as documents of surnames, dates, and sometimes geographical nativity and family structure, and they are also occasionally accompanied by engravings and images that reveal occupations and other community traditions.

### **Documenting Maritime Folklife: An Introductory Guide, by the American Folklife Center**

<https://www.loc.gov/folklife/maritime>

An excellent resource particularly useful to riparian and coastal community schools, this website provides advice and methods for planning and documenting artefacts, including note taking, interviewing, photography, and archiving.

### **Hurricane Resources and Opportunities for K-12 Educators, by Louisiana Division of the Arts**

[https://www.louisianavoices.org/hurricanes\\_k12.html](https://www.louisianavoices.org/hurricanes_k12.html)

Using Hurricanes Katrina and Rita of 2005 as primary examples, these units, which include ideas employing creative artwork, explore the classroom's ability to manage student stress and trauma following destructive and tragic events.

### **Oral Traditions: Swapping Stories, by Louisiana Division of the Arts**

[https://www.louisianavoices.org/Unit5/edu\\_unit5.html](https://www.louisianavoices.org/Unit5/edu_unit5.html)

This site provides a wealth of reading and viewing resources, including links to the storytelling collection *Swapping Stories: Folktales from Louisiana* (Lindahl et al. 1997) and an extensive bibliography. Lesson 7: Personal Experience Narratives may be particularly useful.<sup>26</sup>

### **Sense of Place, by the Walden Woods Project**

<https://www.walden.org/education/curriculum-collection/sense-of-place>

This website offers curricula that help students establish sense of place through fieldwork and writing—and the lessons are written by students!

### **Material Culture: The Stuff of Life, by Louisiana Division of the Arts**

[https://www.louisianavoices.org/Unit7/edu\\_unit7.html](https://www.louisianavoices.org/Unit7/edu_unit7.html)

Additional sites from Louisiana Voices: An Educator's Guide to Exploring Our Communities and Traditions can be adapted to communities and folklife investigations beyond Louisiana.

---

*The authors are each descended from families who survived the Great October Storm of 1893. They are available as advisors for planning community events involving historical and cultural education.*

**John P. Doucet**, PhD, is Professor and Dean of the College of Sciences and Technology and Director of Coastal Initiatives at Nicholls State University in Thibodaux, LA. He is author of *Tant que Durera la Terre*, the official theatrical play of the Cheniere Hurricane Centennial, and co-author of *The Cheniere Caminada Commemorative*.

**Annie Doucet**, PhD, is Assistant Professor of French at the University of Arkansas in Fayetteville. She has conducted field studies on colloquial French across southern and coastal Louisiana.

**Windell Curole**, DSci, is Director of the South Lafourche Levee District, headquartered in Galliano, LA. He served as Chair of the Chênrière Hurricane Centennial. For his efforts in producing the Centennial event, he was awarded Citizen of the Year by the Lafourche Gazette.

*Journal of Folklore and Education* (2022: Vol. 9)

"Il repose ici":

A Century of Death, Loss, and Remembrance Following the Great October Storm of 1893

by John P. Doucet, Annie Doucet, and Windell Curole

## WORKS CITED

- Bastian, David F. and Nicholas J. Meis. 2014. *New Orleans Hurricanes from the Start*. Gretna, La.: Pelican Publishing Company.
- Britsch, L.D. and J.B. Dunbar. 1993. Land-Loss Rates—Louisiana Coastal Plain. *Journal of Coastal Research*. 9:324–38.
- Craft, Lucy. 2021. Japan Rebuilt an Entire Tsunami-Flattened City on a Man-made Hill but Many Still Can't Face Life There. *CBS Saturday Morning*, 4:30, March 11. <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/japan-tsunami-2011-fukushima-rebuilt-city-rikuzen-takata-residents-still-scared/?intcid=CNM-00-10abd1h>
- Dunn, Gordon E. and Banner J. Miller. 1964. *Atlantic Hurricanes*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press.
- Falgoux, Woody. 2017. *Rise of the Cajun Mariners: The Race for Big Oil*. New York: Skyhorse Publishing.
- Falls, Rose C. 1893. *Chênrière Caminada, or The Wind of Death: The Story of the Storm in Louisiana*. New Orleans.: Hopkins' Printing Office.
- Field, Martha R. 2006. *Louisiana Voyages: The Travel Writings of Catharine Cole*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi.
- Forrest, Mark. 1894. *Wasted by Wind and Water: A Photo and Pictorial Sketch of the Gulf Disaster*. Milwaukee, Wis.: The Art Gravure and Etching Company.
- Gorley, Linda G. 2010. *Chênrière Caminada and the Tidal Wave of 1893: The Incredible Survival of Claydomere Paul Lafont*. Bloomington: AuthorHouse.
- Grimeau, Rev. F.J. 1996. The Mission of Chênrière Caminada. In *Lafourche Country II: The Heritage and Its Keepers*, eds. Stephen S. Michot and John P. Doucet. Thibodaux, La.: Lafourche Heritage Society.
- History [History of Hurricane Occurrences Along Coastal Louisiana]. 1972. U.S. Army Engineer District, Corps of Engineers, New Orleans.
- Howard, Diane W and Laurie Kay Sommers, eds. 2002. *Folkwriting: Lessons on Place, Heritage, and Tradition in the Georgia Classroom*. Accessed July 10, 2022, <https://archives.valdosta.edu/folklife/docs/folkwriting-book.pdf>.
- Leonard, Craig, Sr. 2016. *Unto the Last Seed*. Sedona, Ariz.: Sojourn Publishing.
- King, Grace. 1894. At Cheniere Caminada. *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 88.528, May.
- Landry, Marjorie. 1993. *Stories My Grandparents Told Me: Student Essays on Lafourche Heritage*. Thibodaux, La.: Lafourche Heritage Society.
- Lindahl, C., Maida Owens, and C. Renée Harrison. 1997. *Swapping Stories: Folktales from Louisiana*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi.
- Looper, Robert B., John Doucet, and Colley Charpentier. 1993. *The Chênrière Caminada Story*. Thibodaux, La.: Blue Heron Press.
- Louisiana Cemeteries [Louisiana cemeteries shrinking, washing away after years of erosion, powerful storms like Katrina]. 2013. Accessed June 21, 2022, <https://www.nydailynews.com/news/national/louisiana-cemeteries-washing-article-1.1232039>.
- Louisiana Voices [Louisiana Voices Folklife in Education Project]. Accessed July 14, 2022, [https://www.louisianavoices.org/edu\\_home.html](https://www.louisianavoices.org/edu_home.html).
- Norcross, B. 2006. *Hurricane Almanac 2006*. New York: St. Martin's Griffin.
- Page, Jennifer and John P. Doucet. 2010. Literati on the Isle: Nineteenth Century Authors on the Louisiana Gulf Coast. In *Lafourche Country III: Annals and Onwardness*, eds. John P. Doucet and Stephen S. Michot. Thibodaux, La.: Lafourche Heritage Society.
- Perrin, Patricia E. 1977. Storm Lore About the Hurricanes of 1893 and 1915 in the Coastal Areas of Lafourche and Terrebonne Parishes. MA Thesis. University of Southwestern Louisiana, Lafayette.
- Pitre, Glen. 2020. *Advice from the Wicked*. New Orleans: Cote Blanche Productions.
- Pitre, Loulan J., Jr. 1996. Chênrière Caminada, A Late Nineteenth Century Coastal Cajun Community. In *Lafourche Country II: The Heritage and Its Keepers*, eds. Stephen S. Michot and John P. Doucet. Thibodaux, La.: Lafourche Heritage Society.
- Plater, Ormonde. 1971. The Hurricane of Chênrière Caminada: A Narrative Poem in French. *Louisiana Folklore Miscellany*. 3.2:1-11.
- Reeves, W. D and D. Alario, Jr. 1996. *Westwego from Chênrière to Canal*. Jefferson Parish Historical Series Monograph XIV. Westwego, La.: Mr. and Mrs. Daniel Alario.

*Journal of Folklore and Education* (2022: Vol. 9)

“Il repose ici”:

A Century of Death, Loss, and Remembrance Following the Great October Storm of 1893  
by John P. Doucet, Annie Doucet, and Windell Curole

- Réfléchir [*Réfléchir: Les Images des Prairies Tremblantes, 1840-1940*]. 1994. Cut Off, La.: Chênrière Hurricane Centennial.
- Rouse, Norris H. 1979. From Pirate Booty to Parish Belfry: The Bell of Chênrière Caminada. *Acadiana Profile*, Sept./Oct.
- Rogers, Dale. 1985. Retreat from the Gulf: Reminiscences of Early Settlers of Lower Lafourche. In *Lafourche Country: The People and the Land*, ed. Phillip D. Uzee. Thibodaux, La.: Lafourche Heritage Society.
- Russel R. J. and H.V. Howe. Cheniers of Southwestern Louisiana. *Geographical Review*, 25.3:449-61
- Smith, Debra. 1999. *Hattie Marshall and Hurricane*. Gretna, La.: Pelican Publishing Company.
- Terrebonne Life Lines*, 6.1:50-65
- 1893 Chênrière [1893 Chênrière Caminada Hurricane] 2021. Accessed June 21, 2022.  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1893\\_Cheniere\\_Caminada\\_hurricane](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1893_Cheniere_Caminada_hurricane)

## Endnotes

- 1 The poem “L’ouragan de la Chênrière Caminada” was first published in Plater (1971), who transcribed it from written French and translated it into English. The representation here is a new literal translation by one of the authors (AD).
- 2 The number of casualties differs in various resources. As declared by the *Times-Democrat*, 2,000 is generally considered the gross estimate of total mortality across the path of the storm from the Gulf to the Atlantic Coast during the week of October 1-6, 1893, with vastly more deaths occurring along the Gulf Coast in Louisiana where the storm was most intense. The mortality at Chênrière Caminada is variously estimated between 800 and 1,200. Precision is a challenge for multiple reasons: paucity of record keeping in the remote village, the temporary residence of boarders who owned no property but worked seasonally in the fishing industry, and the number of undocumented bodies buried in the aftermath. At mortality of 2,000, it remains the second largest disaster in U.S. history, following the Great Galveston Hurricane of 1900.
- 3 This beach image and other photographs originally appeared in the contemporary account by Forrest (1894).
- 4 See Note 3.
- 5 Jefferson Parish tax rolls for 1894 show that many Chênrière Caminada landowners had abandoned and forfeited their land and water property by failure to pay annual property taxes, which ranged from \$1 to \$12. See *Terrebonne Life Lines* (1987). Similar property abandonment occurs following other major storms, as seen in the New Orleans region following Hurricane Katrina in 2005 and as is emerging in Lafourche and Terrebonne Parishes after Hurricane Ida in 2021.
- 6 For the story of families relocating to Westwego, see Reeves and Alario (1996).
- 7 The term *chênrière* is French for “oak grove,” and it was from this Louisiana colloquial usage that geologists first described the distinctive geological structures deriving from prehistoric beachheads. See Russel and Howe (1935).
- 8 See Note 3. An additional substantiating account is provided by the painting *Surf Bathing, Grand Isle* (c. 1850-1890), by American artist John Genin, curated at the New Orleans Museum of Art. Genin illustrates the common topology of the barrier island and nearby Chênrière Caminada. To the fore of the painting is a barren beach (and here Genin includes surf, bathers, and beach houses), to the rear is a lush oak grove, and in the center the artist strikingly depicts hundreds of downed trees. This downing, either for landscaping or for market lumbering, was likely a common enterprise in the mid-to-late 19<sup>th</sup> century along the Louisiana coast.
- 9 An alternative explanation for clearing the land is capitalizing on the lucrative value of oak as lumber for construction of fishing vessels and larger ships.
- 10 It is difficult to imagine characterization of these villagers as lazy. This opinion may derive from a contemporary view of their beach residence, seasonal fishing lifestyle, and relative personal income. Many of the native Louisianans residents on Chênrière—Acadians and others—were drawn there, leaving behind property to the north where farming as *petits habitants* and the 19<sup>th</sup>-century struggles with that farming economy required group labor and relatively harder work, as well as producing lower income.
- 11 Some of his French-language narratives have been translated. See Grimeau (1996). In different sources, his surname is variously spelled Grimaud and Grimeaux.
- 12 Nearby Grand Terre island, just southeast of Grand Isle, was a documented haunt of the legendary Jean Lafitte and his privateers.
- 13 See Falls (1893).

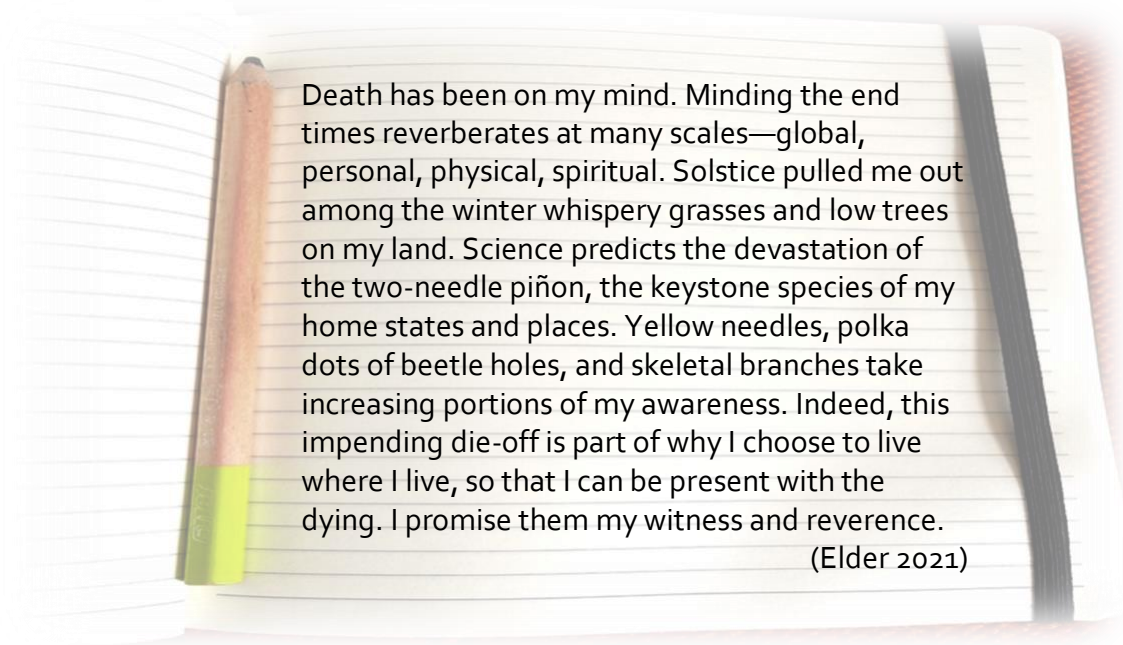
*Journal of Folklore and Education* (2022: Vol. 9)

“Il repose ici”:

A Century of Death, Loss, and Remembrance Following the Great October Storm of 1893  
 by John P. Doucet, Annie Doucet, and Windell Curole

- 14 For multiple examples, see Falls (1893), King (1894), and Field (2006). Field collects the works of travel writer Catherine Cole, who penned an account of Chênrière Caminada around the time of the great storm. For a general accounting of authors writing about this coastal region during the period of the great storm, see Page and Doucet (2010).
- 15 A strikingly similar situation occurs today among survivors of the earthquake-tsunami-nuclear disaster that left 22,000 dead or missing along the northeast coast of Japan. At the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the disaster in 2021, one informant told CBS News, “We lost everything. You don’t count what you lost—you lost everything. It’s kind of a defensive mechanism in psychology. You try not to think about what you have lost... From what I can see in my neighbors and people, they are still quiet. We prefer not to go back to the recent memories. It’s difficult to quantify, but it will be very long lasting.” (Craft 2021)
- 16 Today, this highway is known as Louisiana Highway One (LA 1). LA 1 connects all modern post-Chênrière communities along Bayou Lafourche and crosses the entire state diagonally, from Shreveport to Grand Isle. Before concrete paving in the 1930s, the roadbed consisted of marsh clam shells (*Rangia cuneata*), which grow to enormous populations along the Louisiana Gulf Coast. Due to extreme land loss consequent to subsidence and saltwater incursion from the Gulf, the stretch of LA 1 south of Golden Meadow to the terminus of Bayou Lafourche at the coastline is currently being transformed to an elevated causeway to serve the coastal fishing and recreational economy as well as the major oil field service corridor at Port Fourchon.
- 17 Sometimes referred to as “fire spirits,” *le feu follet* is the subject of a common wetlands Cajun folktale involving the sometimes spherical, sometimes planar glow that can be observed floating over coastal marshes. In the colloquial variant, spherical *feux follets* rise above marshland cemeteries and represent the ghostly heads of unbaptized children rising to escape their earthen purgatory. For another variant, see Lindahl et al. (1997). One natural explanation for the phenomenon is energy released in the form of heat and light from the biological decay of subsurface detritus common in wetland environments.
- 18 Case in point: *Atlantic Hurricanes* by Dunn and Miller (1964) is a Louisiana-based publication by meteorologists from the National Hurricane Center. The 1893 Chênrière hurricane is listed in two tables but not rendered into narrative like storms of lesser severity and mortality.
- 19 For a concise outline adaptation, see Louisiana Voices [https://www.louisianavoices.org/Unit4/edu\\_unit4.html](https://www.louisianavoices.org/Unit4/edu_unit4.html).
- 20 “As Long as the Earth Lasts,” from the first line of the Covenant that God spoke to Noah after the Great Flood. Though titled in French, the play is written in English, and performances typically include unscripted insertions of recognizable, colloquial French phrases according to the actors’ natural capabilities. The title thus represents multiple aspects of Chênrière history and culture: language, religion, and natural disaster. An excerpt of the play appears in Looper et al. (1993).
- 21 In 1996, *Tant que Durera la Terre* was awarded the Louisiana Native Voices and Visions Award and led to an extended avocation for the first-time playwright, who in the ensuing years would compose an additional 12 plays all based on the history and culture of the Bayou Lafourche region and all produced at Louisiana theaters.
- 22 Ironically, though sadly, both centers were destroyed by Hurricane Ida, which made landfall on August 29, 2021.
- 23 For multiple examples, see Smith (1999), Gorley (2010), Leonard (2016), and Pitre (2020). Pitre was a member of the CHC Committee. Readers may recognize the name of his production company from the Works Cited entry.
- 24 See Pitre (1996). In 1880 Chênrière Caminada, less than 24% of males over age five and less than 8% of females over age five were literate.
- 25 For two examples, see Norcross (2006) and Bastian and Meis (2014).
- 26 This strategy was used to public acclaim among schools in Lafourche Parish, La., in 1993. In that year, the Lafourche Heritage Society published *Stories My Grandparents Told Me* (Landry, 1993), a 187-page paperbound collection of personal experiences collected by students from their grandparents. In the process, a contest was established for the best stories from each level of school. Several reminiscences of the 1893 storm appeared in the collection.





## Stories for Change: Solastalgia, Climate Grief, and Re-storying Ourselves

by Rick Fisher and Maggie Bourque

The term "nostalgia" comes from Greek words *nostos* ("return home") and *algos* ("pain"). First coined in the late 1600s, the term was used in medicine to describe people (especially soldiers) suffering from an acute longing for home (Matei 2017). For nearly 200 years nostalgia was treated as a brain disorder with symptoms including melancholy, malnutrition, brain fever, and hallucinations ("Those were the days" nd, para. 5). More recently, the environmental philosopher Glenn Albrecht has been credited with coining the term "solastalgia," which he and others have described as "the pain or distress caused by the loss of, or inability to derive, solace connected to the negatively perceived state of one's home environment" (Albrecht et al. 2007, S96). Related to homesickness and nostalgia, Albrecht et al. distinguish solastalgia as focused on those who may not be directly displaced from home but may nonetheless feel dislocated, especially by the global effects of climate change:

People who are still in their home environs can also experience place-based distress in the face of the lived experience of profound environmental change. The people of concern are still "at home," but experience a "homesickness" similar to that caused by nostalgia. What these people lack is solace or comfort derived from their present relationship to "home." (S96)

Galway et al. (2019) further refine the concept, noting that—unlike related terms such as ecological grief and eco-anxiety—"a key theoretical aspect of solastalgia ... is an explicit focus on place:

solastalgia is a place-based lived experience” (2). Put more simply, solastalgia might be understood as a kind of homesickness felt by those who are physically at home but feel nonetheless displaced or distanced from the comfort of that place.

Albrecht et al. (2007) categorize solastalgia as a somaterratic illness, meaning it occurs at the intersection of body (*soma*) and earth (*terra*) where a person’s mental health is “threatened by the severing of ‘healthy’ links between themselves and their home/territory” (S95). In 2020, Albrecht and his coauthors updated his concept and reinforced that while solastalgia remains a place-based and embodied state, it also exists within a socioeconomic and political context; rather than an inevitable and hopeless resignation, solastalgia “is an emotional state that can be countered and overcome” (20). They argue that countering solastalgia—in addition to recognizing and processing it as a human emotional experience—can be done through deliberate personal and community action to change corporate, social, and political realities.

### **Grappling (or Not) with Climate Change**

As part of the evolving notion of solastalgia, Albrecht (2020) has proposed a new way to re-story the future: the Symbiocene, which he describes as

a period in the history of humanity on this Earth, [which] will be characterized by human intelligence and praxis that replicate the symbiotic and mutually reinforcing life-reproducing forms and processes found in living systems. This period of human existence will be a positive affirmation of life, and it offers the possibility of the complete re-integration of the human body, psyche and culture with the rest of life. The path to avoiding yet more solastalgia, and other negative psychoterratic Earth emotions that damage the psyche, must take us into the Symbiocene. (102)

For Albrecht, then, as well as for the many grounded activist networks orienting their work around the frameworks of hope (Solnit in McQuilkin and Chakrabarti 2020) and joy (Intersectional Environmentalist), there is a pathway out of the deep, often anticipatory pain that many of us are feeling as we consider our personal, communal, and inter-species existential futures as well as our impacts on ecosystems around the globe. As Albrecht suggests, that pathway includes intentional efforts to positively re-story human existence among other forms of life.

Yet, for many of us living in the first quarter of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the solace of “home” is undercut with anxiety and—for many more—grief. A report co-produced by the American Psychological Association, Climate for Health, and ecoAmerica (Whitmore-Williams, Manning, Krygsman, and Speiser 2017) notes that effects of climate change can “induce stress, depression, and anxiety; strain social and community relationships; and have been linked to increases in aggression, violence, and crime” (4). Yet, Galway et al. (2019) help to establish that, even if “physical health implications of climatic and environmental change are increasingly well documented, ... the emotional, mental, and spiritual health implications remain understudied” (1-2). Further, Richard Louv warns that “if climate change occurs at the rate that some scientists believe it will, and if human beings continue to crowd into de-natured cities, then solastalgia will contribute to a quickening spiral of mental illness” (in Galway et al. 2019, 1).

Despite the psychological effects that climate change has and will continue to have, it appears there is substantial reluctance to talking about this topic. A 2018 Yale/George Mason survey, for example, found that 65 percent of participants say they discuss global warming “never” or “rarely” (Leiserowitz et al. 2018, 16). Psychiatrist Lise van Susteren adds, “It’s culturally acceptable to talk about all kinds of anxieties, but not the climate” (in Scher 2018).

At this point we feel it is important to note that, among scholars and public-facing voices, the phenomenon of climate *anxiety* has been critiqued as “overwhelmingly white:”

The prospect of an unlivable future has always shaped the emotional terrain for Black and brown people, whether that terrain is racism or climate change...Exhaustion, anger, hope—the effects of oppression and resistance are not unique to this climate moment. What *is* unique is that people who had been insulated from oppression are now waking up to the prospect of their own unlivable future. (Ray 2021 para. 6)

While acknowledging this important critique, we argue that solastalgia—within the context of the Symbiocene and embracing its relationship with grief and hopeful action—is a concept that remains worth interrogating, and we believe folklore can fill an important gap in present cultural engagement with climate change.

### **A Place for Folklore**

This is a time of change, death, and, perhaps, an opportunity for rebirth. This is a time when we need folklore to help us process change that is in many ways beyond the scale of rationalization. Owens (2022), for example, argues that folklorists can help U.S. communities address climate-related human migration by driving conversations about how to sustain collapsing cultures, how to welcome newcomers in recipient communities, and how to determine priorities for preservation efforts. And, as Alvarez (in Ober 2020) notes, “Folklore is often the harbinger of cultural change; folklorists and cultural reporters can track shifts in beliefs and habits with great efficiency.” Her research has illustrated that “many of the first people to notice significant changes in patterns of pollination, the temperature in bodies of water or the variation of patterns of wildflowers in certain zones affected by drought were actually ‘the folk’ who lived, walked and knew these places intimately.” Folklore can serve functions for recording and documenting change, creating or capturing adaptive guidance, and offering narratives for emotional and psychological engagement with solastalgia.

Not only does solastalgia capture deep grief (one both reflective of the current moment as well as anticipatory of increasing change, destabilization, and loss of familiar experiences of our surroundings), but it also has been documented across a range of cultures and communities, including the Erub Island and Torres Strait Indigenous communities (McNamara and Westoby 2011). Recognizing the ways in which their cultural identities are connected to their biophysical surroundings, women in the Erub Island community have “an intrinsic synergistic relationship [that] connects the health of islanders and the wellbeing of their land and sea country” (234). Even as this community faces accelerating, destabilizing changes that affect their traditional and embodied methods for reading the land/seascape, their millennia-long histories of adaptive co-

evolution with nature—many captured through folklore practices—may provide insights and strategies that can inform a global move towards the Symbiocene.

Across cultures, folklore's focuses on storytelling and on documenting place-based expertise and local ways of life offer many pathways through which students (and others) can engage with the social, personal, and economic impacts they are experiencing during this period of worldwide death, displacement, and loss of connection with "home." The activity below offers options for engaging individuals and groups with themes of grief and solastalgia as well as possible adaptation through re-storying and active engagement needed to move forward. Our conception of "re-storying" draws on Positioning Theory's concept of storylines as semi-stable constructions through which individuals take up and negotiate social positions. Re-storying, then, is a process by which people intersubjectively create new social possibilities for themselves and others (Davies and Harré, 1990).

In line with the call for submissions for this special issue, we believe the educational activities we describe illuminate how "remembrance of the deceased [can offer] an entry point to learning about identities, histories, and communities through traditions, rituals, and culture" (Helmsing and Varga 2021, para. 2). Especially in educational settings where climate change is often presented as science separate from embodied and local experience, we believe that framing climate change in terms of death, loss, and remembrance can help collapse the felt distance between global climate impacts and the internalized, embodied, local grief implied in the term solastalgia.

Because human and environmental health are deeply interconnected, there is a strong correlation between witnessing effects of climate change and an increase in traumatic stress. The World Health Organization, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the American Psychiatric Association, among others, have described the threats that climate change poses to mental health; experiencing and anticipating environmental destruction or loss, along with the physical impacts of climate change, likely increase traumatic stress for all people, and most acutely for those most vulnerable and marginalized (San Mateo County Environmental Literacy and Sustainability Initiative 2019).

Because of the close association of climate change and trauma, teachers should realize that exploring these concepts—even using a re-storying framework or symbiotic action approach—carries the potential to trigger or reveal participants' trauma responses or prior experiences. Using a trauma-informed approach, however, can strengthen students' educational experience and create a safe environment for learning, documenting, and re-storying to occur. Some primary trauma-informed educational strategies that apply to these activities include cultural humility and responsiveness, social emotional learning, and empowerment and collaboration (San Mateo County Environmental Literacy and Sustainability Initiative 2019).

The activities described here are additionally informed by the "Lead with Listening" guidebook from the Climate Migration Project (Climigration 2021). This guide invites facilitators to slow down, be extremely mindful of language choices and cultural context, and acknowledge the challenging emotional, psychological, and personal relationships that are bound up in exploring loss and death within our home places.

## Classroom Connections — Stories for Change: Exploring Climate Death, Loss, and Remembrance Through Folklore

These activities can be adapted for a range of settings and participants, including elementary, secondary, post-secondary, and community learners. These activities are not designed to align directly with any specific national standards or learning outcomes; rather, they are designed from the perspective that engagement in personal-reflective, empathetic, and trauma-informed activities can holistically enhance and deepen learning in science, social studies, language arts, ethics, and other subject areas and topics of cultural concern. To extend and adapt this activity, facilitators may want to consider projects and ideas in the *Journal of Folklore and Education*'s 2018 [Common Ground: People and Our Places](#) issue.

### Individual Exploration

As an initial activity, participants should be encouraged to seek out culturally relevant texts, artifacts, artworks, documents, and other existing expressions of folklore seeking to make sense of death and loss in the context of climate change\* and its related consequences.

Example texts include artist Nina Elder's collective [Solastalgic Archive](#) (2019-2020) and her photo essay [Inspiration and Adaptation: Art in the Anthropocene \(2022\)](#); poet Amanda Gorman's ["Earthrise" \(2018\)](#); architect and designer Maya Lin's crowd-sourced memorial [What Is Missing \(2022\)](#); the social media and podcast work of [Intersectional Environmentalist](#); popular music grappling with climate and ecological crises (Petridis 2021, compilation from [The Guardian](#)); the essay [When Climate Change Comes for the Fairy Tale Forest \(Campbell 2017\)](#); and stories from *The New York Times Magazine*'s [The Decameron Project \(2020\)](#).

\* Certainly climate change can be understood in the context of scientific evidence; it is also located within the political and moral complexities of climate change denial. Such complexities include challenges of cultural acceptance and/or rejection of causal attribution in cases of environmental injustice, corporate and governmental responsibility, and anthropogenic factors overall. In facilitating discussion in a classroom context, teachers may want to acknowledge the tension of belief and denial when it comes to climate change, as well as the role of denial in the context of western notions of grief.

### Empathy, Discussion, and Collaboration

**Part I. Discussion of Individual Exploration.** Facilitators should develop questions to deepen participant engagement iteratively with the individual activity text(s) and support students in social-emotional learning experiences. Possible prompts include:

- What did you **notice** as you read/viewed the texts? Why?
- What did you **feel** as you read/viewed the texts? Why?
- What do you consider the **subject** of each text? Why/how do you know?
- How would you describe the **tone** of these texts? Why?



What do you think the creators/authors were **trying to say**?  
What do the texts say about the **creators/authors**?

**Part II. Additional Connections to the Central Topic.** Transition from discussion of specific initial examples to other examples of focal topics (e.g., climate grief, solastalgia, and/or the loss of recognizable aspects of place and home). Consider the following questions:

What do these texts suggest about people and the places that matter to them?  
What do these texts suggest about the more-than human world? What do they suggest about the “natural” worlds?  
What kinds of literal and figurative “death” do you see in these texts?  
Why do you think the authors/creators chose these media for their expression?

*During this stage:* With the help of an educator trained in trauma-informed learning, consider introducing a list (like the one provided in the Activity Companion below) that can help further extend participants’ recognition of climate change and loss. (The San Mateo County Environmental Literacy Initiative provides [an excellent overview of environmental literacy and trauma for educators](#).) Alternately, engage participants in constructing their own lists of local climate impacts, documenting loss from their existing experiences or observations.

**Part III. Connections to Participants’ Existing Knowledge/Experience.** This step is designed to help participants connect potentially distant texts/examples to their lived experience to bring themes of *solastalgia* and climate grief into local consciousness. Facilitators might ask questions like these:

What kind of climate-related or environmental changes have you seen in your local environment or community?  
Whom do you know personally whose life, home, goals, or career have been affected by climate change?  
How have you noticed changes in a place that matters to you?  
What possible changes to a place you care about would cause you concern?

**Part IV. Re-Storying the Future: Engaging in the Symbiocene.** This step invites participants into radical reimagining and action planning. Participants can be asked to describe an imagined future—what might be possible in a particular place—through drawing/sketching and free writing. Then participants might list three concrete, tangible actions they can take to begin to build toward that future. Examples include collective organizing, political engagement, fundraising for causes, participation in mutual aid organizations, sharing of creative and generative work, or collective celebration of symbiotic relationships in place.

### Contributing to Folklore

Depending on how the facilitator defines folklore (see <https://whatisfolklore.org> for ideas), ask participants to engage in crafting, documenting, or making some other contribution to the folklore of climate grief. This may include story writing, drawing, mapping, dance, photography, audio recording, and other forms of permanent or transitory expression. Depending on a facilitator’s

theories of learning they may choose to be directive or open-ended about final product criteria. Examples of prompts and products are provided below.

Individually or in groups choose a specific type of climate death event to explore and represent through creating an altarpiece. Each participant collects artifacts, images, terms, and found objects to create a three-dimensional collage or offering that represents, memorializes, and/or celebrates the loss.

Choose a specific, local place to observe for 30 minutes each week for the next 10 weeks. Decide how to document that place over time (nature journal, sound mapping, audio recordings, photography, etc.). Create an archive of that place over time and provide your reflections on changes you observe and changes you anticipate.

Choose a place that is familiar and meaningful to you. Based on the communal readings/discussions we've had, imagine how that place might change—in big or small ways—within your lifetime. Create artwork or writing that engages with themes of death, grief, or destabilization in relationship to your familiar place.

Append or amend existing narratives. If discussion uncovers existing personal experience narratives and other representations of local change, update or extend those narratives. As one example, Old Crow Medicine Show's "[James River Blues](#)" captures a culture shift as river-based transportation gave way to railroad shipping. How might additional verses of this song further capture more recent, climate-based shifts in the area?

**Editors' note:** Another folklife resource to consider is [Louisiana Voices' "Sense of Place" unit](#). Two handouts from this unit can especially help students consider their sense of place and its relationship to culture and their folklife:

- [Cultural Perspectives on Place or Event worksheet](#)
- [Spirit of Place Worksheet](#)

## Activity Companion: Climate Facts for Discussion

The list below can help participants visualize, imagine, and confront diverse forms of death and loss that comprise climate change on a global scale. Asking participants to connect these examples to art, literature, policy, ritual, and other forms of expression may help them recognize existing folklore that addresses, responds to, or memorializes previous moments of local or more broad-spread climate-related change.

Vidal (2010) reported that the planet has entered a new period of mass extinction, with scientists estimating that 150-200 species of plant, insect, bird, and mammal become extinct every 24 hours. An International Union for Conservation of Nature report (2019) notes the impacts of warmer temperatures on endangered green sea turtles; because warmer temperatures during egg incubation determine the sex of the newly hatched turtles, females have accounted for 99% of hatchlings on some nesting beaches. This imbalance will affect population growth and survival in the future, since it means fewer male mating partners for this species.

Cressey (2016) described a massive 2016 coral bleaching event across the Great Barrier Reef, including a substantially impacted 1,100-km stretch; he projects up to 50% mortality on the most severely bleached reefs, with follow-on effects to fish and other sea animals that depend on these reefs for food and habitat. Such events result in the death of millions of individual corals (Hughes et al. 2018).

Regarding total global impacts of climate change on plant communities, one study (Worland 2015) suggests that overall growing days could decrease by 11% by the end of the century; the areas predicted to be worst impacted are already hot regions, where up to 2 billion people in low-income countries might be displaced. Alternately, reporting by Leahy (2019) suggests that a hotter, more carbon-rich climate will lead to dramatic plant growth in many areas—with the carry-over effect of leaving less water for humans, especially those living in mid-latitude regions including North America, Europe, and central Asia.


If climate change leads to the death of forests, dead trees will become sources of carbon being released back into the air; as the Canadian Invasive Species Centre (2021) notes, warming temperatures have contributed to the spread of mountain pine beetle beyond its normal range, leading to pine tree mortality on unprecedented scale in some areas.

Globally, nearly 15 million excess deaths have been attributed to Covid-19 between January 2020 to December 2021 (World Health Organization 2022). While the coronavirus pandemic is not often described in terms of climate change, Aaron Bernstein (Director of Harvard's Center for Climate, Health, and the Global Environment) explains that key climate change triggers also contribute to increased risk of pandemics: "Deforestation, which occurs mostly for agricultural purposes, is the largest cause of habitat loss worldwide. Loss of habitat forces animals to migrate and potentially contact other animals or people and share germs. Large livestock farms can also serve as a source for spillover of infections from animals to people" (Center for Climate, Health, and the Global Environment 2020).


Bernstein (Center for Climate, Health, and the Global Environment 2020) also explains that, as species move toward the poles to find more temperate climates, increased interaction among species brings a higher likelihood of zoonotic spillovers. Lustgarten (2020) further warns that a changing climate “is even bringing old viruses back from the dead, thawing zombie contagions like the anthrax released from a frozen reindeer in 2016, which can come down from the arctic and haunt us from the past.”

---

**Rick Fisher** is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of English at University of Wyoming. He also directs UW's Communication Across the Curriculum program, meaning that he values and promotes the use of writing as a form of learning across disciplines. He holds a Ph.D in Literacy Education and an MA in Composition and Rhetoric. His recent research has focused on disciplinary literacy, writerly identity, and student transitions to post-secondary education.

 ORCID 0000-0002-8080-2817

**Maggie Bourque** holds a BA in Philosophy and Theatre Arts and an MS in Natural Science Education and Environment & Natural Resources. An alumnus of the Teton Science Schools graduate program in place-based education and field ecology, her scholarship and teaching is at the intersections of interdisciplinary environmental education and place studies. As Associate Lecturer in the Haub School of Environment and Natural Resources at the University of Wyoming, she teaches across the environmental studies curriculum and works with students, faculty, and communities to explore the integrative and complex relationships among people and place.

 ORCID 0000-0001-5846-0200

### Works Cited

- Albrecht, Glenn, Gina-Maree Sartore, Linda Connor, Nick Higginbotham, Sonia Freeman, Brian Kelly, Helen Stain, Anne Tonna, and Georgia Pollard. 2007. Solastalgia: The Distress Caused by Environmental Change. *Australasian Psychiatry: Bulletin of Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists*. 15.Suppl 1: S95–8. [doi.org/10.1080/10398560701701288](https://doi.org/10.1080/10398560701701288).
- Albrecht, Glenn. 2020. Negating Solastalgia: An Emotional Revolution from the Anthropocene to the Symbiocene. *American Imago*. 77.1:9-30. [doi.org/10.1353/aim.2020.0001](https://doi.org/10.1353/aim.2020.0001).
- Campbell, Olivia. 2017. When Climate Change Comes for the Fairy Tale Forest. *Lithub*, October 19. Accessed July 17, 2022, <https://lithub.com/when-climate-change-comes-for-the-fairy-tale-forest>.
- Canadian Invasive Species Centre. 2021. Climate Change [fact sheet]. *Canadian Invasive Species Centre*. Accessed May 30, 2022, <https://www.invasivespeciescentre.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Climate-Change-Fact-Sheet-FINAL-WEB.pdf>.
- Center for Climate, Health, and the Global Environment. 2020. Coronavirus, Climate Change, and the Environment: A Conversation on COVID-19 with Dr. Aaron Bernstein, Director of Harvard Chan C-CHANGE. *Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health*, May 19. Accessed May 30, 2022, <https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/c-change/subtopics/coronavirus-and-climate-change>.
- Climigration. 2021. Lead with Listening: A Guidebook for Community Conversations on Climate Migration. *Climigration*. Accessed July 8, 2022, <https://www.climigration.org/guidebook>.
- Cressey, Daniel. 2016. Coral Crisis: Great Barrier Reef Bleaching Is “the worst we’ve ever seen.” *Nature*. Accessed February 7, 2022. [doi.org/10.1038/nature.2016.19747](https://doi.org/10.1038/nature.2016.19747).
- Davies, Bronwyn, and Rom Harré. 1990. Positioning the Discursive Production of Selves. *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour*. 20.1:43–63.
- Elder, Nina. 2019-2020. The Solastalgic Archive. *Nina Elder*. Accessed May 30, 2022, <https://www.ninaelder.com/solastalgic-archive>.

- . 2021. Death, Sweetness, Seeds, and Stones [newsletter]. *Nina Elder*. December 27. Accessed May 30, 2022, <https://mailchi.mp/c28fbc6c5df2/death-sweetness-seeds-and-stones>.
- . 2022. Inspiration and Adaptation: Art in the Anthropocene [photo essay]. *National Performance Network*. Accessed May 30, 2022, <https://nnpweb.org/nina-elder-essay>.
- Galway, Lindsay P., Thomas Beery, Kelsey Jones-Casey, and Kirsti Tasala. 2019. Mapping the Solastalgia Literature: A Scoping Review Study. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*. 16.15:1-24. [doi.org/10.3390/ijerph16152662](https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph16152662).
- Gorman, Amanda. 2018. 24 Hours of Reality: “Earthrise.” *Climate Reality*, December 4. Accessed May 30, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xwOvBv8RLmo>.
- Helmsing, Mark E. and Bretton A. Varga. 2021. Death, Loss, and Remembrance Across Cultures: A Role for Folklore in Education Call for Submissions. *Journal of Folklore in Education*. Accessed May 30, 2022. <https://jfepublications.org/for-authors/call-for-submissions>.
- Hughes, Terry P., James T. Kerry, Andrew H. Baird, Sean R. Connolly, Andreas Dietzel, C. Mark Eakin, Scott F. Heron, Andrew S. Hoey, Mia O. Hoogenboom, Gang Liu, Michael J. McWilliam, Rachel J. Pears, Morgan S. Pratchett, William J. Skirving, Jessica S. Stella, and Gergely Torda. 2018. Global Warming Transforms Coral Reef Assemblages. *Nature* 556:492–96. [doi.org/10.1038/s41586-018-0041-2](https://doi.org/10.1038/s41586-018-0041-2).
- International Union for Conservation of Nature. 2019. Issues Brief: Species and Climate Change. *International Union for Conservation of Nature*. Accessed May 30, 2022, <https://www.iucn.org/resources/issues-brief/species-and-climate-change>.
- Intersectional Environmentalist. 2022, <https://www.intersectionalenvironmentalist.com>
- Leahy, Stephen. 2019. Climate Change Will Make Plants—and Us—Thirstier. *National Geographic*, November 4. Accessed May 30, 2022, <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/science/article/plants-consume-more-water-climate-change-thirsty-future>.
- Leiserowitz, Anthony, Edward Maibach, Connie Roser-Renouf, Seth Rosenthal, Matthew Cutler, and John Kotcher. 2018. *Climate Change in the American Mind: March 2018* [Joint report by Yale University and George Mason University]. New Haven: Yale Program on Climate Change Communication.
- Lin, Maya. Ongoing. *What Is Missing*. Accessed May 30, 2022, [www.whatismissing.org](http://www.whatismissing.org).
- Lustgarten, Abrahm. 2020. How Climate Change Is Contributing to Skyrocketing Rates of Infectious Disease. *ProPublica*, May 7. Accessed May 30, 2022, <https://www.propublica.org/article/climate-infectious-diseases?token=NSp20wPlrvAdpWIFWb6cp-BfIWitJeY>.
- Matei, Adrienne. 2017. Nostalgia’s Etymology Explains Why It Can Feel So Painful. *Quartz*, October 22. Accessed May 30, 2022, <https://qz.com/1108120/nostalgias-unexpected-etymology-explains-why-it-can-feel-so-painful>.
- McNamara, Karen E. and Ross Westoby. 2011. Solastalgia and the Gendered Nature of Climate Change: An Example from Erub Island, Torres Strait. *EcoHealth*. 8.2:233-6. [doi.org/10.1007/s10393-011-0698-6](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10393-011-0698-6).
- McQuilkin, Hilary and Meghan Chakrabarti. 2020. What Disasters Reveal About Hope and Humanity. *On Point: WBUR Boston*, March 31. Accessed May 30, 2022, <https://www.wbur.org/onpoint/2020/03/31/rebecca-solnit-hope-coronavirus>.
- Ober, Andy. 2020. A Deeper Level of Knowing: Folklorists Tackle Global Issues. *The University of Arizona News*, May 27.
- Owens, Maida. 2022. Climate Change Needs Folklorists! [workshop presentation]. American Folklore Society, February 22. Accessed July 19, 2022, <https://americanfolkloresociety.org/resources/climate-change-needs-folklorists-a-workshop-with-maida-owens>.
- Petridis, Alexis. 2021. The Greatest Songs About the Climate Crisis—Ranked! *The Guardian*, October 28. Accessed July 17, 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2021/oct/28/the-greatest-songs-about-the-climate-crisis-ranked>.
- Ray, Sarah Jacquette. 2021. Climate Anxiety Is an Overwhelmingly White Phenomenon. *Scientific American*, March 21. Accessed May 30, 2022, <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/the-unbearable-whiteness-of-climate-anxiety>.
- San Mateo County Environmental Literacy and Sustainability Initiative. 2019. Environmental Literacy and Trauma: An Overview [handout]. San Mateo County Office of Education. Accessed July 17, 2022, <https://sites.google.com/smcoe.org/smcoe-environmental-literacy/resources/curriculum-andinstruction/smcoe-model-efs-curriculum>.



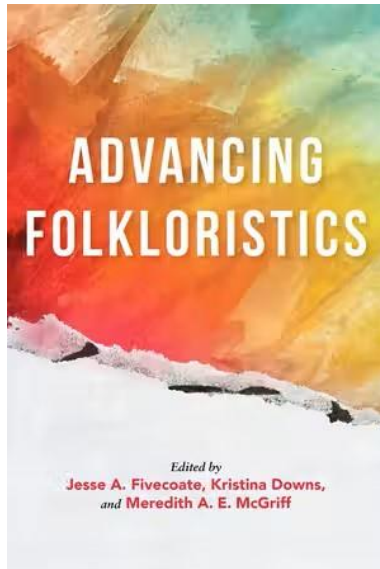
- Scher, Avichai. 2018. 'Climate Grief': The Growing Emotional Toll of Climate Change. *NBC News*, December 24. Accessed May 30, 2022, <https://www.nbcnews.com/health/mental-health/climate-grief-growing-emotional-toll-climate-change-n946751>.
- The Decameron Project: New Fiction. 2020. *The New York Times Magazine*, July 7. Accessed May 30, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/07/07/magazine/decameron-project-short-story-collection.html>.
- Those Were the Days: On "Nostalgia." *Merriam Webster*. Accessed May 30, 2022, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/words-at-play/nostalgia-word-origin-history-homesickness>.
- Vidal, John. 2010. Protect Nature for World Economic Security, Warns UN Biodiversity Chief. *The Guardian*, August 16. Accessed May 30, 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2010/aug/16/nature-economic-security>.
- Whitmore-Williams, Susan, Christie Manning, Kirra Krygsman, and Meighen Speiser. 2017. *Mental Health and Our Changing Climate: Impacts, Implications, and Guidance* (503122017-001). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association and ecoAmerica. [doi.org/10.1037/e503122017-001](https://doi.org/10.1037/e503122017-001).
- Worland, Justin. 2015. The Weird Effect Climate Change Will Have on Plant Growth. *Time*, June 11. Accessed May 30, 2022, <https://time.com/3916200/climate-change-plant-growth>.
- World Health Organization. 2022. Global Excess Deaths Associated with COVID-19, January 2020-December 2021. Accessed May 30, 2022, <https://www.who.int/data/stories/global-excess-deaths-associated-with-covid-19-january-2020-december-2021>.

## Urls

- Journal of Folklore and Education, *Common Ground: People and Our Places* <https://jfepublications.org/journal/vol-5>
- Nina Elder, *Solastalgic Archive* <https://www.ninaelder.com/solastalgic-archive>
- Nina Elder, *Inspiration and Adaptation: Art in the Anthropocene* <https://nnpweb.org/nina-elder-essay>
- Amanda Gorman, *Earthrise* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xwOvBv8RLmo>
- Maya Lin, *What Is Missing* <https://www.mayalinstudio.com/memory-works/what-is-missing>
- Intersectional Environmentalist <https://www.intersectionalenvironmentalist.com>
- The Guardian* <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2021/oct/28/the-greatest-songs-about-the-climate-crisis-ranked>
- Campbell, *When Climate Change Comes for the Fairy Tale Forest* <https://lithub.com/when-climate-change-comes-for-the-fairy-tale-forest>
- The New York Times Magazine*, The Decameron Project <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/07/07/magazine/decameron-project-short-story-collection.html>
- San Mateo County, *Environmental Literacy and Trauma: An overview* <https://sites.google.com/smcoe.org/smcoe-environmental-literacy/resources/curriculum-andinstruction/smcoe-model-efs-curriculum>
- What is folklore? <https://whatisfolklore.org>
- Louisiana Voices Sense of Place [https://www.louisianavoices.org/Unit4/edu\\_unit4\\_lesson3.html](https://www.louisianavoices.org/Unit4/edu_unit4_lesson3.html)
- Cultural Perspectives on Place worksheet [https://www.louisianavoices.org/Unit4/edu\\_unit4w\\_cult\\_per.html](https://www.louisianavoices.org/Unit4/edu_unit4w_cult_per.html)
- Spirit of Place Worksheet [https://www.louisianavoices.org/Unit4/edu\\_unit4w\\_spirit\\_of\\_place.html](https://www.louisianavoices.org/Unit4/edu_unit4w_spirit_of_place.html)
- Old Crow Medicine Show*. James River Blues <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gp0V5v7w4jQ>

## Journal of Folklore and Education Reviews

---



*Advancing Folkloristics*. Jesse A. Fivecoate, Kristina Downs, and Meredith A. E. McGriff, eds.

(Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2021, 223 pp.)

Martha Sims *is an Independent Folklorist*.

Inspired by presentations and discussions at the 2017 Future of American Folkloristics Conference held at Indiana University, the essays in this collection discuss and, in some cases, illustrate ways to build a strong path forward for the discipline and those who are (or are studying to be) practicing folklorists in public and academic contexts. Taken as a whole, the essays provide numerous explanations for why and how folklorists should carefully and consciously consider ways to shape the future of the discipline, with the goal of spurring a reimagining of the work of the discipline

as well as the presentation of that work beyond the field. How can folklorists amplify the unique perspective they bring to the study of cultural expression? How can folklorists productively collaborate with those in other disciplines? How can folklorists build on the ways they give voice to those in the communities they study to better support those communities? Each of the essays provides insight into the theory or praxis addressed. However, to fulfill JFE's mission, this review will focus on ways that the collection, including particular essays, might be useful in educational contexts.

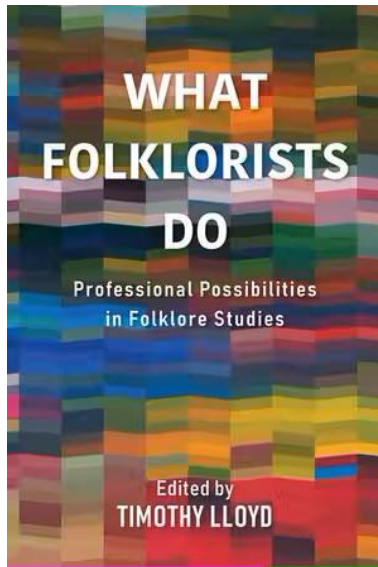
The opening essay, Kay Turner's "Deep Folklore/Queer Folkloristics," dives directly into the collection's focus with Turner's playful, engaging writing drawing readers along as she builds bridges between folklore and queer theories. Bringing in concepts from the history of folklore scholarship, she lays groundwork that could make clear, even for readers such as advanced folklore undergraduates unfamiliar with queer theory, the value she identifies in connections between folklore and queer theories. Turner nudges readers into the collection, where they will read more about challenges in the field's present and for its future.

The groupings of essays, below, suggest themes addressed in the collection but are not intended to be exclusive. Readers will find essays on work folklorists do (in public and/or academic arenas) by Hansen, Belanus, Guest-Scott, Wilson, and Addison. Also included are essays suggesting expanding folkloristic research and scholarly concepts, written by Rouhier-Willoughby; Thorne and De Los Reyes; Otero; and the collection's three editors, Fivecoate, Downs, and McGriff. The final two essays offer practical approaches for advancing the field, Shutika's from an academic-administration perspective and Kitta, McNeill, and Blank's from a public/social media perspective. Two of the essays, Andrea Kitta's and Phyllis M. May-Machunda's, would effectively fit multiple educational contexts.

Andrea Kitta's "An Epidemic of Meanings" describes the complex ways her experiences and beliefs have intersected with her ongoing research on vaccinations and how challenging it has been for her to manage her expression of those beliefs. The essay could be incorporated into an introductory college folklore course, an advanced undergraduate or graduate course, or useful as an introduction to belief and fieldwork practices for public school educators (such as those who participated in programs like the one May-Machunda writes about). In any of these contexts, Kitta's personal exploration of her position as a researcher, including if and how she has handled expressing her beliefs during fieldwork, would be enlightening, especially for those newly introduced to ethnographic research. For readers more experienced with fieldwork and familiar with basic principles related to researchers' interactions with consultants, the essay could serve as a jumping-off point for discussions of reflexive approaches to fieldwork and interactions with community members. The personal nature of the piece and limited use of jargon are features that would make it accessible to a variety of audiences. Kitta's introspection reveals questions about where researchers' beliefs and attitudes belong in the fieldwork process, opening up potential discussions of how and when researchers might deepen their work with their consultants.

Phyllis M. May-Machunda's essay will speak to educators and folklorists of varying ages and levels of experience, in particular those who are doing and/or interested in social justice work. "Culturally Conscious Collaborations at the Nexus of Folklore, Education, and Social Justice" examines a significant intersection of educators' and folklorists' practices. Through the essay's description and analysis of a workshop May-Maychunda and Amanda Dargan facilitated, readers will see an illustration of a powerful community-based project that provides a window into the value of folkloristic praxis in addressing issues of social justice in education. The essay has multiple layers, explaining the context and background—both theoretical and practical—of the workshop. Folklorists, graduate students in folklore studies, and public-school educators will benefit from a look at this deeply collaborative project. This essay provides an example of the meaningful work folklorists can do in collaboration with communities, especially important work in the current climate of critiques of and attacks on the education system.

Overall, the collection will be thought-provoking for practicing folklorists, as well as those teaching and training aspiring folklorists.



*What Folklorists Do: Professional Possibilities in Folklore Studies.*  
 Timothy Lloyd, ed.  
 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2021, 245 pp.)

Timothy H. Evans is Associate Professor of Folk Studies,  
 Department of Folk Studies and Anthropology, Western Kentucky  
 University

Timothy Lloyd, former Executive Director of the American Folklore Society, has assembled a valuable compendium of 76 short essays by folklorists, mostly North Americans, exploring an impressively broad range of professional options and careers. Most of these essays include career trajectories, describing the authors' background and education, and how they were led, whether through planning or serendipity (commonly, a mixture of both) into their own particular niches.

In the Introduction, Lloyd provides a quick history of Folklore Studies, and surveys its key ideas and methodologies. His description of Folklore as a "listening discipline" with fieldwork at its core, sets the central theme of the book. The book is then divided into four large chapters, each with approximately twenty short essays: "Research and Teaching," "Leading and Managing," "Communicating and Curating," and "Advocating and Planning." Of course, these categories are arbitrary (as Lloyd acknowledges); many of the essays could fit comfortably into more than one category, some into all four. The book's organization leads the reader from the halls of academia through various kinds of public and applied work, and into the world of advocacy.

Chapter one, "Research and Teaching," includes essays on fieldwork, library research, and teaching college classes, but also less obvious topics such as quantitative research, internationalism, and being an independent scholar. The seven articles on college teaching focus on teaching undergraduates, graduate students, community college students, teaching in an interdisciplinary department, teaching medical students, teaching writing, and teaching science; this list demonstrates a strength of Lloyd's book, which is the examination of similar or related topics from different perspectives.

Chapter two, "Leading and Managing," includes not only academia and public folklore programs, but such topics as non-profit organizations, museums, recording labels, consulting firms and diplomacy. Although being a diplomat or directing a recording label may seem very different from teaching college classes, the book reveals commonalities among folklorists, regardless of job titles: listening, educating, thinking ethnographically.

Chapter three, "Communicating and Curating," is the most diverse chapter, although they are all diverse. It includes essays on communication-related topics as translating, designing comics and other kinds of visual representation, editing, publishing, journalism, the internet, and theater; writing fiction, poetry, and textbooks; the curating of museums, libraries and archives; and such

public folklore topics as festivals and cultural tours. Again, these diverse topics are linked by the perspectives of folklorists: dialogic, fieldwork based, inclusive and accountable.

Chapter four, “Advocating and Partnering,” builds on the foundations of Folklore Studies described in earlier chapters to suggest current and future directions for the field. Many of the essays describe advocating for various kinds of communities: place-based communities, labor-based communities (and unions), regions, disability communities, poets. Many of them deal with politics and public policy, community organizing or social services. This section also includes several essays on working with K-12 education and educators.

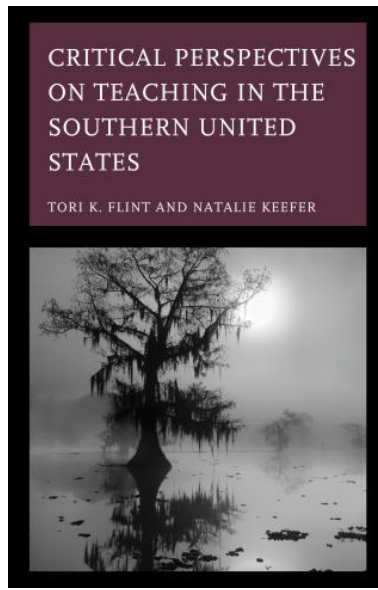
The diversity of “professional possibilities” and of career trajectories presented in *What Folklorists Do* is breathtaking, and is certainly an antidote to the “how will you find a job?” question that folklore students inevitably are asked. Personally, I was impressed at how much Folklore Studies has changed and expanded in the four decades I have been in the field.

Anyone reading this book will be more interested in some topics than in others. Inevitably, there is variation in the tone of the essays. Some are more personal, some are more issue-oriented. They are all highly readable, and, considering that almost all of them involve some element of career trajectory, most of the authors resist bragging about their accomplishments (although they all are very accomplished). Most readers will probably not read the book cover-to-cover – in some ways, it is more like a reference work than a unified collection of articles. But the shared themes of so many of these essays are striking: fieldwork, collaboration, dialogue, advocacy, education, cultural mediation, and most of all, skilled listening.

Although most of the essays in this volume deal with education in a broad sense, those dealing with K-12 education may have particular interest for readers of this journal. These include Ruth Olson’s “Collaborating with K-12 Teachers,” which focuses on the development of cultural tours (for students and teachers) in Wisconsin, Lisa Rathje’s “Partnering with K-12 Education,” which focuses widely (but succinctly) on working with artists and K-12 teachers in the classroom, and Jon Kay’s “Creating Educational Content,” which broadly focuses on the link between public folklore and education, including Kay’s own work with elders in Indiana. Many other essays, however, are closely related to these: for example, Nicole Musgrave on a variety of ethnographic, educational and advocacy programs at the Hindman Settlement School in eastern Kentucky, or Katherine Borland on connecting university education to community education. A great many of the essays in this book take readers into areas that are highly applicable to K-12 education. The ideas and methodologies of museums, for example, can be brought into the classroom either directly (visiting museums) or indirectly (creating a classroom exhibit); the same is true of ethnographic documentation (audio or visual), theater and stand-up comedy, writing, poetry, archival research, comics, and so many other areas that are touched on in *What Folklorists Do*.

*What Folklorists Do* is an important, exciting and accessible book that I would recommend to anyone with any interest in folklore.





*Critical Perspectives on Teaching in the Southern United States.*  
Tori K. Flint and Natalie Keefer, eds  
(Washington, DC: Lexington Books, 2020, 258 pp.)

Mary L. Sellers is an Associate Teaching Professor of English, American Studies, and CAS at the Pennsylvania State University.

For many, the term “The South” evokes ideals of grace and beauty, lush greenery, and sweet tea. While these images may be true, Tori K. Flint and Natalie Keefer’s edited volume present a different set of words describing the educational system in the South. This work highlights extreme poverty, racial prejudice, and a curriculum that overlooks those who have differing cultural backgrounds. While these issues sound disheartening, the authors provide hope to address these matters as well as thoughts on their own teaching practices.

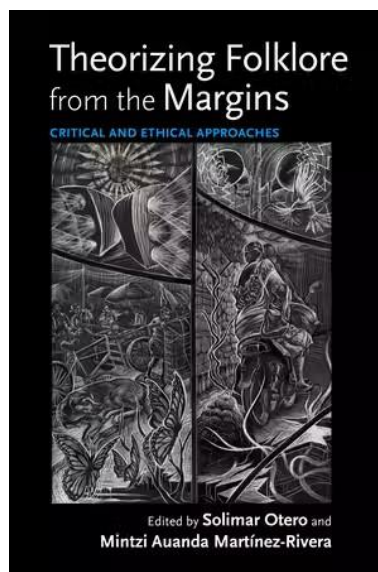
The book consists of fourteen essays divided into four sections: Sociohistorical Foundations, Reflections from the Field, Pedagogy and Content, and Borders and Boundaries: Language, Immigration, and Identity. The authors range in years of experience and classroom levels, from college faculty to middle school teachers, giving a variety of perspectives on the topic. These educators do not suggest radical changes to the curriculum but as Samuels and Haas said of those wishing to teach social justice, it is “not [taught] as a separate component...but as an approach that is ingrained in their daily professional practice” (36). While the authors suggest methodology and approaches that have helped them to connect with their students and make the content relevant and meaningful, these actions can be performed on an individual level. The book also presents autoethnographical reflections on being a teacher in the South. Valin S. Jordan posits that this type of “counterstorytelling...publicizes the marginalized voice for the purpose of understanding racism and Whiteness on the experience of people of color” (85). She and others in the volume reflect on their experiences as educators—but also as women, as first-generation immigrants, as Black—and share how their own lives enhance (or frustrate) their pedagogical experiences. The quantitative research presented in this volume, performed by educators in their classrooms, provides novel findings on student experiences and perceptions as well as the reactions of teachers to these activities. Throughout the book, the ideas of community, identity, and conversation for inclusion resonate, the key tenets of folklore.

Although the only time the authors mention the word “folklore” in the book is to indicate an erroneous belief about antebellum race relations (129), folklore practices and methodology are offered as ameliorative measures for many of the educational problems in the South. Bernard and Flint examine “unscripting the curriculum,” a reaction to state-mandated content that must be delivered verbatim, and they instead allow students to “discuss and share the ways that cultural traditions are kept alive in their own families” (61). An additional suggestion comes from Amy Samuels who discusses the blind spots students have in their own world views and how some students (particularly white students) do not feel they have a culture. She suggests that through aspects of identity exploration, students can realize the error of the presupposition that “dominant

culture is not culture, it is just *normal*” (77). Personal narrative serves as another unspoken folkloric approach in education. Watson-Canning noted how telling her story of 9/11 put the tragedy into perspective for her students in a way that no other methodology had.

Teachers also found success through the appreciation of community and identity. Matthew M. Green discusses community and notes that when teachers are “valuing the knowledge that students bring with them to the curriculum and allowing students space to write themselves into the curriculum,” (213) the subject matter begins to resonate with students as they see themselves and their identities as part of the American community. Butler and Spinoza reference the idea of *cariño* (affective warmth) as a way of “building authentic relationships with students and fostering reflection and discussions about their lives, interests, and stories” (193). Each essay, from Percy and Clabough’s chapter on teaching Southern politics to Bravo-Ruiz’s contribution on English learners, echoes the ideas of allowing students’ unique voices and experiences to shape the classroom.

While this book is more theoretical than practical in that it does not offer distinct lesson plans or classroom activities spelled out in detail, it does offer teachers a current perspective on what it means to be an educator in the South. This book serves as a needed overview of systemic problems in American education. However, the challenges faced by educators in Louisiana and Florida are not unique. Educators in Illinois, California, and Pennsylvania will find inspiring, helpful conversations surrounding pedagogical and classroom concerns that teachers across the United States encounter daily.



*Theorizing Folklore from the Margins: Critical and Ethical Approaches*. Solimar Otero and Mintzi Auanda Martínez-Rivera, eds. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2022, 342 pp.)

Julián Antonio Carrillo is *Curator of Education & Public Programs at the Maxwell Museum of Anthropology, University of New Mexico*.

As I write this, another wave of mass shootings in the U.S. continues to rip at the delicate threads of our already overstretched cultural tapestry, devastating trust in each other and institutions, and creating even more fear in public spaces and schools. Thus, this book, and other resources like it, should be the only weapons used in public and educational settings. I am referring to a “weapon” as “a means of gaining an advantage or defending oneself in a conflict” (*Oxford English Dictionary*) and as “(a skill, idea, or tool) that is used to... achieve something” (*Encyclopedia Britannica*).

This powerful collection of 16 critical essays takes aim at the myriad forms in which hate, violence, othering, disenfranchisement, etc., manifest in social life as the result of dominant power structures

*Journal of Folklore and Education* (2022: Vol. 9)

Journal of Folklore and Education Reviews

Theorizing Folklore from the Margins: Critical and Ethical Approaches. Solimar Otero and Mintzi Auanda Martínez-Rivera, eds.

supported by the “legacies of white supremacy, homophobia, misogyny, xenophobia, ableism, and other injustices and forms of discrimination” (19). It is these power structures, among others, that have kept certain individuals and communities at the margins. The “margins,” as presented in the book, vary by author and range from the physical (such as prisons) to the symbolic (as in the intersections between methodologies and ideas).

The book draws its inspiration and edge from communities at the margins that have been creating strategies to survive and thrive despite the abovementioned challenges using *cultura y poder*, or “culture and power” (19). These two terms signify a relational process and “work through each other in helping create individual and communal reinventions of the self, tradition, and belonging” (3). As such, the editors and contributors cast a wide net across multiple key themes, geographies, and sites to “examine the elusive yet visceral nature of the conception and experience of *poder y cultura*, by centralizing the epistemologies of the communities typically the subject of folklore studies” (3).

The result is an illuminating, moving, and reflexivity-inducing work that takes us into and through very different marginal worlds “among, and with, Mexican, Wolof, Native American, Cuban, Puerto Rican, Haitian, Martinican, Andean, North American, African Diaspora, and LGBTQI folk cultures and communities” (13). Ethnographic essays show us what it means for both subjects and researchers to live, learn, interact, research, and, of course, theorize, from the margins; others that focus on archives and disciplinary histories, for example, reimagine how to challenge institutional power most critically to bring to light the insights of people (in community, public, and academic settings) who have been silenced, pushed aside, or invisibilized by the dominant power structures already mentioned.

The volume is divided into four sections: ‘Critical Paths,’ ‘Framing the Narrative,’ ‘Visualizing the Present,’ and ‘Placing Community.’ “Each section engages with ideas of critical and ethical folkloristics and invite us to rethink folklore studies from multiple perspectives, from the concrete to the abstract” (13). Some of the skills, ideas, and tools that readers can expect to gain from these pages include many fine examples of reflexivity, as “[c]laiming a clear positionality and a reflexive apparatus is necessary for doing folklore critically and ethically” (18-19). Indeed, whether the book is talking about the margins of academia, or the margins of our own subjectivities, we find throughout the hopeful message that you can—and should—bring your full self into the research and writing process and engage the world ethically and critically with the tools, languages, lenses, senses, knowledges, and interests you already possess.

Also in the text we encounter the important idea that we should embrace engaging in difficult topics that often push us outside our comfort zones (19). Indeed, the “authors in this book touch on issues that most folklorists tend to avoid: racism, sexism, ableism, ethnocentrism, homophobia, elitism, violence, and regionalism” (9). However, they put them front and center and open them up, in dialogue with voices from the margins, not only to “share stories that otherwise may not be told, [but also] to experiment with format[s] and content [that feel right for each of us], and to (re)create, (re)think, and (re)model our discipline[s]” (19). There are also critical practical skills for fieldworkers likely not found elsewhere in folklore literature, skills that can help all, but

particularly women of color, defend ourselves and each other in the dangerous dominant social order. For instance, Mintzi Auanda Martínez-Rivera's chapter in which she speaks firsthand in an open, vulnerable, and honest way of the difficulties of doing research in a conflict zone in Mexico.

Ultimately, what the editors and the contributors of the book are trying to achieve is a more honest, reflexive, critical, and ethical set of approaches, conversations, methodologies, narratives, and histories to set us on "alternative paths that can enrich and strengthen folklore studies in ways that are relevant and necessary for the twenty-first century" (19). An enriched and strengthened folkloristics means a discipline that puts forth work that matters, disrupts the status quo, and creates a more equitable world, anywhere we are challenged by the most pressing issues of our troubled times.



*Engaging the African Diaspora in K-12 Education.* Kia Lilly Caldwell and Emily Susanna Chávez, eds.

(London: Peter Lang Press, 2020, 326 pp.)

*Kennedi Johnson is a PhD candidate in Ethnomusicology with a minor in African American and African Diaspora Studies at Indiana University.*

On September 17, 2020, former President Donald Trump announced that he planned to craft the 1776 Commission—a commission charged with developing and promoting “patriotic education” and “pro-American curriculum” (Donald Trump, “Remarks by President Trump at the White House Conference on American History,” September 17, 2020).

The commission was largely in response to 1) educators becoming increasingly critical and honest about the white supremacist, genocidal foundations of the United States and 2) the 1619 Project—an ongoing journalistic endeavor spearheaded by Nikole Hannah-Jones that seeks to “reframe the country’s history...[by placing] the consequences of slavery and the contributions of black Americans at the very center of the story we tell ourselves about who we are as a country” (Jake Silverstein, “Editor’s note and introduction” in the “1619 Project,” *New York Times Magazine*, August 14, 2019, 4-5). Trump and his followers viewed these approaches to American history as “toxic propaganda [and] ideological poison” which “if not removed, will dissolve the civic bonds that tie us together, [and] will destroy [the] country” (Trump). During his 1776 Commission announcement, the former president declared that discussion of race in the classroom likens itself to an imposition of a “new segregation”—a sentiment that continues to be echoed by senators and congresspeople, educators and administrators, and parents and students. In 2021, a slew of Republican-driven bills in many states were introduced to restrict the teaching of critical race theory—a way to think about systemic racism—and other discussions of racism. While a reactionary response to progressive change is the norm in this country, it is important for educators to continue to resist teaching our children an inaccurate and deeply flawed version of our history

that upholds white supremacist ideology. One such act of resistance is the recently published text *Engaging the African Diaspora in K-12 Education*.

Edited by Kia Lilly Caldwell and Emily Susanna Chávez, the volume contains chapters and curricula by K-12 educators, librarians, academics, scholar-activists, and administrators whose work centers around the teaching of the African diaspora. They aim to provide a text that considers how we teach the African diaspora at the K-12 level. *Engaging the African Diaspora in K-12 Education* argues that while the African diaspora is crucial in K-12 it is either taught inaccurately, completely overlooked, or reserved for higher education. This volume thoroughly addresses this gap between K-12 education and higher education by equipping educators with ways to competently incorporate issues such as U.S. and Latin American slavery, the Haitian Revolution, and the role of art in Black liberation into their curricula.

The book initially took shape in the fall of 2014 with the founding of the African Diaspora Fellows Program (ADFP) at the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill. The goal is to provide professional development around African and African diaspora studies to middle- and high school teachers in North Carolina. While this program reached and resonated with a group of educators in the state, there was an acknowledgement that this type of information should also be shared nationally—hopefully in the form of a book. Most contributors have participated in ADFP as fellows, speakers, or planning members. Together they offer a text that advances “educators’ knowledge of and familiarity with African [diasporic] communities” and provides “resources for teaching about topics and people that are often invisible or overlooked in traditional school curricula” (1).

*Engaging the African Diaspora in K-12 Education* is sectioned into seven parts. The first, “Slavery and Emancipation in the Americas,” contains chapters that address overlooked or whitewashed aspects of slavery in middle- and high-school classrooms. For example, Signe Peterson Fourmy addresses the unique and often neglected experiences of enslaved women—from sexual abuse and reproductive resistance to division of labor among prescribed gender lines. Like other contributors, Peterson Fourmy also provides age-appropriate modifications for subjects like sexual assault. Such modifications allow younger students to see the complexity of history in a way that does not rob them of a truthful presentation. The second section, “Pan-Africanism and Perspectives Across the Diaspora,” focuses on ways to think about the interconnectedness of the African diaspora through the exploration of Pan-Africanism, forms of autoethnography, and Black German Studies.

Meanwhile the third section, “Black Communities and Movements in the United States,” is composed of chapters with goals to correct historical narratives of Black folks and communities by humanizing the enslaved and engaging the idea of music as resistance. In “Challenging the Master Narrative: Teaching the Civil Rights Movement Accurately and Effectively,” Hasan Kwame Jeffries writes about how damaging it is to teach students about the false dichotomy between figures such as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and Malcolm X; the need to look at Civil Rights activism outside the South to paint a fuller picture of Black resistance; and the importance of teaching students about the power of organization for material change.



Section four, “Centering Afro-Latin American Experiences,” addresses the erasure of Afro-Latin American experiences in K-12 curricula through discussions of African descendants in Latin American countries and ethnoeducation. Section five, “Teaching Critically About the African Diaspora,” includes chapters of culturally responsive professional development, the use of critical race theory in thinking about Eurocentric curricula, the importance of primary sources in teaching the African diaspora, and ways to competently complete research in the “digital information age.” As is the trend within this book, Mireille Djenno provides practical advice on how students can gain access to primary documents, books, art, and more in “Bibliographic Resources for Learning About and Teaching the African Diaspora.”

Section six, “African Diaspora-Centered Professional Development: Reflections from Educators and Curriculum Specialists,” features perspectives from current and former ADFP participants.

Holly Marie Jordan’s chapter seems especially relevant during a time when educators are needing to resist misinformed desires to squelch discussions of race in schools. She writes:

Until our schools and society have abandoned the oppressive and whitewashed status quo, our classrooms must be places where educators and students together continue the powerful history of resistance that began in the African diaspora. As they develop, students must encounter meaningful learning that allows them to divine their own roles in the struggle for equity and liberation. (264)

The final section provides three phenomenal curriculum resource guides: developing and maintaining identity and resistance in the transatlantic slave trade, the Haitian Revolution and the Negritude movement, and how to approach analyzing activists’ texts from Abolition to the ongoing movement for Black lives. Each guide provides key topics, general questions educators and students could investigate, standards that align with the topic, and resources such as websites, books, primary resources, art, and more.

In a time when educators are finding themselves in struggles to our students how to engage honestly and accurately with our past, present, and future, *Engaging the African Diaspora in K-12 Education* is a truly timely book.

# Teaching with Ethnographic and Folk Arts Collections: Challenging History

*A Call for Submissions for the 2023 Journal of Folklore and Education Volume 10.  
Submissions due between January 1 and April 1, 2023.*

Alexandra Antohin, *Guest Editor*

In 2021 Local Learning received funding to engage a consortium of experts from around the nation to develop learning materials for Teaching with Primary Sources (TPS), the Library of Congress' premier educational program focused on helping educators enhance students' critical thinking, analysis skills, and content knowledge using the Library's collections of millions of digitized primary sources. The Local Learning project team offers teaching tools and materials that engage the digitally available archival holdings of the American Folklife Center of the Library of Congress alongside local and regional collections, bringing them into conversation with each other to create a fuller, more complex narrative of American communities, history, and people. **This special issue of the *Journal of Folklore and Education* offers a deep dive into ethnographic primary source materials, organized around the theme "Challenging History."**

**Challenging History:** Teaching hard history and topics that may engage unjust content.

**Challenging History:** Offering training and learning resources through oral histories and primary source collections gathered through ethnographic research to offer diverse perspectives for analysis and inquiry.

Core to this issue are the materials that the project team developed, tested, and refined over the past two years in classrooms, museum settings, and with community-based learning opportunities. Our project partners include the Vermont Folklife Center, Oklahoma State University Library, Oklahoma State University Writing Project, and HistoryMiami Museum. **We invite submissions that**

- Explore learning activities, framework articles, case studies, and research that demonstrate the value of ethnographic and oral history primary source materials in K-12 classrooms, with emphasis on their value in exploring Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) concerns through the lens of "Challenging History."
- Examine curricular approaches that connect original source materials and their interpretations (e.g., comic books as a secondary source) as a way to feature the complexity of the oral history interview as a record, present counternarratives, deepen the representation of marginalized histories and communities.
- Explore ways to adapt materials for English language learners and migrant educational settings.

Over the past 150 years, folklorists, ethnomusicologists, and other ethnographic researchers have created a unique, enormous corpus of ethnographic field collections unfamiliar to most educators. These multi-format, unpublished groups of materials documenting human life and traditions have been created, gathered, and organized by folklorists or other cultural researchers as part of community-based field research. Such collections are created works, brought together through the intentions and activities of the ethnographer, often working in collaboration with members of the community whose traditional expressive life is the focus of study. The largest and most significant collection of these materials in the United States is the Archive of Folk Culture at the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress, but similar, smaller collections are held by individuals, organizations and academic institutions across the United States.

**Why focus upon primary sources?** These collections contain irreplaceable records of the life of our country that will amplify curricula across disciplines and learning settings. They show, for example, the occupational culture of Cuban American cigar rollers in Florida and migrant workers in Vermont. They record the personal experience narratives and life histories of thousands of Americans expressing the significance of many of the most important experiences of their lives, such as immigration, courtship and marriage, birth and death, and wartime military service. They include one-of-a-kind recordings of music, from klezmer, Slovenian polka, and Piedmont blues to conjunto, bluegrass, and gospel. They capture the artistry of Irish step dancing, Puerto Rican bomba, Brazilian capoeira, and Appalachian square dance. They hold stories and images of bay houses on Long Island, sharecropper cabins in the South, and adobe buildings in the Southwest. They describe locally and culturally characteristic foods, foodways, and the family and community events of which they are a part. They capture valuable information about worldview and belief, expressed through cultural practices of many kinds. They are a repository of images and interviews gathered in projects to document quilts and quilt making, traditional boats and boat building, and many other material culture traditions. Most importantly, they demonstrate complex, nuanced perspectives on the cultures of the United States, providing vehicles for challenging long-held assumptions about the sources of collective American identity and providing opportunities for vital engagement—and for greater awareness and understanding—across the often seemingly intractable boundaries of culture, race, religion, and class.

The records that comprise these collections were created by scholars and activists whose perspectives are rooted in the ethnographic disciplines of folklore studies, ethnomusicology, anthropology, and oral history. Through these lenses, these collections are viewed less as concrete historical records than as evidential components of the ongoing, dynamic process of human cultural change. And although they do often reflect historical truth, they are valued as powerful reference points for understanding individual and community perspectives on memory, meaning, and identity. In addition, these materials are consciously created through the interaction of multiple actors—researchers, interviewees, community members—and reflect the perspectives and biases that influence all human interaction. The nuances that underlie the interpretation of these materials are often not noted by those unfamiliar with the processes that birthed them. As both creators and stewards of ethnographic materials, we hope this special issue will bring ethnographic perspectives to their interpretation, enriching the ways in which they are framed and taught.

**Guest Editor for this special issue is Alexandra Antohin.** *She is an anthropologist with over ten years of experience leading and supporting ethnographic fieldwork projects. She is committed to supporting educators and cultural institutions to engage in community-based, qualitative research. As the Vermont Folklife Center's Director of Education, she helps design and deliver learning materials for undergraduate and secondary school students and the general public on the application of ethnographic methods as a foundational approach to inquiry and ethical representation. Previously, she worked as the Research and Program Director (2017-2020) for the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation's Avoice Virtual Library Project, a digital archive dedicated to capturing Black legislative behavior in the United States Congress. Antohin completed her doctorate in Social Anthropology at University College London.*

We are grateful to our Advisory Committee for their input on this special issue:

**Michael Knoll**, Vice President of Curatorial Affairs, HistoryMiami Museum

**Andy Kolovos**, Associate Director and Archivist, Vermont Folklife Center

**Vanessa Navarro Maza**, Folklife Curator, HistoryMiami Museum

**Tina Menendez**, Director of Education, HistoryMiami Museum

**Sarah Milligan**, Head, Oklahoma Oral History Research Program, Oklahoma State University

**Shanendra Nowell**, Associate Professor of Secondary Education in the School of Teaching, Learning and Educational Sciences, Oklahoma State University-Stillwater

**Guha Shankar**, Folklife Specialist in the American Folklife Center, Library of Congress

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.*

**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 highly recommend reviewing [previous issues of JFE](#).

We encourage authors to contact the editors to learn more and share their concept. 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. You may find a citation style guide [here](#). 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. Contact editors at [info@ifepublications.org](mailto:info@ifepublications.org) with ideas for stories, features, lessons, and media productions. Initial drafts of submissions are due April 1, 2023.

*Journal of Folklore and Education* (2022: Vol. 9)

Teaching with Ethnographic and Folk Arts Collections: Challenging History  
Alexandra Antohin, Guest Editor

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 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**, Folkwise and Independent Folklorist

**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 Curriculum Studies in the College of Education at the Texas Christian University

**Monique Verdin**, Multimedia artist and author and member of the United Houma Nation

---

**About the Guest Editors**

**Bretton A. Varga**, Ph.D., is an assistant professor of History-Social Science at California State University, Chico. His research works with(in) critical posthuman theories of race, materiality, and temporality to explore how visual methods and aesthetics can be used to unveil historically marginalized perspectives and layers (upon layers) of history that haunt the world around us. [bvarga@csuchico.edu](mailto:bvarga@csuchico.edu)

**Mark E. Helmsing**, Ph.D., is an 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 considers how teachers and learners narrate and emplot different aspects of the past in our present. He also works within public pedagogy, historical culture, and vernacular histories to examine how people feel about the past and how the past makes them feel. [mhelmsin@gmu.edu](mailto:mhelmsin@gmu.edu)

**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. [pbbowman@gmail.com](mailto: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. [lisa@locallearningnetwork.org](mailto:lisa@locallearningnetwork.org)