

**CONTEXT** Since piloting our [Culture, Community, and the Classroom \(CCC\)](#) series in 2018, we have engaged traditional artists from diverse communities and connected them with public school teachers and museum educators in learning residencies. CCC uses a three-phase series model, starting with a 12-hour professional development workshop that includes artists, culture bearers, and regional educators learning together. The second phase pairs artists and teachers working together in a classroom. The final phase brings everyone who participated together in a program showcase to reflect on what was learned and to strengthen peer networks and connections. This lesson plan was shared with us by a teacher who participated in the CCC program. It can be adapted for use with a local artist in another region. Or, [Contact Us](#) to learn how to invite the named artist in this lesson to your learning space.

**WHAT WE LOVE** Folk artists are often invited into a classroom to demonstrate their art form and sometimes have the opportunity to teach students artistic skills. Less often they are given an opportunity to speak with students about the value of the art form in their personal life and community context. This lesson plan, created for three short artist residencies over the course of a semester, provided the space for student inquiry that allowed them to connect with the artist on a personal level and learn more about their cultural traditions.

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**TITLE:** Cultural Inquiry Through Interviewing

**AUTHOR AND TEACHER:** Jennifer Nelson, School Director, Middle School Lead Teacher, Primrose Hill School, Rhinebeck, NY

**ARTIST AND COLLABORATOR:** Several folk artists over the semester

**SUBJECT AND GRADE LEVEL:** Middle School, Social Studies and English Language Arts

**HANDOUTS:** Interview question sheet, co-created in class; Teacher Residency Note-catcher

**LENGTH:** Two class periods of 40-60 minutes

**MATERIALS/RESOURCES:** Four pieces of poster-sized sheets of paper, markers, pens

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**OVERVIEW** This lesson follows the guest artist’s class presentation visit. Students and the guest artist will begin by answering questions about their lives. Then, students will have the opportunity to ask the guest followup questions in an interview about their life experiences, culture, art form, and background.

### **Teacher Preparation Tips**

1. Before the guest artist visits your class, share the artist’s personal statement and portrait with the class. You may ask them to “read” the portrait like a text. Then ask them to inventory their assumptions about the artist. With the class, brainstorm a list of questions they might have for the artist. After the artist’s demonstration during the first visit, revisit the list of questions with students to see if they would like to add or remove any questions. Print out the list of interview questions, one for each student and one copy for the artist. These question sheets will be used during the artist’s interview.
2. Before the artist interview visit, choose four questions from the list that would apply equally to students’ lives as well as the artist. Write these questions in marker on four different poster-sized sheets of paper. Leave space under each question for students and the artist to write their answers. Pin or tape the question pages spaced around the room for a “gallery walk” experience.
3. Communicate the questions to the artist ahead of time to prepare them for the visit.

### **INSTRUCTIONAL PLAN**

Note - This lesson occurs after the initial artist visit and demonstration.

#### **1. Artist Interview Lesson Opening**

“When we learn something new from an expert--whether it is a form of painting or dance, or some other medium, curiosity allows us to be more informed about the world around us and the culture from which that person’s knowledge came. Learning through curiosity can help us understand the journey a person has taken, the importance of their craft to them as individuals and to their culture more broadly, and how to pursue that path if we are personally interested in it. Curiosity leads to learning through inquiry. When we inquire, or ask questions, about each other, we learn more about ourselves and others around us. We better understand similarities and differences. One skill we can use to inquire about another’s culture is interviewing. Through

interviewing, we give another person the opportunity to share deeply about their own lives and experiences.”

Share with students the list of interview questions they brainstormed. Have them read through this list and circle the three or four questions that they are most curious about learning the answers from the artist. “ If you come up with other questions you are curious about, write them at the bottom of the page. Take a moment to do that now.”

## **2. Opening Activity - Self Discovery**

Note: Before this activity, the teacher should select four questions from the brainstormed question sheet that could apply to students as well as the artist. Write these questions on four different poster-sized sheets of paper and place them around the room.

“Today, we will have the chance to interview (artist name here) using the questions you just reviewed. Before we begin asking them questions, we will warm up by answering questions all together to get to know each other better. Around the room you will see four questions posted (teacher walks to each question and reads it aloud to preview with class). Everyone take out a pen or pencil and choose a question to answer first by writing your name and your answer on the page, leaving room for other people to answer, too, and then move to the next question, until you have answered each question. (artist Name) and I will also answer the questions.”

After each person has answered each question, assign four students to stand up and read the answers aloud to the class. As a class, notice and name similarities, differences, interesting responses. Leave some space for casual communication among the group.

## **3. Artist Interview**

Arrange your class desks in a circle, if possible, or some other arrangement that facilitates closeness and the ability to see all participants. Have the artist sit in a conspicuous spot where all students can see and hear them. Instruct students to each choose the question from the question sheet they would most like to ask the artist, stating that if someone else asks their question to move to the next question they have circled on the list and ask that. Choose one student to begin by asking the first question. Give the artist time to answer thoughtfully and in detail to their comfort level. Facilitate the next question when the artist seems to have completed their first answer, moving around the circle until each student has had the chance to ask a question. If follow-up questions arise after one interview question is asked, facilitate them if there is time since the goal is to have all students ask a question. You might want to take notes during the interview to record how students are engaging with the artist. You may use the Teacher Residency Note-catcher, for example.

## **4. Closing**

Offer the artist the chance to share anything else about themselves that they would like the group to know. Ask your class what they learned or what they found most interesting about the visit. Ask the class how they could use interviewing in the future or another person they would like to interview in their lives. Thank the artist for coming and have the class thank them as well.

### **5. Follow-up**

Brainstorm with your class the most interesting things they learned with the artist and jot them on the board. Have your class write thank-you cards to the artist using the ideas they brainstormed from the visit. Have them illustrate their cards with a relevant drawing related to the cultural experience of the visit, if possible. Review the responses to assess what students engaged with and learned.



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