

Classroom Connections: Create Your Own Folklore Iceberg

This classroom activity can be adapted for a group discussion. Earlier in this paper, I recommended creating a semester-long Iceberg class project. If that is not feasible, this activity will achieve similar goals. Both the semester-long project and this smaller activity are suited for introductory folklore, social studies, and language arts classes. First, have a class discussion to start to define what folklore is, so that everyone is starting with the same understanding. Have students pair off into groups of three to five and generate a list of ten pieces of folklore they know from their school. These can include legends, myths, pranks, jokes, sayings, traditions, stories, memes, graffiti, etc. Then, have them rank each entry based on how much they think that folklore is known by their entire student body, with one being most recognizable, and ten being the most obscure. Reconvene the class and ask the following discussion questions.

To adapt this activity for a middle or high school level, you could broaden the scope from just the educational institute to also include the town, county, or state. This will make the research portion easier, as your students will have more information to work with. For the questions below, simply replace any instance of “student body” with “population” if you go down this route. Alternatively, you could still have the focus on just the school and its folklore, providing a valuable opportunity for students to dig deep and reflect on their surroundings.

From where did you draw your list of folklore? Personal experience, social media, passed down stories, or somewhere else?

What are the “types” of folklore that you chose? Are there commonalities?

What are the “origin themes” of the folklore that you chose? Are there common themes?

How did you determine your rankings of “recognizability”? Was your group a good judge of it, or did you discover shortcomings? If so, what would you do differently?

What aspects of the student body are not recognized in your list of folklore? Maybe certain student organizations or groups are excluded, while others are overrepresented?

Is any of your folklore harmful in its content to certain groups, and if so, to whom and why?

What would you do to expand your list of student body folklore to one hundred entries?

In the Prologue (page XV) of Campus Traditions, Simon Bronner outlines the frame theory that he uses for interpreting collegiate folklore: “The concept is that students imagine boundaries between themselves and other campus interests and consequently construct or engage with social frames for speech, actions, narratives, and rituals that might not be appropriate in another setting or in everyday practice. The intangible frames for traditional action understood by participants are useful strategies to deal with issues of aging and social connection that cause anxiety or ambivalence and are difficult to broach in everyday conversation.

Do you agree with Bronner’s frame theory as a good way of interpreting collegiate folklore? Why or why not? What might be its shortcomings, if any?

Easier Alternative Question (To the above question): Where does folklore come from? What motivates people to create it? Is there some central motivator for all folklore creation?