



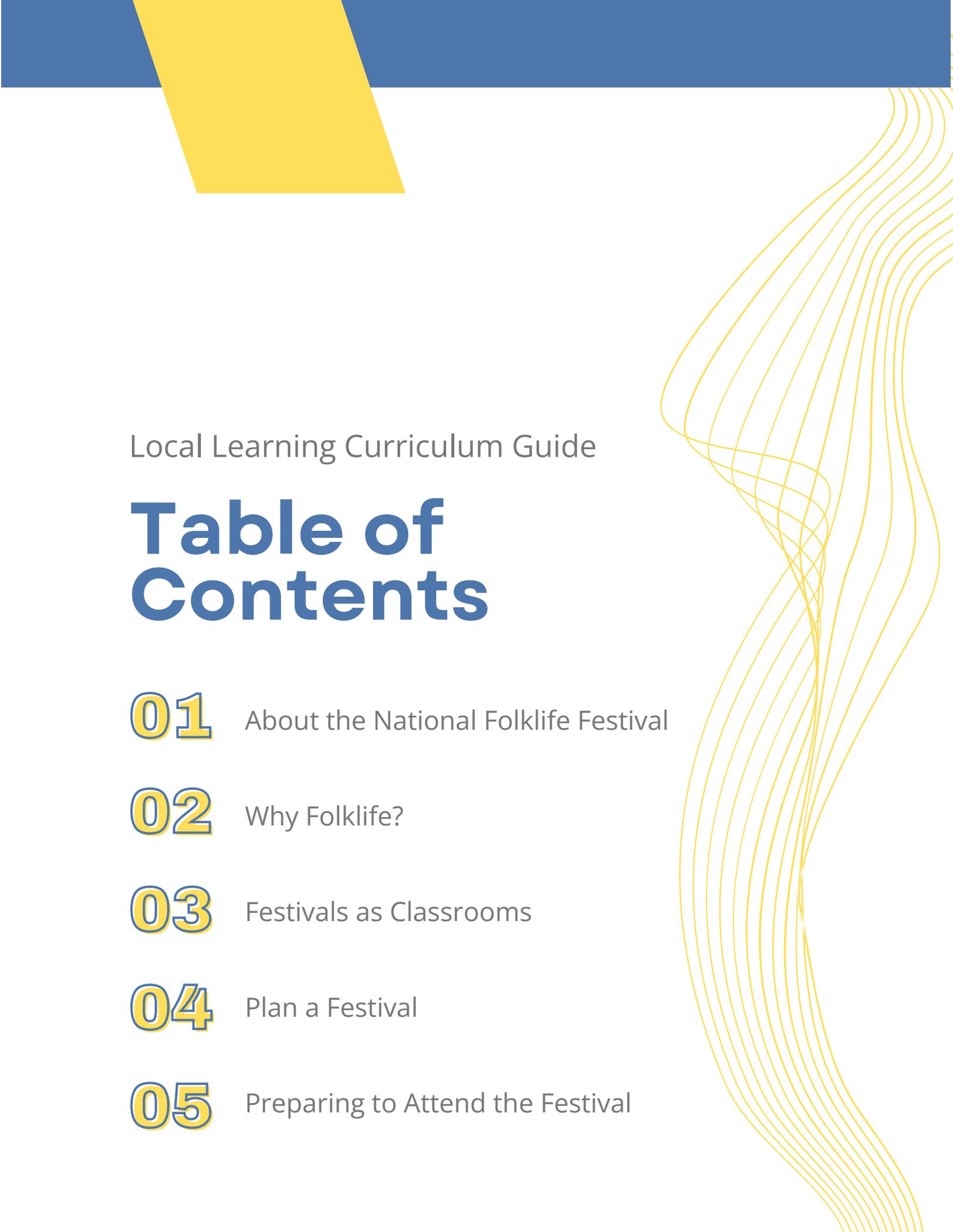
The 82nd National Folk Festival

**IT'S FESTIVAL
TIME!**

Coming to Jackson, Mississippi

November 7-9, 2025





Local Learning Curriculum Guide

Table of Contents

- 01** About the National Folklife Festival
- 02** Why Folklife?
- 03** Festivals as Classrooms
- 04** Plan a Festival
- 05** Preparing to Attend the Festival

01

About the Festival

Founded in 1934 in St. Louis, the National Folk Festival is the nation's oldest celebration of traditional arts. Some artists who performed at the first festivals are now legendary, and the recordings and other documentation made possible by the National are precious. Championed by First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt, it was the first event of national stature to present artistic traditions of all Americans on equal footing. It was also the first to present to the public musical forms such as the blues, Cajun music, polka, Tex-Mex conjunto, Peking Opera, and many others. Over the festival's long history, it has evolved to meet the needs of the times, but its commitment to presenting the nation's finest traditional artists in an exciting, joyful event remains constant. Today, the National is an exuberant traveling festival, produced by the National Council for the Traditional Arts (NCTA) with communities around the country to embrace the many cultural expressions defining us as a people in the 21st century.

Changing locations on a three-year cycle, the National is a broad-based community partnership, bringing together organizations and community representatives from across the host city. Participation of local and regional cultural communities in the performance, folklife, and foodways components of the festival encourages deeper public understanding of traditions practiced close to home as well as around the U.S. Each festival city has its own unique local culture, outlook, and issues, with different strengths and different resources, a new universe of personalities and politics, and a new physical site. Jackson will serve as host 2025-2027.

This large-scale, FREE, three-day event features hundreds of the nation's finest traditional performers and craftspeople, many stages of continuous music and dance, craft exhibits and demonstrations highlighting Mississippi folklife, a festival marketplace, family activities, parades, and delicious diverse and regional foods.

02 Why Folklife?

Folklife—We All Have It! The National Folk Festival is an exciting, free opportunity to discover amazing music, dance, stories, foods, and crafts from across the nation and Mississippi. Traditional arts are learned and taught informally, and we all practice them in our daily lives. Folk arts are interdisciplinary and easily integrated into any subject area in school settings. Counter to stereotypes of folklife as quaint and in the past, think of folklife as dynamic, contemporary, and future facing.

This guide will help ground and prepare visitors for this big, diverse festival and to expect vibrant, contemporary traditional art forms. We developed scaffolding for teachers to share with students and their families through an arts-integrated lens. Because folklife is interdisciplinary, it fits into any subject area and any grade level. And, because all of us and our communities have folklife, we can enjoy seeing how others share their folklife through performances and demonstrations. Something may appear exotic, but we can ask, where is something like this in my life? Something may be familiar, and we can deepen our knowledge of its context.

Everyone and every community has folk traditions, so studying folklife provides an accessible subject, in which students can be the experts. Students acquire new perspectives about themselves, their culture, and the culture of others. Seeing the continuation of folklife in their communities, students can connect the past with the present and be cultural stewards. Students are also using and creating primary resources. They practice and embed critical-thinking and inquiry skills as they encounter and reflect on traditional art forms of their own communities and of the wider world. Use the Finding Folklife in Daily Life worksheet to uncover your living traditions and expand your ideas about folklife.

Finding Folklife in Daily Life

You might not call your answers folklife, but these examples all point to how arts and culture show up in our lives in unique and special ways!

What is your favorite holiday?

How do you cure hiccups?

Who taught you how to ride a bike?

What is something you know how to make?

Share a knock-knock joke.

How do you choose who's "it" when playing a game?

On Thanksgiving I love to eat....

How do you celebrate your birthday?

What is a saying in your family or among friends?

Name a favorite song or musician.

What do you say when someone sneezes?

What dances do you know?

What sports do you enjoy?

What do you collect?

What is your school's mascot?

Do you have any beliefs or sayings about the weather?

What do you wear when you dress up?

Festivals as Classrooms

Each community is culturally unique and worth celebrating. Festivals are a way of honoring and showcasing local traditions, from farm goods to the arts. Mississippi has many festivals year around: the Delta Blues and Heritage Festival, Cruise Control on the Coast, the Mississippi Book Festival, the Catfish Festival, and many more. Attending and studying the National Folk Festival will enrich students in every subject level.

English Language Arts

In addition to hearing storytellers and musicians' lyrics through close listening, students can respond to performances and artists by writing, sketching, and photographs to record their reflections. Their notes can be used to inspire short essays, poetry, lyrics, and media clips.

Science

Studying foodways has a scientific point of view as well as artistic and historic so students can choose a food to research how it is grown, produced, packaged, cooked, and served. Several craftspeople will have skills that involve understanding the environment, physics, and chemistry. Students can interview and document these artisans.

Social Studies

Students will encounter artists from many different cultural groups. In addition to asking students to observe artists carefully by writing, sketching, and photographs, ask them to write or report on where something like this occurs in their lives. They may not dance like a performer, for example, but they have dance traditions. Looking for similarities as well as differences builds connections among people.

Math

All art forms and artists need math to count, measure, plan, and create. Festival organizers must compute how to use space and build performance areas. Students can interview craftspeople to learn how they use math and can create word problems related to music, dance, and foodways.

Physical Education

Ask students to share skills and games they have learned outside class: hopscotch, skateboarding, tag, jump rope, biking, water games. These are examples of students' folklife and represent the informal learning from family, friends, neighbors, and cultural groups that festival artists also learned from.

Dance

Many of the festival performers are dancers so students can study specific dances and replicate some of the moves they observe. Stages will also feature spaces so the audience can dance. Students can hit the dance floor and share their moves back in class.

Media Arts

Folklorists identify traditional artists through fieldwork—interviewing, sketching, photography, and recording people and preparing those who want to perform publicly. Students can use fieldwork tools to document parts of the festival and develop podcasts, short videos, webpages, and other media to tell a story about their festival experience.

Music

Incredibly diverse music genres present opportunities to experience music new to students and to pay closer attention to familiar genres. Teachers might ask students to focus on one genre to document, learn a song, interview a musician, or write a musical response to a performance or the festival.

Visual Art

The festival is a visual as well as aural spectacle, so students will find many aspects to sketch, paint, and photograph for a class exhibition. Ask students to interview one of the craftspeople who will have booths where they are demonstrating to research how the artist learned and is teaching their art form. How does informal learning inform formal learning?

Drama

Again, the festival is a spectacle that students can read like a theatrical production. They can look for storytellers and craftspeople demonstrating their skills to document their dramatic skills. They can re-enact or create a tableau of a demonstration or performance, write a script for a skit inspired by the festival, storyboard and create a short video telling the story of some aspect of the festival.

Festivals and Learning

What We Can Learn from Festivals:

- Traditions that communities find important
- New and different as well as familiar art forms and cultural expressions
- How organizers set up and manage spaces and events
- How audiences behave and interact
- How to “read” or decode a festival through inquiry and reflection
- How traditional culture is embedded in daily life
- Inspiration for stewardship of local arts, traditions, and ways of living
- Connection to things we know and love
- Connection to other people and cultural groups
- Engagement of all five senses—vision, hearing, touch, smell, taste

Does your community have a festival? Is there something special about your region that you believe should be celebrated with a festival? Even if there is already a festival, there’s room for more celebrations! Use the [Plan a Festival worksheet](#) to plan a local festival of your choice.

04 Plan a Festival

What is special to you about your community? Are there musicians, dancers, cooks, craftspeople, and artists who make your local place exceptional? Are there landmarks or natural elements like rivers or forests that are unique? Brainstorm a list of things to celebrate, then choose one for which to plan a festival.

What will you call the festival?

When should it occur?

Where will it be held?

Who will organize and host it?

Where could funding come from?

Who should attend?

Is it free? If not, how much is admission?

What artists, craftspeople, and other cultural experts will perform and demonstrate?

Which foods and drinks will be featured?

What activities will take place?

How can you involve young people?

How will you publicize the festival?

How will you know it was successful?

05 Preparing to Attend the Festival

Many vibrant forms of music, dance, crafts, and foodways are planned for the National Folk Festival. They are all traditional genres learned from family, neighbors, and elders in cultural communities. Some will be new, others will be familiar, but you will learn even more about them during the festival. Preparing students for what they may see and hear will make the festival more accessible.



Music and Dance

Brainstorm types of music and dance that students know in a class discussion. Share some of the genres from the Music and Dance Research worksheet and ask what students know about them. Then have them choose some genres from the worksheet to investigate and then share their findings with classmates.



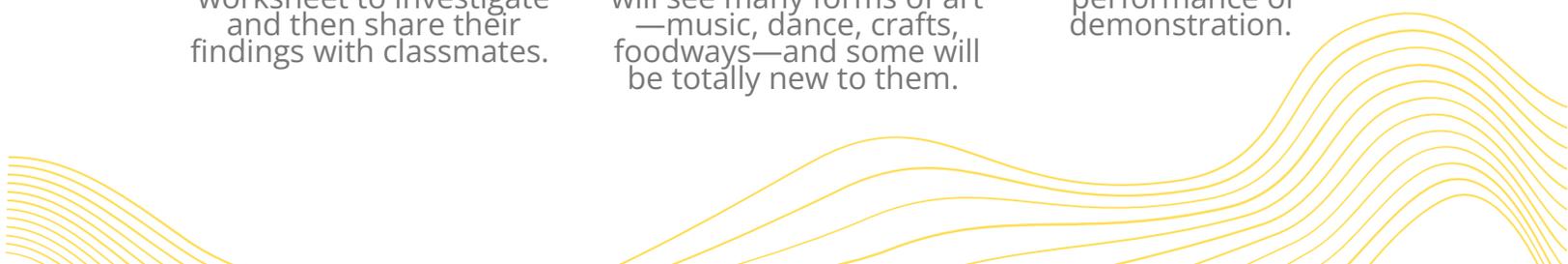
Festival Context

For students attending the festival, more context and scaffolding will help them understand and learn from the experience. First, ask them to inventory their assumptions about what the festival will be like. Revisit their assumptions after the festival to gauge learning. Explain that they will see many forms of art—music, dance, crafts, foodways—and some will be totally new to them.



Reading the Festival

Review the Reading the Festival worksheet with students to set a framework for their observing and documenting their experiences. Ask them to take notes, make sketches, record audio and video, and take photos of at least one performance or demonstration.



Music and Dance Research

Choose three of these music and dance genres to investigate. You can use the National Folk Festival website (<https://www.nationalfolkfestival.com/artists>) as well as other sources. Share your findings with classmates. Which performers do you most want to see?

Use these questions to scaffold your research:

What do I know?

What do I wonder?

What did I learn?

Selected Festival Music and Dance Genres

Delta Blues

Chicago Blues

Bluegrass

Hip-hop

Go-go

Gospel

Soul

Old-time

Choctaw Social Dance

JSU Sonic Boom

Irish

Punk

Sacred Steel

Zydeco

Music of the Civil Rights

Movement

Flamenco

Bomba and Plena

Fife and Drum

Western Swing

Korean Percussion & Dance

Klezmer

Mexican trio romántico

West African Balafon

Reading the Festival

Use this worksheet to help read or decode and research the National Folk Festival. (This also can be used with other family, community, state, national, and international celebrations, holidays, and special occasions.) Not every category applies to every event.

Name of Event

Season of the year and date

Location, relationship to the environment

Organizers, sponsors

Staff and volunteer roles

Audience

Beginning/Opening

Activities

Special food and drink

Sounds

Artifacts and publications

(pins, posters, etc.)

Types of music and dance

Types of arts and crafts

Special terms or language

Special clothing or regalia

Overall festival arrangement and decoration

Individual stage or booth

arrangement and decoration

Festival stories (funny, hard, good, or dangerous

experiences)

Ending/Finale

Cleanup

Curriculum Guide by Local Learning
<https://locallearningnetwork.org>

Standards



Festival Information

The 82nd National Folk Festival will take place in downtown Jackson, Mississippi, from State Street to Farish Street and from Pascagoula Street to Mississippi Street.

Information forthcoming on festival website.

