

Starting a Conversation about Cultural Stewardship: An Activity Guide for Exploring Your Community

Culture creates and strengthens communities. Understanding the complexity and power of culture gives communities agency. The concept of Cultural Stewardship teaches us to understand our personal cultural identity as well as that of our families, schools, neighborhoods, and communities.

When we identify and protect our important ways of life and cherished places that make up our region's cultural ecosystem, we strengthen vital relationships to each other and the wider world.

Use the self-documentation work created by these cultural stewards as inspiration to begin exploring your own community's important traditions and identity.

Supplies Media to screen documentaries and/or read articles, optional worksheets, pencil, paper, recording device for bonus activities

Directions

1. Begin with a discussion about what “culture” means to students. What does “stewardship” mean? What might it mean to be a steward of culture? Who do students know who might be cultural stewards in their own family, neighborhood, school, or community? What do these people do as cultural stewards?
2. Use one or more of the media projects below to learn how some individuals are acting as stewards of their community's culture. Better yet, use documentation media from and about your local community!

Mini-Docs

ECCA documentary <https://sflxtraditions.org/cultural-mapping/elmira-center-for-cultural-advancement-jesse-knoxs-story>

IAFL documentary <https://sflxtraditions.org/cultural-mapping/islamic-association-of-the-finger-lakes-a-brief-history>

Short Articles

Thomas Indian School: Narrative Sovereignty and Healing (link to JFE 9:94-102)

<https://jfepublications.org/article/close-to-home/>

Close to Home: Thomas Indian School (link to JFE 9:103-109)

<https://jfepublications.org/article/the-thomas-indian-school>

3. After exploring some of the documentation media, consider some of these questions:
 - a. What community is represented in the work?

- b. What parts of the community's culture did the documentarians highlight?
- c. Why do you think these cultural traditions or cultural histories are important to their communities?
- d. In these media projects, the documentarians are mostly members of the communities they are representing. Why might this be important for sharing the stories from their own communities? How might the work differ if the person presenting the culture was not from that community?

4. Now that you've seen how other communities are using documentation to be cultural stewards, how might you be a cultural steward in your local community? Are there important culture bearers in your community whose stories need to be told? Important community places that should be documented?

5. Use the resources below to become a steward of your own community's culture. As you document the important people and places of your community organize what you've learned by creating a web page, podcast, picture book, poster, or slide show and sharing it with local community groups or schools, as well as libraries, newspapers, radio or TV stations, museums, historical societies, friends, and family members.

Bonus Activities and Resources

- Start learning about your own family with this [Writing a Family Memoir Worksheet](https://jfepublications.org/article/writing-memoirs-prompted-by-family-photos)
- Take a deeper dive into Interviewing with this [Interviewing Virtual Unit](https://locallearningnetwork.org/resource/interviewing-virtual-unit)
- Created by The Rockwell Museum, use this guide to have a conversation about how art connects to your perspectives, experiences, and the communities in your life [*Art That Sparks Conversation on Cultural Stewardship*](#)

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