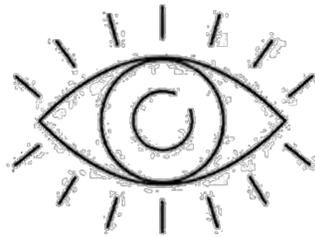


Teaching with Folk Sources



Listen – Observe – Connect

Teaching with Folk Sources
A 10th Anniversary Double Issue

Alexandra S. Antohin, Guest Editor

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Introduction: A Call to Teaching with Primary Sources

by Alexandra S. Antohin

For me, primary sources have long had an enduring appeal because of their direct link to people and their knowledge. In fact, helping create the conditions for people to share a piece of their lives is what attracted me to anthropology and specifically fieldwork that studied the “life of folks.” I wanted to play a role in the production of original research materials through extended observation and participation of local customs, and by having casual and sometimes recorded conversations with people who could share how they see their world. I also knew that this kind of learning required risk, vulnerability, and a fair share of humility. Anthropologists often refer to this engagement as a kind of “negotiation”—a give and take where the researcher is eager to learn and absorb, to ask questions that are not always comfortable, and, most crucially, to listen. Over time, I discovered that there were other types of researchers drawn to a similar allure. Ethnomusicologists, folklorists, sociologists, historians, archivists, and curators also treat primary sources as intimately tied to the process, circumstances, and people who share what matters to them from their past and present.

This volume is dedicated to showcasing a kind of research and researchers who seek to make direct human connections to documentation and treat cultural knowledge as a type of primary source. It also pivots around a term—folk sources—that is likely new to the general public. “Folk sources” are materials from ethnographic and folk arts collections that are housed in museums, libraries, historical societies, and other educational institutions. They can be photographs, recorded interviews, artifacts, recipes, music, and maps, to name only a few. Folk sources can also refer to the products of a researcher’s fieldwork, such as their notes, audio recordings, interview transcripts, visual media, and material culture examples such as textiles. Importantly, folk sources are an act of co-production and shared authorship between the researcher and the individuals and communities whose expertise and experiences inform a study.

All contributions to this issue present multiple compelling reasons for why educators should use folk sources in classroom settings. These collections are a wealth of community records and an occasion to get better acquainted with local histories, personalities, customs, and traditions. Williams and Hilliard present the wide array of digital materials available from the West Virginia Folklife Collection that cover topics such as foodways, music traditions, traditional artists, and local celebrations. They also spotlight a collection that documents the state’s 2018 teachers’ strike as a springboard for discussing local histories of public education, protest, and labor movements. The “bottom-up archive” at Ohio State University (Borland, Lovejoy, and Christensen) also profiles their folklife holdings and a collection of student ethnographic projects dating from the 1960s that feature students’ families, their hometowns, and local occupational life. The use of folklife archival materials is a dialogue with the past in ways that are direct and close. These two regional archives showcase that folklife collections contain diverse topics relevant to contemporary life and are repositories that are constantly being added to by local people, including students.

To engage with folklife and ethnographic collections can elevate lived experience as a primary source that offers numerous dimensions to discuss culture, race, class, and identity. The music education program Lâche Pas (“Don’t Let Go”) in Louisiana’s Vermilion Parish Schools (Vidrine) presents Cajun and Creole artistic expression and history, grounded in primary sources of song lyrics, instrumentation, and performance recordings, as a vehicle for teaching cultural themes, language, diversity, and music. For the OurStoryBridge program (Bartlett, Huntley, and Schwartz), crowdsourcing oral history interviews into short personal narratives is a conduit for students to orient to the idea that their perspectives are valued and essential, and “they, too, are storytellers” and creators of primary sources. The worldview of folklife education, as Deafenbaugh outlines, treats every member of a community as possessing “golden nuggets of knowledge” and encourages playing the long game: Observe the small moments of everyday life, pause to reflect, re-examine, form new questions and curiosities, and demonstrate the infinite qualities of human expression.

Folklife and the unique sources ethnographers generate can ignite critical reflection and sensitivity to the stories left out of the public record. The Black Diaspora Quilt Index (MacDowell and Furman) is an archival project that works closely with Black quilters and collectors to build out the larger social and cultural context of this folk art, details largely missing from cultural institutions. The Densmore (Lakota/Dakota Song) Repatriation Project (Swenson, Engelman, and Geist) positions Lakota and Dakota communities to engage with archival recordings from the early 20th century to recover and reclaim linguistic and artistic expression and practices that were historically criminalized. Engaging with folk sources means listening for the silences in the archives and addressing these gaps through actions such as record keeping, item description, keyword/meta tags. The use of folk sources, because they are closely tied to their human authors, can deepen consciousness about not only creating a more just and inclusive record but also how those individuals and communities are ethically and accurately represented.

At a time when teachers are searching for ways to navigate politicized classrooms, ethnographic and folklife materials offer pathways into themes and topics of “challenging history.” Because these collections are co-produced and co-authored by local people they chronicle life as witnessed on the ground, and are located (sometimes in hidden ways) in local and state records and archives, the facts of community history are part of collective memory, although not always shared. These perspectives come from past and present residents, neighbors, family, and friends one or several generations removed. To face historical truths that are unjust, painful, and contested with folk sources is a way to lift the filter of analysis and interpretation and allow students and teachers to listen and learn directly from sources that come directly from peoples’ lived experiences.

To me, a folk source is a provocation to recognize that every person, every group, and every institution have specific vantage points and positions they speak from. Some might call this personal or cultural bias. But I want to suggest that bias, when used reflexively, can be a useful tool. To recognize bias is an opportunity to inventory one’s assumptions and reflect on how and where one got them. What About Delia? (López López) describes how diving into folklife collections of Colombia’s folklore foremother Delia Zapata Olivella and creating a listening journal initiated a process of critical reflection—of motivations, interests, and curiosities and of the ways cultural knowledge is preserved and presented locally and internationally. This is among many powerful tools that can reveal one’s lens or position of

observation, and challenge oneself to listen for voices and perspectives in each cultural encounter, whether in real time or in the archives.

Learning with folk sources, therefore, involves a similar risk and vulnerability that it takes to listen to people's stories. To have the confidence and enthusiasm to step into unknown conceptual territory, to learn from strangers, you have to be aware about the limits of your knowledge and be brave about expanding your perspective. This is the paradox. While personally challenging, this learning is simultaneously liberating and transformational.

We are happy to celebrate our 10th Volume of the *Journal of Folklore and Education*! Offering a two-issue volume seemed an excellent opportunity to mark this occasion and highlight the growing networks of folklife education. As we first explored the thematic idea informing this volume, we named as a goal to expand mainstream notions that primary sources are historical documents housed in hard-to-access archives to include our vision of community, self, the past, the future, pedagogical opportunities—and, yes, history. What if young people saw themselves in an archive? Recognized their families and communities in a folklife collection? Grew curious about documenting what is going on in their lives? Explore these possibilities in Issue 1 of our two-part 2023 *Journal of Folklore and Education*, entitled “Learning with Folk Sources: Listen, Observe, Connect.” This theme was inspired by our consortium project Teaching with Folk Sources, funded by the Library of Congress Teaching with Primary Sources (TPS) program.

Issue 2 features frameworks and detailed lesson plans from the four TPS consortium members and their educator partners, organized as a Curriculum Guide. As we note in our introduction to the Guide, oral histories and ethnographic materials help present complicated issues and topics by comparing and contrasting life experiences, voices, and vantage points. Readers will find different ways that localizing knowledge connects people with one another across time and space through articles that highlight teaching with regional and national archival materials, from recorded and transcribed interviews to music, photographs, maps, recipes, and artifacts. The largest and most significant collection of these materials in the United States is the Archive of the [American Folklife Center](#) at the Library of Congress, but similar, smaller collections are held by individuals, organizations, and academic institutions across the U.S.—a point particularly evident in the Borland, Christensen, and Lovejoy article here in Issue 1, which includes a list of local and regional folklife archives and an invitation to add to it.

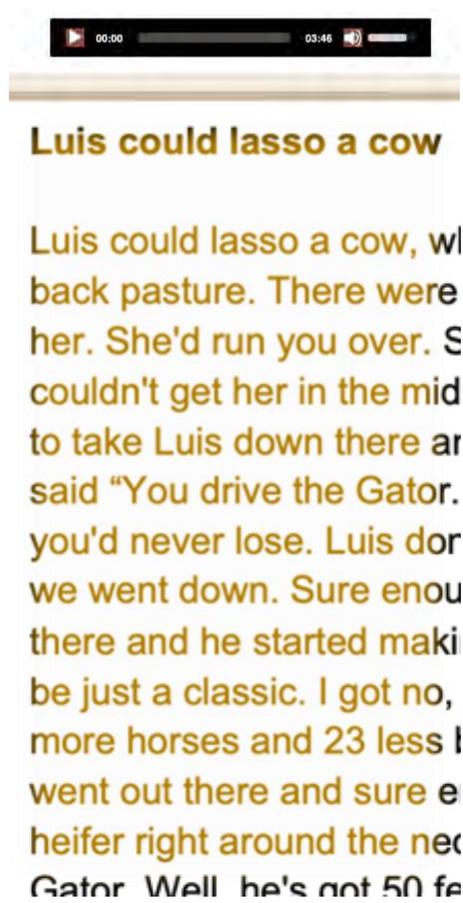
Ethnography literally means to “write culture” and uses interviews and documentation as research tools to learn information directly from our community members that might not be in a published book or searchable online. Accessing collections also mutually benefits teachers, students, and local archives. There is a reciprocity in introducing students to archives and archivists. Although they do often reflect historical truth, primary sources are valued as powerful reference points for understanding individual and community perspectives on memory, meaning, and identity.

Paddy Bowman and Lisa Rathje, Co-Editors, *Journal of Folklore and Education*

The Local Learning *Teaching with Folk Sources* Team answers: What does a primary source do for you?

Primary sources force us to complicate what we accept as the full story.

Alexandra S. Antohin, *Journal of Folklore and Education* Guest Editor



Anonymous Dairy Farmer
(Interviewee), Interview Excerpt –
Vermont Dairy Farmer: "Luis could
lasso a cow." *Folklife Primary
Sources Repository*,
[https://folksources.org/resources/
items/show/29](https://folksources.org/resources/items/show/29)

Primary sources allow us to think of documentation as beyond the reporting of information and repetition of established narratives and status quo thinking. They introduce the possibilities of comparison and contrast that highlight how events, memories, and values vary based on how they are experienced and by whom. They present the positive and negative sides of perspective. They can showcase bias, harmful representation, and partial facts. They also elevate testimonies, insights, and missing reflections. After all, how people make sense of the world is often personal. We are impacted most by what we can relate to. Primary sources force us to complicate what we accept as the full story.

Primary sources invite us to see knowledge as made up of many parts and pieces coming from different formats and directions. Ethnographic and folklife materials are especially good at this. These kinds of sources are mediated by the fieldworker whose identity and role in shaping the "collecting of material" is actively present. You can hear their voice on the audio recording, see them in the photos, read their handwriting in the artifact descriptions. Their presence shows us another truth about primary sources: The act of collecting is a form of individual selection and interpretation. Folklife and ethnographic collections are an invitation to continue to contribute to the evolving representation of everyday life.

These kinds of sources matter because they make the case that we all have a role to play, not only as interpreters of historical and contemporary details as they are passed down but also as key contributors in how these details are carried forward.

Primary source materials matter because they help us understand who we are as people.

Sarah Milligan, Oklahoma State University Library, Oklahoma Oral History Research Program



Burns, Joe (interviewee); Clark, O.G. (interviewee); Jackson, Mrs. G.E. (interviewee), Interview Excerpt – “Were you aware of what started this riot?” *Folklife Primary Sources Repository*, <https://folksources.org/resources/items/show/60>

Primary source materials matter because they help us understand who we are as people. We can get a glimpse into the perspectives and actions of individuals around us, whether decades before we were born or existing alongside us, which can help us understand ourselves today. Especially looking at ethnographic primary sources, we can experience direct conversations related to how traditions, communities, families, etc. have carried forward and changed over time to contextualize what we experience today.

Broad representation for perspectives in primary sources is essential to share an egalitarian history of a people sharing space over time.

Primary sources matter because points of view and perspective-taking matter.

Shanendra D. Nowell, Oklahoma State University, School of Teaching, Learning, and Educational Sciences



Booker, Kenny (interviewee); Alexander, John (interviewee), Interview Excerpt – “What started this riot.” *Folklife Primary Sources Repository*, <https://folksources.org/resources/items/show/59>

Primary sources invite us into the lives and experiences of people who lived long ago and to those who live today just down the street. They allow us to see the world through someone else’s eyes and to take in different perspectives. As a history teacher, I often teach students that primary sources are first-person accounts of the events we are studying. Reading the personal diary of a woman eking out a living alone on the prairie or sorrowful, yet hope-filled words of a Holocaust victim, these voices give students a way into the past that is not possible with secondary and other sources. As we teach students to think and write like historians, it is important for them to realize we are living through history. They are creating primary sources everyday with their tweets, snaps, reels, and poses on the gram, which may be

collected and cataloged to create tomorrow’s history. Their thoughts and perspectives matter as much as those we read, view, and analyze to understand eras of the past.

Primary sources matter because points of views and perspective-taking matter. We need to see and understand the world through others’ eyes, lives, and experiences to understand better who we are, how we got here, and where we are going. These experiences that focus upon point of view help us learn to talk to each other and to work together to create the world we want to see.

Primary sources allow us to be curious and may inspire more questions than answers.

Vanessa Navarro Maza, HistoryMiami Museum



Rojas, Leandro (maker). Artifact: Tres Guitar., *Folklife Primary Sources Repository*, <https://folksources.org/resources/items/show/45>

A primary source is an opportunity for connection and a window into the life of a person or group of people. Primary sources allow us to be curious and may inspire more questions than answers.

Most of recorded history deals in the triumphs and challenges of world leaders, royalty, the rich, and the powerful. Primary sources help us not only to understand these public figures better as human beings, but also to get a sense of what life was/is like for everyday people living in a specific place and time. First-person narratives, whether written stories or recorded interviews, are records of self-expression and contemplation that help us connect on a deeper level with the human experience. Photographs capture a moment in time and allow us to connect visually with the environments or activities of others, whether they are a neighbor or someone who lived hundreds of years ago. Objects are tangible remnants of a person's time on earth that can connect us physically to their talents, traditions, values, and so much more.

In engaging with primary sources, it is important to think critically about how we are all actively involved in the creation and interpretation of these sources. They are alive

and flexible. The processes through which they are documented, categorized, made accessible, and interpreted are carried about through human interaction. Personal biases and experiences inform these interactions. Some questions to consider when engaging with a primary source are: What are some of the layers of interpretation that are contributing to your engagement with that source? What are the descriptions or keywords that are attached to this source that may influence the experience of what you're seeing, hearing, or touching? Could this be described or categorized in a different way? How can bias play a role in assigning these descriptions or categories?

Primary sources also bring up important questions about how much agency people have in the collecting, displaying, and interpretation of a source of or about them, whether it is an object they made, an interview they gave, or a photograph of them. As folklorists, ethnographers, and museum curators, we make choices about whom to invite into our spaces, what objects to collect, whom to interview, and what to photograph or document. When engaging with a primary source, you may ask yourself: How much agency did this individual or group of people have in representing themselves? What are some of the choices they may or may not have been able to make during this process of documentation, categorization, and presentation? How could we find out more about what this person or group of people found valuable and important about this primary source? Does that information matter?

Primary sources offer access to diverse perspectives on topics that have significance for the hyper-local, yet can extend to deep global and historical connections.

Lisa Rathje, Executive Director, Local Learning: The National Network for Folk Arts in Education



Collins, Marjory (photographer). New York, NY. Chinese American girl playing hopscotch with American friends outside her home in Flatbush. United States, New York, New York State, 1942. Photograph, <https://www.loc.gov/item/2017835800>

Primary sources that come from ethnography and cultural documentation offer access to diverse perspectives on topics that have significance for the hyper-local, yet can extend to deep global and historical connections. Primary sources can spark curiosity and offer opportunities for inquiry. They can teach us new narratives about a time, a place, or an event. Primary sources can also complicate a story.

The process of ethnography and documentation provides tools for ethical collaboration and connection within communities. The products of this process matter because they are texts that are necessary for deeper understanding of ourselves, our many communities, and our multiple histories. Also, this is not just about the record for people who did not experience that event, that place, or that time. Primary sources save things for the community. People may have access to their own story that otherwise is lost or not amplified through formal education or dominant narratives. Youth pay attention to what is valued by society, and seeing a record of their community stories as texts that should be taught matters.

Teaching with primary sources matters because the critical analysis of these texts offers opportunities to consider significant topics in Social Studies, Literacy, and Civics, such as subject position, multiple truths, the complexity of memory, and the ways we need ALL of these diverse and sometimes contradictory stories to understand where we have been to better chart our future.



Now we ask: What does a primary source mean to you?

Noticing that primary sources come in many formats and from across time and place begins to suggest the many ways primary sources can be useful in teaching and learning. To see more from this team of authors and the Local Learning Teaching with Folk Sources Project, explore Issue 2 of this Volume of the *Journal of Folklore and Education*.

Content created and featured in partnership with the Teaching with Primary Sources program does not indicate an endorsement by the Library of Congress.

Journal of Folklore and Education (2023: Vol. 10, Issue 1)

The Local Learning Teaching with Folk Sources Team answers: What does a primary source do for you?
Lisa Rathje, Executive Director, Local Learning: The National Network for Folk Arts in Education

A Future from the Past

by David Swenson, Rebecca Engelman, and Troyd Geist



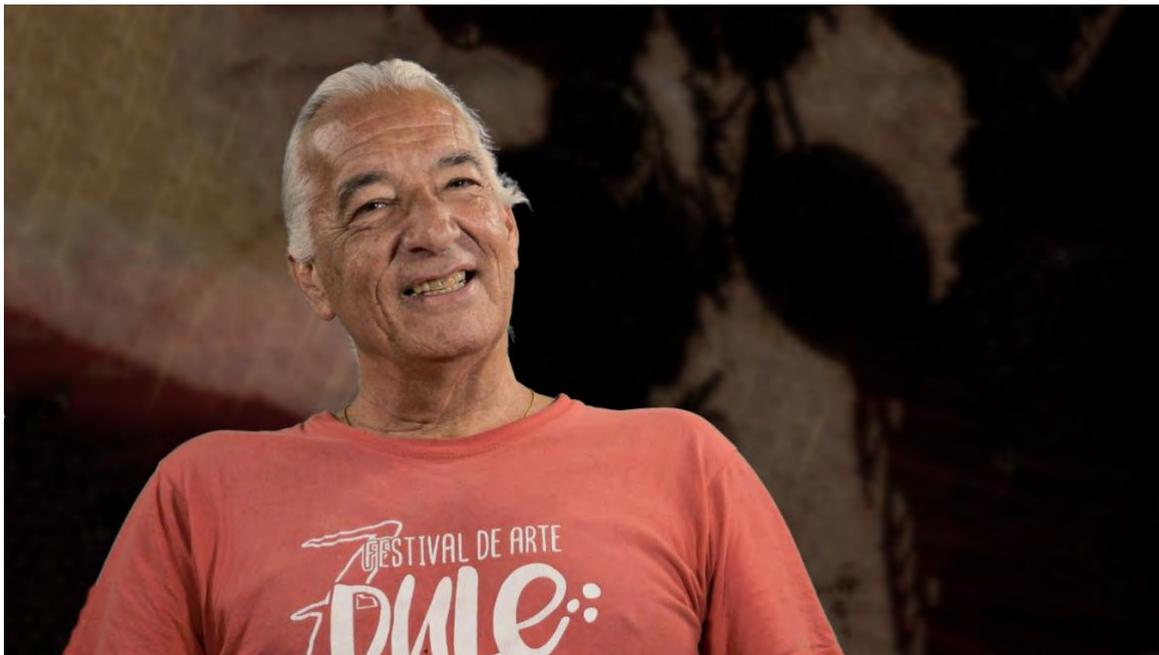
Frances Densmore playing back a recording to Mountain Chief, 1916 (Library of Congress). <https://www.loc.gov/item/2004667752>

The American Folklife Center, Library of Congress, houses the works of the ethnomusicologist Frances Theresa Densmore, including a collection of more than 2,500 American Indian songs she recorded between 1907 and 1941. Approximately 260 of Densmore’s cataloged recordings were made at the Standing Rock Reservation in the Dakotas between 1911 and 1914. These wax cylinder recordings made over a century ago are a voice from the past that still speaks to the Lakota people today.

Lakota culture embraces strength and family, power and gratefulness, and acknowledges the past while looking toward the future. Many Lakota value and honor the land, treating it as a living member of their own families. Their songs are about all these things. The music of the Lakota people is proof of a culture that survived despite all that it suffered.

Densmore’s work, along with other available ethnographic materials, represent an opportunity for reclaiming heritage and culture, and for teaching difficult or unknown histories. Teaching with primary sources reveals very complex influences—gender, gender roles, familial relationships, language barriers, language translation, changes in technology for good or bad, politics, and, above all, reclamation and hope for a voice to be heard—that shape and guide those very materials. These influences are revealed to great extent in the groundbreaking work that ensued with the original Lakota and Dakota songs Densmore recorded and with this current project repatriating the music back to the Lakota.

In 1993 the late renowned Lakota flute player and hoop dancer Kevin Locke introduced Densmore’s work to the twice-nominated Grammy producer and co-owner of Makoché Studios, David Swenson of Bismarck, North Dakota. Locke’s interest was in learning the old songs she had recorded, but he was having trouble understanding and transcribing the singer’s words. Locke



The late Kevin Locke, Lakota author, educator, musician, and NEA National Heritage Fellow, May 1, 2022. Photo by Dennis J. Neumann for the Densmore Repatriation Project.

impressed upon Swenson the cultural importance of preserving these old songs. In her book, *Teton Sioux Music*, Densmore writes, “The songs comprised in the first group, almost without exception, were recorded by men 65 to 80 years of age. This group contains 147 songs believed to be from 50 to 150 years old. The oldest songs, which are considered the best songs, were composed in dreams” (Densmore 1918, 22).

Locke described her work as a preservation of the “old songs of the Lakota people,” and described the recordings as “hard to understand” and “very old sounding.” He expressed his desire to get a clearer, cleaner copy and asked if Swenson could help. Swenson attempted to improve the sound using available technology of the time. Locke was kind in his assessment of the effort, but Swenson felt there was much more that could, and should, be done.

Swenson contacted Judith Gray, Head of Reference and Native American subject matter expert at the American Folklife Center, about purchasing a set of higher quality copies. He was granted permission by then Standing Rock Tribal Council Chairman Jesse Taken Alive to purchase a copy from the Library of Congress and received the digital tapes on November 7, 1996. His plan was to make an indexed CD set and make it available to the library of Sitting Bull College at Standing Rock. His initial work proved frustrating; the sound of the tapes was still very bad. Something just did not seem right.



Densmore wax cylinders from the State Historical Society of North Dakota collection.
Photo by David Swenson.

In September 1996 while reviewing the Densmore recordings, the actual transfer speed of the tapes became suspect. Swenson investigated further and eventually came to the reel marked AFS 10,582B. He had not recognized it before, but that reel contained several of the few recordings

Densmore had made of women singers. It was difficult to recognize the singers as women because the recordings did not sound like women at all. When he increased the tape speed by approximately 11 percent, the tapes sounded correct. After checking other masters in the collection, it became apparent the entire collection had been transferred to the current version of digital masters at an incorrect speed.



Hear Densmore speed correction examples:

<https://vimeo.com/816342039>

Swenson was able to verify his findings by measuring the distance between “spikes” or cracks in the cylinders and matching them to the correct revolutions per minute, along with matching the pitch-pipe Densmore blew as a reference tone at the beginnings of certain recordings. In his excitement and naiveté, he assumed this discovery would be welcomed, but instead, it met resistance. Swenson sent his detailed analysis to Thomas Venum, at that time Senior Ethnomusicologist with the Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage, and on November 22, 1996, received his response. Venum wrote that the while he could not vouch for the accuracy of the transfers, “one must be careful that today’s Native singers aren’t imposing their own aesthetic judgement when they say a song from 1910 is “too low, too slow.” Almost 20 years later his findings were acknowledged in the 2015 book *Travels with Frances Densmore* (Jensen and Patterson 2015). Judith Gray at the American Folklife Center wrote about the efforts to correct the speed variations, stating that Michael Donaldson, Library of Congress Recording Lab engineer, “concur[s] with David Swenson’s initial assessment that at least on the Sioux recordings, the lab’s recording engineers in the 1940s interpreted Densmore’s reference pitch as an A rather than the higher C she had, in fact, used” (Gray 2015, 381).

The Recording Lab has since corrected the playback speed. Efforts to replace incorrect collections at museums and institutions, including tribal colleges, are ongoing. In 2022 Judith Gray graciously provided Swenson with a speed-corrected copy of the Densmore Teton Sioux recordings. Correcting these recordings was a small return made to a living society. It is cleaning the glass to see the past clearly, and to learn from it.



Frances Densmore transcribing from her wax cylinders in 1915 (LC-H261- 6136). Photo by Harris & Ewing, 1915.

Frances Densmore

Frances Theresa Densmore was born in Red Wing, Minnesota, in 1867, just two years after the American Civil war ended, and five years after the Dakota War of 1862 in Minnesota, which resulted in the deaths of 358 settlers and 106 soldiers. After the Dakota surrendered, President Abraham Lincoln reviewed the convictions and approved death sentences for 39 of the Dakota men. Eventually, 38 were hung in the largest one-day mass execution in the United States. This is the nation that Frances Densmore grew up in, a society damaged by civil war and racial struggle.

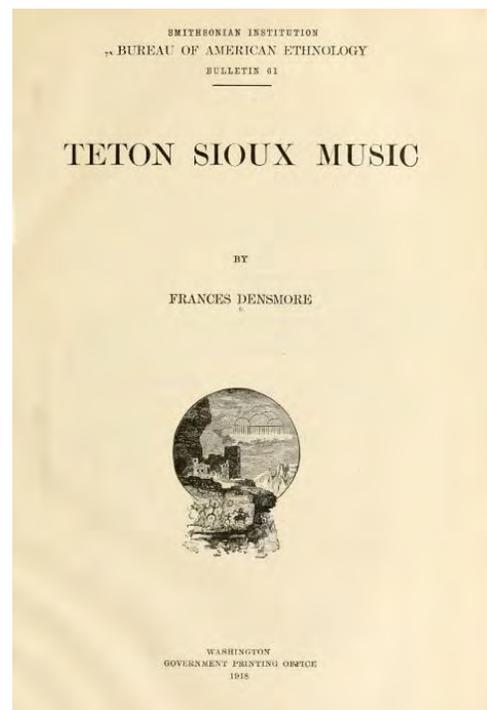
In her childhood home near the Upper Mississippi, she would lie in bed at night and hear the singing and drumming of the Sioux* people camped across the river. Densmore wrote about this in *Frances Densmore and American Indian Music, A Memorial Volume*:

Opposite the town, on an island, was a camp of Sioux Indians and at night, when they were dancing, we could hear the sound of the drum and see the nicker of their campfire. In the twilight I listened to these sounds, when I ought to have been going to sleep. Instead of frightening me with stories of war dances and scalps, my wise mother said, “Those Indians are interesting people with customs that are different from ours, but they will not hurt you. There is no reason to be afraid of them.” So, I fell asleep with my mind full of fancies about the “interesting people” across the Mississippi. (Hoffman 1968, 1)

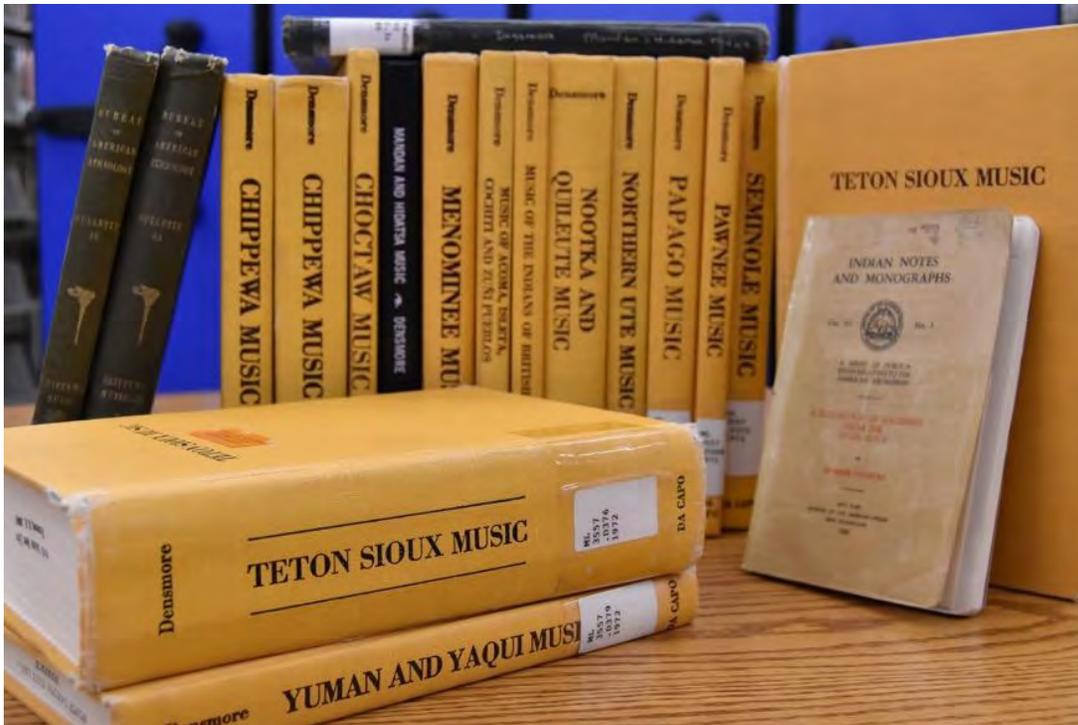
Years later, she would often begin her lectures with the line, “I heard an Indian drum.”

Densmore began working for the Smithsonian Institution's Bureau of American Ethnology in 1907. This was a time when the field was dominated by men, and she struggled at times. In her 50-plus year career of studying and preserving American Indian music, she wrote over 20 books and collected over 2,500 recordings of some 30 different tribal nations. Most of the recordings she made are now held by the Library of Congress.

Although some of Densmore’s scientific methodology now seems archaic, and some of her ways of dealing with Indigenous peoples questionable, it must be remembered that she helped to preserve Native culture when U.S. federal government policy actively pursued forcing Native Americans to adopt Western customs and forget their own. The tribes were confined to ever-shrinking reservations. Their religious practices were forbidden. The use of Native language was banned in “Indian schools.” Because of this, her work represents a somewhat unique occurrence of Western technology benefiting Indigenous peoples. Through one of her most substantial works, *Teton Sioux Music*, much of Lakota culture was preserved.



* “Sioux” refers to a confederacy of several tribal nations that speak a dialect of the same language family; those dialects being Lakota, Dakota, and Nakota.



Some of the more than 20 books Densmore published.
 Photo by Dennis J. Neumann for The Densmore Repatriation Project.

Densmore faced three main obstacles while working at Standing Rock. One was finding a suitable interpreter, and she found a more than capable one in Robert Higheagle, whose contributions to her work cannot be overstated.

Another issue was finding locations appropriate for her recordings along with finding qualified and willing participants. Robert Higheagle's contributions became crucial. Higheagle lived in two worlds. As a boy he was sent to boarding school and finished his education at the Hampton Institute in Virginia. Higheagle understood Densmore's methodology and needs. He was also a Lakota who understood the culture and guided Densmore to interact appropriately with tribal members. Higheagle knew how to find the best singers and informants and would ride on horseback for miles to connect with them and secure their participation.



Robert Higheagle, Densmore's translator and assistant, circa 1908.
 National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.



Densmore's office and recording location, McLaughlin, South Dakota, 1913 (LOC).

Densmore also faced the awkward cultural issue of being a single white woman recording the testimony and singing of tribal men. The origin of the solution is unclear, but at a council meeting in July of 1911 Thokála Lúta (Red Fox) declared his intention to adopt Densmore as his daughter. Red Fox had the right to do this as he had lost his own daughter and it was the accepted custom to “adopt” a new one. This made Densmore a member of the tribe, a position she exploited to her own advantage.

Densmore later wrote, “My adoption into the tribe will be of the greatest help in this study as it is widely understood that I am entitled to anything which a member of the tribe is entitled to...old men would not hold back anything from me” (Jensen and Patterson 2015, 81-7).

Frances Densmore died on June 5, 1957, at the age of 90 at her home in Red Wing, Minnesota.

The Densmore Repatriation Project

In 1927 Frances Densmore wrote, “Research work is only valuable when its results are transmitted to others” (Jenson 2011). This was the guiding principle of the Densmore (Lakota/Dakota Song) Repatriation Project.

David Swenson discussed his long-time efforts on the Densmore *Teton Sioux Music* recordings with his colleague and mentor, Troyd Geist, the state folklorist with the [North Dakota Council on the Arts](#). The original recordings are preserved and housed at the American Folklife Center, Library of Congress, but they are not easily accessible. Additionally, the cataloging system makes

it very difficult to identify specific songs for further study. To rectify these issues, Swenson, Geist, and several members of the Standing Rock Nation collaborated in designing a project and writing a Bush Foundation grant proposal to support the ease of repatriating and reintroducing Lakota and Dakota songs to the Standing Rock Reservation. Another goal was to provide additional cultural context to the songs from today's knowledge keepers and elders. The proposal was awarded generous support on August 12, 2021, with additional funds coming from [Humanities North Dakota](#) to [Dakota Legacy](#), Makoché' Studio's nonprofit arm.



Densmore's Columbia Graphophone wax cylinder recorder. All the recordings from Standing Rock were made using this machine. Courtesy Minnesota Historical Society.

While Densmore used a Columbia Graphophone wax cylinder recorder, the advanced technology of her time, to preserve traditional stories and songs, Swenson used today's advanced digital and video technology to help share and reintroduce the materials to the very people who created them. The overarching goal of the project was to reintroduce the songs and stories to the Lakota community and to make them more accessible for a new generation of Native singers and educators. The importance of this cannot be understated for two primary reasons.

One, at the time of Densmore's original recordings, it was illegal for Native Americans to speak their language or practice their traditional ways. The Lakota and Dakota men and women who sang for her were risking fines, imprisonment, or worse. It took bravery for them to do what they did. They did so, hoping there would be a time when the songs could be sung freely and openly within their social and spiritual structures.

Two, the songs are not just songs. They encapsulate the entire Lakota culture and way of life. These songs are connected to the history, spirituality, worldview, morals, guidance, health, education, environment, language, and much more of the Lakota people. When those are

forbidden, much is lost, and the culture becomes fragmented over time with elements continuing in what the Lakota refer to as their “underground.” It wasn’t until 1978 that Native Americans were legally allowed to practice their own religions. Repatriation of these songs is essential to that religious freedom and to making the culture whole again.

The sound recordings had been catalogued in numbered groups with no easy correlating reference to Densmore’s companion book, *Teton Sioux Music*. This made the study of individual songs beyond challenging. To overcome this obstacle, each song was separated and matched to the entries found in *Teton Sioux Music*. Swenson also did additional sound restoration.

Once the audio was restored and the songs matched to the book, Swenson and Geist worked with talented, influential, contemporary traditional Lakota powwow singers to re-learn and re-record these songs. Doing this helped make the songs more easily accessible and understandable. It also placed them directly into the existing, active, and extensive social structure of the powwow system, creating an immediate and widespread impact by putting the knowledge and materials directly into the repertoire, hearts, and minds of not just the powwow singers, but also the entire communities attending the powwows. In this way, the power and process of reassembling missing parts of Lakota culture is squarely in the hands of the people themselves—a community of individuals, not institutions. The intent was to make it possible for people to reclaim their culture regardless of institutional, financial, educational, or political access or hurdles.



Courtney Yellowfat. Photo by Dennis J. Neumann for the Densmore Repatriation Project.



John Eagle Shield, Kendall Little Owl, Courtney Yellowfat, and Spencer Little Owl recording Song 103 “Buffalo Society Song” at Makoché Studios in 2022.
 Photo by Dennis J. Neumann for the Densmore Repatriation Project.

Courtney Yellowfat, a leader of a Grammy-nominated traditional Lakota drum group, was a project co-producer and primary cultural advisor. He enlisted the help of other young Lakota singers: Jerren Elk, Spencer Little Owl, Kendall Little Owl, Khannie Tobacco, Kelcie Two Shields, Cody Wasinzi, and John Eagle Shield Jr., to re-record over 70 of these songs at Makoché Studios in Bismarck. John Eagle Shield Jr. sang the same songs his great-great-grandfather sang for Densmore over a century ago.



Densmore records participants in the Sun Dance. Photo by Frances Densmore.
 Courtesy State Historical Society of North Dakota.

The songs and their place in the culture of the Lakota and Dakota is complex and sometimes fragmented, and it was obvious that we needed the guidance of elders and tribal historians. A group of these knowledge keepers were interviewed about the songs, their meaning, and their importance to the culture. This group included two National Endowment for the Arts National Heritage Fellowship recipients, the late Kevin Locke and Mary Louise Defender Wilson, along with Standing Rock Elders Preservation Council members Virgil Taken Alive, Cedric Goodhouse, Evelyn “Sissy” Goodhouse, Thomas Red Bird, Terry Yellowfat, John Thomas Eagle Shield Sr., and Tim Mentz Sr. Their insights provided the foundation for 35 videos detailing the culture, the meanings of songs, and further information about the project. The work of this repatriation project, built upon first-source ethnographic fieldwork materials from over 100 years ago tied to first-source ethnographic materials from today, resulted in a dynamic effort of a Nation, the Lakota and Dakota, to further reclaim their heritage.



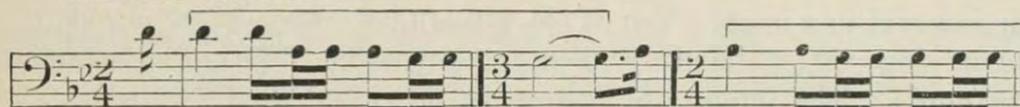
Mary Louise Defender Wilson being interviewed, June 2, 2022.
Photo by Dennis J. Neumann for the Densmore Repatriation Project.

The unveiling of the completed project took place on September 10, 2022, appropriately at United Tribes Technical College’s Annual International Powwow in Bismarck, North Dakota. Toward the end of the unveiling, Courtney Yellowfat’s six-year-old granddaughter sang Song 1, “Song of the White Buffalo Maiden.” The White Buffalo Maiden is at the core of Lakota spirituality and is placed as this first song recorded in Densmore’s book. Courtney taught his granddaughter this song and has been teaching it to other children in her class in the Standing Rock School system.

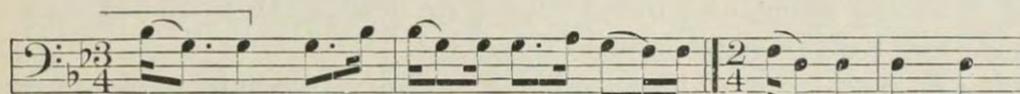
No. 1. Song of the White Buffalo Maiden (Catalogue No. 569)

Sung by CHARGING THUNDER

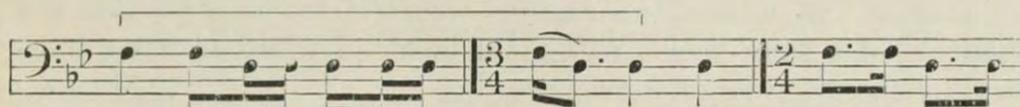
VOICE ♩ = 58
DRUM not recorded



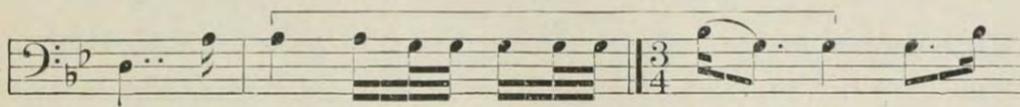
Ni - ya tan-in-yan ma-wa-ni ye ni - ya tan-in-yan ma-wa-ni



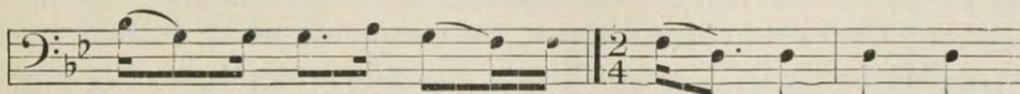
ye e e o - ya - te le i - ma - wa - ni na ho ho



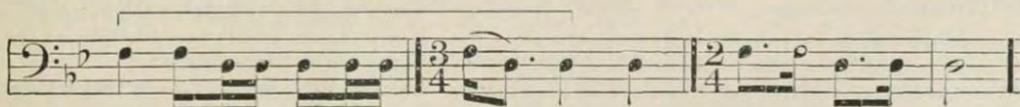
ho - tan - in-yan ma - wa-ni ye ye ye ye a ye a



ye ni - ya tan - in-yan ma - wa-ni ye e e wa -



lu - ta le i - ma - wa - ni na ho ho



ho - tan - in-yan ma-wa-ni ye ye ye ye a ye a ye

¹ The catalogue numbers used throughout this memoir correspond respectively with the numbers designating the phonograph record of the songs, which are preserved in the Bureau of American Ethnology.

WORDS

niya' tanin'yan.....	with visible breath ¹
mawa'ni ye.....	I am walking
oya'te ² le.....	this nation (the Buffalo nation)
ima'wani.....	I walk toward
na.....	and
ho'taninyan.....	my voice is heard
mawa'ni ye.....	I am walking
niya' tanin'yan.....	with visible breath
mawa'ni ye.....	I am walking
walu'ta le.....	this scarlet relic
ima'wani ye.....	(for it) I am walking

Educational Materials Produced from the Project

All the materials produced by the Densmore Repatriation Project are intended for free distribution and use. A comprehensive website to review these videos, recordings and other materials can be found at lakotasongs.com.

These first-source ethnographic materials fill important educational, cultural, spiritual, and linguistic desires and goals, first and foremost, for members of the Standing Rock Nation. While doing so, they reveal complexities and history that are often difficult and unknown to broader society. Efforts like this create space for understanding, healing, and conversation. This work will take place informally and organically within the informal cultural structures, such as the traditional powwow singer network or in ceremonies conducted by knowledge keepers, of Lakota and Dakota society.

These materials also have a place within formalized structures and institutions such as schools. In April of 2021, North Dakota passed SB2304, legislation that requires all public and non-public schools to teach Native American history as a requirement for graduation. Full implementation of this bill goes into effect in 2025 making access to primary sources and ethnographic materials housed in institutions such as the Library of Congress, state folklore archives, and other repositories critically important.

As a rich primary source, The Densmore Repatriation Project opened the door for the development of a unit of study to support the goals of SB2304. The resulting integrated unit of study takes root in the enduring/overarching understanding that relations between differing cultures can elicit both conflict and cooperation, and that music and/or other forms of cultural expression can be a vehicle for developing knowledge, understanding, and cultural appreciation. By cutting across subject-matter lines and emphasizing unifying concepts, students are encouraged to ask questions, make connections, and deepen their understanding and appreciation of Native American history and culture.

These 100-year-old and current primary source materials provide the foundation for the Densmore Repatriation Unit Plan for grades 9-12. Through these detailed plans that use Visual Thinking Strategies and other educational approaches, North Dakota Native American Essential Understanding, Social Studies, Music, and Visual Arts Standards are all achieved. And, importantly, through an examination of the Densmore Repatriation Project, important discussions can be held about unknown history and the varying forces that shape that history and its telling. To access this plan, go to lakotasongs.com and click on the “[Study Guide](#)” tab.

Outline of Available Educational Materials

- Information about Frances Densmore and her work at Standing Rock
- An updated e-book version of *Teton Sioux Music*
- Restored and cataloged copies of Densmore’s original wax cylinder recordings
- Over 70 songs from the collection re-recorded in 2022
- Thirty videos explaining the meanings and significance of the songs
- Eight writings for further study and lesson plans for classroom use
- 1,000 USB sticks containing all the above materials
- Website presence for the materials [lakotasongs.com]

In conclusion, it is best to reflect on the words of Ithúkasaŋ Lúta (Red Weasel), one of Densmore's informants. When Red Weasel gave his information concerning the Sun Dance, he was approximately 80 years old, yet he traveled 43 miles by wagon to participate. Before singing his first song (Song 14, "Song Sung after Raising the Sacred Pole"), Red Weasel bowed his head in prayer. Densmore started the wax cylinder recorder and captured his voice.

Wakǎŋ Tháŋka, hear me. This day I am to tell your word. But without sin I shall speak. The tribe shall Live. Behold me for I am humble. From above watch me. You are always the truth, listen to me, my friends and relatives, sitting here, and I shall be at peace. May our voices be heard at the future goal you have prepared for us. (Densmore 1918, 94-95)



To view the 35 videos online, use this link:
<https://vimeopro.com/makoche/the-densmore-repatriation-project>

Find an excerpt from the Densmore Repatriation Project Education Unit with Lesson one reprinted with permission from the authors below. The full unit, along with additional Study Guides and resources may be found at <https://www.lakotasongs.com/book>.

David Swenson, Executive Producer of the Densmore Repatriation Project is a twice-nominated Grammy producer and co-owner of Makoché studios in Bismarck, North Dakota. His passion for restoring the Densmore recordings resulted in this project. Swenson continues to work with other Densmore collections and hopes to replicate this project with additional tribes, including working with the Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara Music collection now housed at the State Historical Society of North Dakota.

Rebecca Engelman, Educator and Curriculum Developer, is a former Visual Arts Instructor and Arts in Education Director for the North Dakota Council on the Arts. An experienced program director with over 30 years of experience, she is highly regarded for her work as an educator and advocate for the arts. In 1999 she received the North Dakota Governor's Award for Arts in Education and in 2010 a Bush Fellowship from the Bush Foundation to support her development as a leader in the arts.

Troyd Geist, State Folklorist and Advisor to the Densmore Repatriation Project, is charged with helping promote the health and vitality of folk and traditional culture and arts in North Dakota through his position with the North Dakota Council on the Arts. He has worked extensively with Native American communities throughout the state including exhibits, recordings, apprenticeships, traditional culture and health, and special projects.  ORCID 0009-0009-6966-7616



Courtney Yellowfat and David Swenson.
Photo by Dennis J. Neumann for the Densmore Repatriation Project.



Ledger art drawing by Tesla Belcourt for the Densmore Repatriation Project.

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- Jensen, Joan M. 2011. Frances Densmore Gets the Depression Blues. *Minnesota History*. 62.6:216-27.
- Jensen, Joan M. and Michelle Wick Patterson, eds. 2015. *Travels with Frances Densmore, Her Life, Work, and Legacy in Native American Studies*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.

URLs

- North Dakota Council on the Arts <https://www.arts.nd.gov>
- North Dakota Council on the Humanities <https://www.humanitiesnd.org>
- Dakota Legacy <http://www.makoche.com>
- Densmore Repatriation Project comprehensive website lakotasongs.com

The Densmore Repatriation Project



Densmore and Mountain Chief 1916

The Densmore Repatriation Project is named for ethnomusicologist Frances Densmore of Red Wing, Minnesota, who made her first visit to the Standing Rock Reservation in 1911.

She recorded traditional songs on a hand-cranked, wax cylinder recorder and spoke with dozens of tribal elders. The songs she recorded, many over 100 years old, had been passed down for generations. Densmore documented this work in her book *Teton Sioux Music*, which contained additional stories and insights into Lakota/Dakota life and became a touchstone for learning about the culture.

This work of Densmore's has been in storage for over 100 years. The purpose of the Densmore Repatriation Project is to re-introduce these songs and stories and make them easily accessible for a new generation of Native singers and educators.

In 1927 Densmore wrote, "Research work is only worthwhile when its results are transmitted to others." That's the purpose of this project: to transmit what she called research work to others, particularly the people who it belongs to.

Lesson One – Setting the Stage

Introduction to Frances Densmore and the Densmore Repatriation Project



Image 1 - Frances Densmore and Mountain Chief
Commissioned ledger art by Telsa Belcourt

Estimated Time: two, 50–60-minute class periods

Lesson Overview: This lesson begins by introducing students to historical events surrounding westward expansion, namely the Dakota Conflict of 1862 and work of Frances Densmore. Introducing awareness of the historical significance and ramifications of efforts to forcibly remove the Dakota People from their homelands sets the stage for understanding the future impact of Frances Densmore’s work which focused on the study and preservation American Indian music.

Learning Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Use historical context and prior knowledge to describe and analyze works of art and primary source photos.
- Recognize and describe the negative impacts of western expansion on Indigenous Peoples, culture, and communities.
- Discuss and examine the purpose and goals of Frances Densmore’s work encompassing the study and preservation of American Indian music.

Materials:

- Image 1 (image should be enlarged and projected on either a screen or white board)
- Copies of Study Guide 1 – About Frances Densmore
- Computer with internet access
- Student journals, notebooks, or virtual discussion board site where students can share their reflections.
- Large chart paper

Vocabulary:

- Repatriation - the return of someone or something to their own country.
- Ethnology - the study of the characteristics of various peoples and the differences and relationships between them.
- Methodology - research methodology is a way of explaining how a researcher intends to carry out their research. It's a logical, systematic plan to resolve a research problem. A methodology details a researcher's approach to the research to ensure reliable, valid results that address their aims and objectives.
- Acculturation – Often tied to political conquest or expansion, the process of change in beliefs or traditional practices that occurs when the cultural system of one group displaces that of another.
- Sun Dance - *Wiwányang Wačipi*, was the most important ceremony practiced by the Lakota (Sioux) and nearly all Plains Indians. It was a time of renewal for the tribe, people and earth. The village was large, as many bands came together for this annual rite.

Learning Activities:

Part One – Day One

Activity One – **Setting the Stage** (approximately 15 min.)

Project Image 1 on screen or white board and implement the Visual Thinking Strategy

This image contains many clues and elements that will stir students' curiosity thereby enabling them to ask good questions and actively seek out answers.

- Instruct students to observe the image silently for two-minutes
- Following two-minutes of silent observation, open the discussion through the Visual Thinking Strategy (VTS) process:
 1. **“What’s going on here?”** Summarize student responses using conditional language (“Markus thinks this could be...”). This keeps the conversation open to other interpretations by other students.
 2. **If appropriate: “What do you see that makes you say that?”** This encourages students to back up their statements with things they see in the work of art.
 3. **Ask the group: “What more can we find?”** This continues the conversation.

Activity Two – **Background Knowledge and Introduction of the Dakota Conflict of 1862**

(approximately 20 min.)

Background

Following the VTS exercise, share the following information with students:

“The image you have been discussing was created as part of a historical project called the Densmore Repatriation Project. The Densmore Repatriation Project is named for ethnomusicologist Frances Densmore of Red Wing, Minnesota, who made her first visit to the Standing Rock Reservation in 1911 where she recorded traditional songs on a hand-cranked, wax cylinder recorder and spoke with dozens of tribal elders.”

As students begin this unit of study, we encourage you to create space for sharing information concerning time, place and historical events prior to and surrounding Frances Densmore’s research, in particular westward expansion and the Dakota Wars of 1862. For six weeks in 1862, war raged throughout southwestern Minnesota. There were many causes for the war. The war and its aftermath changed the course of the state’s history and descendants of those touched by the war continue to live with the trauma it caused. Viewing the following historical documentaries will create a foundation for understanding the significance of westward expansion and revolutionary work of Frances Densmore.

As a class, view the following video to provide insight regarding time, place, and historical events prior to and surrounding Frances Densmore’s research.

- The Očhéthi Šakówiŋ: A History of the Lakota/Dakota Tribes <https://vimeo.com/786725353> (running time 6:39)

If time remains, the following videos may also be viewed as a class or independently.

- U.S.-Dakota War - War <https://youtu.be/Y1uwsqT2Kkc> (approximately 3 min.)
- Internment <https://youtu.be/BS-Gelkjhghg> (approximately 3 min.)
- U.S.-Dakota War – Aftermath <https://youtu.be/-sm1ITspWig> (approximately 3 min.)

Activity Three - Think, Pair, Share Activity (approximately 10 -15 min.)

1. **THINK:** Have students reflect on the following question and record their response in their journals, notebooks, or virtual discussion board site:
 - *Who were the Sioux tribes and where did they live prior to westward expansion?*
 - *How did westward expansion and the Dakota War of 1862 impact Indigenous peoples and their communities?*
2. **PAIR:** Have students pair up and share their responses.
3. **SHARE:** When the larger group reconvenes, ask pairs to report back on their conversations. Alternatively, you could ask students to share what their partner said. In this way, the strategy focuses on students’ skills as careful listeners.
4. **LIST:** List responses to this question on large chart paper and save as a review and/or refresher for part two.

Part Two – Day Two

Before you begin, review the question and responses created during previous day’s Think, Pair, Share. Ask students if they have more to share or would like to add more to the list.

Activity Four - Read Study Guide 1 – About Frances Densmore (approximately 5 min.)

- Ask students if they have more to share or would like to add more to the list.

- Ask students to read Study Topic 1. This may be done independently or as a class.

Activity Five – Video: The Densmore Repatriation Project (approximately 17 min.)

- View at <https://vimeo.com/730825306> or <https://youtu.be/iCcEnzzEXTw>

Activity Six – Think, Pair, Share Activity (approximately 15 -20 min.)

1. **THINK:** Have students reflect on the following questions and record responses in their journals, notebooks, or virtual discussion board site:
 - *How/why did acculturation take place?*
 - *Why was music so important to Indigenous Cultures?*
 - *What made Frances Densmore’s research so extraordinary?*
 - *What challenges did she face?*
2. **PAIR:** Have students pair up and share their responses.
3. **SHARE:** When the larger group reconvenes, ask pairs to report back on their conversations. Alternatively, you could ask students to share what their partner said. In this way, the strategy focuses on students’ skills as careful listeners.
4. **LIST:** List responses to these questions on large chart paper and save as a review and/or refresher for lesson two.

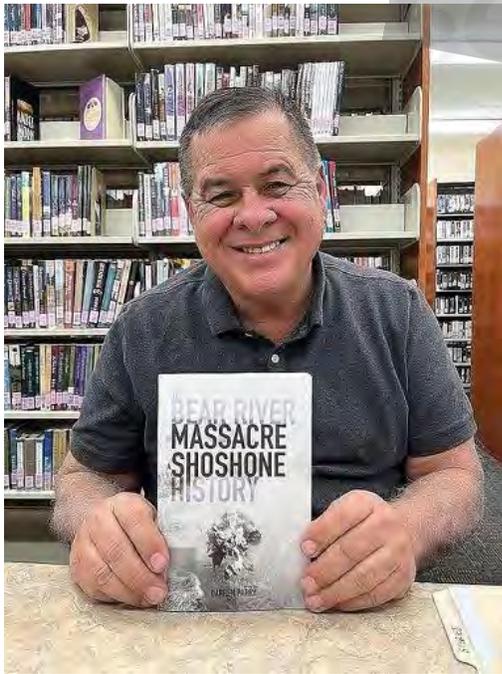
Lesson Extension:

- The Sun Dance <https://vimeo.com/786099379> The meaning and history of The Sun Dance
- The Dakota Conflict <https://video.tpt.org/video/tpt-documentaries-dakota-conflict/> Explores the causes, events and aftermath of the fierce fighting that broke out in 1862 between Minnesota’s white European settlers and the native people of the state.

OurStoryBridge

Expanding the Role of Primary Sources in the Classroom

by Kelly Bartlett, Jery Y. Huntley, and Janelle A. Schwartz



“History and Perspective,” by Darren Parry in Tremonton, Utah. All photos courtesy of the authors.

For thousands of years tribal elders would sit down with the children and tell them stories. The stories were always the same, there was never a word out of place. It had to be that way, it had to be accurate.

Darren Parry, author of “History and Perspective” and former Chairman of the Northwestern Band of the Shoshone Nation

In this story collected and shared as part of the [OurStoryBridge](#) online short-form oral history project from the Tremonton City Library in Tremonton, Utah, Parry recalls learning Shoshone history and culture from stories that his grandmother, Mae Timbimboo, told him. Parry recounts his excitement in elementary school when he heard that Shoshone history would be an upcoming topic. But Parry’s delight turned to shock and concern when none of the stories his grandmother taught him, such as how the coyote stole fire or how the eagle became bald, were mentioned in his class. Instead, this rich heritage was narrowed down to the events of the Bear River Massacre, the largest mass murder of Native Americans by U.S. Army forces in the American West.

Growing up, Parry “always believed that historical events were an absolute that transpired over time and had one conclusion.” So he wondered why his grandmother’s stories, the ones passed between the Shoshone people for generations, had been left out of the classroom and kept from his peers. It was through his confusion that Parry came to recognize history’s reliance on perspective. Rather than being definitive, history falls prey to the loudest voice or so-called victor in the narrative, and the classroom became another place where the tactics of the U.S. military overwrote the vibrant and rich Indigenous history of the land and its peoples.

In just over three minutes, Parry’s captivating story encourages listeners to ask tough questions: Who gets to write history? Which voices are represented over those that are absent, even silenced? The conflicting realities Parry faced in his classroom are, of course, still present today as students and teachers navigate the hard histories of race, culture, identity, equity, access, and other

formative topics of diversity. In fact, his story brushes up against the topic of archival silences frequently discussed in the field of Information Science. [Archival silence](#), as defined by the Society of American Archivists, can best be understood as a gap, intentional or not, within the historic record that, because of its absence, can result in distortion or misrepresentation of the past. Parry's classmates learned the events of January 29, 1863, from one perspective without being given the tools to consider the full scope of the circumstances, actors, and results to examine the history of that day properly. By not including Indigenous voices in the lesson, students without a personal connection to the Shoshone people gained no greater grasp of the Shoshone life and history in Utah than the events of the Bear River Massacre. The resulting historical perspective is forced, effectively leaving the larger historical lens that Parry himself represented to go unacknowledged.

Consider, then, how much greater the impact of this lesson would have been if, for example, the stories from Parry's grandmother had been included. What depths of understanding, curiosity, respect, and inclusion could have been created for Parry and his classmates? The consideration of diverse perspectives from a variety of voices should be fundamental to the educational process. Being able to access multiple viewpoints through previously unheard primary source material can be of substantial educational value; such resources can help to unmute the silences in the documentary record. Using the OurStoryBridge methodology, which targets short-form, digital oral histories made freely accessible on any device, Parry's story along with over 750 others to date have been collected and shared online (with more added regularly) and are available free to classrooms across the country in an effort to do just that.



Ellen Rocco, "Young People Make Change," in Freedom Story Project.

OurStoryBridge: Connecting the Past and the Present is a 501(c)(3) charitable nonprofit that supports crowdsourced community story projects emphasizing audio history collecting and sharing in three- to five-minute personal narratives with scrolling photographs. Founded in 2020 and incorporated in 2022, OurStoryBridge has the threefold mission to be a resource and toolkit for OurStoryBridge projects that preserve and circulate local audio stories past and present through accessible online media; to promote, build, and assist with the deployment of these resources in communities across geographic, cultural, socioeconomic, racial, and organizational strata; and to help strengthen these communities through sharing of their stories, including preserving the stories of older generations before they are lost and encouraging younger

generations to become engaged community members. These tool kit resources are made freely available online to all those who are interested, as the vision of OurStoryBridge is to empower community members to cultivate connections across the generations, encourage civic engagement, celebrate diversity, and engender shared and durable kindness.

OurStoryBridge has supported the release of 22 story projects across 11 states in five languages, from Vermont to Alaska. When a new story project launches, the voices of each unique community present a healthy resource of primary audio and visual materials that enhance and enrich the community’s historical record—for community members themselves, for those beyond their borders, and in classrooms near and far. With stories provided and collected by community volunteers, this local participation yields and shares ample, representative voices. In line with the OurStoryBridge objective to encourage younger generations to become more engaged community members, we recommend [Memria](#), an online audio collecting platform, to upload stories that can be embedded on each community’s individual website, making these stories easily accessible for general engagement online and for directed classroom use. For increased access, Memria provides shareable links; direct posting to social media; and free, downloadable audio streaming transcriptions of every story into 13 languages. Additionally, communities and individuals maintain the creative control to tell their own stories, thereby honoring the authenticity of their intimate voices and collective cultures.

To assist with bringing this multidisciplinary, multi-topic, and participatory archive into classrooms nationwide, OurStoryBridge created a free *Teacher’s Guide*. Now in its third online edition, kept up-to-date by volunteer educators and students, it catalogs all the stories collected and shared using the OurStoryBridge methodology. It grew out of a desire to connect educators to resources that capture student interest, inspire classroom discussion, enhance critical thinking, and provide structure and guidance for creating lesson plans using archival primary source material. Six documents comprise the [Teacher’s Guide](#): How-To Guide, Sample School Assignments, School Story Project Protocol, Story Summaries, DEI Stories, and Story Selection Chart.



Tommy Biesemeyer, “Olympic Dream Fulfilled,” in Adirondack Community.

Each story in the guide features a synopsis, the story number, title, storyteller, and a hyperlink to the story. Associated tags in the Story Summaries and Story Selection Chart help educators find a narrative that suits the day’s lesson. These categories should not be viewed as rigid, given the relevance of all OurStoryBridge narratives for primary, secondary, and university classroom integration. For example, stories like Tommy Biesemeyer’s “[Olympic Dream Fulfilled](#),” which documents the perspective of an Olympian ski racer’s successes, setbacks, and community, is tagged for the elementary level. But this story can also be broadly accessed across age groups and disciplines, including U.S. History, English Language Arts, and Sports Education.

Brad Hurlburt, a Social Studies teacher for grades 9–12 at Keene Central School in Keene Valley, New York, notes the value of the *Teacher's Guide* and the stories to spark classroom discussion: “Tommy Biesemeyer was one of our Keene Central School students. When we play [his story] in the classroom, the students learn about persistence, testing their athletic abilities, family support, and how even giants are human.” Biesemeyer’s short oral history recording demonstrates the power of stories to relay ideas not always easy to convey in conventional or textbook classroom lessons. Such first-person, primary source narratives presented through audiovisual content help build connections for students between classroom learning, their community, and real-world events past and present. They provide “valuable firsthand historical knowledge, including models of local civic engagement,” says Brad Hurlburt. This approach to sharing community-sourced stories in the classroom can lead to interdisciplinary discussions that expand students’ understanding and open up a more complex construction of history.

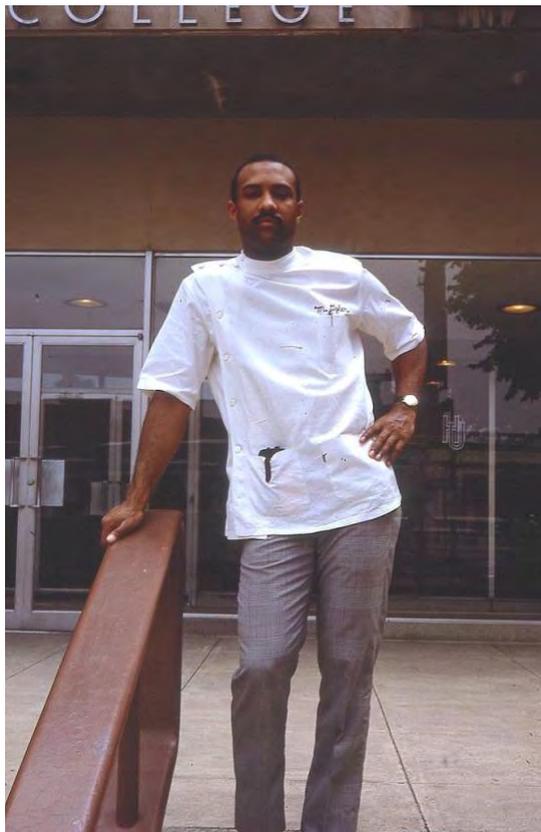
Breaking down the structure of the *Teacher's Guide* demonstrates its useful properties for the classroom.

The **How-To Guide** defines OurStoryBridge and articulates the context for its use by answering the questions, Why should I use these stories in my classroom? and What do these stories add to current resources?

The [Story Selection Chart](#) and [Story Summaries](#) list every narrative collected by OurStoryBridge, organized by story project and sorted by categories and academic disciplines or teaching topics. Each story is presented by title, with a brief summary and hyperlink for quick access. Information in the Story Selection Chart is designed for middle- and high-school classes, while other learning levels, including university or elementary levels, can be easily found in Story Summaries. Educators can visit the Story Selection Chart to find narratives appropriate to many subject areas, including Social Studies, STEM, and English Language Arts. This same method applies for the Story Summaries section, which provides tags to locate a story and its hyperlink to click to listen.

The How-To Guide, Sample School Assignment, and School Story Projects Protocol walk educators through four methods for adding stories to their lessons—assign, present, suggest, and guide—giving details on using relevant stories to facilitate or add nuance to class discussions and offering suggestions for activities and homework that integrate the stories. OurStoryBridge encourages educators to play brief oral histories in the classroom as well as assign stories for homework and guide students toward specific stories that they can relate to upcoming activities or projects. One example is “[Meeting John & Mary Brown, Abolitionists](#),” by Greg Artzner and Terry Leonino, better known as the musical duo Magpie. Together they recount teaching audiences about the lives of historic figures such as John Brown and Harriet Tubman through music and theater. This story can be included for discussion in classes relating to U.S. History, Music, Philosophy, and more. OurStoryBridge stories can also be used to present or introduce a topic, make a concept memorable, or stimulate further discussion. Two more examples among hundreds include “[The Underground Railroad in the North Country](#),” by Jackie Madison, which details how the routes of the Underground Railroad in Upstate New York and Vermont have been used from the 19th century to the present, and “[Lake Placid & the 1980 Olympics](#),” by Jim Rogers, which discusses the challenges of a

small, rural town in the Adirondack Mountains hosting the 1980 Winter Olympics, the redemption it found in the “Miracle on Ice,” and the social and technological impact of televising the games.



Martin Tyler, “What Education Provided Me,” in Freedom Story Project.

At Paul Smith’s College and Clarkson University, university educator Bethany Garretson followed the *Teacher’s Guide* strategy of suggesting students use the primary source materials from OurStoryBridge story projects to amplify their research and writing in courses such as Adirondack History, Interpersonal Communications, and Environmental History and Social Justice. Throughout each semester, Garretson also invited available local storytellers to class meetings, further integrating these oral histories into her curricula and providing an additional layer of learning experience for her students and colleagues (some of whom adopted OurStoryBridge stories into their classrooms). All this highlights the mission of OurStoryBridge to strengthen community by creating closer bonds across generations and celebrating these newfound, shared, and informed connections.

Additionally, the *Teacher’s Guide* invites teachers to guide (mentor) students to tell their own stories with specific directions and scaffolding. This lesson in the Sample School Assignment section emphasizes learning the components of a good story as well as important soft skills such as proficiency in public speaking and fostering a sense of creativity. Within

this type of lesson, students can recognize the value of storytelling, experience a story’s impact on both storytellers and their listeners, learn elements of a compelling story, practice constructing an outline to help tell a story, and develop public speaking abilities that promote confidence in sharing their voices and ideas. By the end of the assignment, students will have advanced their communication skills, which will be useful in their remaining school careers; professional development; and any area of communications, including structured organization, sequential thinking, and presentation skills.

Educators interested in having their students compose narratives may find it helpful if they first listen to a variety of stories using narratives from OurStoryBridge projects as a springboard for brainstorming. Students may find interest, for example, in the many narratives of culture and tradition from the Niraqutaq Qallermcinek “[Bridge of Stories](#)” in Igiugig, Alaska; of learning to love your local community from “[Life in the Islands](#)” from North Hero, Vermont; of finding inspiration in the great outdoors from The Adirondack Mountain Club’s “[ADK Voices](#)”; or through activism in the national issue-oriented “[Freedom Story Project](#)” sponsored by John Brown Lives!, which centers on themes of freedom and justice, human and civil rights, activism, and engagement. By focusing on creating story projects centered around communities or issue-oriented

organizations, OurStoryBridge is positioned to gather many voices, perspectives, and lived experiences surrounding them.

By sharing “Freedom Story Project” with students in the classroom, I wish to impress upon them the importance of standing up for what is right. Through listening to the words of those fighting for justice, equity, and human rights I hope students will carry these voices and lessons with them throughout their lives.

—Brad Hurlburt, teacher

In addition to sharing primary sources, the *Teacher’s Guide* aims to impress upon students that they can create primary sources of knowledge and represent their moment in time by sharing their own histories and experiences through story. As a result, educators reinforce the importance of personal narratives, the impact that crafting an effective narrative can make, and thus the significance of their students’ individual and collective voices. The School Story Projects Protocol provides a rubric to encourage students to recognize that they, too, are storytellers and their lived experiences and perspectives can be valuable guides to others.

One student story comes from former Keene Central School student, Cal Page-Bryant, whose story “[Citizenship](#)” was shared as part of his school’s 12th-grade storytelling project in partnership with OurStoryBridge. Reflecting on the prompts—What do freedom and justice mean to you? How are they reflected in your daily life?—Page-Bryant tells listeners, “We are grown to uphold a legacy of human goodness and empathy, which has survived throughout history in spite of great setbacks through the work of people who do not bend from their conviction in a better world.” Page-Bryant describes the complicated intersection of freedom and justice in the present day and his fears surrounding living and acting in a world that is increasingly hostile, plagued by gun violence, disinformation, prejudices, and a diminishing sense of empathy. He asks how he and his fellow graduates can find a life of moral clarity and community. As he weaves the ways memory, meaning, and identity can conflict and cause division, he is able to find hope: “So in the midst of an uncertain world in which we are on the brink of citizenship, we have ourselves and we have each other. And with these two sources of support, we can accomplish great things in our lives for the human cause.”

OurStoryBridge offers an avenue to explore the complex narratives of our nation’s communities, history, and people. Through efforts to hear and create a storyteller out of anyone with the desire to share their lived experiences, OurStoryBridge offers vital opportunities for education, civic engagement, and learning. Resources like the *Teacher’s Guide* provide easy-to-use, effective methods for deploying varied and insightful stories into classrooms and the minds of young learners, showing them that they, too, can produce important primary sources of history and knowledge. Likewise, storytellers demonstrate that the diverse and manifold roots of history surround us all. OurStoryBridge contributes to efforts that help us share and listen.

Kelly Bartlett is Project Coordinator for OurStoryBridge, working to establish meaningful connections with educators, librarians, historical societies, museums, volunteers, and issue-based nonprofits wishing to begin OurStoryBridge projects. A graduate of the University at Albany's Information Science and English Program, she enjoys the interdisciplinary functions of OurStoryBridge. Her academic and research interests include community archives and the efforts of professional and amateur archivists to preserve the voices, narratives, and lessons of underrepresented populations.

Jery Y. Huntley received her education and MLS degrees at the University at Albany, but her career took a different turn after her early start as a school and public librarian. She moved back to Albany to work for the NYS Assembly, then headed to Washington, DC, for a position in the U.S. House of Representatives. This led to opportunities in environmental lobbying, issues management, 20 years as a trade association CEO, and volunteer work as a trainer in meeting facilitation and with Habitat for Humanity International. She lives in Washington, DC, and Keene Valley, NY, and her volunteer work now includes her role as Founder and President of OurStoryBridge Inc.

Janelle A. Schwartz brings over two decades of experience as an interdisciplinary educator, program developer, and creative consultant to her work as a freelance project strategist, writer, and editor for JAS Creatives LLC. She holds her PhD in Literature and the History of Science and has published widely on literature and ecology, social justice, the Adirondacks, pedagogy, natural philosophy, and more. She taught Literature and Environmental Studies at Loyola University New Orleans and Hamilton College. She founded and directed the Hamilton Adirondack Program, a place-based, experiential semester and helps 8th- and 12th-graders at Keene Central School tell their stories.

URLs

OurStoryBridge <https://www.ourstorybridge.org>

"History and Perspective," by Darren Parry

<https://app.memria.org/stories/public-story-view/60810c77daee43cd8c89910c4fe5e8a1>

Memria <https://www.memria.org>

Teacher's Guide <https://www.ourstorybridge.org/tool-kit#4>

"Olympic Dream Fulfilled," by Tommy Biesemeyer

<https://app.memria.org/stories/public-story-view/33d329b1cf074994a92be7ef5fa2bf0d>

"Meeting John & Mary Brown, Abolitionists," by Greg Artzner and Terry Leonino—Magpie

<https://app.memria.org/stories/public-story-view/4e8089c8f1394e4685ce2183890f532c>

"The Underground Railroad in the North Country," by Jackie Madison

<https://app.memria.org/stories/public-story-view/057dacb2bb7946b9ab65de4000c00c95>

"Lake Placid & the 1980 Olympics," by Jim Rogers

<https://app.memria.org/stories/public-story-view/2777a538c1bf433ba6d1115e3ab3916e>

Igiugig Story Bridge <https://www.igiugigstorybridge.org>

Life in the Islands <https://northherolibrary.org/life-in-the-islands>

ADK Voices <http://adkvoices.org>

Freedom Story Project <http://freedomstoryproject.org>

"Citizenship," by Cal Page-Bryant

<https://app.memria.org/stories/public-story-view/9f0d51779b2c4c60b6d53da8d825efaa>



A Resource for Inclusive Preservation, Research, and Teaching

by Marsha MacDowell and Olivia Furman

Numerous people have acknowledged the importance of quilting within the African American experience. Zora Neale Hurston, who closely examined Black vernacular cultural traditions, included references to quilts in her folklore-infused writing. Alice Walker (1973) wrote a well-known short story focused on quilting, and bell hooks (2008) explored how the work of African American quiltmakers conveyed historical experiences, memories, and aesthetics. The historian Darlene Clark Hine stated that “Quilts are often the only physical evidence or historical testament revealing aspects of the inner lives and creative spirits of many otherwise obscure and unknown Black women. But the quilt, like any other document, needs to be interpreted and analyzed to fully appreciate its significance in the history of African Americans, and, in particular, African American women’s cultural history” (Hine 1998, 13). The Pulitzer Prize-winning historian Laurel Thatcher Ulrich said that the quilts of the African American artist Harriet Power aid us in “understanding contradictory ideas about race, gender, and modernity in the late nineteenth-century and for exploring the place of African Americans in the twentieth century quilt revival” (Ulrich 2011, 85). The folklorist and photojournalist Roland Freeman recognized the individuals and processes involved in making, using, and preserving African American quilts as a “communion of spirits” and that quilts have the power “to create a virtual web of connections—individual, generational, professional, physical, spiritual, cultural, and historical” (Freeman 1996, xv). His efforts distinguished a wide range of styles, intents, and learning and sought to answer “what it means that so many African Americans, across so large an area, are involved with quilting. What is it about quilting that is so important to our culture?” (xviii).

The importance of storytelling in African American quilt heritage is critical to understanding the context in which these objects were and are created and the meaning this art has for the maker, their communities, and wider audiences. Quilts made by African American artists have been overlooked and misinterpreted by those who do not have access to the associated stories or knowledge about the contexts in which they were created. Thus, it is critical to collect and make accessible not only images and physical data on quilts, but also the stories of those who made and used them.

About the image: The Black Diaspora Quilt History Project logo above and all other images are courtesy of the authors or Michigan State University Museum.

A new resource, [the Black Diaspora Quilt History Project \(BDQHP\)](#), aims to preserve a body of data of this important traditional expressive art in its myriad forms and to make that data freely accessible for teaching and research. The BDQHP is an intentional effort to digitally gather primary and secondary sources on African American, African, and African Diaspora quilt history drawn from geographically dispersed public and private collections. This data is then being added to a BDQHP hub in the [Quilt Index](#), an international humanities project based at Matrix: Center for Digital Humanities and Social Sciences at Michigan State University.



Boxes from the Michigan State University archive holding ephemera documented by the BDQHP hub in the Quilt Index.

African American Quilts in Museums, Archives, and Documentation Projects

Museums, through their collecting practices, exhibitions, and educational programs, are one of the main access points for public information about quilting. Despite the nearly ubiquitous presence of quilts in museums in the United States, collecting practices have largely failed to include work of African American, African, or African Diaspora quilters. One exception includes the exhibition in 2002 of quilts made by African American women living in Gee's Bend, Alabama. It proved pivotal in prompting some museums to collect African American quilts. The *Quilts of Gee's Bend* exhibition opened first at the Museum of Fine Arts in Houston and then traveled to other major museums, including the Whitney Museum in New York City, where it was met with enormous positive critical and popular acclaim (Kimmelman 2002). There is no doubt that this Gee's Bend exhibition broke ground in showing the power of quilts made by African Americans presented as art pieces while simultaneously revealing the stories of the people and communities who made them. Although traveling exhibitions of these quilts increased public interest and knowledge about African American quilting traditions, they notably featured only one style of African American quilting particular to the quilters of Gee's Bend and did not allude to the diversity of techniques, content, and aesthetics of historic and contemporary work by other African American quilt artists. Despite an increase in the number of museums that collect African American quilts as well as more publications on African American quilts, knowledge about this important traditional expressive art in its myriad forms across the country is minimally accessible for research and teaching.

Use this image and the BDQHP archive description to learn about some of the many traditions of African American quilting.



Afro-American Women and Quilts, Cuesta's Sampler

Cuesta Benberry, Annette Ammen, Lois Mueller, and the Kinloch Community Center Ladies, St. Louis, Missouri, 1979. Collection of Michigan State University Museum acc.#2008:119.1, <https://quiltindex.org/view/?type=fullrec&kid=12-8-5240>.

Each block is different and signifies something of importance in African American women's quilting experiences.

From left to right, top row:

1. A red and white pieced block with diamonds and a red center square; (Note: this block was from an Arkansas woman, formerly a neighbor).
2. A block replicated from Harriet Powers' "Bible" quilt in applique, featuring Jesus' baptism, two figures and the Holy spirit symbolized by an applique dove; (Note: the original quilt is in the Smithsonian in Washington, D.C.)
3. A block in dark blue and white with reverse applique; (Note: This design was made by an enslaved person from North Carolina).

Second row, left to right:

1. A pieced and appliqued flower in navy blue, teal and orange with a green stem; (This pattern was taken from the Freedom Quilting Bee, forerunners of today's Gee's Bend Quilters).
2. A "Variable Star" block out of red and white cotton with the following poem (sent by Jinny Beyer from *The Liberator*) inked in the center: Mother! When around your child
You clasp your arms in love
And when with grateful joy
You raise to God above---
Your eyes, Think of the Negro mother;
When her child is torn away---
Sold for a little slave--oh, then,
For that mother, Pray!
3. A tulip applique block in green, purple, and red; (Note: This pattern was from the WPA project that collected quilt designs).

Third row, left to right.

1. "Buzzard's Roost" (Note: this block was found in a former slave cabin) A pieced block in brown and white with an eagle quilted in the center;
2. A flowering vine in applique with green leaves and red, yellow and blue blooms; (A Nancy Cabot design) and
3. "Robbing Peter to Pay Paul" block with print navy fabric used with white. (Note: Florence Peto used this block in the end paper of her book and mentioned that an enslaved person had made this quilt).

Fourth row, left to right.

1. "Lady's Shoe" applique in solid red and white (This is a replica of a block from a Benberry family quilt);
2. A "brick" quilt in various fabrics cut in strips of varying lengths;
3. An African woman depicted in applique with a clay pot.

All text adapted from the [primary source description in the Quilt Index](#).

Another major source of data about quilt history comes from regional grassroots quilt documentation projects that began in the mid-1980s. They were initiated and led primarily by quilt scholars or members of state and regional quilt guilds who wanted to make sure that information about this art form, one created primarily by women, was recorded. These projects were geographically circumscribed by county, state or province, or country; some were conducted over a set period of time and have been concluded, others are ongoing, and new ones are regularly initiated. A basic format involves project leaders encouraging makers and owners to bring their quilts into central community locations (museums, libraries, senior centers, etc.) on “Quilt Days.” Volunteers measure and photograph the quilts; describe physical features; and collect biographical information on the quiltmaker and social history of the quilt, including its production, ownership, purpose, function, and any affiliated stories. The collected information is recorded on standardized survey or inventory forms and sometimes the stories about the quilt and its maker are audio or video recorded. Shelly Zegart, one of the founders of the Kentucky Quilt Project, observes that these projects collectively form “the largest grassroots movement in the decorative arts in the last half of the 20th century. More than 200,000 quilts have been documented at more than 2,000 ‘Quilt Days’ and additional projects are starting every year” (Zegart n.d.). Notably, very few of these documentation projects made special efforts to document quilts made by artists of non-white descent.¹

The Quilt Index: Preserving, Accessing, and Using Quilt History Data

The Quilt Index launched in 2003 as a digital humanities resource to preserve and provide access to data on geographically dispersed collections of images and stories about quilts and their makers. It began with a small portion of the records of only four state documentation projects as well as of collections at two museums.² As funding made growth possible, the Quilt Index has inputted data from other quilt documentation projects in the U.S., New Zealand, Australia, Great Britain, and South Africa. It has also partnered with museums, archives, libraries, and individual collectors, artists, and scholars from around the world to add records from these public and private holdings. As of 2023, the Quilt Index holds over 90,000 records. To facilitate public engagement, the Index has also developed numerous features for exploring and using the Index content for research and learning. These features include tools to search, cite, compare, and contrast data as well as a [submission portal](#) for individuals to add their own quilts and stories directly to the Index. Resources added to the Quilt Index have included [exhibitions](#), galleries, [essays](#), bibliographies, and [lesson plans](#).

The Need for a Black Diaspora Quilt History Project

Because this digital resource originally was built on quilt documentation projects and limited collections that rarely included the African American quilting experience, the content of the Quilt Index reflected the relative absence of data from these contributors on this important realm of material culture heritage. A 2000 study estimated that there were over one million African American quilters and that one in twenty U.S. quilters is African American (Hicks 2003, 10). Yet, out of nearly 90,000 records in the Quilt Index as of the end of 2022, less than 1 percent of the content pertains to African American, African, and African Diaspora quiltmaking. Thus, the BDQHP was initiated to redress this absence of data and to include quilts and stories that reflect the diversity within as well as linkages among quiltmaking practices of African American, African, and African Diaspora communities.

With support from a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities, during the period 2022–2024 the BDQHP will add to the Quilt Index thousands of records that document Black quilt history.³ As BDQHP director and co-director, we are working with other members of the Quilt Index team to implement strategies to reach and engage more diverse audiences who can add their data to the Index as well as use the existing data in their research, creative, and teaching activities. We began by conducting an Inclusivity Audit of the standardized form historically used in the quilt documentation projects and amended terminology and imagery that would be more inclusive. Rather than relying only on these forms to gather data on quilts, quiltmakers, and the technical and social history of quilts, project staff are turning directly to artists and collectors to ask what stories, associated documentation (photographs, oral histories, blogs, websites), and related ephemera (study sketches, patterns, exhibition posters, diary accounts) they want digitally preserved and then working closely with them to ensure preservation in the Quilt Index. This direct work with Black quilters to determine their needs is essential to provide responsive, meaningful, and comprehensive documentation of the histories, stories, and legacies of Black quilt artists.

By focusing on building the body of data, the BDQHP provides a means for considering these quilts as visual documents and to read and listen to their associated stories. We hope that this will, in turn, foster questioning, exploration, and understanding of the history and experiences of Black artists and communities. In this time of growing recognition that #BlackLivesMatter, this project offers primary data, resources, and tools to assist individuals in acquiring knowledge about Black quilt artists and their quilts, engaging in dialogues about difficult issues, and finding inspiration and hope in the stories and histories illustrated by this art form. It will create access to data and resources that, as Carolyn Mazloomi, founder of the Women of Color Quilters Network (WCQN) and an NEA National Heritage Fellow, notes allow individuals to use African American quilts “as an aspiring solution to the problem of educating the general population about the ascendant influence of African-American culture on the American cultural landscape.” (Mazloomi 2021, 5)

The Black Diaspora Quilt History Project: Resources for Learning and Teaching

The Quilt Index is currently a resource that allows for the exploration and discoveries of objects and stories related to quilts and quiltmakers. To facilitate deeper engagement with these materials, the BDQHP is adding to the Quilt Index website secondary resources (essays, galleries, exhibitions, and U.S. standards-based lesson plans) related to Black quilters and their quilts. Content specialists and educators will enhance scholarly and educational use of digital resources by diverse audiences. For example, Furman designed educational resources and curated experiences to center womanist literacies of reflection and care. These instructional tools invite learners to consider their own lived experiences and sociopolitical realities, using literacies rooted in African American storytelling traditions and contemporary wellness praxis such as journaling and dialogue to engage meaningfully with Black quilters’ stories, quilts, and other ephemera within the Quilt Index collection.

Learning Resources with Quilts from Black Diaspora Artists

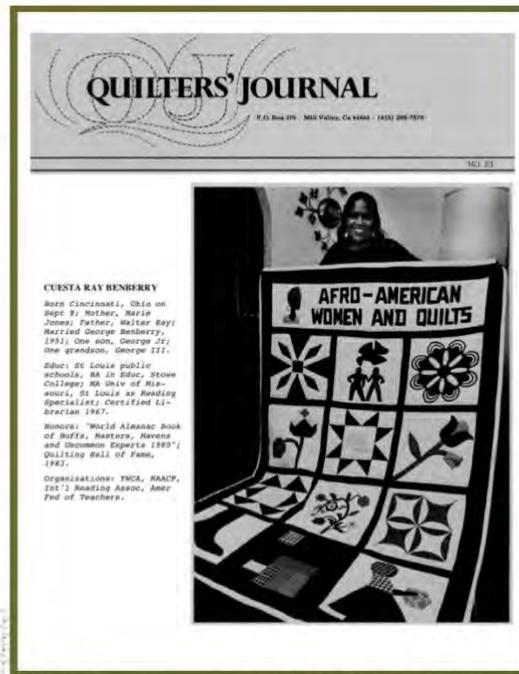
Furman is also developing models for engaging teachers and students in using both the Quilt Index and physical museum collections and archives. As an example, in guided visits to the MSU Museum, students intimately experience a curated collection of quilts made by Black quilters throughout the Diaspora as well as photographs, patterns, and other materials that documented their experiences. Physical duplicates of the original materials were made for in-class use and

scanned for remote use on the Quilt Index website.⁴ Images and stories of the quilts are also in the Index. During sessions with students, Furman uses reflection questions to guide students through their conceptualizations of what quilting is, who quilts, and the speculative significance of quilts within the lived realities of quiltmakers. In each hands-on guided conversation, students learn popular quilt terminology and a variety of quilt styles and construction techniques. Learners are encouraged to make personal connections with the quiltmakers and their quilts, inviting a deeper understanding of the lived implications of quilts and quilt praxis. Students are prompted to ask and answer questions rooted in curiosity and wonder as a means of exploring and imagining realities informed by Black folks' material culture and quilting methodologies.

CLOSE READING

Document Record
1984

Dolph Briscoe Center for American History at The University of Texas at Austin; Joyce Gross Quilt History Collection, 2008-2013
Mill Valley, California, United States



MSU QUILT INDEX | BLACK DIASPORA
QUILT HISTORY PROJECT (BDQHP)

Questions for reflection:

- What do you see or notice?
- What does this let us know about Cuesta Benberry?
- Why do you think this detail was included?

What connections does this artifact make you think about?

Sample page from the BDQHP Cuesta Benberry lesson plan slideshow (Furman 2023).

Learning Resources with the Cuesta Benberry African and African American Quilt and Quilt History Research Collection

Furman designed a series of tools to increase learning about Cuesta Benberry—a renowned African American quilt scholar, writer, researcher, and pattern collector—and her collection of quilts, patterns, and other quilt-related ephemera (exhibition catalogs, event flyers, notes, cards, quilt and sewing patterns) at the MSU Museum.⁵ The activities and resources guide learners through intentional engagements with a curated sampling of artifacts from the Benberry collection that connect to the overall aims of the BDQHP.

The learning activities engaging with materials from Benberry's collection center around using and developing visual communication skills, via multiple close readings of objects. Reflection questions generate dialogue and deep thinking about individual collection pieces. The discussion questions prompt critical inquiry of archival and museum praxis as well as the individual artifacts themselves. Learners are invited to discuss questions such as *Whose histories and/or stories are embodied within the archival and museum materials we explored? Who is excluded? Why is it*

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The Black Diaspora Quilt History Project: A Resource for Inclusive Preservation, Research, and Teaching
by Marsha MacDowell and Olivia Furman



[Women working together pattern](#) from Cuesta Benberry's Archive.

important to know and/or share these stories? Learners are similarly guided through considering implications of these artifacts within learners' current lived realities, as well as ways these artifacts might inform how they think about and engage with one another and the natural world, both now and in the future.

To deepen learners' conceptualizations of the lived implications of archival and museum collections as well as their own experience engaging with these materials, they are invited to consider the ways they collect information about their lives and legacies and to consider the ways this may change in the future, depending on their unique interests, values, and ethical commitments. As learners engage with these questions through journaling or group dialogue, they are invited to root their reflections in their personal engagements with Benberry's life and legacy as well as the stories, material artifacts, and quilt methodologies of other Black quilters throughout the Diaspora.



Cuesta Benberry, illustration by Liv Furman.

Curriculum Guide Learning Resource

Furman also authored a [BDQHP Black Quilts Curriculum Guide](#). It provides a robust compilation of photographs and narrative information about a curated collection of quilts made by Black quilters throughout the Diaspora; information about five selected African American quilt artists; prompts for reflection and creative expression; and lists of basic quilt terms, artists, scholarship, and groups. A YouTube tutorial sharing useful tips on locating and using African, African American, and African Diaspora resources in the Quilt Index is forthcoming. Together, these resources are expected to increase awareness of, appreciation for, and engagement with Black Diaspora quilt history.

Conclusion

One of the most remarkable details about quilts is that they are deeply connected to the human experience; the materials, methods of construction, and forms and styles of quilts richly embody the stories, legacies, and sociopolitical realities of the people who make them. Importantly, quilts created by artists of African American, African, and African Diaspora communities must not be

reduced to the physical artifacts, which can be easily essentialized and commodified. Instead, it is important to engage with quilts made by artists in Black Diaspora communities with their stories of quiltmakers, their literacies, and their cultural traditions at the forefront. This is an explicit goal of the BDQHP and an increasing commitment of the Quilt Index.

Another goal of the BDQHP is to make accessible African American, African, and African Diaspora quilts, quilt-related ephemera, and stories of quiltmakers for meaningful research and teaching engagements. As material artifacts deeply rooted in cultural praxis and individual self-expression, critical learning engagements with quilts and quiltmakers have the potential to illuminate intimate realities of a range of topics and themes. Moreover, the interconnected nature of identity-informed literacies such as quilting, storytelling, meaning-making, and song, namely within African American traditions of quilting, offers a particularly unique and multilayered foundation for deep interdisciplinary learning engagements.

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Olivia “Liv” Furman, PhD, (*they/them*) is a Black non-binary womanist artist/educator/researcher at Michigan State University currently exploring the significance of engaging culturally informed literacies of dreaming, journaling, storytelling, and the arts within conceptualizations and practice of liberatory teaching, learning, and research. Their primary mediums include multimedia and digital collage, ceramics, quilting, and the written and spoken word. Liv is also an avid gardener, skater, singer, musician, and yoga apprentice.

Both authors work at Michigan State University, situated on the ancestral, traditional, and contemporary Lands of the Anishinaabeg—the Three Fires Confederacy of Ojibwe, Odawa, and Potawatomi peoples.

Endnotes

¹ “White” is used here to clarify that the stories and images of BIPOC quilts were rarely documented.

² Read more about the *Quilt Index* history here: <https://quiltindex.org/about/our-history>.

³ During the grant period June 2022–June 2024, the BDQHP aims to add collections of 1) 5,000 images and data on quilts and quilt artists, stories; at minimum 100 oral histories; and at minimum 100 pieces of ephemera drawn from the 20 American and South African museums and libraries identified as containing the majority of public holdings of African and African American quilts and quilt history or having significant individual quilts; 2) the records from the Washington State African American Quilt Documentation Project (the only state quilt documentation project focused on African American quilting); 3) a body of images, data, and ephemera from the private collections of six contemporary quilt artists and from members of the Women of Color Quilters Network (the largest national quilt artist organization) and the Great Lakes African American Quilters Network (one of the largest regional African American quilt artist organizations); and 4) selections of images, data, media, and ephemera from the privately held research collections of scholars of Liberian, Indian African Siddi, and Egyptian quilt history. Included will be materials from some of the most important historical chroniclers and scholars on this realm of quilting, such as

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Roland Freeman, Dr. Carolyn Mazloomi, Dr. Gladys-Marie Fry, Dr. Stephanie Beck Cohen, Eli Leon, Kyra Hicks, and Cuesta Benberry.

⁴ See Olivia Furman, Exploring the Life & Legacy of Cuesta Benberry: Artifacts from the Archive, Quilt Index, <https://quiltindex.org/view/?type=lessons&kid=62-186-51>; Women Working Together Pattern, Quilt Index, <https://quiltindex.org/view/?type=publications&kid=62-186-49>.

⁵ See the Cuesta Benberry African and African American Quilt and Quilt History Research Collection, Quilt Index, Olivia Furman, Exploring the Life & Legacy of Cuesta Benberry: Artifacts from the Archive, Quilt Index, <https://quiltindex.org/view/?type=lessons&kid=62-186-51>.

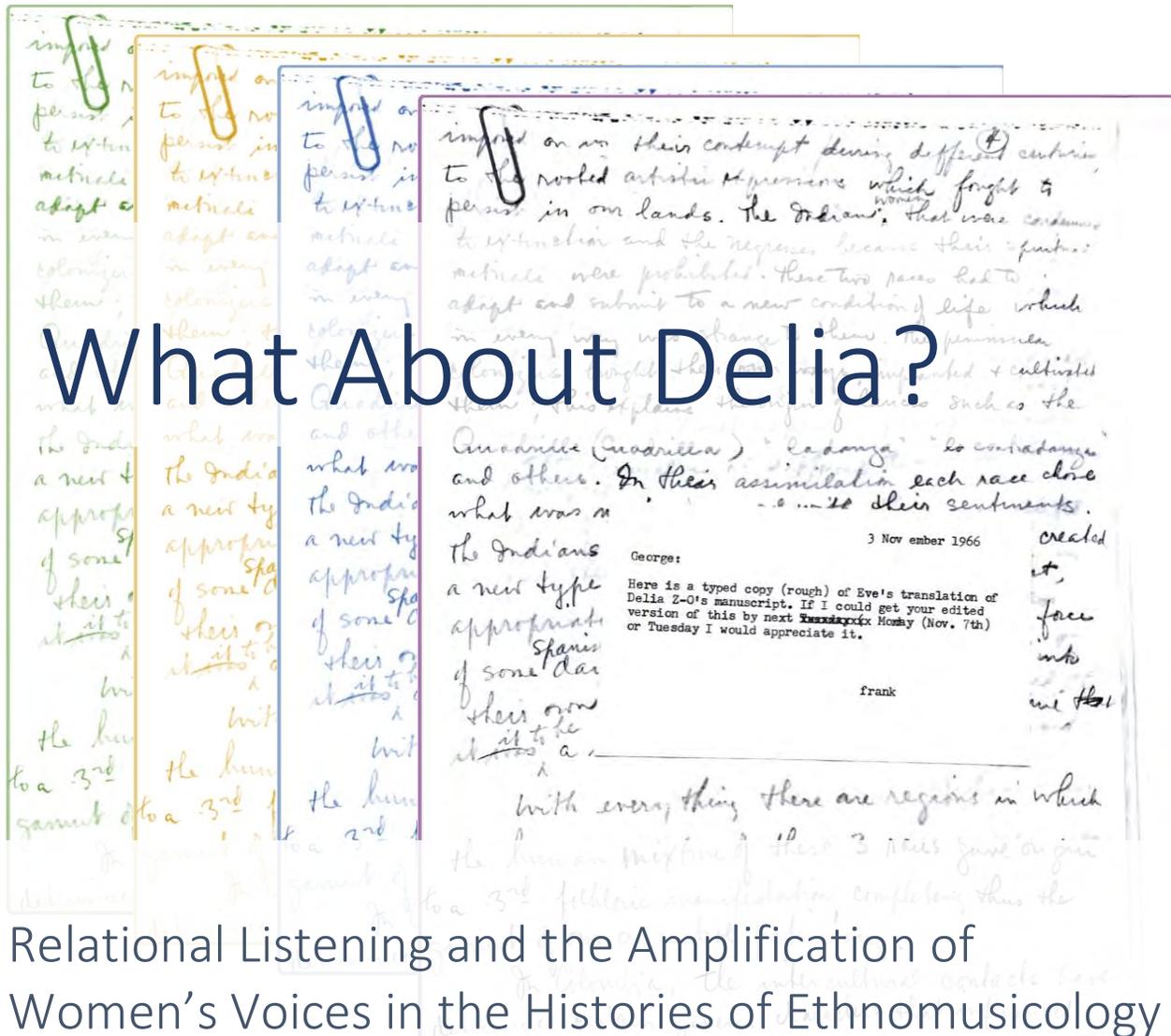
For more information and resources related to the BDQHP visit <https://quiltindex.org/view/?type=docprojects&kid=62-185-1>. For general information about quilts and quilt-related resources explore the Quilt Index website at <https://quiltindex.org>.

Works Cited

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- Zegart, Shelly. n.d. Since Kentucky: Surveying State Quilts. Quilt Index, <https://quiltindex.org/view/?type=essays&kid=8-109-1>.

URLs

- Black Diaspora Quilt History Project, Quilt Index <https://quiltindex.org/view/?type=docprojects&kid=62-185-1>
- The Quilt Index <https://quiltindex.org>
- Afro-American Women and Quilts <https://quiltindex.org/view/?type=fullrec&kid=12-8-5240>
- “Essays,” Quilt Index <https://quiltindex.org/resources/essays>
- “Galleries,” Quilt Index <https://quiltindex.org/resources/galleries>
- “Exhibits,” Quilt Index <https://quiltindex.org/resources/exhibits>
- “Lesson Plans,” Quilt Index <https://quiltindex.org/resources/lesson-plans>
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Relational Listening and the Amplification of Women's Voices in the Histories of Ethnomusicology

by Amelia López López

Delia Zapata Olivella, daughter, mother, sister, friend, bruja.... She was an Afro-Colombian woman born in 1926 in Santa Cruz de Lorica and lived her childhood in Cartagena, Colombia. Delia Zapata Olivella was a renowned dancer, artist, teacher, activist, folklorist, and scholar recognized by many in Colombia as “la madre del folclor colombiano” (Colombia’s folklore foremother). She gained such a nickname for her pioneering contributions to the research of Colombian cultural traditions and practices, including her use of ethnography; the introduction of audio-recording technologies to rural areas that had not been documented before; her activist practices to make visible Black and Indigenous populations in urban spaces; the use of dance notation to understand embodied practices in the country; and creation of the first Black folkloric dance company in Colombia. On top of her innovations, Delia Zapata Olivella published several articles in Spanish and one in English. However, despite the tangible evidence of her intellectual contributions—present in archives and oral histories—music scholars in Colombia, Latin America,

or the United States rarely cite her work, and historiographical accounts of the field of music research only briefly mentioned her. Thus, listening for Delia Zapata Olivella is key for decentering the dominant masculine and the white gaze that have shaped the narratives about the development of music research. Listening for Delia Zapata Olivella sheds light into a significant part of history that has been ignored and unveils the role and presence of women in the establishment of ethnomusicology as a discipline.

The public discourse in Colombia positions Delia Zapata Olivella in a space of ambiguity that celebrates her artistry and activism while ignoring her intellectual contributions, particularly in music research. As a Black woman from the Colombian Caribbean, Delia Zapata Olivella endured multiple forms of discrimination. While resisting oppression she created new possible ways to exist in a country that did not recognize Black and Indigenous peoples as citizens. A framework that goes beyond the binaries of oppressed and oppressor is needed to understand how minoritized people like her shaped the world, and to challenge dominant narratives that ignore them. Thus, I find in the term re-existence—where “living itself is political”—a possibility for framing Delia Zapata Olivella’s life in music studies historiography. The Colombian artist and cultural studies scholar Adolfo Albán Achinte further defines re-existence as:

Re-existencia es recrear la vida. Es estarse inventando la vida no solo para enfrentarse a las estructuras de poder, sino para auto-reconocerse en la alegría y la celebración de la existencia [...] Re-existencia, es el compromiso por el mantenimiento y la reproducción de la existencia en condiciones de dignidad en procesos de transformación de la sociedad. Entonces, el asunto de vivir se vuelve político.¹ (Alban 2015)

To amplify Delia Zapata Olivella’s voice as a scholar and activist, I use relational and multimodal archival exploration with formats that range from the written to the audio-visual. Through this framework of re-existence and relationality I recognize how Delia Zapata Olivella lived a full life, not only resisting oppressions but also creating new possible worlds.² Her research, activism, and artistry shed light into the multiple ways women—particularly Black women—articulate their intellectual voices and enunciate their existence amidst oppression. This articulation comes after the creation of complex texts that are many times not coded as scholarship, and therefore, the registers of their voice remain ignored. In this text, I want to share my path through a relational exploration of four archives—[Instituto Popular de Cultura](#), [Indiana University Archives](#), [The Archives of Traditional Music](#), and [Vanderbilt University Special Collections and University Archives](#)—that led me to listen to Delia Zapata Olivella’s voice in a different and revealing way.

I briefly narrate part of the genealogy of this project through anecdotal vignettes that explain my relationship with the archives. Then I move to specific instances when listening for Delia became a transgressive act, since it amplified other women’s voices in the archive, decentering the male gaze of the archive and challenging the dominant histories that render the labor of these women invisible.

Archival Work and the No-Methodology Approach

I was born and raised in Colombia in a middle-class family in Bogotá, the capital city of the country, where I did my bachelor’s degree in violin performance. During my undergraduate

program the focus (as in many music programs) was on Western European music, hence, little was taught about Colombian traditional musical practices, genres, musicians, or researchers. Although I always had an interest in research and other musical forms, I did not learn enough about women musicians or researchers, and I never encountered the name of Delia Zapata Olivella except in reference to one of the theaters in the city where the National Symphony Orchestra used to rehearse. When I moved to the United States to pursue my graduate degrees, it was a challenge learning how to listen to women in music, which parallels the dynamics in my country, where minoritized people are continuously ignored and pushed to the margins. Not surprisingly, I was unaware of the depth and breadth of Delia Zapata Olivella's work.

In 2018, as a final project for a graduate seminar on mobilities, I was curious to explore the collections of the U.S. ethnomusicologist George List deposited at the Archives of Traditional Music (ATM) at Indiana University. George List was on the faculty there and was also a former ATM director. He was known for his work in applied ethnomusicology and his efforts for preserving sound recordings produced in fieldwork. Among his multiple interests, List conducted research on the musical practices of people in the town of Evitar, Colombia, a work published in his monograph *Music and Poetry in a Colombian Village: A Tri-Cultural Heritage* (1983).

Although this was the first time I had engaged in archival research, my experience working as a graduate student for the ATM guided my research. After many hours of listening to the recordings, I learned these sound archives were related to another collection of George List materials deposited at the Indiana University Archives. After digging into 20 boxes of documents there, I decided to use a network analysis approach to start making sense of a significant set of networks that List created during his career. This formative research centered relationality and collaborations as the core of my research. Nevertheless, it is important to note that at that moment Delia Zapata Olivella's name, although present in the archive, was not yet a name I could hear clearly.

In 2020, I engaged in a Digital Humanities project to showcase how the materials from both archives co-related, focusing on the collaboration between List and the Zapata Olivella siblings (Manuel and Delia), two Afro-Colombian scholars, artists, and activists. By this point, I started to find interesting information about Delia Zapata Olivella, and my project advisors encouraged me to follow her lead, to find out more about her. However, it was difficult to listen to her in an archive created by a white U.S. ethnomusicologist, because he was my initial interlocutor in the archive, and I understood him to be the only expert. My own engagement with List made it difficult for me to listen to Delia Zapata Olivella's voice and to center her work. This situation confronted me with my own limitations and coloniality.³ I knew that as a researcher I needed to embrace the invitation made by Latin American decolonial scholars and activists to deconstruct my beliefs and my way of interacting with the world. Only through a critical self-examination is it possible to listen to what we have been taught is not audible and to give space in history to Black women who have paved the way for many of us. As stated by the Combahee River Collective in their Black Feminist Statement "If black women were free, it would mean that everyone else would have to be free since our freedom would necessitate the destruction of all the systems of oppression" (Combahee River Collective 1979, 368).

Since then, I have been revisiting the archives, and each interaction has differed because we make of archives a fluid entity, with multiple afterlives. Thus, following a predetermined path in research will not suffice for amplifying Delia Zapata Olivella's voice. I found a useful framework and tool for creating my own path to archival research in Alejandro Haber's proposal of a no-methodology approach. Haber suggests that "[una] [m]etodología disciplinada es seguir la secuencia protocolizada de acciones para alcanzar un conocimiento, trazar el camino que se ha de seguir. No-metodología es seguir todas aquellas posibilidades que el camino olvida, que el protocolo obstruye, que el método reprime. Es conocimiento en mudanza"⁴ (Haber 2011, 29). Thus, to un-discipline my research method is a way to listen actively for Delia; it is a way to recognize her acts toward re-existence and to question my own paths. It is a conscious practice of listening to Black women's voices and perspectives; it is a way to open my ears and attunement to what they have been writing, saying, singing, and performing in multiple iterations and to honor their lives—through the deconstruction of my own practice.

Challenging history requires us to think in relation to one another, to value, analyze, and understand different ways of living. To activate the archives in a relational manner is a way to amplify Delia Zapata Olivella's voice.

Relationality in the Archives: Journaling Through Listening, Sensing, and Reading

Throughout my path, I kept track of my relationship with the archives in a listening journal. It was a space for me to learn, reflect, and deconstruct my own coloniality—from an embodied listening practice. I recorded my feelings, sensations, thoughts, and emotions and how they informed my relationship with the materials and histories that the archives yielded. Looking back to that journal, I can understand the way I was relating to the archives, the relationships I found in the archives, and how archives related to one another. I used my training as an ethnographer to interact with the archive, since I understand the archive to be a living body that is constantly transforming and that, at the same time, transforms me. I also used this space to reflect on my relationship to Delia Zapata Olivella. Why did not I pay attention to her work before? Why as a former music student had I never heard about her? Why it was harder for me (a woman from a city and from the majority demographic group—mestizos) to listen to her voice? In that journal I inscribed my understanding of the histories I was trying to unveil and the questions I was trying to answer. This process helped me form a critical perspective of my positionality as a mestiza. In what follows I delve into key examples that helped me listen in a different way.

How Everything Started

El profesor George List, director del Archivo de Música Tradicional de la Universidad de Indiana, y su esposa Eva, llegaron preguntando por Delia en los ventorros que aún pululan en la barriada del Getsemaní. Alguien rescató a la pareja extraviada en la playa del Arsenal entre arrumes de carbón y racimos de bananos. Mi padre, sentado en la Puerta de su casa, los recibió cerrando el libro de lectura, acto de reverencia que concedía a los extraños. Solicitaron a la bailarina. A sus manos había llegado un programa de las presentaciones de su grupo de danzas.

-Venimos a que nos ayude a investigar el folclor musical colombiano
Mi hermana sonrió. Se electrizaba siempre que alguien pellizcaba aquella vena de su sentimiento.

-¡Comience conmigo, yo soy el folclor!

[...] Media hora después de conocerla, antes de salir a investigar con ella los cantos de los negros de Palenque, comenzó a grabar su voz, sus tonos profundos, su risa, la explosión de su silencio. Comprendió que estaba frente a un espécimen del folclor no modelado por indiferencias extrañas. El mismo le conseguiría una beca para que aprendiera con Katherine Dunhan las técnicas de la danza moderna.⁵

(Zapata Olivella, Manuel 1990, 324-5)

In his book *Levántate Mulato*, Manuel Zapata Olivella tells a fantastic story about how Delia Zapata Olivella came to work with George List. Yet the IU Archives tell a different story. The available documentation indicates that Delia's collaboration with List followed her brother Manuel's suggestion (Figure 1).

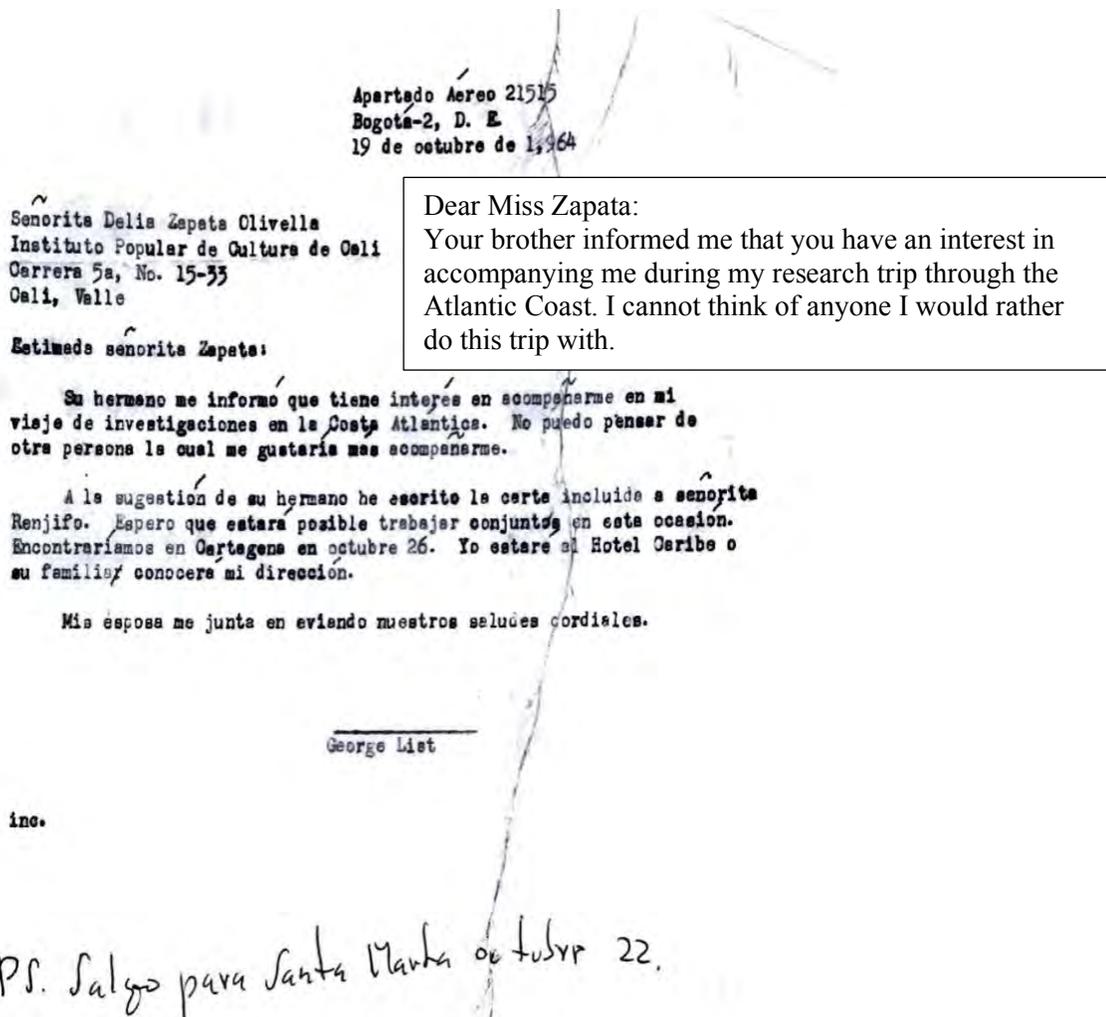


Figure 1. George List, October 19, 1964. George List Papers C242. Box 6. Folder "Zapata Olivella, Delia 1964." IU Archives. Bloomington.

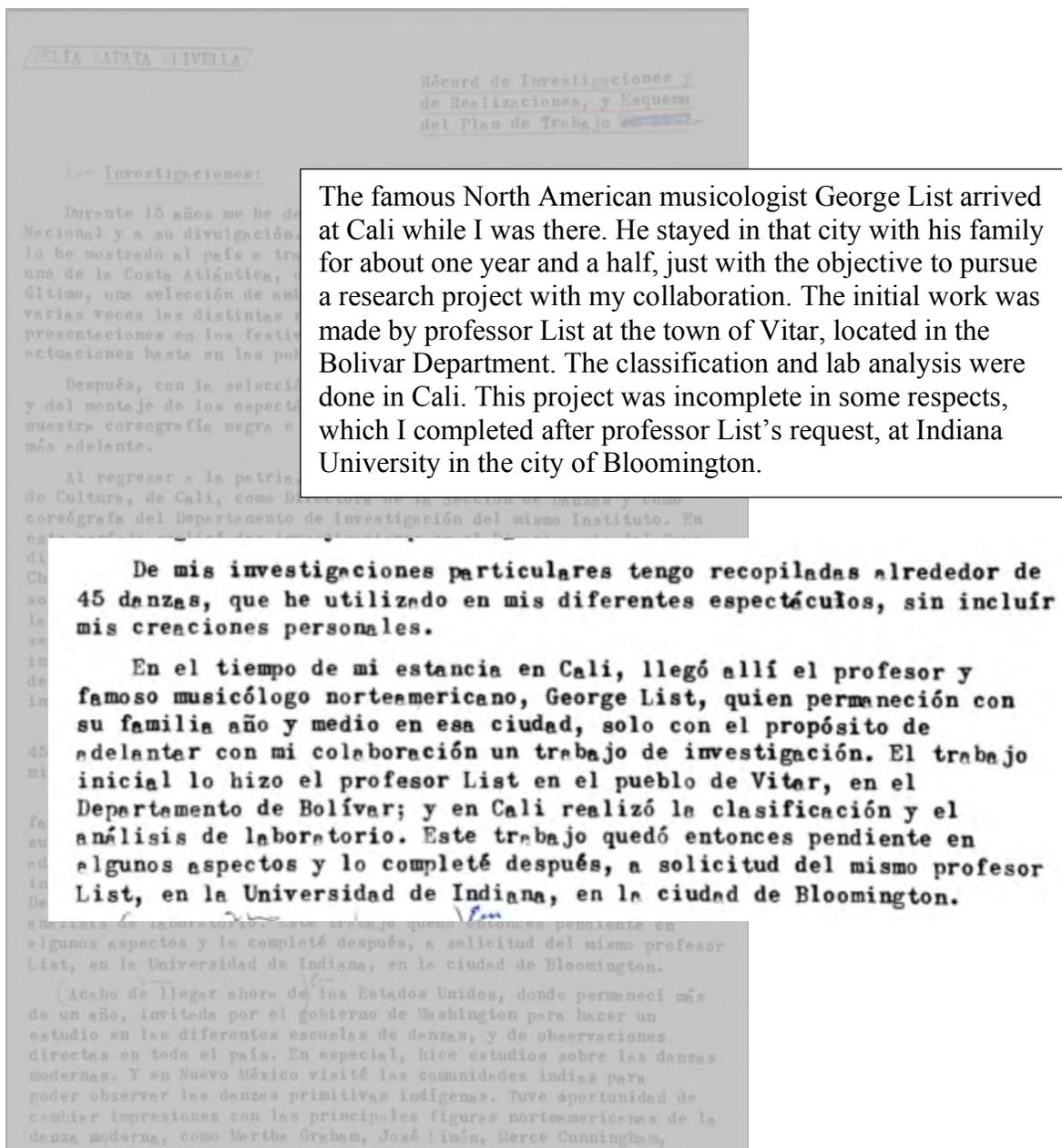


Figure 2. Delia Zapata Olivella, ca. 1967. Delia Zapata Olivella Papers, Box 30 Folder 1. Vanderbilt University Special Collections and University Archives. Nashville, Tennessee.

It was not until later in my research that I could access Delia Zapata Olivella’s archive, deposited at Vanderbilt University. There, I read for the first time her own voice. A set of reiterations of her autobiography and CV revealed her understanding of the situation. In one summary of her research activities, Delia Zapata Olivella indicates that the first encounter with List happened in Cali, not Cartagena, and that he was seeking for her to be a collaborator (Figure 2).

These three different viewpoints of a single historical event helped me complicate the narratives that present Delia Zapata Olivella only through the gaze of her male peers. To include her voice

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as part of these accounts is important for contrasting narratives that have been widespread in the academic accounts of either her brother Manuel Zapata Olivella or George List.

Positioning Delia Zapata Olivella: Assistant or Adviser?

List always acknowledged Delia Zapata Olivella as a collaborator. In his book, List shows two different ways he saw and understood her role. In his prologue List indicates that she joined him “to act as [his] field assistant” (1983, xxi), while in his acknowledgments he states that “Delia Zapata was [his] first tutor in *costeño* life and custom” (1983, xxv). Those two brief mentions signal a dual role that he saw her accomplishing. Nevertheless, it is the prologue that readers recall since it sets the tone of what the work entails, positioning Delia Zapata Olivella as List’s assistant.

Considering that the IU Archives were presenting Delia Zapata Olivella through the lens of George List, I decided to explore other archives where her voice was central. Thus, I found an article published in 1967 in which Delia narrates her time in the U.S.; her studies with Katherine Dunham, José Limón, and others; and her collaboration with George List (Figure 3). In these texts Delia points out her contributions to List’s work and her activities at IU.

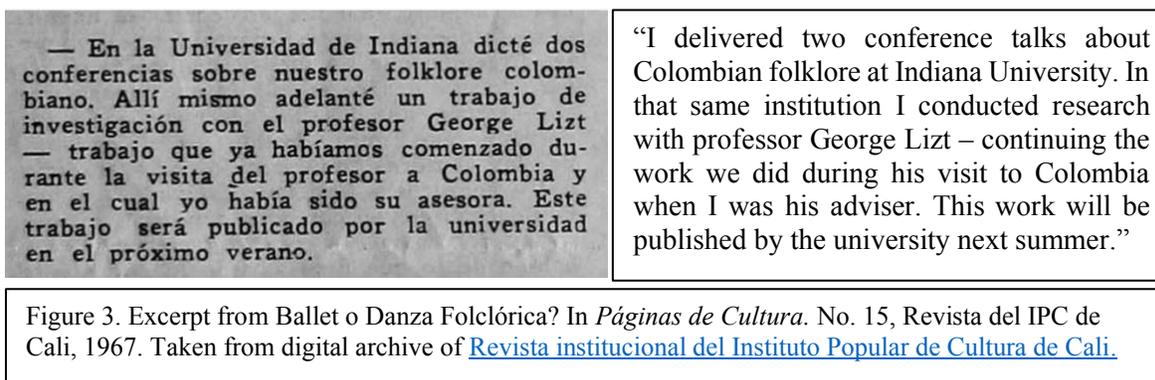
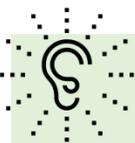


Figure 3. Excerpt from Ballet o Danza Folclórica? In *Páginas de Cultura*. No. 15, Revista del IPC de Cali, 1967. Taken from digital archive of [Revista institucional del Instituto Popular de Cultura de Cali](#).

Whether she considered herself to be a “tutor,” an “adviser,” or a “consultant,” all are categories that assert her expertise as researcher, whereas the category “assistant” can easily undermine her knowledge and years of experience and hide the level of her contributions to the research. It is important to note that by the time Delia Zapata Olivella collaborated with List, she had more than ten years of experience conducting ethnographic research and had a deep knowledge of cultural practices in the region. After listening to the recordings List made on their 1964 trip and deposited at the ATM, I started noticing that Delia Zapata Olivella was shaping List’s research in multiple ways.

Translation: George List was not fluent in Spanish by the time he did his first fieldtrip, and he knew little about musical practices in the Colombian Caribbean. Delia Zapata Olivella, on the other hand, was native to the region and had spent several years researching different musical and dance traditions.



[George List, Eve Ehrlichman, Delia Zapata Olivella, and Erasmo Arrieta. Collection 65-291-F, OT12134. Archives of Traditional Music. Indiana University, Bloomington.](#)

Therefore, Delia Zapata Olivella acted as an interpreter for him, not only in terms of English-Caribbean Spanish but also in musical and cultural terms.

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Silencing through her epistemic authority: Delia Zapata Olivella was not free of reproducing epistemic violence common in ethnographic practice. In this interview List was interested to learn about his interlocutors' (Catalino Parra, Francisco Ramirez, Antonio Orozco, Jesus María Ramirez, and Enrique Alberto Sarmiento) jobs or occupations. Delia Zapata Olivella asks about how they learned their occupations but interrupts them shortly after one tried to tell some additional information.



[Interview with Catalino Parra, Francisco Ramirez, Antonio Orozco, Jesus María Ramirez, and Enrique Alberto Sarmiento, Delia Zapata Olivella and George List. Collection 65-291-F, OT12141. Archives of Traditional Music. Indiana University, Bloomington.](#)

Shaping the narrative of the research: Connecting with community is an important part of the ethnographic endeavor. Delia Zapata Olivella was closely related to some of the musicians who were List's interlocutors, since they played for her dance group. This relationship had a big impact on the information List could gather. In this interview Delia is asking Catalino Parra about the rhythms usually performed with music ensembles. At first, he did not list all the rhythms, so she intervened, asking for specific rhythms, trying to evoke their memory. The joke "traen gordo, que están comiéndose la mitad de lo que hacen"⁶ sets a playful, sassy tone that I associate with schoolteachers who patiently help students remember all of what they already know.



[Interview with Catalino Parra, Francisco Ramirez, Antonio Orozco, Jesus María Ramirez, and Enrique Alberto Sarmiento, Delia Zapata Olivella and George List. Collection 65-291-F, OT12141. Archives of Traditional Music. Indiana University, Bloomington.](#)

It is important to emphasize that by positioning Delia as an adviser, mentor, or tutor, I also intend to acknowledge the power differentials in her collaboration with List and their ethnographic work in territory. Understanding Delia Zapata Olivella's re-existing in the archive opens the door for new perspectives that provide a more complete picture of this history and her history.

It is important to emphasize that by positioning Delia as an adviser, mentor, or tutor, I also intend to acknowledge the power differentials in her collaboration with List and their ethnographic work in territory. Understanding Delia Zapata Olivella's re-existing in the archive opens the door for new perspectives that provide a more complete picture of this history and her history.

Amplifying Whispers: Delia Zapata Olivella and Eve Zipoura Ehrlichman

["I have a question"](#) —Eve Ehrlichman's voice

When I began my listening journey of the field recordings at the ATM, I prepared myself to search for Delia Zapata Olivella's voice. Body and mind were attuned to listening for female voice registers. To my surprise, not until the eighth tape in a collection of 42 sound tape reels did Delia Zapata Olivella's voice appear. Nevertheless, other women's voices called my attention, particularly that of Eve Zipoura Ehrlichman. Eve (or Eva as Delia Zapata Olivella called her), was a pianist, pedagogue, community leader, and George List's wife. Her voice appeared in the fourth tape of the collection in a rather timid way; her whisper led me to uncover a story of close collaboration that she had with Delia Zapata Olivella, a relationship that I was not considering before.

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by Amelia López López

This recording was my first encounter with Eve. I have played it multiple times, and each time I perceived new details. The technology I used differed every time (speakers, earbuds, headphones, laptop speakers), and it was only when I used earbuds that I listened to a whisper saying, “Can I ask a question?” This whisper served as an interlude that prepared my ears and attuned my mind to understanding Eve Ehrlichman’s intellectual contributions. Her active role in the ethnographic endeavor and her labor of care—taking care of their children (Michael and Edelmira) while List and Delia Zapata Olivella traveled to smaller towns—are contributions that remain unrecognized but that enhanced List’s intellectual production.



[Eve List, George List, and Erasmo Arrieta. Collection 65-291-F, OT12136. Archives of Traditional Music. Indiana University, Bloomington.](#)

After listening to Eve, I needed to put a face to that voice, but there were no pictures or videos of her made during that trip that gave me any visual reference. It was in Delia Zapata Olivella’s collection at Vanderbilt University that I found multiple photos of her with her family. This discovery reveals the importance of relational practices in uncovering this part of history that was not registered in List’s book or his own archive.



Picture 1. “Giorgio Litz, Eva de Litz e hijos.” Delia Zapata Olivella Papers, Box 67, Folder 5. Vanderbilt University Special Collections and University Archives. Nashville, Tennessee.



Picture 2. “Eve in Cali.” Delia Zapata Olivella Papers, Box 67, Folder 5. Vanderbilt University Special Collections and University Archives. Nashville, Tennessee.

In my relational engagement with the archives, I challenge music studies histories that only consider the viewpoint of the published authors and that do not further interrogate the actors who play an important role in a research endeavor that is collective by nature. More often than not, publications further erase women's voices and contributions. Through relational listening, the voices and stories of these women became audible, visible, and tangible. I hope this no-methodology approach continues guiding my engagement with the archive and that more voices and ears can join me in this journey.



Delia Zapata Olivella by artist Pedro Ruiz. Centro Nacional para las Artes Delia Zapata Olivella. Photo by Amelia López López, June 27, 2023.

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Endnotes

1. Personal Translation. [Re-existence is to re-create life. It is to be inventing life not only to confront structures of powers, but to recognize one-self from the joy and celebration of one's existence [...] it is a compromise for the sustenance and reproduction of existence in conditions of dignity amidst processes of social transformation. Thus, living itself becomes political]
2. The idea of multiple worlds is explained by Arturo Escobar in his book *Pluriversal Politics: The Real and the Possible*, where he demonstrates through a set of essays or ensayos how the tools and concepts developed by different social movements in the South serve as frameworks to “resist the hegemonic operation of positing one

world, one real, and one possible” (2020, x). The emphasis on the plurality has been key for grassroots movements to resist and defend their territories, emphasizing that “If worlds are multiple, then the possible must also be multiple” (2020, ix).

3. Following Anibal Quijano (1992), I use this term to refer to the inherent colonial violence that is present in my worldview. Quijano referred to the colonial power structures that gave shape to the idea of modernity through the creation of a power imbalance in terms of defining categories like race and class. This concept is expanded in his work on the coloniality of power.
4. “A disciplined methodology is to follow a pre-determined sequence of actions dictated by a protocol that seeks to reach knowledge, it is to trace a path that is supposed to be followed. No-methodology is to follow all the possibilities that are left out from the pre-determined path, that the protocol obstructs, and that method represses. Is knowledge in movement” (Haber 2011, 29).
5. Personal Translation. [Professor George List, director of the Traditional Music Archive of the University of Indiana, and his wife Eva, arrived asking for Delia in the "ventorros" (street vendors) that still swarm in the Getsemani neighborhood. Someone rescued the lost couple on the Arsenal beach among the coal heaps and the bunches of bananas. My father, seated at the door of his house, received them by closing his book, an act of reverence he granted to strangers. They asked for the dancer. A program of the performances of her dance group had arrived in their hands.
-We have come to ask her to help us research Colombian musical folklore, they said.
My sister smiled. She was always electrified when someone tweaked that nerve in her heart.
-Start with me, I am the folklore!
[...] Half an hour after meeting her, before going out to research with her the songs of the Blacks from Palenque, he began to record her voice, her deep tones, her laughter, the explosion of her silence. He understood that he was in front of a specimen of folklore not modeled by strange indifferences. He himself would get her a scholarship to learn with Katherine Dunham the techniques of modern dance.] (Excerpt from *Levántate Mulato.*) Zapata Olivella, Manuel. 1990, 324-5.
6. This is a popular saying used to make fun of people who are withholding information.

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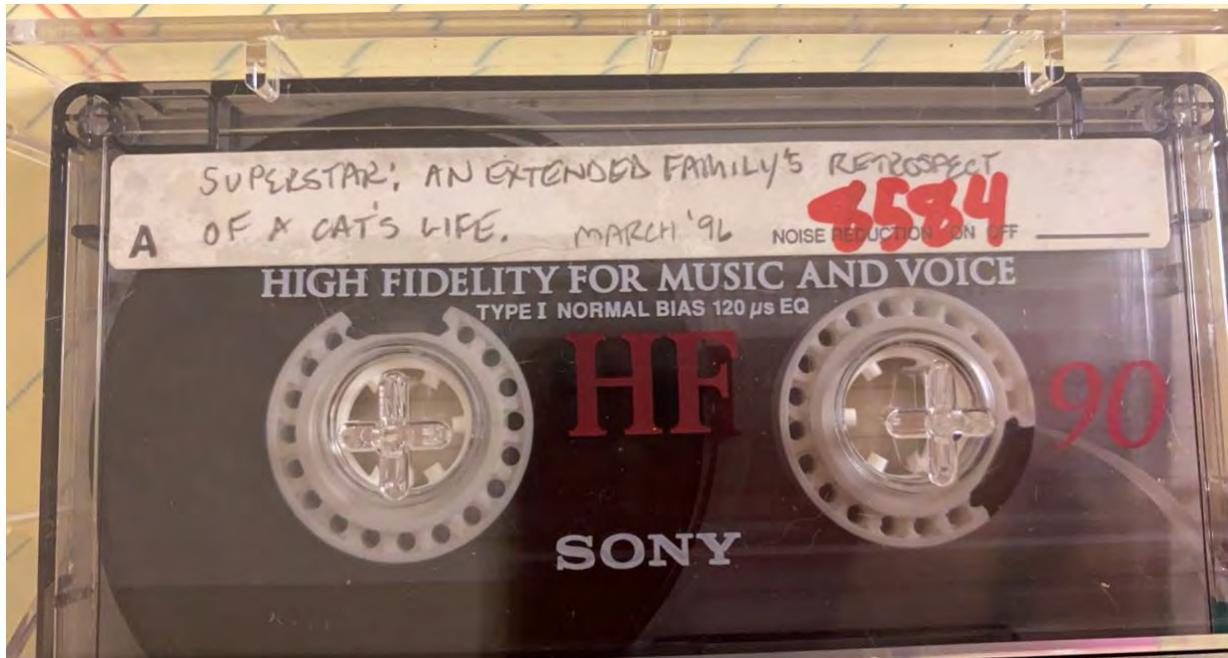
Vanderbilt University Special Collections and University Archives <https://www.library.vanderbilt.edu/specialcollections>

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Introduction: Archives and the Culturally Responsive Classroom

Instructors of Language Arts, History, and Social Studies in the United States are tasked with helping their pupils compare perspectives across time and space. They must teach students how to locate and contextualize varied source materials—and help them develop research, writing, and citing strategies in the process. Standards of learning across the country also require students to analyze claims and practice writing for specific audiences, and to explain and analyze important social issues in the present and recent past, including civil rights, gender politics, technological and institutional change, and human migrations (for example, Virginia’s K-12 Standards & Instruction and Ohio’s Learning Standards for English Language Arts, 2017). Allowing students to explore, interpret, and create ethnographic materials is one way to achieve all these objectives.

Large ethnographic archives, including materials provided online by the Library of Congress, offer enormous and often easily accessible riches to K-16 faculty and students. But we implore teachers interested in creating culturally responsive classrooms not to overlook smaller archives, which often foreground place-based local knowledges and permit both research with existing collections

About the image: Student Ethnographic Project (SEP) Collection cassette tape, featuring narratives that immortalize a family’s incredible cat. Photo by Jordan Lovejoy.

and new community-centered documentation. Diverse perspectives—such as those offered by oral histories—have been shown to stimulate widespread positive outcomes in the classroom and beyond, including creativity and civic engagement (Phillips 2014; Wells, Fox, and Cordova-Cobo 2016). But building on varied local knowledges is especially beneficial for minoritized students, whose cultures and experiences are too often perceived by educators to be deficits. Encouraging students to learn and share information about their own families and communities can create a sense of belonging crucial for “engagement, learning and productivity” (Bowen 2021); more broadly, this kind of sharing encourages all students to “recognize the essential humanity and value of different types of people” (Lynch 2016). And teachers who get to know their students in this way have an upper hand when it comes to making course content and strategy adjustments.

In this essay, we explore what is to be gained from working with ethnographic collections that are relatively “bottom-up” in their orientation and structure. We discuss ways to access local collections and outline the mutually beneficial aspects of developing partnerships with local archives. Most of the article, however, offers a practical glimpse into how we have used The Ohio State University’s Center for Folklore Studies (CFS) Folklore Archives, a repository that has been collecting materials about everyday life in Ohio (and beyond) since the early 1960s. Borland is currently director of CFS, and Christensen and Lovejoy both taught folklore courses in the English Department earlier in their careers. We detail how we used a scaffolded approach to analytic writing that incorporated fieldwork as well as comparative archival research.

In addition to sharing what we learned as we worked to integrate archives into our classrooms, we also provide assignment prompts that can be modified to support learning outcomes for both introductory college composition courses and upper-level high school History and English Language Arts classrooms. Like folklore forms that have been tried and tested through the process of transmission yet are always dynamically adapting to new contexts, we encourage you to take these basic assignment structures and populate them with content attuned to your own needs. As we note below, archives are inherently collaborative institutions, and our best use of them is also collaborative. Thus, we encourage working closely with a local archivist as you develop and modify archive-centered assignments. By doing so, your assignments can address specific learning goals but also take full advantage of the strengths and affordances of the materials available.

Like folklore archives elsewhere in the country, the archive at Ohio State is linked to a curricular folklore program and consists primarily of student-initiated and -defined ethnographic projects. The largest collection, the Student Ethnographic Projects (SEPs), consists of term papers going back to the 1960s. The projects offer snapshots of student interests, campus life, and responses to historic events, and they address myriad topics, including rules for toilet-papering a house and documentation of Dungeons & Dragons gaming traditions (Image 1). While the collection is a trove of youth culture, it also contains interviews with elders from students’ families, hometowns, and workplaces. Because Ohio State’s Introduction to Folklore class requires ethnographic research, student papers typically include at least one audio interview, rich contextual descriptions of practices from everyday life, and sometimes photographs or ephemera. Thanks to many, many student archivists who have labored to keep our archive organized, the SEP Collection is keyword searchable. As we discuss below, our students have not only produced materials for the archive, they have also used existing collections to develop research, writing, and analytical skills.



Image 1. 2022 CFS archivist Jasper Waugh-Quasebarth displays a Student Ethnographic Project (SEP) with original artwork. Photo by Jordan Lovejoy.

But are the SEPs online? you may ask. *And if not, how can they be useful to me if I'm not in Columbus, Ohio?* Because we want to ensure that our materials are used respectfully and according to the wishes of research subjects, and because we lack permanent staff (a feature of many bottom-up collections), most of Ohio State's folklore archive is not immediately available online. However, online galleries and finding aids describe the collections, and we welcome email inquiries and requests for in-person or online visits. Archives of vernacular culture may also exist closer to you, since universities with folklore programs typically manage materials very similar to ours, and some also have online collections. (See Appendix for a list of some archives that we have identified, as well as an invitation to crowdsource an expanded list.)

Alternatively, your nearest university may have an oral history center with interviews and other materials related to local culture. Also look for community archives related to specific groups that may help your students see their own (or new) cultural experiences reflected in documentation and preservation practices. For instance, [Black in Appalachia](#) offers a podcast and online archives of Black life in East Tennessee. Moreover, it supports local documentation and archiving initiatives throughout the Appalachian region (Image 2). The [South Asian American Digital Archive](#) includes a wealth of materials assembled by individuals, families, and organizations. Museums and libraries



Image 2. OSU Geography professor Kendra McSweeney and her students examine letters from an early 20th-century mixed-race mining town in Southeast Ohio (a collaboration between donors Janis and Harry Ivory, *Black in Appalachia*, and the CFS Folklore Archives) during a 2020 class visit. Photo by Megan Moriarty.

often provide online access to a range of primary sources they have identified, as in the personal narratives, videos, and songs about coal company towns in lesson plans created by the [West Virginia Mine Wars Museum](#). These are just a few suggestions for digitally available community archives that you and your students might find interesting. Local, county, and state historical societies may offer online access to primary materials as well, if you are not able to arrange a visit in person.

Once you identify a bottom-up archive close to you, make contact. Remember that these kinds of archives are often under-resourced labors of love, so have an exploratory conversation with archive staff to gauge whether your pedagogical goals can be met using the archives' resources. Developing curricula in conversation with an archivist can ensure that your plans are reasonable and doable and that they align with the learning standards at your institution. Ideally, the archivist could visit your classroom, or your students could visit the archives for a presentation or an encounter with research materials. The CFS Folklore Archives, for instance, has hosted Columbus City Schools students from Mosaic, a high school program that encourages self-directed humanities exploration using the city as an experiential classroom. Our archivists use examples from the SEP Collection to get students thinking about their own community cultures. Mosaic students also learn about archival practices and issues related to the documentation and preservation of everyday life. If an in-person field trip is not possible for you, consider arranging a similar presentation via Zoom, or ask about other options for collaboration.

By exploring archived materials, students learn research skills and discover new content—but archives also benefit. When making a case for financial and staff resources, archive directors can point to your visits as proof that the materials they steward are both important and used. Working with local organizations also facilitates new assignments that can be built and modified over time to enhance learning outcomes. So, it is worth reaching out and developing a mutually beneficial pedagogical relationship with archivists in your area.

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Below, we offer several examples of how we have used Ohio State’s folklore archive in college classrooms. To aid you in developing your own ways to teach using sources from your local archives, we include assignment guidelines and support materials we created for first- and second-year college students. Because the learning objectives in college introductory composition courses are similar to those of upper-level secondary History and English Language Arts classrooms, these assignments can easily be modified for high school students as well.

Using Archives in the Classroom

The CFS Folklore Archives is constantly evolving, sustained in part by decades of English Department folklore courses that teach students the foundations of writing a research paper and conducting ethnographic fieldwork. This student documentary work comprises the SEP Collection. Christensen and Lovejoy brought these materials back into the classroom by building work with Ohio State’s existing SEPs into their versions of a second-level writing course called English 2367 (Language, Identity, and Culture in the U.S. Experience). All sections of this course develop critical-thinking and careful communication skills within a specific academic field, helping students synthesize primary and secondary sources through scaffolded writing assignments. The course stresses analytical strategies such as inductive reasoning and making the implicit explicit, while also expecting students to engage concepts and approaches germane to a particular discipline.

Christensen and Lovejoy both taught a subsection of English 2367 called “Writing About the U.S. Folk Experience.” English 2367.05 couples important folkloristic concepts (such as group, dynamic tradition, genre, performance, power) with fieldwork (observant participation, documentation and reflection, interview and transcription), asking students to reflect on how cultural documentation, as a form of new knowledge production, contributes to their critical-thinking and communication skills. The authors designed SEP-centered assignments to facilitate student success in these areas by drawing on students’ personal experiences, introducing peer models for comparison, and encouraging interrogation of received versions of history.

In her classes, Lovejoy used the SEP Collection to provide examples of other student research papers and help students produce expository writing in an accessible environment. Christensen’s students developed and prepared their own portfolios for accession by the archives, using several archive visits to locate supporting evidence and to examine strategies of ethnographic representation. Both teachers capitalized on the ways the SEPs provide comparative data and allow



Image 3. Archivist Rachel Hopkin introduces students visiting the CFS Folklore Archives in 2020 to the numbering system for the SEP Collection. Photo by Megan Moriarty.

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student researchers to engage issues and objectives germane to Social Studies and Language Arts classrooms. For instance, as students think through the traditional and dynamic elements of folklore, they examine how stories, beliefs, and practices transform over time as they are transmitted and reshaped across groups, networks, and places. Youth culture is not often visible in historical records, so the SEPs simultaneously validate students' life experiences and allow them to speak with authority about the ways that youth and young adult practices have shifted in response to current contexts. Below, Lovejoy and Christensen offer specific descriptions of their different approaches to the same materials, demonstrating the varied possibilities a folklore archive can offer.

Writing the Student Ethnographic Research Paper

In her English 2367.05 course, Lovejoy chose to incorporate fieldwork and ethnography training into research-based writing. Required textbooks included Lisa Ede's *The Academic Writer: A Brief Guide* (2016) and Lynne S. McNeill's *Folklore Rules: A Fun, Quick, and Useful Introduction to the Field of Academic Folklore Studies* (2013). Each student also collected and analyzed examples of vernacular expression early in the semester, based on personal interest. Documenting verbal art, material culture, and customary behaviors can deeply engage students in research practices by encouraging them to examine events or processes from their daily lives, thus expanding notions of what can or should be studied in an academic context.

English 2367.05: The U.S. Folk Experience, designed for 2nd year+ university students, explores “concepts of American folklore & ethnography; folk groups, tradition, & fieldwork methodology; how these contribute to the development of critical reading, writing, & thinking skills.”
(Excerpted from Course Catalog, <https://english.OSU.edu/courses>)

During the first six weeks of class, students worked to define *folklore* and *ethnography*, alongside training in fieldwork practices and expository writing. For example, student groups trekked through campus documenting verbal, material, and customary lore as part of a scavenger hunt activity ([Classroom Connections](#), Document 1). In a subsequent class, each group created and presented a persuasive advertisement for the folklore forms they documented during the scavenger hunt ([Classroom Connections](#), Document 2), applying and analyzing several rhetorical strategies in the process. Later, they participated in an ethnography workshop, using a worksheet ([Classroom Connections](#), Document 3) that asked them to immerse themselves in campus, document their (participant) observations, and reflect on their experiences using fieldnotes.

These activities helped meet course learning outcomes that included effective writing and communication, collaboration, and understanding of rhetorical devices. Because many secondary education learning standards are also focused on communication and research skills, these activities can easily be modified for use in upper-level high school classrooms. For example, [Ohio's Reading Standards](#) for Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects for grades 11-12 include a focus on citing, analyzing, evaluating, and integrating primary sources into student work. The ethnographic research tasks described above support those standards by further developing a student's ability to analyze and employ argumentative strategies and persuasive appeals into written, oral, and visual communication through critical analysis and discussion, including conversation and collaboration with their peers.

After this preparatory work, the class visited the CFS Folklore Archives to engage with the SEPs. The CFS provides several resources and teaching tools for instructors, including [an assignment designed to help students use archive materials](#). This site-specific assignment asks students to choose two existing SEPs related to their individual research topics, then summarize the projects and compare them with their own. In the process, students bolster research skills by learning how to develop keywords and use finding aids. They also reflect on how former students have approached similar topics.

When they visited the CFS Folklore Archives, Lovejoy's students spent the entire class period reading, reflecting on, and analyzing the SEP examples, looking for interviewing and writing strategies and determining how successful they were, and why. Each SEP usually includes a tape log, audio files, transcripts, and an ethnographic research paper, so students see clear writing examples relevant to their research topics and written by peers with similar skill levels. Lovejoy found that these examples encouraged more student engagement than did an unrelated writing sample she provided.

As Lovejoy's students built their own ethnographic research papers, this CFS comparative assignment was useful in several ways. Investigating examples of past student life and interests empowered students to see their own research, writing, and life experiences as valuable contributions to knowledge (and they may deposit their SEPs in the Folklore Archives if they choose). These prior texts also shaped the new ones. For example, one student wanted to explore the intersection of family folklore and youth activism. The two SEPs she read during the archives visit discussed similar ideas, so she was able to examine how other students researched activism and conducted interviews with family members, and she generated more specific keywords that helped her find stronger secondary sources for her own paper.

The archives assignment also helped her craft the questions she used when she interviewed her mother about counterculture protest movements in the 1970s and 80s. Based on what she had seen in the archives, she expanded her study to include more kinds of everyday expression. For example, she analyzed how belief is shaped by personal and group experiences, how material culture like clothing is employed for in-group identification, and how what may be seen as youth rebellion in protest practices might evolve into political agency and citizen engagement over the course of a person's life. Significantly, in reflecting on the project, this student noted how her conversation with her mother revealed that her own political beliefs and protest practices had been informed by those of the prior generation.

This archival, ethnographic, and expository writing process also led this student to discuss how activism burnout often leads to declining engagement in movements for justice, and she argued for methods to prevent burnout—including focusing more on solidarity with, rather than rebellion against, previous generations. The student's paper challenged the stereotype that only youth engage in activism, fight for change, and demand justice, and she commented that her engagement with previous SEPs, alongside her new ethnographic training, reshaped her thoughts about activist movements throughout history.

The SEP Collection is thus a powerful tool to help today's students think critically about the dynamics of both expository writing and vernacular expressive culture. In addition to meeting the

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learning goals related to research writing, such as knowledge of composing processes and conventions, the assignment emphasizes critical thinking, reading, and writing, alongside recognition of how social diversity in the U.S. can shape our attitudes and values toward others. Lovejoy’s use of the CFS assignment also helped students engage with writing produced by academic peers, an important supplement to published scholarship authored by seasoned writers. Importantly, for students who are just beginning to learn both the research process and ethnographic methods, focusing only on a perfect, polished, final product may cause writing anxiety; interacting with peer projects helps students focus instead on research writing as a dialogic and often reflexive process.

Finally, Lovejoy found that collaborating with an archivist on assignments, visits, and materials made the teaching experience smoother and the learning opportunities richer, since teacher and archivist can be sounding boards for one another. The SEPs and teaching with archival material thus challenge assumptions about research writing and pedagogy as monologic products and folklore as a static form, while expanding the scope of whose work and stories are deemed worthy of academic analysis.

Analyzing Framings of Self and Other in Documentary Practice

Christensen taught in the Ohio State English Department several years before Lovejoy, when Folklore Archives staff were still developing technologies and policies to expand the SEP Collection’s accessibility to students and other researchers. At the time, keywords were being standardized and just starting to be required as part of accessioning procedures, and the assignment so helpful to Lovejoy’s students had not yet been designed. Because her course objectives and outcomes were similar to Lovejoy’s, here Christensen draws on several iterations of her course to offer practical tips for guiding students through a multi-visit archives assignment. Explicitly outlining student activities that should take place before, during, and after archives work helps to emphasize and demystify research processes. Furthermore, when created in conjunction with archive staff, these assignments can help repositories develop more efficient or effective processes for working with student researchers.

Like the assignment Lovejoy used, Christensen’s asked students to do comparative work and look critically at archived materials—but instead of explicitly examining writing styles and techniques, students in her classes critiqued modes of documentation and analyzed framings of self and Other. The semester’s textbook was *They Say/I Say: The Moves that Matter in Academic Writing* (5th ed. 2021). In it, authors Gerald Graff and Cathy Birkenstein help students practice summarizing other stances accurately and ethically (“They say . . .”) while also entering important conversations themselves (“I say . . .”).

Christensen also wanted students to engage with a “they” beyond the academy. Employing a rhetorical perspective, she asked students to explore not only what people say and do, but also *how* they say and do it, and with what consequences. For instance, because language shapes how we experience, understand, and order reality, the ways that people have written about and represented “culture” gives insights into the values, assumptions, and social identities of the documenters—not just the documented. In other words, while firsthand interviews, photos, and essays can offer apparently objective data, the ways these materials are “written up” can also reveal social

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hierarchies and point to relationships of power that fracture along lines of race, gender, age, region, class, professional credentials, and the like.

The first time Christensen taught 2367.05 with this comparative project in mind, the semester's theme was the (Ohio State) college experience. To explore the identities negotiated on campus by means of expressive culture, students investigated campus life from multiple viewpoints. They drew on the fieldwork of previous students, conducted an interview, observed campus life in the present, crafted an oral presentation for peer feedback, and composed an analytical research paper that brought past and present ethnographic data into dialogue with theory and history. Patterns and genres they discovered in the archives directed their own fieldwork foci; some, for instance, compared the use of similar genres among different groups (pranking in the marching band in 1970 and pranking on the present-day volleyball team), while others looked at the use of a genre in the same group over time (stepping among African American fraternity members in 1970 and in the student's experience).

Discover assignment scaffolding designed to make research and writing processes deliberately explicit and transparent, including a description of the steps, assignments, and tools that Christensen developed based on student experiences and questions.

However, conducting high-quality research in the archives *and* learning to do high-quality fieldwork proved challenging, given the time constraints of a single semester, an 80-minute class period, and technical issues that slowed down students' ability to identify and search archive materials. Consequently, in the next course iteration the fieldwork piece became an exercise in self-documentation. Based on her emerging knowledge of materials available in the CFS Folklore Archives, and assuming that all students would be able to document and analyze some aspect of their own youth culture, Christensen shifted the second semester's course theme to "Children's Folklore."

Preparing, Documenting, Reflecting: Structuring Archive Visits

At the beginning of the third week of the semester, and in the midst of the disciplinary orientation described above by Lovejoy, Christensen scheduled an exploratory trip to the archives. This visit was intended to help students learn to find and request material. Several readings prepared them for archive etiquette and content (Langlois and LaRonge 1983, Gaillet 2010), and she provided examples of how to cite primary source materials obtained from archives. During this first and subsequent visits, students had tasks to complete before, during, and after ([Classroom Connections](#), Document 4).

Prior to the visit, students were required to reserve several SEPs, using specific instructions and sample search terms.

During each visit, they listed the title, ID number, date, and location of the SEPs they reviewed; summarized the content of each collection in a few sentences; took notes on unusual or intriguing patterns or connections; and identified topics, genres, and groups that they might want to follow up, and why.

After each visit, students shaped these notes into 400-word discussion board posts. To aid peers interested in similar topics—and to improve their summary and interpretation skills—they gave each post a title that suggested some of the genres and topics they’d explored or that pointed to an emerging analytical issue.

“I’ve Got Folklore”: Self-Documentation Assignment

Immediately after the exploratory visit, students used a template ([Classroom Connections](#), Document 5) to begin documenting three examples of vernacular culture that they had learned before age 15. The “I’ve Got Folklore” (IGF) assignment guidelines ([Classroom Connections](#), Document 6) provided students with a list of common children’s folklore genres. Christensen also provided sample completed documentation sheets: one for verbal art, one for material culture, and one for customary behavior ([Classroom Connections](#), Documents 7-9). The template asks the student to transcribe/describe/diagram their specific example (“item”), figure out its genre definition, offer information about its social and cultural contexts (Bauman 1983), find related examples (“variants”), and comment on the item’s social meanings and functions. Peer review of the IGF documentation sheets helped point out information that was confusing or missing and generated new ideas for both the writer and the reviewer.

“They’ve Got Folklore”: Focused Archive Assignment

Weeks 4 and 5 also included an archive visit, preceded by readings about inferring meaning from patterns and generating plausible interpretations. During these visits, students looked specifically at archived data that corresponded to their own “I’ve Got Folklore” documentation sheets. Sometimes, they created new IGF sheets based on gaps they noticed in the CFS Folklore Archives holdings. Students who documented “fighting games,” bullying and “comebacks,” and “gender tests,” for example, noted that these perhaps less savory aspects of playground culture were not well represented in the existing SEPs. Students also took special notice of the ethics and methods of fieldwork employed by the SEP contributors, as well as the ways the collection authors positioned themselves with regard to axes of power (based, for instance, on how they spoke about research “subjects” or framed particular topics).

The first time Christensen taught this archives-centered class, it became clear that the notes many students took during their visits were far too general to permit close comparisons or otherwise be analytically useful. She began asking students to copy out three specific examples from archived materials during each visit. In addition, she required discussion board posts to suggest how these examples related to students’ own experiences and to the secondary scholarship they were encountering in course readings.

Synthesis: Preliminary Collection Analysis

During Week 6, students turned in a three-page preliminary collection analysis for peer review. In it, they cited two original texts from the archives and analyzed them in comparison with a related example from their own life (occasionally, students needed to create an additional “I’ve Got Folklore” documentation sheet for this example, highlighting the shifting and emergent nature of the research process). This source integration essay asked them to identify specific features of the text/practice that they found interesting or puzzling, and then craft a discussion leading to and beginning to answer a “So What” question, perhaps related to one of the issues raised in assigned readings. The second time Christensen taught the course, she added a crucial

fourth visit to the archives in Week 8, after students had received peer review ([Classroom Connections](#), Document 10) of the three-page essay. This final trip allowed students to follow up questions or concerns raised in peer and instructor feedback.

Entering the Broader Conversation

In the second half of the semester, students worked to position their primary data within broader secondary research, creating a relevant annotated bibliography, giving an oral presentation, and revising their analytical essay into a six- to seven-page essay to be submitted to the archives. The essay made a claim about how a specific genre/example worked and why it mattered, using at least four relevant secondary sources to help situate student analysis within an existing scholarly conversation, especially around issues of power, representation, and identity. For instance, students examined children’s song parodies as attempts to navigate power differentials, “seeking games” and tongue twisters as forms of cognitive and social development, and high school football as ritualized aggression. Other students challenged the conceptual approaches of past SEPs, redefining terms like *mischief* or *superstition*. For example, one student from southern Ohio analyzed agricultural sayings and weatherlore—often dismissed as superstition—in terms of knowledge transmission and rural identity formation.

Finally, students packaged their project data and analytical paper in an organized portfolio ([Classroom Connections](#), Document 11), contextualized so that it would be useful for future researchers. This final project component not only asked students to write for a specific public audience, but it also emphasized issues of framing and researcher ethics, including the use of proper consent forms and creation of a cover sheet that included relevant keywords and other information required by the archive. To give future researchers a sense of the students’ positionalities, each portfolio contained a biographical statement in which the maker reflected on why they chose their topics and analytical lenses.

Like Lovejoy’s students, Christensen’s students remarked on the validating effects of self-documentation, an increased appreciation for the past’s relevance to the present, and a sense that competent fieldwork and writing was within their ability. Careful structuring of the timing and products of archive visits is crucial to developing this student confidence and capacity—and it also helps to maximize the efficacy of all-too-short archive visits, especially if an archive relies on nondigitized materials and minimal staff.



Image 4. The CFS Folklore Archives and the SEP Collection recently underwent a move, pictured here, and can be accessed by contacting the OSU Folklore Archives. Photo by Jordan Lovejoy.

Conclusion

As these assignments demonstrate, in-person visits to folklore archives can offer students not only content for their research, but also models for successful writing and sophisticated critique, as well as opportunities to contribute new data. These in-person experiences *can* be modified for student groups that are unable to visit the archives by working closely with archivists to co-develop digital conferencing or slide-based introductory presentations, as well as online access to the materials that students would like to inspect.

Another option for remote participation is to contribute to an ongoing digital collection project. For instance, our University of Nevada colleague Sheila Bock hosts a [mortarboard decoration collection](#) on the CFS Folklore Archives website, with clear instructions for anyone who would like to contribute experiences or photographs. Former Ohio State archivist Rachel Hopkin also set up a [campus life digital folklore collection](#), alongside [aids for contextualizing](#) these materials. Although that collection focuses on the Ohio State experience, Hopkin's module and instructions can be easily modified for other campus contexts. Once again, we urge you to chat with a local archivist to explore possibilities for submitting work as well as for doing research in existing collections.

Ohio State's CFS Folklore Archives provides many helpful tools to make the teaching process smoother and the collaborative process stronger. In addition to the resources discussed above, the archive provides [instructions for electronic submission](#) of ethnographic research material, a [tape log template](#), and a [transcription guide](#) to support first-time ethnographers, teachers of ethnography, and institutions wanting to standardize their archival donation practices or looking to partner with communities and/or educators.

We close with a consideration of broader reasons for engaging with local archives, wherever you happen to be. Although bottom-up archives may not be as easy to access as more established national archives with large online platforms, they can offer opportunities to engage with aspects of the past that are not always included in these larger collections. In her book *Urgent Archives: Enacting Liberatory Memory Work* (2021), Michelle Caswell argues that archives created by the most powerful members of a society often symbolically annihilate marginalized and oppressed communities by systematically underrepresenting, misrepresenting, or ignoring them. These archives can in fact contribute to the continuing domination of the underrepresented by excluding counternarratives.

Community archives, on the other hand, are often set up by and for marginalized or underrepresented groups, such as tribal nations or LGBTQ+ people. Minimally, Caswell writes, community archives provide a sense of "representational belonging." Maximally, they accomplish "liberatory memory work," deconstructing the forms of oppression that have led to underrepresentation and misrepresentation in the first place (2021, 6, 13). Working within the context of the South African reconciliation, Chandra Gould and Verne Harris argue that "the powerful will tend to use memory resources to fulfill the end of remaining powerful" (2014, 5), whereas liberatory memory work makes space for other voices and perspectives to confront historic injustices, insist on accountability, and reveal hidden dimensions of human rights violations.

Folklore archives offer students from diverse backgrounds the opportunity both to learn about local cultures and to contribute to the developing record by documenting their own practices and knowledges. Because students research their own groups, their work bolsters their sense of representational belonging. They also conduct liberatory memory work by valuing what is often dismissed as frivolous and unimportant and by recognizing themselves as possessors and transmitters of knowledge.

Moreover, partnerships with smaller archives disrupt silos that prompt constant reinventions of the wheel; by sharing resources and collaborating with and across physical and institutional boundaries, we enter into a more dialogic pedagogical process. Modeling this kind of pedagogical practice strengthens our ability (and credibility) to teach students collaborative research practices and ethnographic methods. We hope that the resources we offer help foster high-quality expository writing, ethnographic fieldwork, and archive literacy. But these joint endeavors also bolster the sustainability of smaller archives that have a liberatory and inclusive mission. Like public education generally, these institutions are often stressed and sometimes under threat.

As you plan learning activities, we encourage you to partner with and contribute to the archival collections in your neck of the woods, remembering that research is always a collaborative venture, and that we can accomplish more by sharing our classroom-tested tools and ideas than if each of us works from scratch. After the long Covid-19 winter, it is time to get our students out into the world and to bring the world to them. Working with your local bottom-up archive can be an exciting opportunity to build relationships across institutions and disciplines while modeling collaboration for students who can see their own cultural experiences, knowledge production, and everyday life documented in an archival collection.

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Danille Elise Christensen has a PhD in Folklore from Indiana University and is Associate Professor in the Department of Religion and Culture at Virginia Tech. As an undergraduate, she earned secondary education teaching certificates in English and Biology. Today her work largely examines the politics of knowledge production, transmission, and valuation, and her publications encompass work on ritualized sport, scrapbook-making, gardening, Indigenous foodscapes, and food preservation. Her forthcoming book explores who has promoted home canning in the United States over the last two centuries, and why.  ORCID 0000-0003-3640-400X

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Archive Appendix Referenced in Article

We invite readers to help us crowdsource community archives and collections that offer opportunities for teaching and learning using primary sources. Local Learning is maintaining a list at <https://Locallearningnetwork.org/TPS>. Write us at info@locallearningnetwork.org to suggest additional archives for this resource.

FOLKLORE REPOSITORIES:

In the West

Berkeley Folklore Archive <http://folklore.berkeley.edu/archive>

Fife Folklore Archives (Utah State University)

<https://library.usu.edu/archives/ffa>

Randall V. Mills Archives of Northwest Folklore (University of Oregon) <https://folklore.uoregon.edu/archives>

University of Southern California Folklore Archives

<https://dornsife.usc.edu/folklore/folklore-archives>

William A. Wilson Folklore Archives (Brigham Young University)

<https://lib.byu.edu/collections/wilson-folklore-archive>

In the Southwest

Houston Folk Music Archive (University of Houston)

<https://digitalcollections.rice.edu/special-collections/houston-folk-music-archive>

Woody Guthrie Center (Tulsa, OK)

<https://woodyguthriecenter.org/archives>

In the Central States

Center for the Study of Upper Midwestern Cultures (University of Wisconsin–Madison) <https://csumc.wisc.edu>

Indiana University Folklore Archives

<https://folkarch.sitehost.iu.edu/index.html>

Ozark Folksong Collection (University of Arkansas)

<https://digitalcollections.uark.edu/digital/collection/OzarkFolkSong>

In the South

Appalachian English (Joseph Sargent Hall recordings, University of South Carolina)

<http://artsandsciences.sc.edu/appalachianenglish/index.html>

Archives of Cajun and Creole Folklore (University of Louisiana–Lafayette)

<https://louisianadigitallibrary.org/islandora/object/ull-acc:collection>

Digital Library of Appalachia <http://dla.acaweb.org>

The Southern Folklife Collection (University of North Carolina Chapel Hill) <https://library.unc.edu/wilson/sfc>

West Virginia Folklife Program Collection (West Virginia University) <https://wvfolklife.lib.wvu.edu>

In the East

Folklore and Ethnography Archives (University of Pennsylvania)

<https://www.sas.upenn.edu/folklore/center/archive.html>

Harvard Folklore Collections <https://guides.library.harvard.edu/gened1097/Harvard>

Northeast Archives of Folklore and Oral History (University of Maine) <https://umaine.edu/folklife/archives>

Pennsylvania Center for Folklore Collection (Penn State Harrisburg)

<https://guides.libraries.psu.edu/c.php?g=1082288&p=8002156>



Image 5. Cassette tapes featuring student-conducted interviews from the SEP Collection. Photo by Jordan Lovejoy.

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Links to Resources, including URLs referenced

- Berkeley Folklore Archive <http://folklore.berkeley.edu/archive>
- Fife Folklore Archives (Utah State University) <https://library.usu.edu/archives/ffa>
- Randall V. Mills Archives of Northwest Folklore (University of Oregon) <https://folklore.uoregon.edu/archives>
- University of Southern California Folklore Archives <https://dornsife.usc.edu/folklore/folklore-archives>
- William A. Wilson Folklore Archives (Brigham Young University) <https://lib.byu.edu/collections/wilson-folklore-archive>
- Houston Folk Music Archive (University of Houston) <https://digitalcollections.rice.edu/special-collections/houston-folk-music-archive>
- Woody Guthrie Center (Tulsa, OK) <https://woodyguthriecenter.org/archives>
- Center for the Study of Upper Midwestern Cultures (University of Wisconsin–Madison) <https://csumc.wisc.edu>
- Indiana University Folklore Archives <https://folkarch.sitehost.iu.edu/index.html>
- Ozark Folksong Collection (University of Arkansas) <https://digitalcollections.uark.edu/digital/collection/OzarkFolkSong>
- Appalachian English (Joseph Sargent Hall recordings, University of South Carolina) <http://artsandsciences.sc.edu/appalachianenglish/index.html>
- Archives of Cajun and Creole Folklore (University of Louisiana–Lafayette) <https://louisianadigitallibrary.org/islandora/object/ull-acc:collection>
- Digital Library of Appalachia <http://dla.acaweb.org>
- The Southern Folklife Collection (University of North Carolina Chapel Hill) <https://library.unc.edu/wilson/sfc>
- West Virginia Folklife Program Collection (West Virginia University) <https://wvfolklife.lib.wvu.edu>

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by Katherine Borland, Danille Elise Christensen, and Jordan Lovejoy

Folklore and Ethnography Archives (University of Pennsylvania) <https://www.sas.upenn.edu/folklore/center/archive.html>

Harvard Folklore Collections <https://guides.library.harvard.edu/gened1097/Harvard>

Northeast Archives of Folklore and Oral History (University of Maine) <https://umaine.edu/folklife/archives>

Pennsylvania Center for Folklore Collection (Penn State Harrisburg) <https://guides.libraries.psu.edu/c.php?g=1082288&p=8002156>

Black in Appalachia Community History Archive <https://www.blackinappalachia.org/community-history-archive>

South Asian American Digital Archive <https://www.saada.org>

West Virginia Mine Wars Museum lesson plans <https://wvminewars.org/lesson-plans>

“How to Use a Source: The BEAM Method” <https://library.hunter.cuny.edu/research-toolkit/how-do-i-use-sources/beam-method>

Scavenger hunt teaching activity handout created by Lovejoy https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Oegim-cqopAju3ncJ1papcJSoQFjpnar/view?usp=share_link

Folklore advertisements activity handout created by Lovejoy https://drive.google.com/file/d/1pmr2X7vx53gz8sdASba3yWW5XpCirpBt/view?usp=share_link

Ethnography and fieldnotes activity handout created by Lovejoy https://drive.google.com/file/d/1x9exmCQq1JPNtnfb-T2pb5qZNKvKpapF/view?usp=share_link

Ohio’s Reading Standards <https://education.ohio.gov/Topics/Learning-in-Ohio/English-Language-Art/English-Language-Arts-Standards>

Using the OSU Folklore Archive Assignment: Instructions for Students https://cfs.osu.edu/sites/default/files/2022-06/using_the_archive_assignment_-_student_instructions.pdf

“They’ve Got Folklore” assignment guidelines (archive notes/reflections and preliminary collection analysis) created by Christensen <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1ZgudksWApYHnPdHNYsDC8qrPA-rMMLU/edit?usp=sharing&oid=100594272009534305491&rtpof=true&sd=true>

“I’ve Got Folklore” blank documentation sheet created by Christensen <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1-pw14Jwpufob5YEIQsYjn1A6XBF8kVT/edit?usp=sharing&oid=100594272009534305491&rtpof=true&sd=true>

“I’ve Got Folklore” assignment guidelines created by Christensen https://docs.google.com/document/d/1dXStmiBKD_EdKjtTbA_qHLLpZF01AmY-eorGeDfo4oU/edit?usp=sharing

Sample verbal art documentation sheet (“riddle joke”) <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1jjZALPft57vWxK-EruvbaGRAfYf00WympQDShKksvk/edit?usp=sharing>

Sample material culture documentation sheet (“Fly tying”) <https://docs.google.com/document/d/125eZUHqWu-XZL8iyvO9uLMDPVSL5V37j-4cHDWsiN4/edit?usp=sharing>

Sample customary behavior documentation sheet (“Catalina Madelina”) <https://docs.google.com/document/d/173tPntD6F8TaX3Df3xH4vIRaHVcRKz3qTnKHKPZYdOw/edit?usp=sharing>

“They’ve Got Folklore” peer review rubric created by Christensen <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1kjelOyP7mzd3sVVOGXLYEO90JsOwJrOK/edit?usp=sharing&oid=100594272009534305491&rtpof=true&sd=true>

Self-documentation portfolio guidelines created by Christensen <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1CyC7XcicCs7o6H7Pbtvj7rHJ6mI3EJX/edit?usp=sharing&oid=100594272009534305491&rtpof=true&sd=true>

Mortarboard Decoration Collection in the Ohio State Folklore Archives <https://cfs.osu.edu/archives/collections/gradcaptraditions>

Student Digital Folklore Collection Course Module in the Ohio State Folklore Archives <https://cfs.osu.edu/course-modules/student-digital-folklore-collection-course-module>

Instructions for Electronic Submission of Ethnographic Research Materials at the Ohio State Folklore Archives <https://cfs.osu.edu/archives/donate/instructions-electronic-submission-ethnographic-research-materials>

Master Tape Log Template for Student Ethnographic Projects at the Ohio State Folklore Archives https://cfs.osu.edu/sites/default/files/2020-08/master_tape_log_template_for_student_ethnographic_projects.pdf

Transcription Guideline created by authors for the Ohio State Folklore Archives https://drive.google.com/file/d/19n6FcVvj9sXQDXphblz_o_Gc4bglj0e/view?usp=sharing

All Classroom Connections https://jfe-publications.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/OhioStateUClassroom_Connections.pdf



Connecting Themes and Stories: How to Use the West Virginia Folklife Collection in the Classroom

by Jennie Williams and Emily Hilliard

Introduction

The [West Virginia Folklife Collection](#) housed at [West Virginia University Libraries](#) holds over 2,500 items of documented fieldwork produced by the [West Virginia Folklife Program](#), a project of the [West Virginia Humanities Council](#). Digital and publicly accessible, such collections can be an excellent resource for educators who are interested in teaching their students how folklife, which includes storytelling, folk and traditional arts, and expressive traditional practices, can spark an interest in or understanding of how our everyday ways of living relate to larger, interconnected topics that affect the world beyond our local communities. Seeing our communities through a folklife archive also has the potential to deepen our understanding of who we are and where we live.

The West Virginia Folklife Collection received the prestigious [Brenda McCallum Prize](#) from the American Folklore Society's Archives and Libraries Section in 2022. This prize recognizes exceptional work related to archival collections of folklife materials produced by an individual or institution. As we are honored to receive this recognition, we want to take this opportunity to offer ideas for how to use this readily available collection in classroom settings.



About West Virginia Folklife

Founded in 2015, the West Virginia Folklife Program documents, sustains, presents, and supports West Virginia's vibrant cultural heritage and living traditions. The program is a project of the West Virginia Humanities Council and is funded in part by the National Endowment for the Arts and the West Virginia Department of Arts, Culture and History, which also produces [Goldenseal](#), the magazine of West Virginia traditional life.

About the images top to bottom: Screenshot of the West Virginia Folklife Digital Collection homepage; Portrait of Al Anderson at his shoe repair shop (photo by Emily Hilliard); Apprentice Jen Iskow and Master fiddler John D. Morris play fiddle at an apprenticeship showcase at the West Virginia Humanities Council (photo by Mike Keller).

About the West Virginia Folklife Collection

The range of stories that contribute to the West Virginia Folklife Collection reflect the diverse communities of our state. There are interviews discussing Appalachian foodways, such as those with bakers [Jenny Bardwell and Susan Ray Brown](#) describing the history and recipes of salt-rising bread that they have collected and studied. Interviews on West Virginia music traditions include those with “West Virginia’s First Lady of Soul” [Doris Fields a.k.a. Lady D.](#) who describes the blues and Black music scenes and venues in West Virginia. There are several interviews with participants of the active [West Virginia Folklife Apprenticeship Program](#), including photos and videos and an interview with 2020 NEA National Heritage Fellow and old-time musician [John D. Morris](#) of Clay County. Other collection highlights include documentation of the foodways and community celebrations of the Randolph County Swiss community of [Helvetia](#), recordings of members of the [Scotts Run Museum](#) in Monongalia County, and Summers County collector [Jim Costa](#)’s collection of 18th- and 19th-century farm tools and objects of rural life.



Doris Fields, aka Lady D. Photo by Mike Keller. [A&M 4224](#).

The West Virginia Folklife Collection became available online in September of 2021 thanks to the collaborative efforts of West Virginia’s first State Folklorist and Founding Director of the West Virginia Folklife Program Emily Hilliard and Interim Director of the West Virginia and Regional History Center at West Virginia University Libraries Lori Hostuttler. The core of the collection includes photographs, videos, ephemera, and recorded interviews with folk and traditional artists and tradition bearers throughout the Mountain State. The collection is original and ongoing, and as we conduct more fieldwork documentation over time, we will continue to add to the collections to preserve stories of those who live here and provide access to those who wish to learn more.

The collection draws from field research of the State Folklorist, other West Virginia Humanities Council staff, partners, and contracted documentarians in collaboration with the documented individuals and communities. This fieldwork focuses on the traditional and vernacular music, dance, crafts, foodways, and material culture of the people of West Virginia, from long settled to new immigrant communities. When using the digital collection, there is an option to “Browse the Collection” and use specific filter terms such as dates, creators, contributors, subject categories, and more to help narrow a search. The collection uses the widely adopted Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH) as a formal standard for subject indexing language. While there is the convenient option to type in specific search terms to find exact items, there is also the option to click on “Browse Featured Artists, Practitioners & Communities.” This option leads to a curated list of a variety of topics and interviews with individuals that may inspire further research and expand upon assumptions of existing expressive cultural traditions in West Virginia.

The following section dives into a subcollection of photographs and recordings taken during the 2018 West Virginia Public Educators’ Strike. It offers a great example of relatively recent events that tie together interconnected themes related to classroom teaching and folklife archives.

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Striking West Virginia educators rally on the steps of the State Capitol, March 5, 2018.
Photo by Emily Hilliard.

The 2018 West Virginia Public Educators' Strike

[2018 West Virginia Public Educators' Strike Collection](#)

This collection could be used in teaching contexts on public education, unions, labor movements, and public protest as well as forms of ephemeral material culture like protest signs. In the chapter “The Daughters of Mother Jones: Lessons of Care Work and Labor Struggle in the Expressive Culture of the West Virginia Teachers’ Strike” in Emily’s book, *Making Our Future: Visionary Folklore & Everyday Culture in Appalachia* (2022), she details a taxonomy of these signs, organized by topic and messaging style, such as “personal testimony,” “union solidarity,” and “pop culture references.” As one prominent trend in strike messaging referenced historical labor struggles in West Virginia and Appalachia, this collection could also augment units on the West Virginia Mine Wars, the UMWA, and Appalachian history and identity.

On February 22, 2018, thousands of West Virginia public school teachers and school service employees walked out of their classrooms and schools demanding a five percent raise and, most importantly, affordable healthcare coverage through the West Virginia Public Employees Insurance Agency (PEIA). This initial action resulted in a nine-day statewide strike that “went wildcat” when rank and file educators rejected the deal made between the governor and union leadership. The West Virginia Folklife Collection includes a subcollection of videos, vox pop interviews, recordings of speeches, and over 100 photos made during or about the strike. These materials document the occupational folklore and expressive culture of the labor uprising. Vox pop interviews with striking educators, students, and supporters focus on the educators’ motivations for striking and their

struggle for better working conditions, often with the acknowledgement that educators' working conditions are students' learning conditions. The photos in the collection focus specifically on the visual culture of the strike conveyed through handmade signs and attire during rallies at the State Capitol.



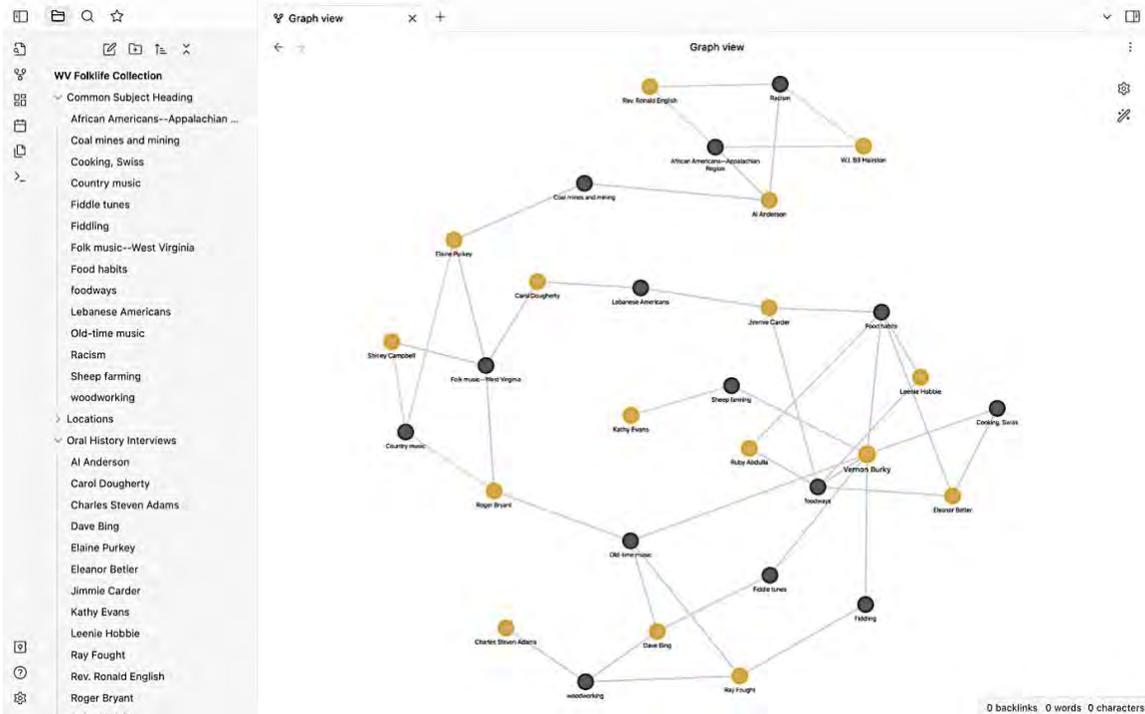
Striking West Virginia educators protesting at the State Capitol hold signs referencing *Star Wars*, February 26, 2018. Photo by Emily Hilliard.

Connecting Stories of Traditional Practices to Subjects in the Collection

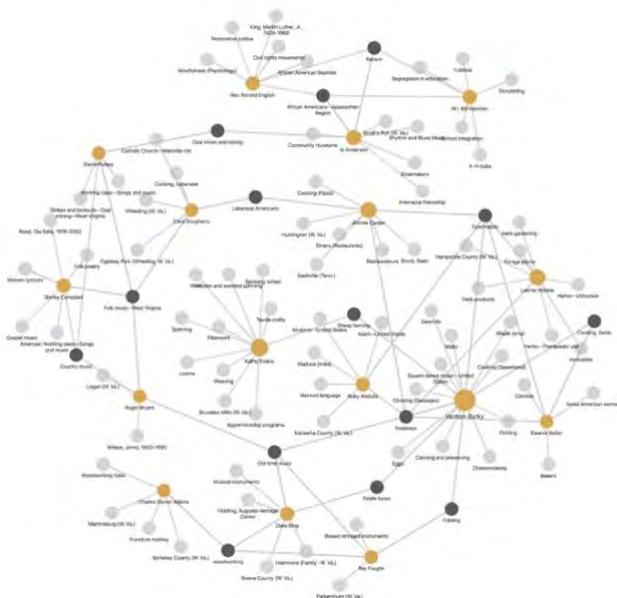
The stories and expressive culture documented and archived in the West Virginia Folklife Collection, such as those of the 2018 West Virginia Educators' Strike, can convey to students the value of local histories and importance of both documenting and studying community histories and culture. As mentioned, documentation of creative practices used during the 2018 strike can aid classroom teaching when discussing greater themes in history related to labor movements or public education. Making this connection will teach students about contemporary examples of protest and perhaps inspire them to learn more about the history of public education in West Virginia or wherever they live. Students may even discover more themes that arise over the course of their research in the subcollections of the West Virginia Folklife Collection. Below are a few visual webs generated by Obsidian, a notetaking software,* to help illustrate how a selection of individual folklife interviews are thematically connected. The visual cannot express the depth, detail, and nuance of the stories; however, it can present a compelling first glance at how the topics in some interviews relate to important topics in the field of folklore.

*Thank you to Mathilde Francis Lind for giving a workshop on how to use Obsidian for several technology-shy Folklore and Ethnomusicology Department graduate students at Indiana University.

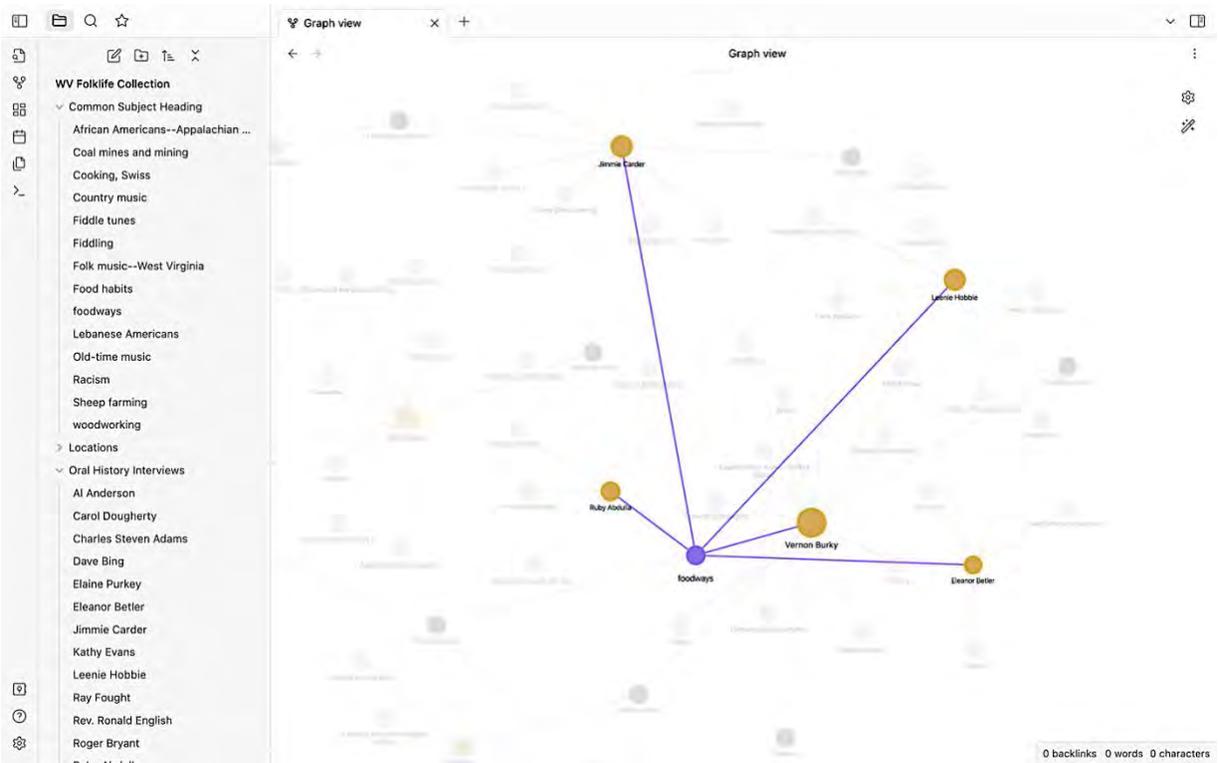
These visuals present connected topics from 16 interviews selected from the “Featured Artists” list. Only 16 are chosen to avoid a cluster of information that would make it impossible to wade through the screenshot visual. The topics are based solely on the Library of Congress LCSH attributed to each interview, not the full interview transcription text. While one can see that each interview connects to another by at least one subject, the people whose interviews are preserved in the West Virginia Folklife Collection may connect over many more topics, including shared creative interests, places where they grew up or worked, and even social bonds.



Note the images illustrate an example of data compilation on Obsidian. Researchers can download the [Obsidian app](#) for free online and use the tool to organize data and notes.



The gold nodes represent a single folklife interview while the light gray nodes connected to the gold and branching off in different directions represent their various LCSH. The dark gray nodes represent shared LCSH, revealing shared themes among individual experiences expressed in the interviews. When using Obsidian, the graph view is animated; it shifts and rearranges so the viewer can consider various degrees of isolation or connection between themes. Visualizing data and notes helps to inspire new ideas and identify connections that one may not have considered. Students are encouraged to try the software, experiment with connections and data, and explore the movement of the animated graph view.



The purple node is “foodways” and shows connections to gold nodes—folklife interviews.

According to the Library of Congress, “foodways” is a variant of the LCSH “[Food Habits.](#)” In this visual, the commonly used term among folklorists, “[foodways,](#)” is highlighted to show clear connections over food traditions and sharing stories about food and community between the following interviews in the collection: [Ruby Abdulla \(Kanawha County\)](#), [Jimmie Carder \(Cabell County\)](#), [Leenie Hobbie \(Hampshire County\)](#), [Vernon Burky \(Randolph County\)](#), and [Eleanor Betler \(Randolph County\)](#). Please note again that this visual is a snapshot of a few select interviews with individuals who live across the Mountain State and are not the only interviews in the collection that share a common connection over “foodways.”

In this visual, the light gray nodes are filtered out so only the dark gray nodes representing shared LCSH are viewable in connection to the artist and practitioner interviews in gold. A researcher can certainly make additional connections and learn more about how these individual stories relate, which may be a compelling project for students learning to conduct research and analyze themes.

Visualizing data can help students understand the connections between the past and the present, between cultural groups and individuals, and between stories in an archive and stories they hear shared every day. Students should be encouraged to research and interpret themes they identify in archival collections and consider ways that they can conduct creative projects using these themes. They can create poems, songs, zines, or short films after reflecting on the themes and stories they find in archival folklife collections. Folklife collections such as the West Virginia Folklife Collection offer students an opportunity to learn about expressive cultural traditions in their own region and may encourage them to think critically about the practices they carry on in their own communities.

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Emily Hilliard is a folklorist and writer at Berea College. She is the former West Virginia State Folklorist and Founding Director of the West Virginia Folklife Program. She was a 2021–2022 American Folklife Center Archie Green Fellow for a project documenting the occupational culture of rural mail carriers in Central Appalachia and serves on the board of the West Virginia Mine Wars Museum. She is also the co-founder and co-owner of the feminist record label SPINSTER. Her book [Making Our Future: Visionary Folklore and Everyday Culture in Appalachia](#), a finalist for the Appalachian Studies Association’s Weatherford Award, was published by UNC Press in 2022. She is also co-author of [55 Strong: Inside the West Virginia Teachers’ Strike](#). Learn more about her work at www.emilyehilliard.com.  [ORCID 0009-0004-6464-6318](https://orcid.org/0009-0004-6464-6318)

URLS

West Virginia Folklife Collection <https://wvfolklife.lib.wvu.edu>

West Virginia University Libraries <https://library.wvu.edu>

West Virginia Folklife Program <https://wvfolklife.org>

West Virginia Humanities Council <https://wvhumanities.org>

Brenda McCallum Prize <https://americanfolkloresociety.org/our-work/prizes/brenda-mccallum-prize>

Goldenseal Magazine <https://wvculture.org/discover/publications/goldenseal/>

Jenny Bardwell and Susan Ray Brown

https://wvfolklife.lib.wvu.edu/catalog?utf8=%E2%9C%93&search_field=all_fields&q=Jenny+Bardwell+&+Susan+Brown

Doris Fields a.k.a. Lady D https://wvfolklife.lib.wvu.edu/?f%5Bcreator_sim%5D%5B%5D=Fields%2C+Doris

West Virginia Folklife Apprenticeship Program <https://wvfolklife.org/folklife-apprenticeship-program>

John D. Morris

https://wvfolklife.lib.wvu.edu/catalog?utf8=%E2%9C%93&search_field=all_fields&q=John+D.+Morris

Helvetia https://wvfolklife.lib.wvu.edu/?f%5Blocation_sim%5D%5B%5D=Helvetia+%28W.+Va.%29

Scotts Run Museum

https://wvfolklife.lib.wvu.edu/?f%5Blocation_sim%5D%5B%5D=Scott%27s+Run+%28W.+Va.%29

Jim Costa https://wvfolklife.lib.wvu.edu/?f%5Bcontributor_sim%5D%5B%5D=Costa%2C+Jim+%28Banjoist%29

2018 West Virginia Public Educators’ Strike Collection

https://wvfolklife.lib.wvu.edu/catalog?utf8=%E2%9C%93&search_field=all_fields&q=West+Virginia+Teachers%2E%80%99+Strike+2018

Obsidian app <https://obsidian.md>

Making Our Future: Visionary Folklore and Everyday Culture in Appalachia, by Emily Hilliard

<https://uncpress.org/book/9781469671628/making-our-future>

“Food Habits” <https://id.loc.gov/authorities/subjects/sh85050275.html>

“Foodways” https://wvfolklife.lib.wvu.edu/?f%5Bsubject_sim%5D%5B%5D=foodways

Ruby Abdulla (Kanawha County)

https://wvfolklife.lib.wvu.edu/catalog?utf8=%E2%9C%93&search_field=all_fields&q=Ruby+Abdulla

Jimmie Carder (Cabell County)

https://wvfolklife.lib.wvu.edu/catalog?utf8=%E2%9C%93&search_field=all_fields&q=Jimmie+Carder

Leenie Hobbie (Hampshire County)

https://wvfolklife.lib.wvu.edu/catalog?utf8=%E2%9C%93&search_field=all_fields&q=Leenie+Hobbie

Vernon Burky (Randolph County)

https://wvfolklife.lib.wvu.edu/catalog?utf8=%E2%9C%93&search_field=all_fields&q=Vernon+Burky

Eleanor Betler (Randolph County)

https://wvfolklife.lib.wvu.edu/catalog?utf8=%E2%9C%93&search_field=all_fields&q=Eleanor+Betler

55 Strong: Inside the West Virginia Teachers’ Strike. Elizabeth Catte, Emily Hilliard, and Jessica Salfia, eds. 2018.

<https://beltpublishing.com/products/55-strong-inside-the-west-virginia-teachers-strike>

Journal of Folklore and Education (2023: Vol. 10, Issue 1)

Connecting Themes and Stories: How to Use the West Virginia Folklife Collection in the Classroom
by Jennie Williams and Emily Hilliard

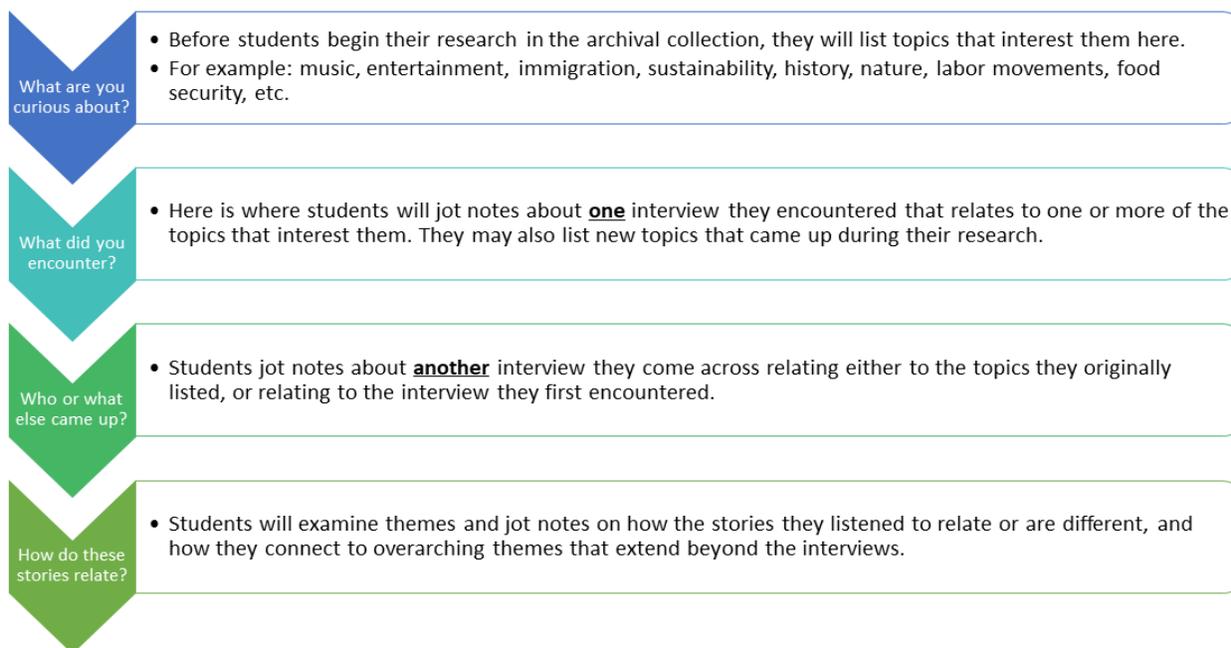
Classroom Connections: Theme Analysis of Interviews

When conducting primary source research, folklorists understand that one person’s account during an interview is not representative of everyone’s experience. That said, we connect with each other through personal stories, and individual stories are necessary for a nuanced understanding of a person’s lived experience. As outlined in the articles featured in the *Journal of Folklore and Education*’s 2019 issue [Art of the Interview](#), “Folk arts interviews teach important details about cultural context, artistic expression as communication, and the ways stories can help us better understand our communities.”* The following activity is designed to help students engage with the interviews and related themes in the West Virginia Folklife Collection.

Activity Goals

1. Students will connect topics and themes that interest them to stories archived in the West Virginia Folklife Collection.
2. Students will identify how personal accounts and experiences archived in the collection relate to themes that exist beyond West Virginia.

This chart is designed for classroom use or as homework for students in middle or high school. It is a “first step” in analyzing themes and allows for engagement with varying levels of detail. The activity could be as simple as jotting down ideas better shared through classroom discussion or as an organizer for longer essay writing. For further engagement, students can consider what they have learned in listening to the collection’s interviews and connect their own experiences and interests to the stories they may hear in the collection.



*Bonnie Stone Sunstein, 2019. Of Art and the Interview: Woven Performance. *Journal of Folklore and Education*. 6:1–3.

How do these stories relate?	Who or what else came up?	What did you encounter?	What are you curious about?

Student name _____

Lâche Pas —



Don't Let Go!

by Jane Vidrine

South Louisiana is not an easy place to live. Hurricanes, heat and humidity, coastal erosion, bad roads, economic hardship, and poor education standings are just a few threats to our daily quality of life. Yet, cultural lifeways and traditions are fiercely vibrant and persistent here, even in the face of a highly destructive force from the past. In 1921, the Louisiana State Constitution removed all mention of school instruction in the French language that had been allowed in earlier versions “in those parishes or localities where the French language predominates” (Louisiana Constitution of 1913, Article 251, qtd. in Louisiana Language Laws). The 1921 Constitution’s Article XII Section 12 states, “The general exercises in the public schools shall be conducted in the English language” (qtd. in Louisiana Language Laws). This policy empowered public and parochial schools to punish and humiliate students for speaking French on school grounds. The message to Louisiana Francophones was that they were second-class citizens. Many who experienced this cultural trauma wanted to protect their young ones from the shame of appearing “less than” by ceasing to teach their children to speak French and other languages even at home. And often when a cultural language fades, so do associated traditions and cultural practices that bind people together—music, dancing, folklore, art, even cooking and home remedies. Although this kind of imposed cultural erosion was not unique to Louisiana French culture, the response was. At the

About the image: Lâche Pas teacher Jason Harrington and Vermilion Parish Schools Arts Supervisor Madeline DeHart on KATC-TV Cool Schools with Lâche Pas musicians.

end of World War II, Louisiana soldiers returned home with stories of how their French language gave them advantages and helped them survive. Many were ready to shuck off the shame and revive Louisiana French language and cultural traditions, although a lot of damage was already done.¹ Thanks to activists who emerged from that generation, total cultural loss has been abated to some extent.

Louisiana Francophone cultural resurgence has been a half-century-long grassroots process fueled by South Louisiana people who believe it is important to maintain aspects of their culture that connect them to their past and make them proud of who they are: Louisiana Cajuns and Creoles. Even though the French language has faded for many, they have preserved cultural family ties and traditions at home. Cajun and Zydeco music and South Louisiana regional cuisine have become world famous since the cultural revival that began in the 1970s. Cajun Culture is a multimillion-dollar tourism brand, a major economic force in the region. Every town has its cultural festival and celebrations—the Breaux Bridge Crawfish Festival, the Rayne Frog Festival, the Festivals Acadiens et Créoles in Lafayette, to name just a few. Community-based cultural consciousness has been raised in South Louisiana. Several organizations have been established whose mission it is to preserve and promote Louisiana’s Francophone Cultures—for example, [Creole Inc.](#), [Louisiana Folk Roots](#), [Vermilionville](#), and the [Cajun French Music Association](#). In recent years, youth camps and private music schools have taught many young people to become competent Louisiana French musicians in both Zydeco and Cajun genres.

Civic and governmental agencies were established to protect, promote, and teach the French language in Louisiana. The most influential of these is CODOFIL, the Council for the Development of French in Louisiana, a state agency founded in 1968. CODOFIL’s mission is to “support and grow Louisiana’s francophone communities through scholarships, French immersion and various other community and language skill-building programs” (CODOFIL). French as a second language (FSL) classes were established in public schools throughout the state in grades 4-12. Unfortunately, 30 to 60 minutes a day exposure to standard French does little to revive an endangered regional language. The desire to further the possibility of bilingualism inspired the creation of French Immersion Programs some 30 years ago in scattered schools around the eight-parish region that locals call Acadiana. Immersion teaching starts in pre-kindergarten and kindergarten with the entire school day (except for English Language Arts) in the French language, including Louisiana French. Whereas French Immersion is only reaching a small part of the population, it has spawned a small but robust community of young adults who are not only competent in the French language but are also dedicated to protecting, strengthening, and interweaving Louisiana French into their daily lives. Some program alumni now teach in immersion settings. Others have seamlessly incorporated Louisiana French language and culture into their career and life paths. There is an expression, “Quelqu’un qui parle deux langues vaut deux personnes,” which means “Someone who speaks two languages is worth two people.” The young adults whose lives were informed by French Immersion have access to the Francophone world in general and have doors held wide open to the cultures of their own region. Their competency in French gives them a deeper insider view of Louisiana French traditions. With that understanding also comes an obligation to continue the trend for future generations.

Teaching Louisiana French cultural traditions in the K-12 setting has largely depended on individual teachers’ creativity and passion for local culture. From an institutional standpoint,

curriculum on folklife topics has made cameo appearances in various editions of Louisiana Social Studies textbooks. Fortunately, an enduring, multigenerational cohort of committed, visionary teachers have found inventive ways to incorporate Louisiana Francophone traditions and culture into their classes in both French and English settings. Most integrated Louisiana culture into their required lesson cycles. One of the earliest examples was Catherine Blanchet, mid-20th- century educator and folklorist who collected French folk songs from her Vermilion Parish students and built lessons and community programs around them. She even established an alternative school in the 1970s with the Acadian Academy, a group of students who performed the Louisiana Acadian music and dances she had collected. Inspired by Blanchet, the next generation of FSL and English language teachers incorporated her work, creating danses rondes² performance groups and using Louisiana French folk songs to teach the language and traditions associated with the lyrics. Theatre pieces, poetry, and history units about Acadian exile and today's Cajuns were created by a cadre of culturally conscious ELA, French, Social Studies, and Gifted education teachers and presented in schools and community wide. French Immersion spin-off community music groups, such as Les Petits Amis formed by the author in the early 90s, have often been used to promote the concept of French Immersion to school boards and the public. A few music educators have incorporated Cajun and/or Zydeco music into their teaching situations. Louisiana French musicians have participated in arts-in-education programs bringing local music into schools. Early on, in the 1970s, school administrators rejected the notion of bringing Louisiana French music to schools, saying that it was “basse classe,” or “low class.” By and large this tide has changed, and now musicians presenting traveling educational in-school performances are welcome, for example, Terrance Simien's “Creole for Kids.” In other content areas, science teachers have incorporated the impact of coastal erosion on cultural groups such as the [Pointe-au-Chien Indian Tribe](#) community of the Terrebonne Basin. [Louisiana Public Broadcasting](#) and its partner [Louisiana Digital Media Archive](#) have been committed to supporting educators with high-quality Louisiana arts, history, and cultural programming for over 50 years.

Interpretive centers and museums provide continuing support for K-12 folklife and local history education through field trips and professional development workshops. Their common missions include public education, promotion, and preservation of local cultures. The largest of these is Vermilionville, a living history museum opened in 1990, whose mission, exhibits, and programming focus on “Native Americans, Acadians, Creoles and peoples of African descent in the Attakapas [historical Louisiana Indian tribe and pre-parish regional designation] region through the end of the 1800's” (Vermilionville nd). Others include the [Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve](#) with interpretive centers in Lafayette, Thibodeaux, New Orleans and Eunice (currently closed); the [St. Landry Parish Visitor Center](#) with its monument to the Creole music pioneer Amédé Ardoin, and regular programming featuring contemporary Creole and Zydeco musicians; and the [Acadian Memorial and Museum](#) in St. Martinville with its commemorative Acadian Migration to Louisiana exhibit.

In the 1990s, [Louisiana Voices](#), a nine-unit online folklife curriculum was launched by the Louisiana Folklife Program of the Louisiana Division of the Arts, Department of Culture, Recreation, and Tourism directed by Maida Owens and the lead consultant Paddy Bowman. The original idea was to build lesson templates to encourage teachers to use technology with their students and to expose them to Louisiana folklife through resources, folklore articles, and the Louisiana Folklife Program's digital photo archive. The author was *Louisiana Voices*' Education Coordinator. For about four years, *Louisiana Voices* was embedded with technology training all

over the state, providing professional development workshops and a week-long summer institute in various locations. Once computer-based teaching became the classroom norm, *Louisiana Voices* remained a resource for educators with occasional workshops sponsored by the Acadiana Center for the Arts or Vermilionville. *Louisiana Voices* is maintained by the State of Louisiana and remains an extensive content and pedagogical resource. However, it has never been formally adopted by the Louisiana Department of Education as an official class or curriculum.

Folklife education in Louisiana is still driven from the individual teacher level. As awareness of the importance of cultural inclusivity increases, perhaps more educators will seek out existing programs, resources, providers, and cultural institutions who can support them.

An Educational Response to Cultural Erosion

In 2022, [Vermilion Parish Schools](#) launched Louisiana Heritage Connections, affectionately called *Lâche Pas*, meaning “don’t let go.” The experiential elective class is exposing students to the rich world of Louisiana Cajun and Creole music, arts, language, and cultural history through hands-on learning and real-life, local cultural experiences.

So, what is new and different about *Lâche Pas*? What sets this project apart is that the project director started at the top and at the bottom at the same time. Her goals included creating a locally based class that met content and district administrative goals alike and was constructed in a way that it could be accepted and adopted as an accredited course by the Louisiana Department of Education (LDOE). After extensive communication and reporting, LDOE Director of Accountability Policy wrote, “participants can earn credit towards the Interests and Opportunities Index in School Performance Scores for their program participation...” (LDOE letter, 4/3/2023). In other words, 8th-grade students may earn high school credit for the course in categories of Arts, Extracurricular (culinary), or World Language by meeting the Interests and Opportunities Index indicators that correspond to the *Lâche Pas* class. Inclusion as a recognized course by LDOE may assist *Lâche Pas* to sustain and grow in Vermilion Parish and encourage neighboring parishes to replicate the class model and start *Lâche Pas* classes of their own.

Louisiana Heritage Connections is the brainchild of Madeline DeHart, Vermilion Parish Schools Arts, Music, and Foreign Language Supervisor. She secured a \$810,000 Reimagine School Systems Initiative Grant, a federally funded grant funneled through the Louisiana Department of Education supporting a three-year plan for implementing Louisiana Heritage Connections classes in Vermilion Parish middle schools. The purpose is “to encourage school systems to think big and to truly reimagine their educational programs in ways that are transformative for students, families, and parish communities” through actions like replication, expansion, rural collaboration, and school model innovation. *Lâche Pas* is thinking out of the box on many levels by creating this model for folklife education across the parish and the state.

Mission, Vision, Goals, and Sustainability

Mission

The purpose of Louisiana Heritage Connections is to offer a general survey course in Louisiana heritage through the disciplines of music, art, dance, folklore, Louisiana history, language, and cuisine. This course cultivates curiosity for one’s roots among youth in Vermilion Parish, and in turn improves connections between students, their families, and the surrounding local community.

Vision

Effect on students: The ultimate objective is to create lifelong musicians and artists who possess a profound awareness of and affection for their heritage and its endangered status.

Serve as a model: Teaching resources developed throughout this project are being made available to any and all school districts throughout the state as curriculum models for similar course offerings. The resources have also been endorsed by and shared with [Louisiana Music Educators Association](#) (LMEA) and the [Louisiana Folk Roots](#) organization.

Administrative goals alignment: The project aligns with the Vermilion Parish Schools systemwide mission to develop a closer connection with community, deepen parent involvement, and improve attendance.



Mardi Gras mask making.

Goals and Sustainability

- Provide instruction in Cajun and Creole Cultures to 150 students parishwide by School Year 2024-2025 at 235 instructional minutes per week. Schools will be phased into the program gradually over three years.
- Provide meaningful interactions with a regional network of master artists, musicians, and historians by hosting visitors and field trips.
- Conduct staff development workshops to recruit and train prospective teachers and administrators and conduct regular professional development sessions with current teaching staff to ensure common outcomes.
- Maintain an Advisory Board of educators, academics, tradition bearers, and community stakeholders to ensure maintenance of high-quality content and pedagogy for effective implementation and sustainability.

Support Superintendent's Strategic Plan

The after-school 9th-hour elective functions as an extension of the newly embedded French elective and French Immersion models installed at several schools and provides space and opportunities for students enrolled in these French courses to use and practice the French language. Moreover, it allows students who are not enrolled in the class to interact with the language and gain an invaluable connection with the culture of their own ancestors.

Implementation Plan

Year I (2022-2023) pilot and planning/curriculum development for René Rost Middle School in Kaplan, LA.

Year II (2023-2024) replication at two additional middle schools—Erath Middle School in Erath, LA, and J. H. Williams Middle School in Abbeville, LA.

Year III (2024-2025) replication at remaining middle schools—Gueydan Middle/High School, Forked Island, East Broussard, and North Vermilion Middle School (tentative).



Jason Harrington teaching fiddle to a Lâche Pas class.

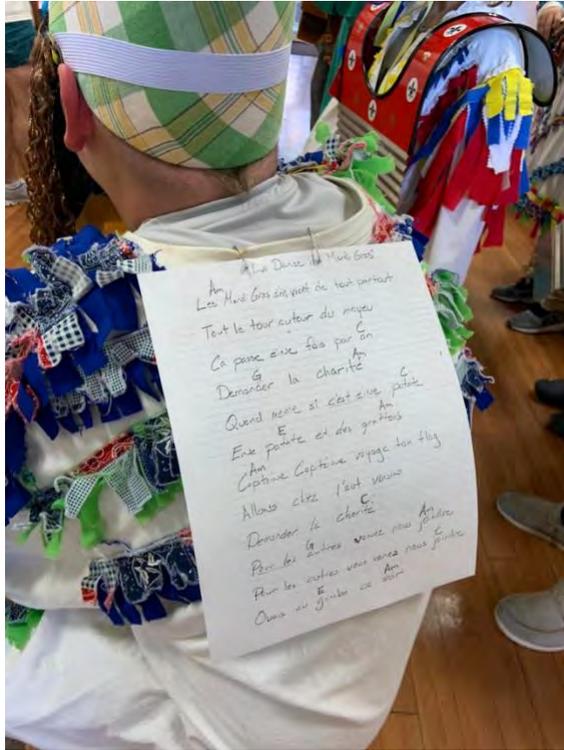
Pilot Class School Year 2022-2023 Highlights

Piloted as an after-school 9th-hour elective for 6th through 8th-graders at René Rost Middle School in the prairie agricultural community of Kaplan, Louisiana, the class of 16 was taught by Jason Harrington, whose family is deeply rooted in Vermilion Parish. Jason is a degreed visual artist, musician, and songwriter whose “all day” job is Vermilion Parish Talented and Gifted music teacher. He also plays in a Zydeco band and a Cajun band and does solo gigs throughout Acadiana. Jason and Madeline were a team in planning and executing the many special projects for the benefit of the students, the school, and the community. Other project consultants who provided lessons, materials, and support were a public historian and author of *Creoles of South Louisiana*, Elista Istre; a Louisiana French Language specialist, Earlene Broussard; and myself, a folklorist, musician, and music educator. This teamwork between teacher, arts supervisor, and resource consultants assured the depth and richness of programming. Essential to the effort was the cooperation of community leaders, businesses, and school administrators.

The primary content focus of the pilot Lâche Pas class was on teaching Cajun and Creole music played on diatonic accordion, fiddle, guitar, vocals, ’tit fer (triangle), and frottoir (rubboard). French language, cultural history, and art lessons are interwoven to increase learning beyond the notes. Community tradition bearers, craftspeople, and artists are often invited to visit class to share their life-learned knowledge with the students and conduct activities with them. Adaptability to other schools and teachers with other interests and areas of expertise is key to Lâche Pas. In a different context, the focus could be changed to other folklife genres.

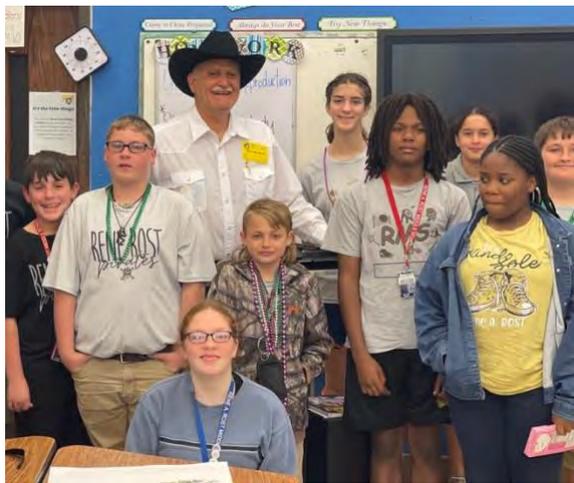
Deep Dive

The Lâche Pas class dove right into the music, learning to sing and understand the French lyrics of the iconic waltz “J’ai Passé Devant Ta Porte” (“I Passed Your Door”). After only a few



Lyrics “cheat sheet” on the Mardi Gras run.

technique lessons on fiddle, students were playing the melody and rhythms by ear, supplemented by basic tablature to support the aural learning and to encourage home practice. The fiddles were purchased with grant funds from [SOLA Violins](#), the violin and luthier shop in Lafayette, LA. The students also learned all about the song—one of the first Cajun waltzes recorded in the 1930s by Joe and Cléoma Falcon—and all about the early days of recorded music. They connected with the song’s story about a young man who loses his sweetheart and learns about it when he comes to see her. In October, the Lâche Pas fiddlers performed “J’ai Passé Devant Ta Porte” and a classic fiddle two-step called “Mon Vieux Wagon” (“My Old Wagon”) along with Grammy-winning Steve Riley and the Mamou Playboys at the Grand Reveil Acadien celebration of Acadian heritage in Abbeville, the Vermilion Parish seat. Community curiosity about Lâche Pas was piqued. Students learned what it takes to prepare for a performance and the feeling of playing music for a real audience.



Alan Broussard with Lâche Pas class.

Back in class, students learned a few more essential Cajun songs with the addition of ten handmade diatonic Cajun accordions from maker Junior Martin. One of their first tunes was the “Cowboy Waltz,” learned from early 1930s recordings of Dennis McGee, the distinctive old-style fiddler who played at home and all over the country until his death in the 1990s. The song tells of working hard with his horse to take care of the cattle. To bring in real-life context, a guest speaker who grew up on a Vermilion Parish cattle ranch shared memories of his childhood on the ranch. Although most of the students are growing up “in town,” several had family experiences in the marsh and in the countryside and could relate to Mr. Alan Broussard’s stories. He shared the history of early cattle ranching in Louisiana; a description of his great-grandfather’s ranch in Forked Island; and an explanation of what it was like to be a youngster on the ranch working alongside his father and grandfather to brand cattle, birth calves, and perform other chores. Students were particularly interested when he showed his grandfather’s handmade horse-hair rope and spurs, talked about cattle drives through

the marsh, and recounted the design and registration process for the Flying J ranch brand. Mr. Alan talked about his best friend Pancho, his burro. What really got the students' attention was when he cracked his grandfather's hand-braided leather whip! After his visit, the "Cowboy Waltz" lyrics "mon cable et mes éperons" ("my rope and spurs") took on a different level of meaning.

Mardi Gras Comes to Class

The town of Kaplan considers itself the center of rural Mardi Gras celebrations in Vermilion Parish. However, in recent years, the traditional "chicken run" has been replaced by the more New Orleans-style float parade found in larger towns and cities. Lâche Pas project coordinators decided that the rural courir de Mardi Gras (Mardi Gras run) would be the focus for nearly four weeks of class—a realistic parallel to the actual Mardi Gras season. Preparations included learning about the rural Mardi Gras from primary sources, including video, written, oral, and photographic materials.

Students learned an adapted version of the Balfa Brothers' "La Danse de Mardi Gras" song on fiddle, accordion, guitar, and vocals. They designed and handcrafted traditional screen masks and capuchons (decorated pointed hats) with donated decorations from a mask maker who was retiring. Rural Mardi Gras celebrations are highly spirited house-to-house begging rituals to gather ingredients for a communal gumbo during mid-winter—historically speaking, the leanest time of the year when food needs were greatest. In this spirit, Jason Harrington and his students decided to ask local businesses for donations of canned goods that they could "collect" during their Mardi Gras "run" down the main boulevard in Kaplan. The students dressed in their handcrafted costumes, visited local businesses, played their Mardi Gras song for the people there, begged with the traditional "Donne-moi que'que chose!" ("Give me something!"), collected over 500 pounds of canned goods, and delivered them to the local food bank. Businesses demonstrated total buy-in and delight, and the mayor escorted the students, gathering the boxes of food on his decorated golf cart. A cultural purist may view the Kaplan middle school take on Mardi Gras as inadequate or incorrect. But if one takes the time to visit, observe, and participate in celebrations out on the South Louisiana prairies, one can observe themes and variations that make sense within the context of each community, assuring Mardi Gras



Young Alan Broussard on his best friend Pancho at the Flying J Ranch.



Lâche Pas students on their Kaplan Mardi Gras run.



Louisiana swamp painting with Klébé Meaux.



Mardi Gras mural almost completed.

as a living, transforming, relevant tradition. As such the Mardi Gras of these middle schoolers was not a pale reenactment, but instead, it was the real deal.

Visual Arts Integration

Several community-based, Louisiana-themed art projects have been woven into the curriculum. The first was a Louisiana swamp scene painting project led by Klébé Meaux, a Vermilion Parish artist. This was followed by a model slab clay pirogue (canoe) project with great geometry connections. The students were quite proud of these and couldn't wait to take them home to share with their families after a school community exhibit. In the same semester, the students painted a huge mural designed by local artist Blake Broadhead. It resides in the hallway of René Rost Middle School, greeting students as they walk to lunch every day. Capitalizing on the success of the students' Mardi Gras project, another mural project is in progress on the side of Piazza Office Supply in downtown Kaplan. Funded in part by the Rotary Club of Abbeville, the mural design and execution are also guided by Broadhead.

Outside the Classroom Walls

René Rost Middle School understands the value of the Lâche Pas and French classes and the administration supports a high frequency of activities beyond the classroom walls. Students take on the role of ambassadors for the school, the community, and the Lâche Pas program. They are encouraged to perform at other schools to recruit students for next year's class, play at community concerts and festivals outside school hours, and promote the program to a broader audience in the media. Students also took cultural field trips. The favorite was to Crawfish Haven, a working crawfish farm right outside Kaplan, for an immersive and tasty lesson in crawfish aquaculture.

Year 1 Takeaway

It's been a year of diverse experiences for the Lâche Pas class. Students started in the fall knowing next to nothing about Cajun and Creole music and traditions and now most could talk your ear off about all the things they have learned and done. The side benefit is the camaraderie and insider knowledge that have developed among the students. It will be years before actual effects on these students become apparent in the decisions they make and paths they pursue as adults. One thing is sure, their cultural treasure chest is filling up with gems that they can be proud of as they look toward the future.

"Before I only knew a couple of words in French and now I know like two whole songs. It's like, I didn't know that I would be able to learn that fast." The student on their aspirations: "Maybe I'd start my own club to play the fiddle and teach lessons to kids."

"What made me interested to take this course was that I wanted to learn to play the fiddle. My grandpa would always bring his fiddle to the house to play—either the fiddle or the accordion—those were the two." -Student reflections

Curriculum Development/Method Books Using Primary Sources

A team of six educators, folklorists, Cajun French language experts, historians, and musicians worked on developing a framework for present and future versions of Lâche Pas. Models for an in-depth, year-long class in a K-12 public school setting are scarce, with the exception of *Louisiana Voices*. Published traditional Louisiana French music methods with score and parts teaching materials are nonexistent although sources such as Ann Savoy's *Cajun Music: A Reflection of a People, Vols. 1 and 2* (Savoy 1984 and 2020) are excellent background resources. Cajun and Creole music have been passed along informally for generations, yet formal teaching of Louisiana French music is a relatively new phenomenon. Only in the past 10 to 20 years have a few master players begun to teach in a formal way through private lessons and camps. A clean slate such as this sparked creativity, soul-searching debates, philosophical and methodological discussions, and challenges for the curriculum writers.

The goal was to create a method book mirroring those found in band and orchestra programs to make it easy for trained music educators to teach using the materials even if they are not master Cajun or Zydeco musicians. Big questions presented themselves: Where to begin and whether to teach technique embedded in repertoire or as a separate entity? How far can you break down a song to its essential melody and structure without losing its stylistic characteristics altogether? At some point, simplification can take the soul right out of the music. What are the first songs that should be taught?

The Cajun, Creole, and Zydeco song bank is staggeringly huge and stylistically diverse. Moreover, a tune that may be easy for a beginning accordion player may present technical challenges on the violin and be better suited for the advancing player (e.g., the use of Lo2 fingering). Should teaching be entirely by rote, or should tablature be introduced, along with or only after learning by ear? Should standard notation be taught at all? And what about lyrics and the question of age appropriateness? Many Louisiana French songs contain adult-themed lyrics, more suited for the dancehall than for the classroom. Yet, there are so many more songs that contain beautifully poetic Louisiana life stories, rich with Louisiana French vocabulary and expressions. The pilot class has been a superb testing ground to work out solutions for some of these issues thanks to the resilience of the students and the teacher. Everyone knew they were involved in something new and different from other classes, so they worked together to get the best results possible.

The project team agreed to focus the music method repertoire on sources that reflected Vermilion Parish through its music, its musicians, and its ways of life—ranching, farming, hunting, fishing, living on the coast, social and family gatherings. A very long list of possible musicians and thematic songs was compiled. Unfortunately, in the course of a year, only a few songs could be learned. The task was to choose carefully for the most representative songs that could be taught successfully at the beginner and advancing student levels.

A flexible list of 20 songs was compiled, and a working rough draft of the Year-1 method book with 12 songs is soon to be unveiled. The songs are sequenced by successive difficulty for the three-year cycle of the class. Songs may be repeated and scaffolded to higher levels as some students remain in the class and new students enter the program during Year 2 or 3. Resolutions to many of the big questions have presented themselves in the process of transcribing the fiddle, accordion, and guitar parts to tablature and standard notation.

Contextual history and language lessons complement the music materials to deepen students' relationship with what they are playing. Subjects include Louisiana: A Cultural Gumbo, the Cajun and Creole Flags—symbols and meaning, Busting Myths about Louisiana Tribes, Cajun and Creole Notables, and Immigrant Story Interviews. An extensive, embellished glossary of Louisiana French vocabulary and phrases focuses on English-French cognates to facilitate French language learning through music lyrics, stories, and cultural themes.

In June 2023, the first five-day Lâche Pas Summer Teacher Institute was held at the pilot school in Kaplan. Music educators from the parish and guest teachers from surrounding parishes learned a sampler of Lâche Pas repertoire; how to play and teach beginning fiddle, accordion, guitar, 'tit fer, and frottoir; and how to dance to Cajun and Zydeco music. Teachers also sampled the Lâche Pas history lessons. Presentations by Louisiana French scholars and experts provided context for the music learning and sparked

Basic criteria were developed to guide decisions about what representative songs from primary sources and tradition to include:

Songs recorded/composed by significant Vermilion Parish Cajun and Creole artists, historical and/or present day, for example, “La Porte en Arrière” (“The Back Door”), by D.L. Menard, and “Soleil Est Proche Couché” (“The Sun Is Nearly Set”) from Inez Catalon, a Vermilion Parish Creole acapella singer.

Songs related to traditional South Louisiana lifestyles and places in Vermilion Parish, such as “Kaplan Waltz,” named for the town where the pilot class took place; “Mon Vieux Wagon,” a fiddle tune about going to the dance on Saturday night; and “Les Ecrevisses Dans Le Platin” (“The Crawfish in the Crawfish Pond”).

Historical songs of Vermilion Parish from the work of collectors such as Catherine Blanchet, Irene Thérèse Whitfield, and John and Alan Lomax. These include les danses rondes, old French round dances sung and performed during the Lenten season when playing instruments was considered taboo.

Iconic, essential first tunes beginners can play successfully, for example, the Cajun waltz “J’ai Passé Devant Ta Porte” (“I Passed in Front of Your Door”), by Joe and Cléoma Falcon, and the Creole La La old-style two-step “Quoi Faire” (“Why?”) from the pioneer accordionist Amédé Ardoin.

interesting reflection, feedback, and discussion about personal cultural connections and contemporary cultural issues. The valuable input from these educators gave direction for further edits to the Lâche Pas curriculum.

Lâche Pas, Louisiana Heritage Connections is a class template that honors the lineage of educators dedicated to assuring that their students are literate in Louisiana French cultures, music, and language. Lâche Pas is contributing by creating a replicable class model with momentum that is sustainable into the future and equipping young people to be stewards of their regional lifeways and traditions.

Jane Vidrine is a Cajun musician, folklorist, cultural activist, and music educator. She is Lead Consultant for Louisiana Heritage Connections, Lâche Pas, a groundbreaking elective curriculum development project focused on teaching Cajun and Creole music, traditions, and language in Vermilion Parish Schools in Southwest Louisiana. As a music educator, she created the Guitar and Ukulele Program for Lafayette Parish Public Schools. Her efforts spawned high school and elementary guitar programs with many graduates earning music college scholarships and becoming professional musicians, arts administrators, teachers, and luthiers. Jane was the Education Coordinator for the Louisiana Voices Folklife in Education Project, planning and delivering professional development workshops throughout Louisiana. She holds a BA in Music from Washington University and an MEd from the University of Louisiana-Lafayette. She performs with two-time Grammy nominated Cajun band, the Magnolia Sisters.  ORCID 0009-0006-1357-4574

Endnotes

1. See the documentary *Mon Cher Camarade*, directed by Pat Mire, 2009, <https://www.lpb.org/programs/mon-cher-camarade>.
2. Les danses rondes are acapella play-party songs practiced during the Lenten season when the use of instruments was not allowed in years past.

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- Cajun French Music Association <https://cajunfrenchmusic.org>
- Pointe-au-Chien Indian Tribe Community of the Terrebonne Basin pactribe.com
- Louisiana Public Broadcasting <https://www.lpb.org/education/home/digital-media-libraries>
- Louisiana Digital Media Archive <http://www.ladigitalmedia.org>
- Jean Lafitte National Historical Park <https://www.nps.gov/jela>
- St. Landry Parish Visitor Center www.cajuntravel.com
- Louisiana Voices louisianavoices.org
- Vermilion Parish Schools <https://www.vpsb.net>
- Louisiana Music Educators Association <https://www.lmeamusic.org>
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- SOLA Violins <https://www.solaviolins.com>

Folklife Education: Why Teaching Students the Skills of Ethnography Matters

by Linda Deafenbaugh

I work at the Folk Arts-Cultural Treasures Charter School (FACTS) in Philadelphia. New teachers coming to teach at our school are unlikely to have had any courses in folklife education in their preservice training, so we kick off new staff orientation with a day that digs into the mission of the school, defines folk arts and cultural treasures, and provides a brief orientation to folklife education. One day working with terms, concepts, and methods gives them a taste and the flavor of the school and why folklife education is such a critically important and powerful approach to teaching and learning in a multicultural society. Teachers also appreciate gaining language to explain to others what their new school is all about when they are inevitably asked “What is FACTS—folk arts and cultural treasures?”

At FACTS, we are dedicated to developing advanced practices in folklife education, and as a charter school, we take seriously our role to share what we are learning with other educators. As we share at conferences and workshops, teachers and educational administrators and community tradition bearers alike give feedback about how important it is for them to have language to explain folklife education in ways educators can easily grasp. Such explanations help them to explain and justify the importance of teaching their students about culture and convince those they are working with of the value of using this educational approach. This article captures some of the language we use at FACTS for teacher professional development to communicate why the skills of ethnography and folklife education matter for student learning.

What are folk arts and cultural treasures?

Culture is layered and complex. See the [Classroom Connections Activity Sheet](#) to begin to create learning around how one might define “culture.” Before I start to define folk arts, I acknowledge that I also use the words “folk arts,” “folklife,” and “folklore” interchangeably. These three terms have a lot of overlap, but it's not a complete overlap. “Folk” most simply means ordinary people—in other words, all of us. “Art” is simply defined as creative expression, “life” as ordinary daily living, and “lore” as words. The overlap is knowledge—the shared knowledge of a cultural group of people that underlies their creative expression, ordinary daily life, and words. But because “folk arts” is in the name of my school, I will consistently use the term folk arts in this section.

Folk Arts: Leveling the Definition

Kindergarten: Folk arts are what we do in our cultural communities.

Middle School: Folk arts are how a culture expresses itself.

Elevator definition for adults: Folk arts live at the intersection of art and culture. Every culture creates unique practices, call them arts if you will, and these practices make the most sense and have the most meaning when situated within the culture that creates them.

To teach within this intersection of art and culture, it is important to bring in community members to the classroom to teach about their folk art practice and to help students explore how the students' own culture(s) may do something similar—or something very different. For example, Veronica Ponce de Leon comes to FACTS to teach about her cultural remembrance traditions (Mexican Day of the Dead). She guides students to explore their remembrance traditions while they create sculptures within her visual arts tradition. Students may have experienced skeletons as scary Halloween artifacts, but in Veronica's tradition, skeletons are comforting. Used to remember those who have passed, they hold three layers of meaning that she shares with the students. In a folk arts residency with Veronica, students investigate how they remember their dead. It may be similar to parts of Veronica's tradition (celebratory visits to graves), or not (with examples that include different practices using photo albums, chairs left empty, or talking through the wind or incense smoke).

One comparison for the topic of death and remembrance can be made in our school using the vertical curriculum model developed by Teacher Biaohua Lei on the history and traditions of the Tomb Sweeping Festival — 清明节 Qing Ming Jie. Students engage instructional topics on traditions about death, as well as remembrance, and the worldview values they reinforce. [Learn more in the 2022 Journal of Folklore and Education.](#)

Folklife Education: Major Components

Folklife education engages three core areas:

- 1) Community knowledge and resources,
- 2) A toolkit that includes skills developed in support of ethnography, and
- 3) Cultural concepts and vocabulary that support nuanced and differentiated student analysis. (Figure 1)

The community knowledge component of the folklife education pie reflects the importance of using primary sources as resources for study. Some community knowledge resources may be in print form, but most are not. Community knowledge resides in the heads of community members. Perhaps this knowledge has never been recorded or written until students begin to re-present what they are learning from their study with community knowledge holders. (See Appendix for additional discussion of each of these major components of folklife education and its connections to formal education.)

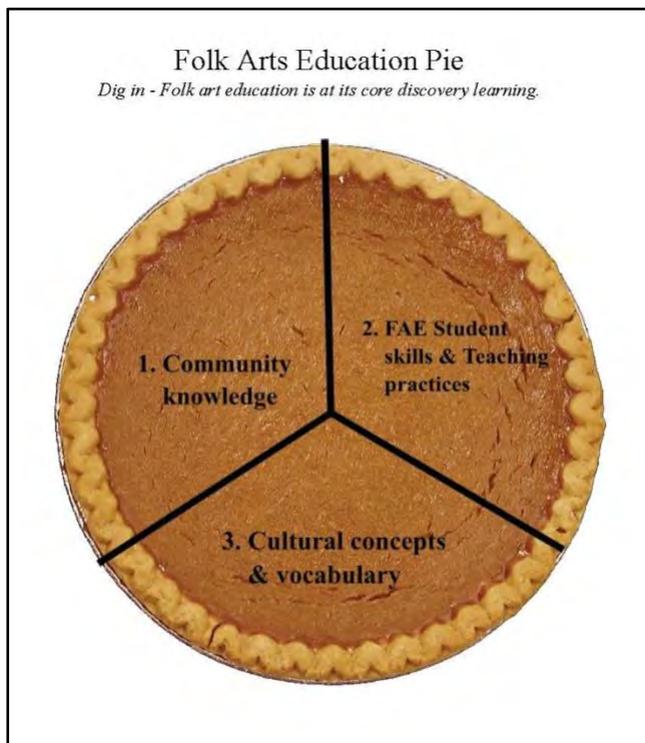


Figure 1. Folk Arts-Cultural Treasures Charter School Folk Arts Education Pie. © Linda Deafenbaugh 2021 (reprinted with permission).

In folklife education, students access the knowledge within the experiences of their families and communities through this specialized toolkit. Students become creators of knowledge resources,

or primary sources, while becoming themselves active community members through experiential learning methods. Every community member holds golden nuggets of knowledge providing unending resources for investigation. The best thing is that this gold resides in every community, so through folklife education, rich resources for learning are easily accessible to every learner regardless of locale, economic, and other considerations and common limitations (Deafenbaugh 2015).

Primary Texts and Diverse Cultural Communities

Getting students into activities or texts that have them interacting with others from different cultural communities is exciting for both teacher and students. I just caution teachers not to move too quickly to interactions with others, for doing so shortchanges the exploration of themselves that students need to do beforehand through activities like Me-to-We. This process builds the bridges that lead to inquiry rather than immediately to categorization. Without preparation for the encounter, students risk learning new stereotypes. “It is depressingly difficult to change stereotypes once they have been acquired. The evidence strongly suggests that it is easier to strengthen negative stereotypes than to weaken them” (Stephan and Stephan 2001, 38). So, avoiding teaching and reinforcing stereotypes is essential (Deafenbaugh 2017).

The folklife education approach is constructivist, as students create new knowledge through inquiry and discovery learning methods to explore the socio-cultural world we live in. We respectfully use authentic cultural resources when we tap into the community knowledge holders. Teachers guide students into exploring their own experiences and then connecting and comparing these experiences with those of others to arrive at new understandings of how culture works in a teaching technique called Me-to-We. (See the [Classroom Connections for an extended activity on Me-to-We](#)). By attending to ordinary daily life, teachers can direct students to slow down and focus more deeply on small moments encoded with cultural information—again presenting endless opportunities for learning about cultural processes. Frequently inviting students to pause and reflect on what they are learning in their study of culture helps solidify and expand student thinking in useful ways. Synthesizing activities furthers students’ skills as knowledge builders. Teaching students the skills of ethnography actively engages them in learning from and with their communities about culture.

Teaching Students the Skills of Ethnography

Why emphasize teaching students the skills of ethnography? When we look at other fields like science or art education, those content areas seek to teach students the habits of mind of scientists or of artists. Likewise, folklife education helps students develop the habits of mind of folklorists and closely related fields that study culture (like anthropology and oral history). Developing students’ ethnographic skills is the central cornerstone for exploring culture—both one’s own and other cultures students may encounter throughout their lifespan. The method of approaching a new-to-them or a different-to-them culture with a question rather than an assumption will go far to fostering positive social interaction across differences in society. Developing the capacity for tolerating and respecting difference is teachable (Deafenbaugh 2017).

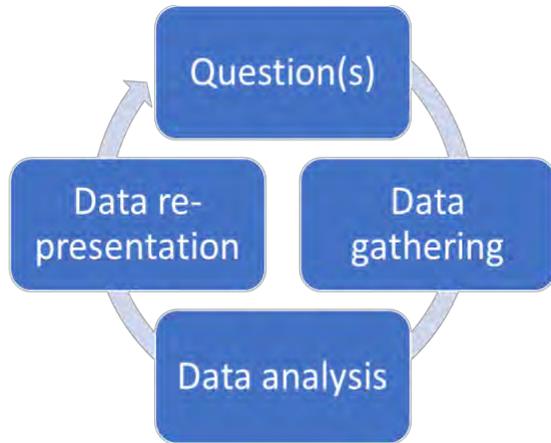


Figure 2. Ethnographic inquiry’s iterative cycle.

The iterative process of ethnographic inquiry (Figure 2) illustrates how students begin with question(s), go through a process of steps to investigate the question(s), and then go back to more questions to pursue by engaging in the ethnographic inquiry cycle again. Science educators may recognize overlaps between ethnographic inquiry and scientific methods. These similarities can open the door for folklife education and science education to be allies. But there are limitations. Ethnography has overlap with science’s study of the natural

biological world, but it diverges from laboratory scientific methods. Culture is a uniquely dynamic phenomenon to study and folklife education equips students with ethnographic skills to investigate the social cultural world.

I developed a grid to help make visible some of what students are learning when we teach them to work with data in ethnographic inquiry (Figure 3). Although the question(s) students start and end with are not presented, questioning is an integrally important part of ethnography.

Ethnographic Inquiry	Folk Arts Education	Tangible Skills (Capabilities)	Intangible Capacities (Habits of mind)
Data collection	Noticing deeply	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Observation • Interviewing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Curiosity • Perspective shifting • Mental flexibility • Working with ambiguity • Openness
Data analysis	Making meaning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organizing • Finding patterns • Making connections 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Problem solving • Inductive reasoning • Hypothesis construction • Empathy
Re-presentation	Sharing with others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presentation • Building an argument/story 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self and social advocacy/action • Confidence in engaging with others across differences

Figure 3. What we are teaching when we teach students the skills of ethnography through folklife education.

The first column lists common vocabulary for describing what ethnographers do as they move through the ethnographic inquiry process. These terms are recognized and used in and by the field of those who study culture professionally.

The second column provides terms that are more friendly-to-young-students for describing each step of ethnographic inquiry. FACTS is a K-8 school, so teachers appreciate having simpler language to use with their students when explaining and discussing the activities they are learning to do in their folklife education learning experiences.

The third column lists some of the tangible skills that teachers are teaching to develop student capabilities in each step of the ethnographic process. These are skills that can be concretely and directly taught. Students can be measurably seen to develop and become more capable in these skills through doing these steps of the ethnographic inquiry process repeatedly in a variety of folklife education learning experiences. Students develop listening skills as they learn to conduct interviews and record responses from their interviewees. To notice deeply, students develop skills in observing and record their observations from data they may gather through any of their senses.



FACTS 4th-grade students in Chinese Shadow Mask Puppet Theater residency. Photo by Messiah King.

To illustrate these skills, I will share an example from a FACTS 4th-grade student's reflections after studying Chinese Shadow Mask Puppet Theater with master artist Hua Hua Zhang. In this classroom experience, the artist guided students to make and wear animal masks to act out a folk tale behind a shadow screen. The student wrote, "Before I thought shadow puppet was when people put their hand inside a puppet. But now I think it people who do shadow puppet."¹ When students learn by doing, as they do in folklife education, they become participant observers and record deeper insights into a cultural tradition.

When students develop analytical skills in making meaning of the data they are gathering, they learn to find patterns, look for similarities and differences, and make connections. By relying on the data gathered, students seek explanations that the data supports. The 4th-grade shadow puppetry student described how she overcame her fear of performing with the mask as she recorded, “it made me feel brave...You couldn’t really tell who was on stage because it was shadow puppet!” The student continued her analysis with a further connection that showed the meaning she was making about the importance of this learning experience for herself and other students, “In school, you have to be brave enough that you will raised your hand.”

Re-presenting or sharing their data and the meanings they made through analysis is an important step. Students can develop their skills for sharing what they are learning through writing assignments, presentations, and synthesizing final projects. The 4th grader we are following wrote her findings in a one-page document that she placed in a decorated folder with some of her observation notes. She shared the new knowledge she had created with her classmates and her folder was hung in the school hallway for more students to see and learn from her insights.

The fourth column is not as easy to measure as the tangible third column is. It contains some of the capacities and habits of mind that students develop as they become more capable in the skills of ethnographic inquiry through folklife education. It is difficult to directly teach mental flexibility, empathy, or other habitual ways of thinking that are useful for positive functioning in a multicultural society. But students do develop these capacities as they become more capable with the skills of ethnography.

Reflection is an important practice at FACTS. Reflective thinking is used during data collection when students recall their prior experiences. Remembering and working with their memories to notice the details of their experiences more deeply helps them develop their observation skills while building mental flexibility. In thinking about that previous experience, the student is in a different place and time and can zoom into their memory to explore details and zoom out to examine the entirety of the experience. Students are developing the fundamentals of multiple perspective shifting as they look at their memories from different perspective points and the fundamentals of mental flexibility as they engage in shifting between these perspective points.

Reflection is also used in meaning making. Teacher-prepared reflective writing prompts guide students into exploring the data they have gathered about their own and others' experiences to find the connections, similarities, variations, and differences. As students discover underlying common bonds between what they may have previously thought was complete difference, they develop a pathway for seeing others with more empathy. Whether students truly have become more empathetic to others is hard to measure tangibly, but they do develop a way of thinking that allows them to see others in a different light—and to see their underlying connectedness to others through surface differences. This mindset equips them with a pathway to developing empathy.

Conclusion

This article has focused on terminology and some of the underpinnings of what is taught in folklife education. I hope I have been able to convey that folklife education is much more than just content, and more than simply teaching artists coming in to work their magic with students. There are teaching methods that are useful for teaching the content that involve meaningful sustained

interactions with knowledge bearers. There are learning experiences within cultural ways of knowing. There is learning with and from tradition bearers. And there is exploring one's own cultural experiences. Folklife education orients education to a particular worldview .

We are all familiar with the dominant paradigm operating within education, which aligns the field of education with the field of psychology. This pervasive worldview focuses on the primacy of teaching and learning as taking place within individual brains. Thus testing, and more specifically standardized testing, has become a major tool to see what the individual student knows. Folklife education, however, aligns with the fields of anthropology and folklore. This worldview focuses on the primacy of the cultural context of learning. In folklife education, it is not just the study of culture, but it is also the attending to the culture of the classroom and the school. It is attending to the whole child in a learning environment. As the FACTS Teaching Artist Ngô Thanh Nhàn explains, students can only creatively express themselves as individuals when they are full members of the ensemble. It is in being part of the group that they learn to be an individual.

Because culture is so complex, and the contemporary world is so mobile, it is a certainty that our students will be interacting with culturally different people throughout their lives. If not sooner, then later. If not in the community, then in the workplace. Folklife education takes the knowledge, skills, and methods of those in the professions that study culture and makes them available to children and youth. Students already grapple with cross-cultural interactions, with misunderstandings, bias, and racism. They need help doing this. Folklife education is a welcome educational approach that empowers students to interact in their culturally complex lives with the confidence to figure out how culture works and how to have positive intercultural interactions. I look forward to hearing some of the definitions for conceptual terms that you readers develop to use with your students and some of the insights your students gain as you engage them in folklife education learning activities and the primary sources that can be found in your communities.

Linda Deafenbaugh has been developing folklife education learning activities for students and teachers for decades, most recently at FACTS in Philadelphia. She can be reached at lindadeafenbaugh@gmail.com

Endnote

1. Student grammar has been retained from original assessment products throughout this article. This assignment was encouraging written expression—getting ideas down—rather than spelling and grammar.

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Appendix: Folk Arts Education Pie

Dig in - Folk arts education is at its core discovery learning.

1. Community Knowledge – The resources we use in folk arts education

- Texts from cultural communities (broadly defined to include songs, sayings, stories, visual art, etc.)
- Students' experiences (families, folk groups)
- Community presenters/visiting artists in the classroom
- Community field investigation
- Home investigation

2. FAE Student Skills and Teaching Practice – What students are learning to do and how to teach it.

Folk arts education equips students to investigate the social/cultural world around us. FAE skills fall squarely under the skills of ethnography.

Tangible skills of ethnography

Data gathering = Noticing deeply

Deep listening, observation (subjective and objective), interviewing, reflection, etc.

Data analysis = Making meaning

Finding patterns, making connections, similarities, differences, etc.

Re-presentation = Sharing with others

Presentations, synthesizing projects, building an argument/story, etc.

Developing habits of mind – Intangible capacities that come from skill development*

- Curiosity, perspective shifting, mental flexibility, working with ambiguity, openness
- Problem solving, inductive reasoning/hypothesis construction, empathy
- Self and social advocacy/action, confidence in engaging with others across differences

* These skills are elusive to measure but are outcomes of students' educational arc. They support FACTS Social Emotional Learning activities.

Teaching practices

Me-to-We, attending to ordinary daily life, reflective writing, respectful use of authentic cultural resources, synthesizing activities, constructing new knowledge, inquiry, discovery learning, etc.

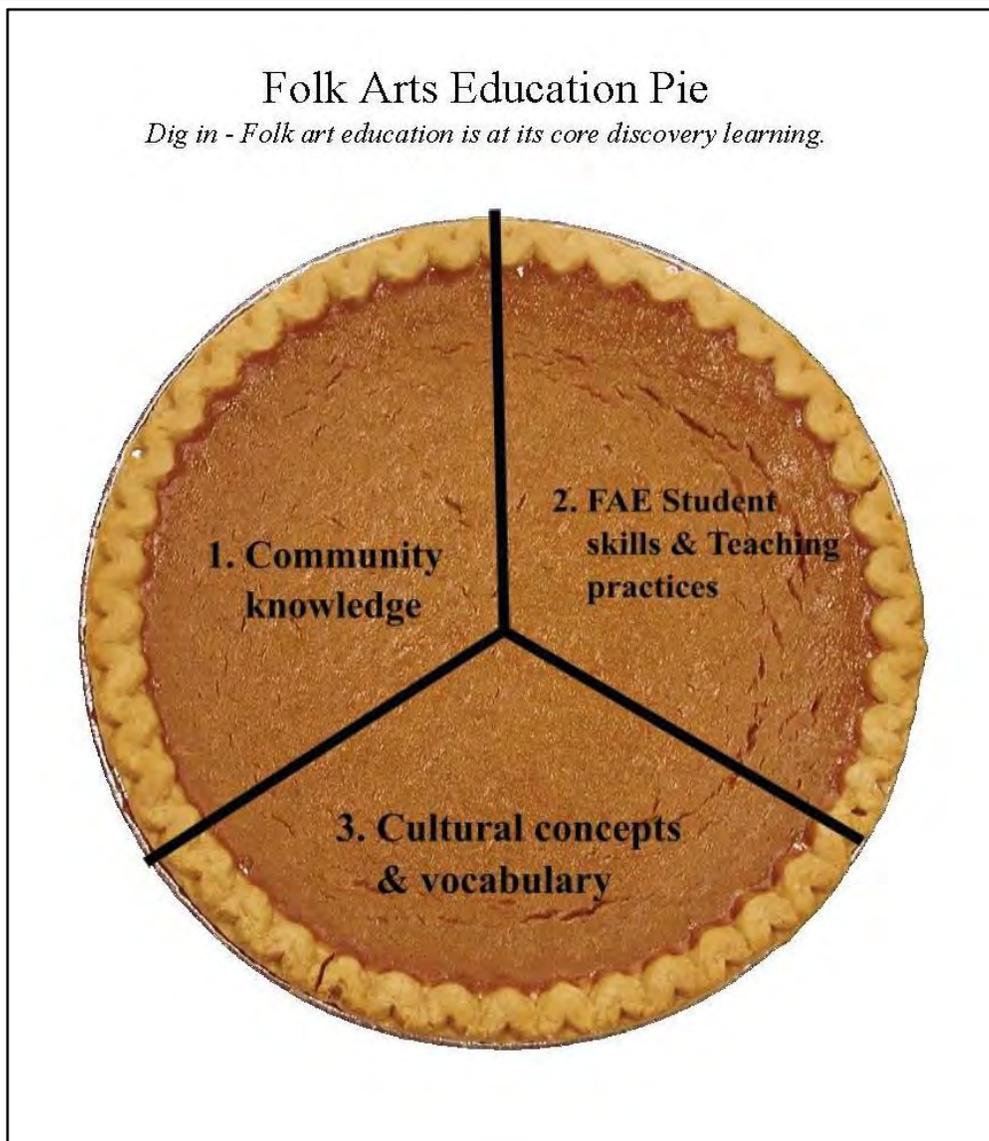
3. Cultural Concepts and Vocabulary

“Big Ideas” about culture, including Folk groups, traditions, cultural rules, roles and participation, folk/popular (commercial)/elite, worldview, etc.

How culture works, including We learn our culture in our folk groups from other people; change is constant in culture; every person is multiculturally constituted; we shape our folk groups, and they shape us; etc.

Enduring understandings, including Communities have artistic ways of sharing what is important to them; art forms arise from the needs, history, resistance, struggles in a community; artists go through training in their form; learning an art form is a process that takes time to master; the art form serves as a record keeper of a group of people and is a way to teach about the history of the group and self-identity; etc.

FACTS folk arts standards, including Recognizing folklife as an active force in our society; explaining the processes by which traditions are created, maintained, altered, lost, and revived; understanding how traditional art forms are shaped by social, political, and economic conditions; expressing themselves appropriately within a range of traditions; etc.



Folk Arts-Cultural Treasures Charter School Folk Arts Education Pie.
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Classroom Connections: A Me-to-We Activity

This pedagogical practice involves starting students with exploration of selected aspects of culture within the student's own experience and then expanding to explore the same or similar aspects of culture within others' experiences.

Planning a “Me-to-We” Lesson

Determine what aspect of culture you want students to explore. With primary and intermediate grades, folklife practices like “home remedies” or “stories about how someone got their name” are very accessible for students to explore. With middle school students, folklife practices continue to be accessible, but you can challenge them to dig deeper into how culture works by selecting a cultural process for students to explore.

This instructional practice makes use of **comparison** as the basis for seeing variations and patterns in cultural practices. Starting with self, and then comparing with others, helps students cognitively reframe differences as variations and recognize more nuanced, complex comparisons, especially as they experience this comparative process multiple times, with culturally diverse others. Reframing differences as variations is important to the recategorizing process for eliminating or countering intergroup biases (Deafenbaugh 2017; Stephan & Stephan 2001).

In this activity to illustrate Me-to-We, I have picked a concept “cultural rules” from “3. Cultural Concepts and Vocabulary” in the Appendix above. Key to students gaining an understanding of a concept is to identify when this aspect of culture is likely to occur in their lives. Culture is complex, so any given aspect is likely to occur in multiple ways or re-occur at multiple points. This repetition in culture increases the accessibility of abstract concepts for students by giving them multiple entry points to explore aspects of culture’s inner workings and structure.

Example:

Cultural Concept: Cultural Rules

Folklife Practices in Student Lives: Students identify all the “rules” they know about a celebration that they may know well—The Fourth of July. Suggest a different occasion, like Thanksgiving, as an entry point for students with no experience with Fourth of July.

Cultural Processes for Students to Discover:

- 1) Many cultural rules are rarely, or never, spoken.
- 2) Culture is both visible and invisible. Like an iceberg, there is a lot going on below the surface.

Start with “Me”

Assign students to gather data from memories of their own experiences. They are to record everything they can remember about a family/extended-family celebration: What are all the activities, what are the preparations, who does what and when and how and why, etc.? Prompt them to remember deeply and record the details. Once students are inside their memories, ask them to be sure to record things that are always the same, or done the same way, anytime their family does this celebration (Noticing deeply/Data collection).

Transition to “-to-”

In pairs or small groups, students share their memories with each other. The task of listening is very important, since the listener must ask questions to get the sharer to explain in more detail or

clarify aspects unfamiliar to the listener (Expanding the data collection to include data from someone else’s experience). Pairs/groups can be tasked with figuring out what was the same, or similar, or somewhat different, or very different between their celebrations or the ways each family “always” does them (Making meaning/Data analysis).

Go to the “We”

Pull the class back together to discuss what they have found was done similarly or differently. You then can restate/revoice their findings as “rules.” Verify with the students that your rewording is correct and then put these up on the board (e.g., men do all the grilling at one student’s Fourth of July picnic, while anyone can grill in another family). By asking the students what might or did happen if someone broke this “rule,” you can guide them to see that there are indeed cultural rules operating in this celebration. By asking students if anyone ever sat them down and specifically told them this “rule,” you can guide them to discover that cultural rules are not always spoken, yet everyone in that family cultural group knows their rules. To guide students to understanding their common bonds, the “We,” ask students to explain what is the same between these two families whose grilling rules are different. Students quickly grasp that “they both grill” or “they both have rules for cooking” (Making meaning/Data analysis).

Then organize this analytic insight into a way to present it, as in this graphic organizer:

<i>We are the same:</i> We both have rules for who can grill at a picnic	
<i>Variation 1:</i> Only men can grill.	<i>Variation 2:</i> Anyone can grill, but it is usually done by someone who is really good at it.

Assessment

Students then return to their pairs/small groups to work together to create their own list of rules by putting them into a graphic organizer that shows the similarities and variations. Instruct students to put a star next to any of their rules that are unspoken, that they have never heard anyone tell them. Then determine how you would like students to share their work, like by presenting to the class or hanging clusters of graphic organizers on a board with yarn linking rules that may be related (Sharing with others/Representation).

Reflection writing prompts after a Me-to-We lesson can usefully direct students to reflect on what they learned about their own culture or what they learned about how culture works.

Activities in which students interact with someone from a different culture in the community should align substantially with the explorations students have been doing of their own culture. In this way, students can repeat the Me-to-We process they just did with their classmates, but this time with whomever they are interacting with from a different cultural community. Alignment between students’ exploration of their own cultural knowledge and their exploration of a community person’s cultural knowledge contextualizes interaction and facilitates the exchange to productively continue the development of their inquiry skills important to Developing the Capacity for Tolerance. (Deafenbaugh 2017)

Classroom Connections: Defining Culture While Teaching the Skills of Ethnography

Wouldn't it be so easy if there were a one-page vocabulary list about culture containing simple definitions for everything students needed to know? But the reality is that culture is so complex, such a list would become quickly useless. Users would realize how much it left out, how limited its perspective was, or even that the list contained biases.

This folklife education lesson guides a group in defining a conceptual term about culture by leading participants (students or educators) through the ethnographic inquiry process. When I do this activity to define “cultural treasures” with new teachers, it allows them to experience discovery learning, an important aspect of folklife education. I do this lesson with a group of teachers, but it is easily adaptable to do with students.

Lesson Objectives

- To reset participants' expectations away from seeking simple phrase or sentence definitions of cultural phenomenon and toward more expansive definitions that better embrace culture's complexities
- To develop participants' ethnographic inquiry skills

Lesson

Step 1: It All Starts with a Question

I use a metaphor to introduce the task the group is going to do together by asking participants to “think of a basket.” A basket can hold many things. We are going to first fill our basket with the incredible range and diversity that make up just one aspect of the human cultural experience. We want our basket to hold one cultural concept with all its variations. Then we are going to describe what goes in our basket to make a basket-shaped definition of the conceptual term: What is a cultural treasure?

NOTE: I prefer to not explain the ethnographic process we use in the lesson until the end of the activity. Inquiry is powerful when participants engage and experience the excitement of discovering. When we reflect on our learning during the wrap up, we then review the steps in the ethnographic process we followed throughout the lesson.

Step 2: Data Collection or Noticing Deeply

On the board write: Cultural treasures.

Ask participants to work together as a large group to give examples of cultural treasures. Rather than writing down all the specific items participants call out on the board, I rephrase their examples as generalizations.

→ For example, a teacher says, “my grandmother's necklace.” I would write “family heirloom,” “special family object,” or even “special object/item.” The way I record their contribution helps all participants think more generally while holding in their memories the specific items that fall within the examples of cultural treasures listed on the board.

Participants begin by drawing examples from their lived experiences and knowledge of the world, and we move together to expand the list to include examples that did not readily come to mind.

Although I am ready with prompts to guide the direction of their thinking, it always happens that when one person comes up with an example, that shifts the direction of the board; others can more easily brainstorm in new directions. At minimum, examples of cultural treasures I would like to see on the board include:

- Physically tangible examples - like artifacts, foods, tools, clothing, etc.
- Temporally tangible examples - like stories, songs, dance, celebrations, etc.
- Ways of doing something - like healing, rituals, governing, cooking, making something, etc.
- Those who know how to do something - like grandparents, folk artists, ceremonial leaders, healers, etc.

This board full of examples becomes our data to work with as a group to form the definition we seek for the cultural treasures concept.

Step 3: Data Analysis or Making Meaning

Ask participants to work independently to find the commonalities between examples on the board. They write down the categories they see in their own words (this is data analysis or making meaning out of our data). Their ways of categorizing help them to come up with, or discover for themselves, what all belongs in the basket for the conceptual term of cultural treasures.

We again work together as a large group to create a new list of categories on the board (or a separate piece of flipchart paper). Individuals share their ideas with the whole group. I do not quickly or necessarily accept all commonalities they suggest. The curated discussion I lead in this step includes asking them to explain their thinking and then possibly asking other participants to build on this or offer a more generalized rephrasing. I then check in with the original speaker to see if the rewording others suggest still captures the common bond that the original contributor saw in the data on the board. With their agreement, I will then add the co-created commonality to our new list of categories.

Step 4: Re-Presentation or Sharing with Others

Once we have generated a list of cultural treasures commonalities, I explain that although we found these as common bonds among some examples, not all the examples of cultural treasures we initially came up with were included in every category and there are millions of other examples of cultural treasures we don't even know about that could fit within our categories. Nonetheless, our list of categories, when considered together, all represent the definition of what can be considered as cultural treasures. At this point, I am modeling the process called re-presentation: re-presenting our findings gained during data analysis.

Next, I present a different re-presentation by introducing the canonical knowledge while honoring the learners' knowledge as being equally valued. I begin to describe what the teachers have found out by using other words—by using terminology from the field of folklife education. I discuss that the teachers have found out or discovered that cultural treasures can be:

- Tangible (like things that can be seen, heard, touched, felt, tasted)
- Intangible (like knowledge that is not readily able to be seen, heard, touched, felt, or tasted)
- People who possess their culture's knowledge and practice it

I then reference the [UNESCO protection of intangible culture](#) and several countries' practice of honoring masters of cultural traditions, for example, the [U.S. National Endowment for the Arts Heritage Fellows](#) and [Japan's Living National Treasures programs](#).

Step 5: It Comes Back to More Questions

I ask participants to voice any questions they now have. Then I ask them some questions to consider: Are they themselves a cultural treasure? Are their students each a cultural treasure—even the youngest kindergarten students? If the teachers don't bring this up, I can point out how all members of a culture, even the young ones, know something about their traditions. I ask teachers to consider what impact it might have if they could help their students know that each of them is a cultural treasure.

Lesson Wrap Up or Assessment

This is the assessment point when we review what we learned about culture. We reflect upon participants' experience using the ethnographic process to craft definitions of cultural phenomenon. I can go over the steps of ethnography, teaching into any step that teachers have questions about. We can also discuss ideas for guiding students through exploratory inquiry learning.

I typically like to end with a culminating assessment activity. I challenge teachers to craft a vocabulary definition appropriate for their students' developmental level. To help them do this, I may give them a rough draft they can edit—or scrap—as they write their own, such as: Cultural treasures are the people of a cultural group and what they know about their culture and what they do to practice their cultural traditions.

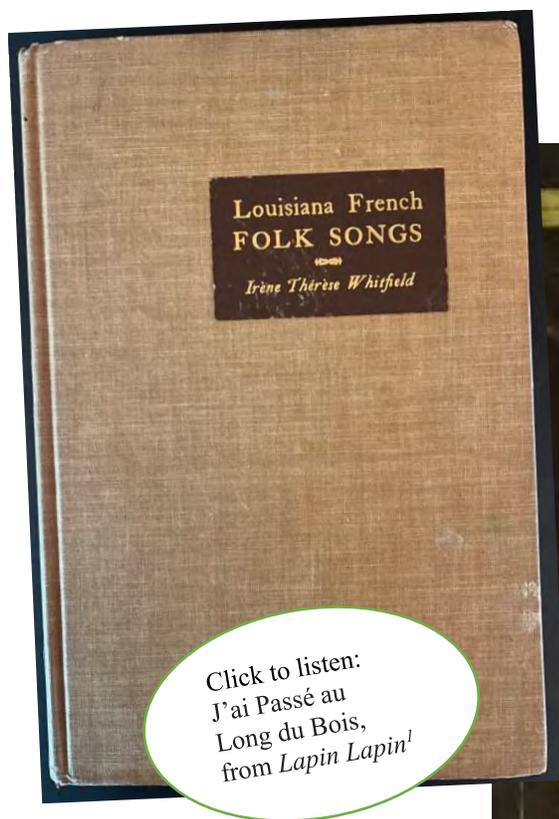
One final question I ask the teachers in my workshop, and I ask you the reader of this activity, to ponder: Now that we have defined cultural treasures, which way of gaining definitions has greater impact toward increasing your understanding of culture: 1. Just receiving a one-sentence definition of cultural treasures or 2. Discovering the “basket” definition for yourself?

URLs

Infokit 2011: What Is Intangible Cultural Heritage? <https://ich.unesco.org/en/home>

National Endowment for the Arts National Heritage Fellowships <https://www.arts.gov/honors/heritage>

Living National Treasure <https://www.japanesewiki.com/title/Living%20National%20Treasure.html>



Digging for Gold: Cajun and Creole Children's Songs and Lullabies

by Jane Vidrine

Getting to the earliest sources of traditional Cajun and Creole songs is a veritable mutual obsession for Ann Savoy and me. We are friends and bandmates in the [Magnolia Sisters](#), the premier all-women's Cajun band from South Louisiana. A song collector, musician, author, and folklorist, Ann had just published Volume 1 of her book *Cajun Music: A Reflection of a People* (Savoy 1984) when she and I, a folklorist and musician, started playing music together. We were both mothers of young children and found common ground and friendship in sharing music while our children played around us. We also were dedicated French speakers seeking to learn more about Louisiana French. Our story goes that our duo was harmonizing on a Cajun song at a party in the early 1990s when the [Arhoolie Records](#) creator Chris Strachwitz overheard us and said, "You should make a record!" Seven albums, countless concerts and tours, and two Grammy nominations later, we are still playing and creating together along with our other musical sisters, Lisa Trahan and Anya Burgess.

Louisiana French music has been the regional social music of South Louisiana since long before the advent of commercial recordings in the 1920s. Yet, as late as the 1980s, it was rare to see a woman perform in a Louisiana dancehall or festival, even if she were on stage with her husband

or other family members. Several notable women who did perform and record were Cléoma Breaux Falcon, who made the first Cajun recording “Allons à Lafayette” with her husband Joe Falcon in 1928; Eva Touchet, who performed with her male family members; and Sheryl Cormier, powerful accordionist and the first woman Cajun band leader. When the Magnolia Sisters came on the music scene, Ann had been playing, recording, and touring for a decade with her husband, a master accordionist and Cajun accordion maker, Marc Savoy. Still, an all-women’s Cajun band was virtually unheard of. This presented certain challenges related to adapting the music to a woman’s voice and sensibility. Many traditional Cajun songs are about jilted love affairs that cast the woman as the antagonist, so choosing repertoire often meant rewriting or gender switching lyrics to make sense from a woman’s stance. Plus, many Cajun standards are awkward for women’s voices because of the range limitations of commonly used C diatonic button accordions.

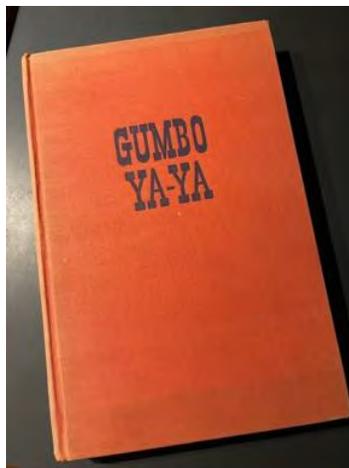
The focus of Ann's and my musical friendship has always been about finding and learning the parts of the Cajun repertoire that nobody else was doing but that somehow spoke to us. We gravitated to songs that were reflections of home, women, and real life. Songs and ballads with beautiful, haunting melodies pulled at our heartstrings. We looked to the past for our models and repertoire, captivated by the earliest Cajun recordings made in the 1920s and 30s by Cléoma Breaux Falcon, singing and playing guitar with her brothers and her husband, Joe. Some of these early recordings had been re-released by Chris Strachwitz on [Arhoolie Records](#). Ann had a collection of 78s, books, and theses on Louisiana folk songs as well as tapes from all over the Francophone world that other music collectors gave her when she was doing her book project. Those resources that others had not explored were gold mines waiting to be shared.

Lapin Lapin: Chansons Cajuns & Créoles pour les Enfants

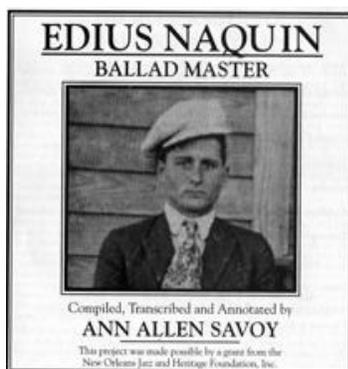
Louisiana French children’s songs are missing from late 20th-century commercial recordings, except for a few that were incorporated into the Cajun dance band repertoire by artists such as Happy Fats (“Little Fat Man”) and Nathan Abshire (“Les Maringoins Ont Tous Mangé Ma Belle,” “The Mosquitoes Ate Up My Sweetheart”). Plus, by the 1970s, the amount of French language spoken in Cajun and Creole homes had declined to the point that most children in the region were no longer exposed to these songs. When asked, some older French speakers might remember parts of one or two songs such as “Saute Crapaud,” a ditty about a jumping frog, but basically the tradition was lost to the archives.

So why did we launch a project to make a CD of Louisiana French Children’s songs? Like any passion project, the reasons were personal. Both Ann and I had grown up outside Louisiana singing the catalog of American children’s songs in school and at home. Songs like “Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star,” “Row, Row, Row Your Boat,” and “Polly Wolly Doodle” were a natural part of our childhoods. They helped us learn the English language. But our children missed out on the Louisiana French counterpart to American traditional children’s songs. At the time of this project, my children were attending grade school in a French Immersion setting taught by teachers from Francophone countries who did not know Louisiana music and certainly had no access to Louisiana French children’s songs. The students were learning French songs, but not Louisiana French songs. I wanted to learn the songs so I could teach them to my children’s classes. As we started to research children’s song, we found language, poetry, and vocabulary that offered glimpses into life in French Louisiana from a time when French language was spoken in the home, in the fields, in businesses, and on the streets of every rural town in South Louisiana.

Children’s songs are rooted in teaching language. Ann and I felt strongly that recording and publishing these rare Louisiana children’s songs might contribute to the ongoing effort to revive French language in Louisiana. The task led us to the archives available to us, notably the [John and Alan Lomax 1930s field recordings at the American Folklife Center of the Library of Congress](#) and important works in the [Center for Louisiana Studies archive by Irene Thérèse Whitfield, Catherine Blanchet, Corinne Saucier, and Elizabeth Brandon](#), as well as books from the early mid-1900s that included songs for children. Upon compiling a list of more than 200 songs, danses rondes, ditties, and variants from recorded and written resources, we realized the huge scope of the project and decided to apply for a grant from the Louisiana Division of the Arts to transcribe, catalog, select, and arrange songs, then publish a CD with a booklet containing lyrics, translations, and background notes. *Lapin Lapin (Rabbit Rabbit)* was placed in every library and French classroom in the state; lesson plans and related articles plus workshops for teachers promoted use of the songs in French classes (Magnolia Sisters 2006).

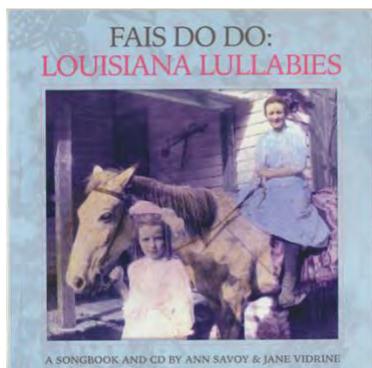


The *Lapin Lapin* CD contains 16 songs. Most of the originals were either sung a capella, as collected by the Lomaxes, or were transcribed in books such as Lyle Saxon’s *Gumbo Ya Ya* (Saxon 2022, 1945). The challenge was to arrange the songs to give the young listener a sense of the historical period without being stodgy while conveying the mood and implied meaning of the text. One song, “Misi Banjo,” is a 19th-century New Orleans Creole ditty found in an old folk song collection as well as a fragment sung by an elderly solo singer in a nursing home recorded by John and Alan Lomax. Adding a banjo and a calypso beat made the song come alive again. Another, “Compère Lapin,” brings to mind the many Louisiana trickster rabbit tales passed down in Cajun and Creole French tradition. “Compère Lapin” is a perfect companion to the author Sharon Arms Doucet’s beautifully illustrated *Why Lapin’s Ears Are Long* (Doucet 1997) referenced in our lesson plan for the song. French Canadian roots of Cajun culture are explored in “Laissez Moi S’en Aller” and “La Caille Et La Perdrix” (French version of “Frog Went A-Courtin”) from recordings of the Cajun ballad singer Caesar Vincent.² The piano accompaniment lends the song its Canadian flavor. “Cribisse Cribisse” (“Crawfish Crawfish”) is a Creole version of “You Get a Line and I’ll Get a Pole” from an old song collection. Old-time stringband accompaniment with playful fiddle and mandolin is the perfect sound for this one.



While it was inventive to make stylized treatments to bring out the mood or reflect the cultural origin of a song, sometimes getting as close to an original recording as possible is called for, as with “[J’ai Passé au Long du Bois](#)” (“I Passed Along the Woods”), a song Ann collected from the prolific Cajun ballad singer [Edius Naquin](#) of Eunice, LA. With only stark fiddles and vocals, it tells of the animals in the woods that sound different and scare us when it’s dark outside. Although not as comprehensive as the huge list of identified songs, *Lapin Lapin* is representative of the types of songs once sung by children in South Louisiana French-speaking families. Yet, there

was an entire category unrepresented by the *Lapin Lapin* project—lullabies.



Fais Do Do: Louisiana Lullabies

More than a decade after *Lapin Lapin*, Ann and I released *Fais Do Do: Louisiana Lullabies* (Magnolia Sisters 2019). This is a book and CD combo with 16 collected lullabies. Original source recordings are adapted and arranged simply yet beautifully with acapella and harmony singing and accompaniments on guitar, fiddle, cello, and piano. I transcribed the music and both of us transcribed the lyrics. Ann designed the book with selected photographic gems from her trove of historical photographs, which she and her daughter Gabrielle hand-colored.

“Je M’endors” is a beautiful song from a 1934 recording made in Louisiana by John and Alan Lomax. Rather than telling the original story about the bullies in Baton Rouge with iron knuckles, Ann composed new lyrics to reflect a child waiting for her parents to bring her home. As with *Lapin Lapin*, old recordings inspired the lullaby project, including collected recordings from the Lomaxes, Irene Thérèse Whitfield, Ann Savoy, and others.

The lyrics to “[Petits Sans Papa, Petits Sans Maman](#)” (“Little Ones with No Papa or Mama”) were found in a hundred-year-old article about Creole songs. They are so rich and full of unusual vocabulary and the story is fascinating. Since there was no tune with these lyrics, we used two traditional Creole melodies to create this song.

Petits sans papa, petits sans mamans (2x)
Qui ça ‘vous autres fait pour gagniez
‘d’l’argent? (3x)
Petits sans papa, dis moi, donc.

Little ones without fathers, little ones
without mothers (2x)
What do you do to make money? (3x)
Little ones without fathers, please tell me.

Nous couri l’autr’ bord pour chercher pat’ d’chats.
Nour tournien au bayou pour pêcher patassas.
Avec nous la cage nous trappé zozos.
Nous couri dans l’bois ramasser cancos.

We run to the other bank to gather catpaws.
We go around the bayou to fish for perch.
With our cage we catch birds.
We run in the woods and gather berries.

Nous couris dans l’bois fouiller latanier.
Nous vend sa racine pour fourbir l’plancher.
Pour faire de thé nous fouillé sassafras.
Pour faire de l’encre nous porté grain sougras.

We run in the woods to gather dwarf palmetto.
We sell the roots for scrubbing the floors.
To make tea we gather sassafras.
To make ink we bring pokeberries

“Fais Do Do Cola Colinette” is a version of a classic European French lullaby in which the mama offers her babies custard. In this characteristically Louisiana version, the mama offers gumbo and cake. Although the purpose of lullabies is to put babies to sleep, some of the lyrics are compelling and full of imagery, offering a view into the private life and thoughts of the singer. They are personal and sometimes sad. They contain advice to the growing child and reveal mothers’ concerns and worries.

Louisiana French lullabies and children's songs were almost lost to history; this project is an effort to help them make a comeback or at least be a relaxing soundtrack at the end of a long day for babies and adults alike. Producing these two collections of Louisiana French children's songs and digging deep into archival remnants of this tradition were personally gratifying to be sure. Combing through reams of paper, books, and cassette recordings was both tedious and exciting. Collaborating on music notation and arrangements, translation and transcription of Louisiana French language, writing and designing *Lapin Lapin* and *Fais Do Do: Louisiana Lullabies* were all part of our creative process. We never expected to change the world or make a ton of money with the products of our work. Rather, we wanted to honor those old voices and have them heard again. The experience of creating something new and useful from something nearly forgotten is palpable. Finding gems like this and bringing them back to life is like mining for gold and hitting pay dirt.

Jane Vidrine is a Cajun musician, folklorist, cultural activist, and music educator. She is Lead Consultant for Louisiana Heritage Connections, *Lâche Pas*, a groundbreaking elective curriculum development project focused on teaching Cajun and Creole music, traditions, and language in Vermilion Parish Schools in Southwest Louisiana. As a music educator, she created the Guitar and Ukulele Program for Lafayette Parish Public Schools. Her efforts spawned high school and elementary guitar programs with many graduates earning music college scholarships and becoming professional musicians, arts administrators, teachers, and luthiers. She holds a BA in Music from Washington University and an MEd from the University of Louisiana-Lafayette. She performs with two-time Grammy nominated Cajun band, the Magnolia Sisters.  ORCID 0009-0006-1357-4574

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URLs

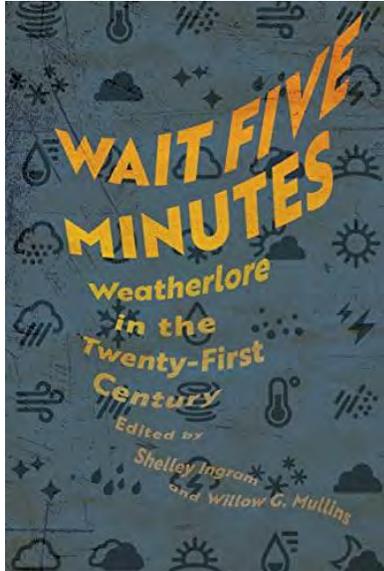
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- Arhoolie Foundation <https://arhoolie.org>
- Arhoolie/Folkways <https://folkways.si.edu/arhoolie>
- American Folklife Center Lomax Collections <https://www.loc.gov/folklife/lomax>
- Center for Louisiana Studies Collections <https://louisianastudies.louisiana.edu/research/collections>
- J'ai Passé au Long du Bois by Edius Naquin <https://folksources.org/resources/items/show/74>
- Edius Naquin Ballad Master CD/Booklet https://www.annsavoy.com/shop_copy.html
- Petits Sans Mamans, Petits Sans Papa <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PEAxnutaXhg>

Endnotes

1. This is the Magnolia Sisters' (Ann Savoy and Jane Vidrine) version of Edius Naquin's J'ai Passé au Long du Bois, from *Lapin Lapin*. We chose to record as close to the Naquin original as possible. [Hear it here.](#)
2. See the *64 Parishes* article by Ben Sandmel about Barry Ancelet's CD project on Caesar Vincent. Our project pre-dated this one, but it was very significant and worth reading for those interested in further investigation: <https://64parishes.org/innovative-new-interpretations-of-centuries-old-music>.

Journal of Folklore and Education (2023: Vol. 10, Issue 1)
Digging for Gold: Cajun and Creole Children's Songs and Lullabies
by Jane Vidrine

Journal of Folklore and Education Reviews



Wait Five Minutes: Weatherlore in the Twenty-First Century. Shelley Ingram and Willow G. Mullins, eds. (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2023, 324 pp.)

Kara Rogers Thomas is Professor of Sociology and Director of Folklore and Folklife Studies at Frostburg State University.

In their edited volume, *Wait Five Minutes: Weatherlore in the Twenty-First Century*, editors Shelley Ingram and Willow G. Mullins bring together an impressive array of contributors to explore weatherlore and its place in contemporary folklore scholarship. That's a daunting challenge given the discipline's long-standing interest in the topic, a fascination that reflects the general public's steadfast occupation with weather-related lore.

What the editors have achieved in this publication goes well beyond a simple cataloging of weather-related proverbs, narratives, and divinatory predictions. Collectively, these essays investigate how social experiences of community, place, and politics shape and inform our beliefs about weather.

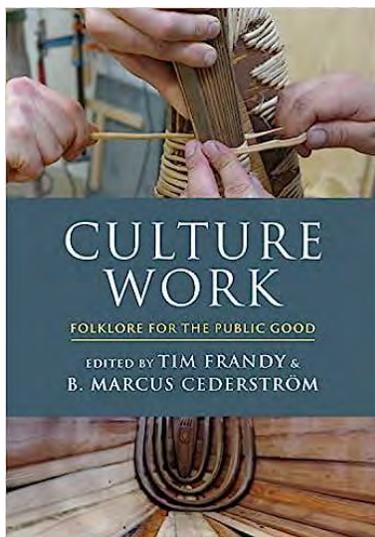
Ingram and Mullins admit that the essays they received in response to their call for submissions did not precisely align with the project as they initially envisioned it—an updated account of weatherlore as it had been previously examined by folklorists. In what may superficially appear to be an eclectic mix of material, the editors found overlapping trajectories that provided a much more nuanced understanding of weatherlore, “...first is a desire for our experiences of weather to match our beliefs about weather, and second, should that weather pose a threat, is a belief that we will survive it” (p. xv). Although the breadth of this volume's approach to weather offers its strongest attributes in that it will appeal to a broad audience, by the book's conclusion, I found myself longing for a few more conventional pieces on weatherlore.

Structurally, the volume is divided into three sections—“Belief,” “Text,” and “Tradition,” each featuring five essays. It is in the introduction to these sections that the editors' work shines. In the introduction to “Belief,” they explore how cultural factors shape our experiences, interpretations, and beliefs of and about weather. Exploring the disquieting reaction to the greenish hue of sky that every Midwesterner understands as a harbinger of tornadoes, Ingram observes that college students she surveyed in the U.S. South do not perceive the sky in the same manner—even though tornadoes frequently pummel southern states. Rather, their weatherlore is rife with indicators and narratives of hurricanes and humidity. The work highlighted in this section goes on to explore the complexities of weather-related beliefs and their religious, cultural, and political ramifications. In the introductory remarks on “Text,” the editors show how weather plays a central role in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, describing the book's physical setting as well as its dramatic mood and

tone. The editors posit that weather plays a similar role in the literature of the 21st century. In reflecting the realities of climate change, weather goes beyond the contextual to drive contemporary narrative action (arguably, weather also drove the action in Shelley's book since it produced her monster). The editors provide a provocative introduction to the theme of "Tradition" by exploring the ways people stock up for pending storms—different weather events evoke different preparation—and what they consume, often marrying the festal with the ferial.

A fascinating and pivotal byproduct of this work is the contribution the volume makes to contemporary concerns and discussions of climate change. As each editor and several contributors point out, weather is a safe subject of conversation. Discussions of weather serve as icebreakers. Sharing personal narratives of weather-related events provides people of disparate backgrounds with common ground. But in a 21st century immersed in changing weather patterns contributing to an increased intensity of weather-related disasters caused by anthropogenic climate change, people are finding themselves anxious about our future. Discussions of climate change are politically polarized, but these essays reveal how talking about the weather provides us an opportunity to voice deeper concerns about our changing climate. Albeit, I would have liked to have seen more care taken in the acknowledgement of the distinction of weather and climate given how the synonymous use of the terms can be misleading and counterproductive.

For the discipline of Folklore, this work holds particular value in showing the centrality of folkloric themes in the exploration of pressing contemporary issues. Taken together, the essays demonstrate the continued pertinence of folklore in our everyday lives and the merits of engaging in an academic analysis of traditions and beliefs. Although assigning the volume in its entirety would not be feasible for most educators, specific essays or clusters of essays could hold appeal to interdisciplinary discussions of belief, weather, and climate change.



Culture Work: Folklore for the Public Good. Tim Frandy and B. Marcus Cederström, eds.

(Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2022, 407 pp.)

Sarah Craycraft is Head Tutor and Lecturer of Harvard University's Folklore and Mythology Program.

This edited volume explores and expands upon the legacy of public folklore in the United States. The editors bring together 34 short essays exploring what they term "culture work" from a wide range of contributors: seasoned public folklorists, professors, program staff and directors, graduate students, and colleagues from neighboring fields. Although the editors and contributors use "public folklore" and "culture work" interchangeably, Frandy and

Cederström propose "culture work" as a liberatory term because of its "proletarian implications and humble nature," its interdisciplinary openness, and its ability to move past the "public vs. academic" dichotomy to focus instead on folklore's capacity for addressing inequality and political

representation (5). They conceptualize culture work as those projects that are long-term, community driven, deeply collaborative, and translational across group boundaries.

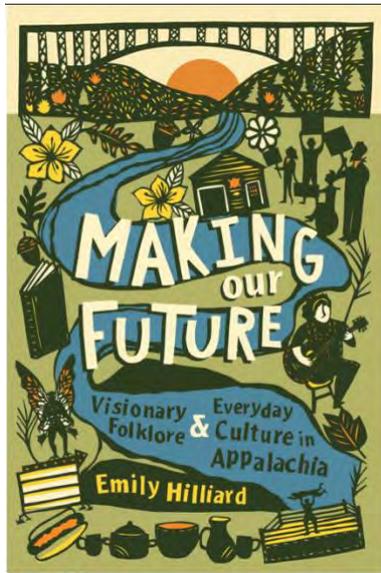
Rather than work with a strict definition of “culture work,” contributing authors demonstrate what such work can do and mean. The essays are arranged in six thematic clusters, each with an opening introduction that provides commentaries on the state of our field in relation to the subtopic addressed. Part I: Public Folklore, Cultural Equity, and Collaboration introduces the work that public folklorists do, and the essays consider the possibilities and difficulties of this work. Part II: Beyond Preservation and Conservation, explores the relationship between culture work and collections, emphasizing the responsibility of folklorists to reflect on archives as “the tracks we leave and follow” (79). Part III: Amplifying Local Voices addresses the outputs of culture work. The authors suggest “amplifications” to conceptualize what culture work can and should do beyond staging folklife. Part IV: Creating Community argues that community is sustained *through* folklore, and as such our tools of trade might contribute to community-led sustainability. Part V: Engaging with the Past considers the ways in which folklore and cultural work are always in conversation with the past as a production of the present, exploring negotiations between heritage and history. Part VI: Creating the Future emphasizes change and creativity as central aspects of tradition, with the power for creating desirable, livable futures for all.

On their own, the introduction and section abstracts are important contributions to our field thanks to their clear summaries of the components of public folklore and its role in contemporary issues of cultural access and equity. Together with the contributing essays, they offer a refreshing manual of sorts for collaborative research, public projects, the tools of our work, and reflection on its impacts. Case studies cover an array of genres and topics: folk song, festival, vernacular architecture, craft, sports, labor lore, belief, museums, and shifting community priorities. Several essays explore cultural revitalization efforts, while others foreground the labor of culture work. Essays such as Mary Twining Baird’s “Notes from the Field: Activism, Folklore Research, and Human Rights on the South Carolina Sea Islands in the 1960s” and Richard March’s “The Downhome Dairyland Story” exemplify the sense of “culture work” as described by the editors, illuminating how such work was carefully fine-tuned to serve the communities. The text’s overall structure nicely performs the balance between grounded work and distanced reflection that the authors advocate for in their conception of culture work, moving between ideas and application.

The volume’s essays also offer an immersive, historiographic, and sometimes anecdotal introduction to the interwoven institutions involved in public folklore work: the National Endowment for the Arts, the Smithsonian Folklife Festival, state arts agencies, local museums, universities, K-12 classrooms, and, of course, communities themselves. These interconnections are described with poetic, yet straightforward writing. As such, the text is instructive and appropriate for readers at many levels who are looking to bring folklore and community-engaged models into their teaching, research, and applied practice. The book is also appropriate for international readers who are interested in U.S. applied models but need a brief background on the structural (im)possibilities that shape this work. The interested reader should note that most essays focus on case studies in the Midwest, with exceptions such as those exploring the relationships between national institutions and local infrastructures. Indeed, the editors introduce the volume’s framework in conversation with the University of Wisconsin-Madison’s public engagement imperative, the “Wisconsin Idea.” Thus, the volume also addresses entanglements between

community and university, interrogating to whom we are responsible in our research and programming.

Overall, *Culture Work* does much to advance conversations about what folklore and folklorists can offer broad publics. As Frandy and Cederström suggest, the contributing essays make clear that “good research is public work and that good public work is research” (8). I myself am eager to teach with this text and its reframed approach to the relationship between “public” and “academic” folklore. This contribution is an immensely helpful tool for moving beyond the still-present “mistaken dichotomies” of our field and simply getting to work, with all the strategies that a thorough training in folklore can offer.



Making Our Future: Visionary Folklore & Everyday Culture in Appalachia. Emily Hilliard.

(Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2022, xv + 261 pp.)

Georgia Ellie Dassler is the Program Director, Folk and Traditional Arts at Mid Atlantic Arts.

Emily Hilliard served as the West Virginia State Folklorist from 2015 to 2021. In *Making Our Future: Visionary Folklore & Everyday Culture in Appalachia*, she presents stories and case studies from her work in the state.

Making Our Future highlights a diverse array of West Virginia traditional culture. Chapters cover everything from a community-run museum contesting dominate narratives of scarcity and segregation to the Swiss town of Helvetia, WV, and how locals represent their traditions to tourists to a tour of West Virginia hotdog stands. Hilliard brings the chapters into conversation with one another around the unifying concept of *visionary folklore*, which she defines as using cultural heritage to consider and contest not only the past and present, but also what the future will look like.

Hilliard brings thoughtful attention to the history of extraction from West Virginia and the Appalachian region. This includes extraction of tangible resources and economic value by the coal industry, as well as the misrepresentation of West Virginia culture by and for outsiders. But she warns against “the dangers of fixing West Virginia vernacular culture in the past” (16). Instead, she approaches her work with a future orientation, grounded in the material realities of the place. She asks, “How might a future-focused framework help us be more attuned to present conditions? What current narratives will constitute the base of future folklife? What must we fight for in the present so that future communities may retain their sovereignty and have agency over how their traditions are transmitted?” (210).

Some chapters present more obvious links to one another and to the concept of visionary folklore. For example, the chapter exploring the legacy of late author Breece D’J Pancake through the place-

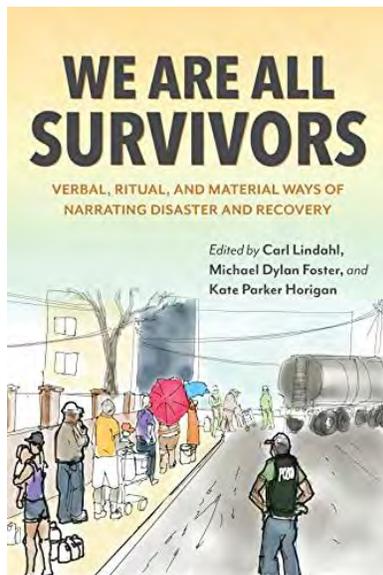
based perspectives of his childhood acquaintances feels least connected to the rest of the book. Still, *Making Our Future* serves also as a kind of memoir, cataloging the stories and projects Hilliard was most excited by during her work in West Virginia. As a result, it is all a delight to read. Hilliard's conversational voice brings you in, highlighting the humanity of each West Virginian introduced throughout the book.

Making Our Future provides strong examples of how to take vernacular culture seriously as an entry point for engaging with complex concepts. Teachers at any level can draw inspiration for how to think differently about the everyday culture of their students and how to incorporate it into the classroom. The most appealing chapters for K-12 learners are likely to be those about hot dogs, the independent West Virginia pro wrestling scene, and the video game *Fallout 76*. Good thing too, because the *Fallout* chapter (my personal favorite) provides one of the clearest articulations of visionary folklore. The chapter on the 2018 West Virginia teacher's strike could serve as a relatable entry point for teachers themselves. The book could also thrive on syllabi at the university or graduate levels. For example, I can imagine the chapter about women songwriters becoming a valuable addition to a women's folklore or gender studies course.

Hilliard's writing is engaging and never takes for granted that readers have pre-existing expertise in folkloristics. However, the book's primary audience seems to be other public folklorists, as Hilliard encourages us to "center voices that have historically been marginalized or erased from the record" and to "assist [...] communities so that they are able to continue to practice their expressive traditions" (11). As a result, readers will benefit from a prerequisite understanding of what "folklife" means and how public folklorists approach their work. Still, *Making Our Future* is an accessible entry point to high-level theories and methodologies, such as collaborative ethnography, another of the book's conceptual throughlines.

Collaborative ethnography, as Hilliard lays it out, "frames narratives as participatory and equitable dialogues" between culture worker and collaborator, rather than directed primarily by the fieldworker (xiii-xiv). Teachers could also employ a collaborative ethnographic model as a framework for engaging students' cultural communities in the classroom.

Hilliard's "hope is that this book contributes to a picture of what folklore is, why it is important, and how the framework of folklore can help us understand, access, and engage with cultural communities" (xv), with an eye toward the future, equitable representation, and social and economic justice. *Making Our Future* grounds these concepts in uniquely West Virginian contexts, but Hilliard also makes them feel approachable and easily adaptable to other communities.



We Are All Survivors: Verbal, Ritual, and Material Ways of Narrating Disaster and Recovery. Carl Lindahl, Michael Dylan Foster, Kate Parker Horigan, eds.

(Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2022, 174 pp.)

Donalyn Heise is Associate Professor of Instruction, Department of Art and Art History, the University of Texas at Austin.

What happens after a natural disaster? What helps individuals and communities recover after trauma? What is the role of researchers in a community relief effort? *We Are All Survivors: Verbal, Ritual, and Material Ways of Narrating Disaster and Recovery*, edited by Carl Lindahl, Michael Dylan Foster, and Kate Parker

Horigan, provides valuable insights from scholars who use their skills as folklorists and field ethnographers to explore ethical, authentic ways to study and respond to natural disasters.

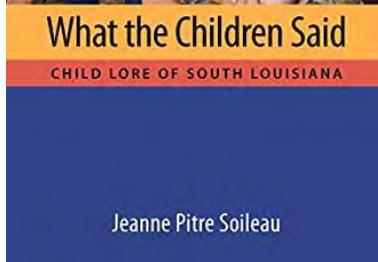
The book is timely, relevant, and well organized, starting with the first chapter, which provides an overview of the information to come. Each chapter author shares valuable experiences and insights from disaster-affected areas in the United States and abroad, moving readers toward a survivor-centered response to collective trauma from natural disasters such as hurricanes, floods, earthquakes, tsunamis, and a global pandemic. Folklore and ethnographic research are used to uncover deep understanding of the culture and values of each area; help identify tradition bearers; and reveal authentic narratives told through oral traditions, rituals, and cultural objects. With special attention to local logic and local wisdom, authors suggest survivors are the best sources of knowledge about what is happening in their communities and provide authentic perspectives on effective responses. Insights on how to work collaboratively to regain, maintain, and create traditions are shared. The text encourages us to examine our positionalities and avoid a dichotomy of researcher/researched, supporter/supported.

This book offers insights on the cultural assets and tools of everyday life and their power to link the past, the present, and our future. Studying material culture—the act of collecting, archiving, and sharing objects—reveals what we value. Rituals and cultural artifacts can uncover insights into how individuals and communities return from loss, displacement, and collective trauma. Shared stories told and retold invite others to contribute to the ongoing narratives.

Chapter authors expand on the concept of empathy and its contribution to trauma research, disability studies, psychological research, and folklore research. We are called to move toward greater understanding of the thoughts, values, and wishes of survivors themselves to regain, maintain, and create traditions collaboratively. There is much to learn from paying attention to how we interact with survivors, how we gather and share their stories. Resilience should not be imposed upon survivors, but empathetic listening to the stories people share after disaster can often reveal ways individuals and community cope with trauma.

Unlike some books with chapters by different authors that result in disjointed narratives, the editors of this book provide a common thread that integrates concepts throughout. The book can be read in nonlinear fashion, starting with the reader's area of interest. However, I do not recommend omitting any chapters as each provides valuable contributions to the topic of ethical, survivor-centered responses to disasters.

This book bridges research/theory to practice and provides practical application of concepts for future scholars, leaders, policymakers, and community workers. This publication contributes to the growing literature on qualitative research methods, providing rich narratives to elevate authentic voices of survivors. It would be a useful addition to any reading list for an introduction to research, arts-based research, or undergraduate and graduate students interested in qualitative research in social and behavioral sciences. It contributes to the emerging field of resilience research and community work that use strengths-based approaches to increasing capacity for individuals and communities who have experienced trauma. It also provides valuable insights for local and national leaders charged with designing, implementing, and allocating resources for effective relief efforts following a natural disaster. In addition, this book is useful for K-12 education, serving as a guide for students and teachers to conduct their own fieldwork ethically or for readings to explore concepts of empathy, folklore, and cultural traditions. Finally, art classes could benefit from insights on material culture, the collection and preservation of cultural artifacts, and the ways individuals and communities use objects and rituals to commemorate what is valued. I highly recommend this book to learners of all ages.



What the Children Said: Child Lore of South Louisiana. Jeanne Pitre Soileau.

(Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2021, 331 pp.)

Jocelyn Hazelwood Donlon is a lecturer in folklore and literature at the Louisiana School for Math, Science, and the Arts, Natchitoches, Louisiana.

Jeanne Pitre Soileau's collection of children's lore draws largely from her fieldwork conducted in the 1970s-90s, with occasional examples from the 21st century. For 50 years, Soileau collected more than six hundred examples of children's lore from African American and Caucasian communities in Baton Rouge, New Orleans, and Lafayette—cities in South Louisiana.

The book's purpose is to provide a collection of full transcripts, partial transcripts, and lists that present the children in their own voices. Multiple variants of the lore show how transmission changes the language over time and space. In eight chapters Soileau catalogs "Counting-Out" methods of determining who is "it"; "Ring Games" performed as song or chants; "Jump Rope" games that could be complex; "Hand Games" played in the schoolyard; "Rhymes and Songs," including well-known parodies; "Running and Imaginative Games," from fieldwork at Gates of Prayer Hebrew Synagogue in Metairie, Louisiana; "Teases," which often enforce conformity; and

“Jokes,” revealing how a child’s sense of humor requires cognitive and emotional development to learn structure, timing, and order.

The collection demonstrates children’s social and psychological development, showing their need for fairness in games, their desire for security when sitting in a circle, the complexity of jump-rope rhymes and hand games within African American communities, and their push for conformity. Children must grow into certain structures. For example, in response to “Why does the chicken cross the road,” Soileau’s four-year-old grandson replied, “Uh—maybe because he was going to the store?” But by age seven he had mastered the joke structure: “Did you hear about the kidnapping in the park....You ought to wake him up.”

Soileau notes that there are differences in how African American and white children whom she documented perform their lore: Black children, she observed, often use African American Vernacular English (AAVE) when playing, while white children use white dialect; Black boys roughhoused a bit more than white boys; and differences in physical distances were distinguishable. The games not surprisingly revealed racist and sexist tendencies, with pejorative names and racist slurs in play. (One need only remember “Eenie meenie miney moe.”) Transcripts also showed boys using insults to overpower girls, and girls slyly responding.

Because the book relies heavily on transcripts and lists, it is more useful as a reference work for teachers than as a thorough critical analysis of children’s lore. Soileau includes substantive transcripts as examples of what to do and what not to do, acknowledging the teaching opportunities that come from her experiences. Teachers will find the breadth of this repository and the lengthy transcripts useful.

Some questions linger after reading, particularly as to what is currently happening on school grounds in the 21st century, especially with the transition to virtual games. Overall, however, the book is a useful contribution to the field of children’s schoolyard folklore.

On Shifting Ground: Migration, Disruption, and the Changing Contours of Home

A Call for Submissions, Vol. 11 (2024) | Guest Editors, Michelle Banks and Sojin Kim

We live and produce our senses of community and place on shifting ground. Folklore and other traditional practices offer tools, strategies, and resources for both responding to and catalyzing change. Whether adapting traditional expressive behavior to meet new exigencies during and after migration or asserting them to challenge the status quo, people productively leverage the durability and dynamic nature of culture to strengthen community life through changes of many sorts—whether political, social, environmental, or cultural. The 2024 *Journal of Folklore and Education* seeks submissions that explore “disruption” and “migration” in relation to the process of reimagining home and tradition. We are interested in contributions that situate creativity and cultural production in moments and landscapes of flux and transformation, and how those affected by these forces forge strategies that disrupt established paradigms. Thus, topics such as identity, inclusion and exclusion, memory, transformation, and community also inform this issue.

We are interested in contributions that address, for example:

- People’s experiences during and in response to migrations and/or displacements of different sorts (domestic, international, rural-urban, voluntary and forced, in response to climate, for economic reasons, etc.)
- Cultural realignment (coalition building, mutual aid, rethinking/rebuilding communities);
- Stories or examples of how people disrupt narratives of harm and pathology related to migration with cultural production that represents resilience, agency, transformation, generative practices
- Praxis—the work we do—examples of how the work of educators, folklorists, or culture bearers/artists directly intervene in or disrupt conventions, persistent issues, or chronic conditions

We seek submissions that present case studies, programs, lessons, and research on the significance of arts that are based in community cultural life for the following audiences:

- Educators in diverse settings with student populations that are changing because of migration, immigration, and gentrification and others, such as social service providers, who work in communities affected by these processes
- Curators and program managers at museums, community centers, and cultural institutions addressing issues of representation and access in content creation and program development
- Administrators addressing the need for tools that reflect the diversity of their students that may be used in teacher preparation and professional development
- Students and community members who want to see their cultural knowledge valued in educational practices, curricula, and policy

We welcome contributions in many formats, including interviews, multimedia, photo essays, notes (a shorter format report), and lesson plans. Submissions due March 15, 2024.

Essential questions that contributors may use to inspire submissions include questions that
Consider migration through a cultural framework:

- In what ways can the study of culturally specific oral and written traditional forms help young people connect their lives/cultures with those of others? Between literature and social studies? Between the arts and social studies?
- How can folklore in education approaches share content, value, and insights about human relations, creativity, and problem solving?
- The exploration of migration and disruption through a cultural lens may include both opportunities and pitfalls for students. What frameworks and models productively examine the role of media in informing stereotype or bias about cultural groups and their movements, understanding and addressing cultural appropriation, and trauma-informed pedagogy?

Examine how tradition intersects with contemporary challenges:

- Culturally responsive teaching asks educators to recognize students’ cultural displays of learning and meaning making (see Gloria Ladson-Billings). Culturally sustaining teaching sees culture more deeply as an asset that should be explicitly supported (see Django Paris). How can educators engage traditions—narratives, arts, and meaningful lifeways shared within families and groups—to foster learning and understanding across subject areas?
- How can educators from multiple disciplinary areas, such as English language arts (including composition and literacy), ELL, art, music, science, or social studies use inquiry through folklife education in their teaching to create inclusive learning environments?
- How can higher-education teacher-preparation programs incorporate cultural ways of knowing, creating, or learning as a key part of their literacy pedagogy?

About the Guest Editors

Michelle Banks is a cultural worker from Washington, DC, and was co-curator for the 2023 Smithsonian Folklife Festival program *Creative Encounters: Living Religions in the U.S.* She takes a transdisciplinary approach to work that explores the intersections of language, culture, and sustainability.

Sojin Kim is a curator at the Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage, where she works on projects focusing on migration, music, and public history. She was co-curator of the following Smithsonian Folklife Festival programs: *D.C.: The Social Power of Music* (2019), *On the Move: Migration Across Generations* (2017), *Sounds of California* (2016), and *China: Tradition and the Art of Living* (2014).

We are grateful for our Advisory Committee for their input on this special issue:

Sarah Craycraft, Head Tutor and Lecturer of Harvard’s Folklore and Mythology Program

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Jean Tokuda Irwin, Utah Division of Arts & Museums and Local Learning Board

Fariha Khan, University of Pennsylvania and Philadelphia Folklore Project

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Lamont Jack Pearley, editor of the *African American Folklorist* and WKU Folklore graduate student Nelda Ruiz, Southwest Folklife Alliance

Kate Schramm, Connecticut Museum of Culture and History

Read the full call and information for authors at <https://jfepublications.org/for-authors/call-for-submissions>.

Journal of Folklore and Education (2023: Vol. 10, Issue 1)

On Shifting Ground: Migration, Disruption, and the Changing Contours of Home

A Call for Submissions, Vol. 11 (2024) | Guest Editors, Michelle Banks and Sojin Kim

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We are grateful to our Advisory Committee and Teaching with Primary Sources project team for their input on this special issue:

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Lisa Lynn Brooks, Assistant Professor at Montclair State University

About the Guest Editor

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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

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