

Local Learning: A Folk Arts Integration Handbook

by **Paddy Bowman**, Director, Local Learning: The National Network for Folk Arts in Education

This project is so rich and meaningful on so many levels. My students love interacting with the folk artists and this interaction helps them uncover the uniqueness of their own families. The art projects were so much more than I would have expected; the students poured their hearts and souls into creating pieces that reflect the essence of the project!

--Colleen Tharp, language arts teacher, L.J. Alleman Middle School

The Local Learning residency approach accomplishes the following:

- Creates teams that include a folk artist, a teaching artist, and a classroom teacher
- Engages students in documenting folk artists and interviewing family and community members
- Diversifies understanding of the arts
- Connects the arts with core curriculum

HANDBOOK CONTENTS

Introduction

A Model Project

Key Definitions

Sequence of Activity

Roles and Responsibilities: Project Director, Teachers, Teaching Artists, Folk Artists

What Students Are Learning

Online Resources: Folk Arts and Folklife, Arts Integration, Folk Arts in Education, Interview Guides

Handouts

Release Form

Documentation Worksheet

Seasonal Round Calendar

Foodways Interview Worksheet

Interview Checklist

Art Checklist

Developing an Artist Statement

Model Artist Statements

Partners: Local Learning, Acadiana Center for the Arts, Louisiana Folk Roots, and the Lafayette Parish School System

Funded by the National Endowment for the Arts

INTRODUCTION

This handbook provides the basics for incorporating a folk arts approach into arts-integrated projects and residencies. Everyone has folk traditions -- expressive customs practiced within a group and passed along by word of mouth, imitation, and observation. Calling on the work of folklorists and the field of folklore in the classroom educates, motivates, engages, and fosters the creative expression of students and powerfully links them to their communities.

Each of us belongs to a variety of folk groups that share values, goals, experiences, and interests. Within folk groups, people who create and pass along stories, objects, and skills that represent group values are called tradition bearers and folk artists. Along with participation in various folk groups come insider perspectives that we often overlook because we take them for granted. Thus, studying folklife helps us identify our cultural assumptions and recognize the importance of multiple points of view.

Folk arts manifest ways in which the arts enrich our daily lives, dignify our communities, and define our cultural heritage. Every community is blessed with a broad spectrum of folk arts and traditions offering educators an important opportunity to enrich their teaching. Folk artists give students an opportunity to learn with artists who look and sound like themselves, their families, and community members. Students enthusiastically respond to the content of folklore, such as stories, music, dance, crafts, customs, and foodways. They readily embrace folklorists' methods of collecting and preserving primary sources through observing, interviewing, listening, recording, writing, sketching, mapping, categorizing, quantifying, and analyzing findings. Students also acquire new perspectives about themselves, their culture, and the culture of others. By seeing the continuation of traditions, students tie the past to the present and use and create primary resources.

In the folk arts-integrated residencies of Local Learning, students draw upon the traditions that they research as a resource for making art and learning required subjects. By documenting folk artists and tradition bearers in the classroom and also at home and in the community, students connect with authentic living traditions and learn about culture as a dynamic process. Folk artists share memories of learning their treasured art forms -- often as young people -- and the core values that their art forms represent. Teaching artists and teachers build upon students' interactions with folk artists and also with family members to design arts-integrated lessons that combine key curricular content and art concepts.

Folk arts contribute not only to students' understanding of cultural traditions but also to their ability to think critically, gather and analyze evidence, and express their ideas and interpretations through personal creativity. Folklife and the tools of the folklorist can support learning in all subjects, including the arts. Folk arts are uniquely suited to explore the ways in which traditional art forms reflect the history, culture, geography, and values of different cultures and communities. Finally, integrating the study of folk arts into existing curricula awakens self-awareness in students of their own roles as tradition bearers, their families as repositories of traditional culture and history, and their communities as unique resources.

A MODEL PROJECT

As arts integration began to grow in popularity, folklorists became concerned that tradition bearers from the community--parents, grandparents, elders and folk artists--were being excluded from classroom residencies. Local Learning began conversations with colleagues in Lafayette, Louisiana, about developing a practical model to incorporate folk artists and the interview process into arts-integrated classroom residencies designed by teaching artists and teachers. Local Learning has had a working relationship with the Kennedy Center Partners in

Education team from Lafayette and the Acadiana Center for the Arts since 1995, when the American Folklore Society met in Lafayette. We based our model, Local Learning in Lafayette, on the work of City Lore in New York City public schools and received funding from the National Endowment for the Arts from 2009 until 2012 for this pilot. Local Learning in Lafayette proved highly successful and we are happy to outline our work so that others may adapt it.

Described by teachers as the most important thing that their students did each year, Local Learning in Lafayette infused folklife and the interview process into arts-integrated units of study. This handbook outlines the process we used so that others may adapt the model. Integrating local traditional arts into your curriculum and classroom residencies is easier than you might think. Folklife, inherently interdisciplinary, can apply to any subject area, and learning to interview and re-present findings inspires creativity in students as well as in teachers.

Every community has unique traditional cultures and people who are experts at an array of traditional art forms. From foodways to music, needlework to the building arts, local artists and artisans represent every segment of a community, introducing young people to rich traditions that contribute to a distinctive sense of place. Through uncovering their personal traditions, learning the interview process, documenting folk artists, and collaborating with teaching artists and their teachers, students connect community and classroom as they meet education standards and tap their creativity.

The teaching artists in our project were visual artists, but all arts disciplines are suited for integration with core classroom curricula for any subject. Folk arts-integrated studies do not require elaborate funding or resources. Excellent interviewing guides are available for free online, and since everyone and every region has unique traditional culture, folk artists grace

every community. As for teachers, project educators said that embracing open-endedness was important, and the rewards in terms of pedagogical creativity and student achievement were invaluable. Renée Roberts, an arts education specialist at the Acadiana Center for the Arts, and Local Learning Director Paddy Bowman co-directed this project. The expertise of both fields helped to support the teams, but a teaching artist or a teacher with basic knowledge of arts integration, local traditional culture, and documentation could also serve as project director.

This guide begins with definitions of key terms to illuminate a folk arts approach to arts integration. The sequence of activity, the roles and responsibilities for team members, and a list of what students learned outline the process in detail. A list of online resources augments the guide, and handouts provide scaffolding. These include an interview release form, documentation worksheet, interview worksheets on the seasonal round and foodways, checklists to assess students' interviews and artwork, and a process for developing Artist Statements with folk artists. Contact Local Learning director Paddy Bowman at paddybowman@verizon.net for further assistance or additional resources.



Folk artists Daphney Walker and her mother Geraldine Robertson make a variety of baskets and dolls, including corn shuck dolls. They had Local Learning residencies with visual artists in English language arts and Louisiana history classes.

KEY DEFINITIONS

Folk Arts and Folklife are terms used interchangeably in this handbook. Everyone has folklife, traditions and expressive customs practiced within a group and passed along by word of mouth, imitation, and observation, often informally.

Arts Integration connects an art form such as visual art, music, literature, drama, or movement with another subject area, for example, English language arts, math, science, or social studies. The process develops understanding and activities in both the connected areas.

Folk Artists learn their art forms from family and community members and often carry on traditions specific to a region, ethnic group, occupation, or family. Informal apprenticeships rather than formal classes are how many folk artists learn and teach traditions. Informal pedagogy does not equate to ease of learning, however. Mastery may take many years. Passing on a traditional art form allows for individual variation, but core elements remain intact and represent the collective experience of a community.

Teaching Artists are professional artists who have received formal training in teaching as well as in their art forms. They practice art forms such as visual arts, dance, drama, literature, and music that they learn in formal programs in schools, universities, and academies. They have also learned how teachers plan lessons to meet education standards, deliver required content, and assess student learning. Many are practiced in arts integration, which gives equal weight to an art form and another subject such as English language arts, math, science, or social studies.

Teachers attend schools of education where training includes instructional methods, lesson planning, assessment, educational philosophy, practice teaching, and content area studies such as reading, math, social studies, and so on. Teachers must comply with local certification requirements, which differ from district to district. They must also undergo professional development throughout their careers in the classroom to remain certified. Teachers understand local and national education standards and how to address them in lesson planning, delivery of instruction, and student assessment.

Arts in Education (AIE) Specialists work in local arts and cultural agencies and out-of-school programs to ensure that young people have access to learning in and through the arts. Some are trained in formal university programs, and most attend regional and national training opportunities offered by a variety of organizations. AIE specialists often raise funds to facilitate artist residencies for students in classrooms and other settings. They offer training to artists and teaching artists to help them be more effective educators. They also work with professional educators to deepen understanding of how the arts can improve student learning and to develop arts-integration projects with teachers and teaching artists.

Folklorists study in formal academic programs to learn about traditional culture and its transmission as well as ethnographic fieldwork research methods. Some folklorists work in public sector agencies such as arts councils and museums. Others teach in universities and colleges. Some folklorists specialize in K-12 education to promote integration of folk arts in

education (FAIE) through resources, training, and collaboration with teachers, teaching artists, and AIE specialists. Like cultural anthropologists and cultural geographers, folklorists can help identify and provide context for significant local traditions and folk artists and point to resources such as publications, films, and recordings. They can also assist with training educators to introduce folk arts, interviewing, and documentation methods such as photography and audio or video recording.

SEQUENCE OF ACTIVITY

Identify and Prepare Team Members

Project director recruits and arranges training for folk artists, teaching artists, and teachers

Folk artists learn about classroom residencies and arts integration and develop an Artist Statement for students with the project director

Teachers and teaching artists learn about folklore and the interview process and practice interviewing

Folk Arts in the Classroom

Teachers determine the curriculum connection and design family interview topics with the teaching artist and the project director

Teachers teach the interview process to students and students practice in the classroom

Folk artists are introduced to students through Artist Statements

Folk artists demonstrate their art forms to students

Students interview folk artists

Students interview family members about the assigned topic and conduct any needed follow-up

Arts Integration

Teaching artists choose an art form and collaborate with teachers to design student projects that teach a core curricular concept and the art form

Students, teachers, and teaching artists assess their work

Teachers, teaching artists, and the project director document throughout the project and collect student reflections as well as photos and notes and often include students as documentarians

Share with an Audience

Teaching artists work with students to develop, polish, and exhibit or perform artwork

Teachers invite other classes and parents for an exhibit, presentation, or performance
Students share their final artwork and project reflections in the presentation

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Project Director

- Develop the project plan and seek funding opportunities as well as partner organizations such as schools, arts agencies, folk arts organizations or academic departments, museums, libraries, and so on. Identify and recruit teachers, teaching artists, and folk artists. Teachers should be comfortable with open-endedness, teaching artists should be flexible and experienced in arts integration, and folk artists should want to share their traditions with young people.
- Find local folk artists by starting with longtime residents, colleagues, and students who might know people who are masters of skills from cooking to needlework, decoy carving to fiddling. Search for folk arts organizations in the Regional Resources section of the Local Learning web site www.locallearningnetwork.org. The American Folklore Society web site lists colleges with folklorists on faculty who will be knowledgeable of local culture at <http://www.afsnet.org/?page=WhereToStudyFolklore> and state and regional folk arts agencies at <http://www.afsnet.org/?page=USPubFolklore>.
- State and local arts agencies and the school system's curriculum specialist for the arts can identify experienced teaching artists specializing in visual art, music, theater, or dance. All the disciplines work well in folk arts integration. Project teaching artists should be open to improvising as they observe students' response to the folk artists and to their interviews with family members.
- Line up resources such as web sites, interview guides, and local folklife publications, films, recordings, and so on. (See Resources)
- Find trainers experienced in folk arts or prepare yourself to train teachers and teaching artists to understand folk arts, the interview process, and arts integration. Make sure teachers learn basic interviewing skills to practice with students in the classroom.
- Introduce the folk artists to the residency concept, classroom culture, and their role in the project (classroom demonstration and interview). Also work with the folk artists in developing an Artist Statement, which will introduce them to students and help them to articulate why their art form is important to them, how they learned, and who they are teaching. (See Handouts)
- Students should interview family or community members as well as the guest folk artist. (See Resources) Develop and use a release form for folk artists, interviewees such as parents, and students whose artwork, images, or writing might be presented in a culminating project. (See Handouts)
- Oversee the teaching artist-teacher team to ensure they work together to integrate the teacher's curricular goals and the artist's art form. Make sure that there is an arts-

integrated culminating project in response to the folk artist residency and interviews with family or community members. Provide opportunities to showcase student learning for other students, parents, and the community.

Teachers

- Meet with the folk artist and the teaching artist to introduce yourself and describe your students and your curriculum. Choose a potential curricular connection, although it may later shift in response to students' interviews. Plan schedules with folk artist and teaching artist. The folk artist will visit twice: once to demonstrate and again for an interview. The teaching artist will observe the folk artist in the classroom and will visit up to six more times, depending on your project and funding.
- Research the folk artist's genre and the interview process. Prepare resources and handouts for students. (See Resources and Handouts)
- Introduce students to traditional culture through an activity that uncovers some of their traditional culture, for example, naming traditions, games and play, seasonal round traditions, favorite foods, family rules, and school culture. (See Handouts) Practice low-key interviews in class (students may pair off, for example). (See Resources for free online interview guides)
- Document the process as you go. What are students learning? What are you learning? Ask the project director for help, advice, or resources as you go. Consider creating a student documentation team to help. (See Documentation Worksheet in Handouts)
- Introduce the folk artist to students through the Artist Statement and then ask students to inventory their assumptions about the artist and the art form before the artist's first visit.
- Coordinate scheduling so the teaching artist can observe the folk artist's demonstration and interview. Ask the folk artist what is needed for room set-up and share information on parking, school office procedures, the grade level of your students, and your academic area.
- Prepare students for the two folk artist visits. They will need a release form plus documentation supplies such as paper, pencils, cameras, and recorders. Depending upon the equipment available, students will be making notes and sketches and perhaps photos and audio and video recordings during the demonstration and the interview. (See Resources for free online interview guides)
- Right after each visit, ask students to reflect on the visit with free write reactions. Then discuss the folk artist's visits with the class and take notes of students' reflections.
- Assign students interviews with family or community members. Start with something simple like asking about a naming tradition or coloring a paper plate with Thanksgiving

meals. Interviewing can become more detailed and fit any curriculum with students taking notes, photos, and audio or video recordings. They will need release forms. (See Handouts for a release form plus a seasonal round calendar and a foodways worksheet and see Resources for free online interview guides) Students share and analyze interviews. They may have to follow up for more detail. Ask them to use the Interview Checklist to assess their work. (See Handouts)

- Call on the project director at anytime for assistance and feedback!
- Relate students' interviews to your curriculum and share them with the teaching artist as you both tweak the curricular connections. With the teaching artist, plan the teaching artist's residency, which can be up to six class periods in addition to the observation of the folk artist's visits. Tie arts discipline skills to the curriculum topic and the folk artist residency as well as students' interviews with family or community members. The Art Checklist will help students assess their work. (See Handouts)
- Ask students to create a way to say thank-you to the folk artist and the teaching artist.
- Help the teaching artist with the culminating exhibit or performance. Arrange for students to discuss their artwork as well as their interviews with the folk artist and family and community members.
- Invite the folk artist back to view the artwork with the students.
- Maintain and share the artwork for a public presentation before returning it to students.
- Evaluate the overall project in interviews with the project director and share your written notes, photos, and student work.

Teaching Artists

- Meet and talk with the teacher and the folk artist to describe your art form and experience in collaborating with teachers to develop arts-integrated units of study. Plan the project schedule with the teacher and stay in touch throughout the project. Talk with the teacher about potential curricular connections.
- Read the folk artist's Artist Statement to gain background knowledge of the artist and the art form. Observe the folk artist's two classroom visits (the demonstration and the interview) to note how students respond to the experience.
- Meet with fellow teaching artists to support one another and call on the project director at any time for assistance and feedback! Keep the project on schedule.

- Talk with the teacher and the students about students' interviews of family and community members. Tweak the art project and planned sequence of activities and gather supplies for making art.
- Document students' work and reflections as you go. Students can help with documentation. (See Documentation Worksheet)
- Plan and conduct your art-making sessions with students. Ask students to use the Art Checklist to assess their work. (See Handouts)
- Help the teacher and students to hang visual art or conduct a performance.
- De-brief in interviews with the project director and share documentation.

Folk Artists

- Work with the project director to develop a one-page Artist Statement. (See the Developing an Artist Statement in Handouts) Call on the project director at anytime for assistance and feedback!
- Meet and talk with the teacher and the teaching artist to introduce yourself and your art form and to learn about them. Plan and schedule classroom visits with the teacher. Let the teacher know your needs for setting up your demonstration.
- Conduct a demonstration of your art form in class.
- Be prepared for students to interview you on your second classroom visit.
- Plan to return to the classroom to see students' final projects.
- De-brief in an interview with the project director.

WHAT STUDENTS ARE LEARNING

(compiled by Local Learning in Lafayette team members)

Observation
Close listening
Polished questioning
Notetaking
Insider/outsider points of view
Analyzing data
Re-presenting findings
Interpersonal relationships
Finding patterns
Abstraction
Understanding metaphor and symbol
Art as a language
Synthesizing elements that seem unrelated so they come together and create new meaning
Seeing themselves as part of history and community
Translating meaning
Points of divergence as well as cultural similarities
Tolerance
Different ways of knowing and teaching
Pride
Confidence
Self-knowledge and identity
Ethics
Manners
Good citizenship



ONLINE RESOURCES

Defining Folk Arts and Folklife

- **Local Learning**

Folk arts and folklore

<http://locallearningnetwork.org/about/about-folk-arts-and-folklore>

So what is a folklorist?

<http://locallearningnetwork.org/about/about-folk-arts-and-folklore/so-what-is-a-folklorist>

- **American Folklife Center**

American Folklife: A Commonwealth of Cultures, by Mary Hufford

www.loc.gov/folklife/cwc

- **American Folklore Society**

What is folklore?

www.afsnet.org/?page=WhatIsFolklore

- **Louisiana Voices**

Unit I Defining Terms

www.louisianavoices.org/Unit1/edu_unit1.html

Defining Arts Integration

- **ArtsEdge**

Why Arts Integration?

<http://artsedge.kennedy-center.org/educators/how-to/arts-integration/why-arts-integration/why-two-big-reasons.aspx>

- **Arts Education Partnership**

Arts Integration Frameworks, Research, and Practice, by Gail Burnaford

www.aep-arts.org/publications/info.htm?publication_id=33

Folk Arts in Education Guides

- **Folk Arts in Education: A Resource Handbook II** www.folkartsineducation.org

- **Folkvine** www.folkvine.org

- **Iowa Folklife: Our People, Communities, and Traditions, vol. 1 and 2**

www.uni.edu/iowaonline/folklife and www.uni.edu/iowaonline/folklife_v2

- **Louisiana Voices** www.louisianavoices.org

- **Wisconsin Folks** www.wisconsinfolks.org

- **Masters of Traditional Arts Education Guide** www.mastersoftraditionalarts.org

Interview Guides

- **City Lore** shares a useful Interviewing Guide in a PDF that can be easily printed

<http://locallearningnetwork.org/local-learning-tools/great-interview-guides>

- The **American Folklife Center** offers English and Spanish versions of *Folklife and Fieldwork*, better suited for secondary students www.loc.gov/folklife/fieldwork

- **Louisiana Voices** is an extensive guide in public domain very useful for students and teachers and studying all types of folk arts. **Unit II** on Fieldwork provides detailed instructions for planning and carrying out documentation projects with students. There are student worksheets and rubrics for many topics www.louisianavoices.org
- **Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage** provides online lesson plans, curriculum guides, and online exhibits as well as two interviewing guides: *Discovering Our Delta* student and teacher guides useful and practical for any region www.folklife.si.edu/education_exhibits/resources/delta.aspx and the *Smithsonian Folklife and Oral History Interviewing Guide*, which features a general guide to conducting an interview, as well as a sample list of questions that may be adapted to your needs and circumstances www.folklife.si.edu/education_exhibits/resources/guide/introduction.aspx
- **Wisconsin Teachers of Local Culture** online resources include these guides that are super easy to use for any grade level, especially elementary: *Teacher's Guide to Local Culture* <http://artsboard.wisconsin.gov/docview.asp?docid=18876&locid=171>
Kids' Guide to Local Culture <http://artsboard.wisconsin.gov/docview.asp?docid=18875&locid=171>



Local Learning in Lafayette Folk Artists included Keith Richard, fly fisherman; Geraldine Robertson, basket and doll maker; Dale Pierrottie, bousillage; Mitch Reed, fiddle; Daphney Walker, doll maker; Connie Boustany, French egg dyeing; and Johnny Richard, cowboy.

Release Form

Person Interviewed _____

Address _____

Phone () _____ Email _____

Place of Interview _____ Date _____

Name of Interviewer _____

Interviewer's School _____

I understand that this interview and any photographs, audio recording, or video recording are part of an education project at the school named above. I give permission for the following (check all that apply):

_____ May be included in an educational nonprofit publication, presentation, web site, or exhibit

_____ May include my image

_____ May include my name

_____ May be used but DO NOT include my name

_____ May be used but DO NOT include my image

Signature of Interviewee

Date

Signature of Parent or Guardian if
Interviewee is a Minor

Date

DOCUMENTATION WORKSHEET

To help in the collection of documentation, this worksheet can serve as an easy way to prompt reflections and comments. In addition, student work samples and photos are helpful as are occasional informal interviews

I noticed that students _____

I heard students talking about _____

I learned _____

Students learned _____

The folk artist _____

The teaching artist _____

I was glad that _____

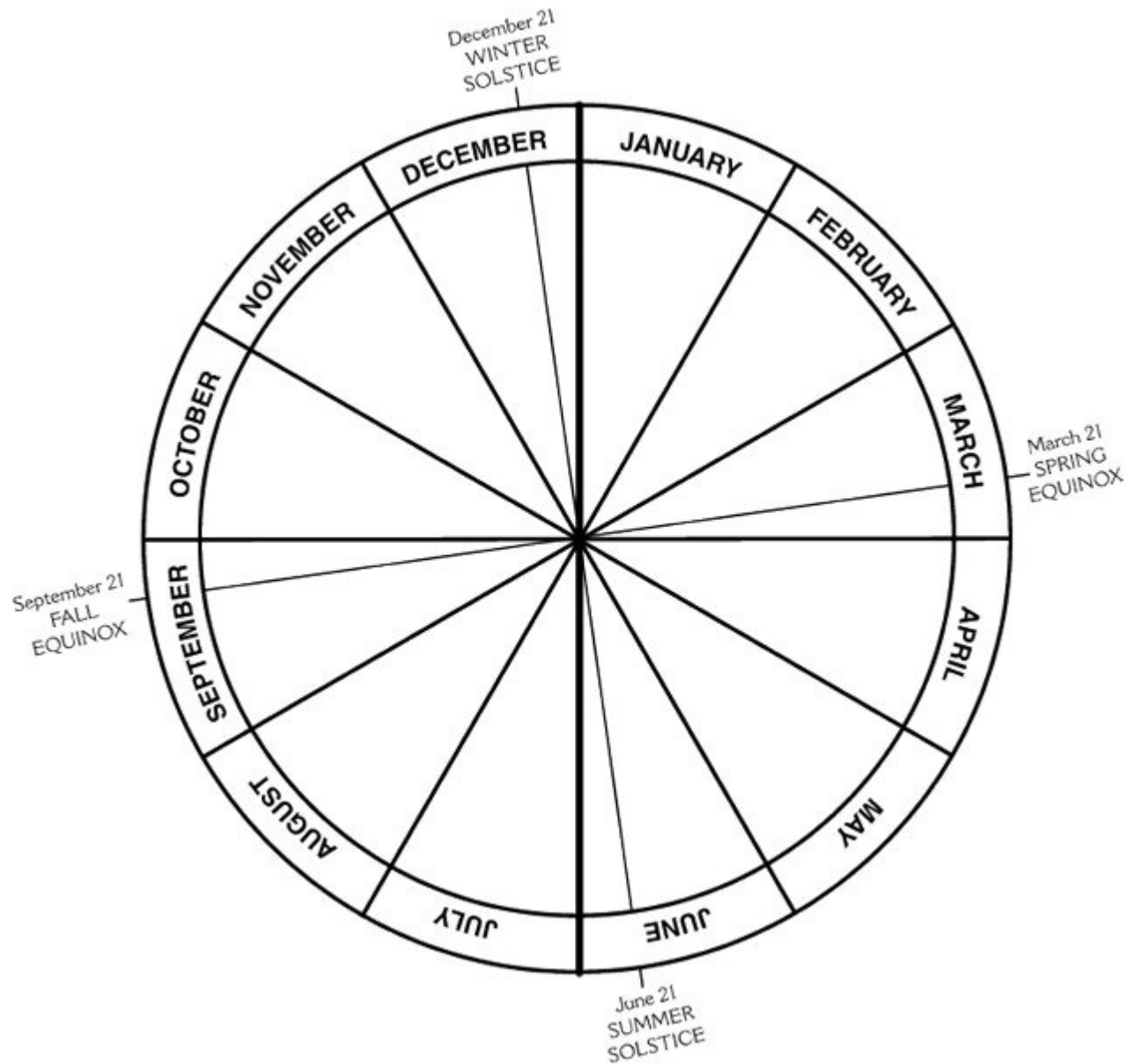
I wish that _____

I documented student work by _____

If only _____

Seasonal Round Worksheet

Name _____ Date _____



Reproduced from p. 19 of *All Around the Year* (1994) by Jack Santino with permission of the University of Illinois Press. Adapted with permission from www.louisianavoices.org

FOODWAYS INTERVIEW WORKSHEET

“Proverbial wisdom tells us that we are what we eat,” writes folklorist Millie Rahn, “but perhaps it is the other way around: We eat what we are.” Our ideas about food—what’s fit to eat, when to eat, manners, taboos, well-being—are a dynamic part of our folk culture.

--2010 CARTS Teaching with Foodways Newsletter

Choose one of the three topics below and brainstorm responses, which might take the form of lists, anecdotes, or sketches. Share results in a classroom discussion. Use this list to practice your interview skills or to introduce an interview about foodways.

1. Food Beliefs

2. Food Sayings and Proverbs

3. Breads You Eat

INTERVIEW CHECKLIST

Preparing

- Ask yourself what you want to know
- Research basic knowledge about the topic
- Choose a person to interview and make an appointment
- Prepare a list of questions to guide the interview
- Prepare release form and a form for collecting biographical information
- Prepare equipment, making sure you have pencils, paper, and appropriate batteries
- Practice using the forms and equipment

Listening and Responding

- Start with basic biographical information and introductions
- Test sound levels if using recording device
- Listen more than you talk
- Take notes of key ideas
- Ask about special terms and specific examples
- Stay flexible and ask new questions
- Photograph the interviewee if possible
- Review notes and ask follow-up questions
- Make sure release form is signed
- Thank the interviewee

Analyzing and Interpreting

- Review and add to notes as soon as possible after the interview
- Review audio or video recording and any photographs that you took
- Analyze your findings to identify important points
- Decide if more follow-up is needed
- Look for themes and connections
- Select interesting quotes

Organizing and Presenting

- Choose an appropriate medium for presenting your findings
- Select key segments for presentation
- Provide sufficient context, or background, about your interviewee
- Share insights, themes, and symbols
- Convey your message creatively
- Share your presentation with the interviewee as a thank-you

Work Habits

- You used good manners
- You remained on task
- You represented the interviewee with respect

ART CHECKLIST

Composition and Design

Your work shows creativity and originality

Your work includes images, colors, and other art elements that have specific meaning to your theme

You thought of ways to improve the work artistically

You implemented some of those improvements

Addressing the Assignment

Your work shows the use of several of the art techniques demonstrated

Your work includes background research

Your work includes a response to family interviews

Your work includes a response to the folk artist interview

Your work includes meaningful personal story or artifact

Care and Effort

You demonstrated proper use and care of art materials

Your work is cut, glued, and painted neatly

You worked to do your very best

Work Habits

You followed all the classroom rules

You were helpful, positive, and considerate

You remained on task

DEVELOPING AN ARTIST STATEMENT

Adapted with permission from City Lore www.citylore.org

During classroom residencies, there is not enough time to teach young people a traditional art form. It takes years to learn to play a fiddle, weave a rug, or make a basket. Yet the authentic voices of community artists are essential for students to encounter. They may hear echoes of their family members, see objects that are familiar, and discover the importance of local aesthetics, local culture, and local learning. Use the questions below to consider your traditions: how you learned them, whom you're teaching, what they mean to you. Then draft a one-page Artist Statement to introduce yourself to a classroom of students and their teacher. The students will first meet you through a piece of your work and your statement, so they will be eager to interview you.

Included are Artist Statements by some Local Learning in Lafayette folk artists as examples. Let students hear your voice and learn what is important to you as a folk artist. Just write! The project director will work with you to edit the final statement.

QUESTIONS TO JUMP START YOUR ARTIST STATEMENT

What people and/or experiences inspired you to become an artist? Why were they so pivotal in your development?

How does your artwork reflect your personal experience? How does it reflect your culture or membership in a community? How does it reflect your sense of place?

What are two things you want students to know about you as a teacher?

What are two things you want students to know about you as an artist?

What are two things you want students to know about you as a child?

What do you want students to understand about your art form?

Meet Connie Arceneaux Boustany

I was self-driven to become an artist at an early age. Living in a small rural farming community in Southwest Louisiana, there was always work to be done and only three black and white TV stations to watch. So I became involved in 4-H, which disciplined me to learn from, watch, and help my parents, grandparents, and aunts in many projects. From them I learned natural egg dyeing, quilting, appliqué, cut work, sewing, tatting, candle making, crocheting, spinning yarn, traditional candy making, and organizing *boucheries*.

I was the youngest of 64 grandchildren on my father's side of the family, and I had 74 first cousins. We lived next to my grandparents, and they had lived next to my great-grandparents. French was the only language that my grandfather spoke and understood. Today I feel that it is a great blessing to know French.

My artwork is as deeply embedded in me as my Cajun Catholic roots. It is a labor of love to gather leaves and plants for wrapping and dyeing eggs. This tradition has been handed down for at least five generations for over 150 years. My mother introduced the commercial Paas Egg Dye Kit when I was nine years old. It was horrible! At that point I became adamant to stick with our traditional method of dyeing eggs.

Wrapping eggs with plant materials and fabric creates unique colors and patterns. Each egg is a surprise and each is unique. When I was a child, we used brown country eggs to dye, but white store-bought eggs make a nicer show. The shell is very porous and absorbs color easily. This is a one-of-a-kind art form that is easy to create and that I love to teach.

I appreciate art more with both the passing of time and the loss of artists I have known. Teaching art gives me the opportunity to share and work with students. Seeing students expand on my ideas with their creativity is very satisfying. I would like students to realize that my artwork is a direct expression of my heritage, reflecting the authenticity of ancestral techniques and the hard work and gifts of generations.

Meet Mitch Reed

When I was just starting grade school, my parents would take me to stay with Old Maman in Mamou, Louisiana. She would sit in her rocking chair and listen to what she called “French Music” on the radio. At the time I did not much like the way that music sounded, but after Old Maman passed, I would hear those familiar tunes, what we now call “Cajun Music,” and miss her as I was reminded of my early experiences.

Around that same time I started listening to the Irish folk group Planxty and the English singer Kate Bush, whose styles were very different from what my friends were listening to on the radio and from the Cajun music of Mamou. I began playing guitar when I was 12 and mandolin when I was 13. At 14 I was brought back to my family’s musical roots when my father started learning to play the accordion.

Daddy offered to get me a fiddle to accompany him. Since the fiddle and mandolin are tuned the same, it was easy for me to transition to this traditional Cajun instrument. The music connected me and my dad because it was something we could share. He would bring home records and then, as I learned more tunes with him, we would go and buy them together. We started to get into local folk music, and the gap between Irish and Cajun music began to narrow in my musical mind.

The other reason I started to play traditional Cajun music was my realization that I had a part to play in a unique culture. Paul Simon’s “Graceland” had just come out, and it struck a chord in me that a world-renowned artist could draw on influences not only from African musicians but also from my own people. It was then that I realized the significance of my family’s culture.

I have found that my role in my culture is that of a tune collector, although I do enjoy writing songs inspired by Cajun and Irish sounds. My two greatest influences in this process have been Michael Doucet and Dennis McGee. While Michael has spent his life digging up old tunes, Dennis spent his time passing them along. Together their sounds reconnected me to old Irish reels with similarities to the European music I already enjoyed listening to.

In the past, Cajun music struggled, as our people were discouraged from taking pride in their language and culture, but in my lifetime “The Cajun Renaissance” has gained momentum. Today our music is heard from local dancehalls to Carnegie Hall, played by my musical contemporaries and influences alike. As a teacher I am honored to pass on this tradition that has been handed down to me.

Meet Corey Arceneaux

My interest in zydeco came early because I grew up in a family centered on music, which I just could not miss since it was all around me. At first I aspired to play the guitar, but I never had the patience to learn. Then I saw my uncle Fernest Arceneaux performing at a family reunion, and I knew that I wanted to play the accordion. The Christmas after my tenth birthday I received an accordion, and the rest is history. Today I am a self-taught accordion musician who has been playing over twenty-five years.

So far I have released five recordings. In 2008, my CD “20/20: 20 Years, 20 Tracks” confirmed that I am not a zydeco newcomer. I am a member of one of zydeco’s first families, led by my late uncle Fernest, who performed and recorded worldwide as the New Prince of the Accordion for more than fifty years.

Just months after reminding zydeco dancers and fans of my rich family history with that CD, I unveiled “Nu Band Nu Sound,” which shows that I am a modern as well as traditional musician, adept at the R&B and rap-flavored zydeco of the new millennium. The “Nu Band Nu Sound” project is dearest to my heart because it features my sons and throws in some blues, French, and gospel roots that are still in my blood as well as the newer sounds.

These days I am a single parent of three boys, who reside with me on our family farm. On gigs now my sons perform with me, when the schedule does not interfere with school. Even though they are influenced by music of their decade, I teach them their history. My kids appreciate the music of our rich Creole ancestry.

On weekends I host a radio program, DJ Hot Show, on KFXZ 105.9 FM. My show airs ten hours between Saturday and Sunday with five hours dedicated to current and traditional zydeco music. Tune in sometime!

When doing workshops and events dealing with Creole and zydeco history, I usually bring along my uncle, Rodney Bernard. He is a French-speaking Creole who has been playing music over fifty years. Rodney has played scrub board and sung vocals with greats such as Rockin’ Dopsie, Marcel Dugas, Lynn August, and Fernest Arceneaux. He currently performs with his son-in-law, Horace Trahan. We both still live the Creole lifestyle in some fashion in our everyday lives, not just with music. For example, both Rodney and I raise cattle and horses, and family life is very important to us.

Zydeco has re-emerged in current times and has kept the younger generation listening. It is an honor for me to be able to teach our rich history to all the newcomers. Today our music is heard from the dance hall to the White House. I even had the honor of performing for Vice President Al Gore when he was in office. I am proud to be a Creole and honored to pass down this tradition.