

Grade Level **K-12**

Class Periods **2**

Goals/Objectives/Student Outcomes:

Students will:

- Define in writing family folklore.
- Identify aspects of family folklife through discussion of traditions of their own names.
- Identify examples of family heirlooms, family stories, and family recipes as types of family folklife.
- Look at family bonding and continuity through folk traditions.
- Identify family activities which meet the criteria of folklore and folklife.

Materials:

1. Family photographs
2. Family recipes
3. "Discover Your Own Family Folklife" worksheet
4. "Family Information" worksheet

Background:

Folklife traditions are all of the traditions that are passed on from one generation to another and are usually learned by word-of-mouth. Students hear stories and songs from parents. Often are involved in activities such as catching a fish, making a quilt, or telling a joke. We inherit folklore from our family and friends. When students play a game like tag there is a good chance their great grandparents played the same game when they were the same age. Examples of family folklore is passing on heirlooms, passing on family recipes, learning to do family folk arts such as quilting or woodcarving, having family reunions, telling family stories.

Procedure:

A number of activities in this lesson plan deal with family traditions or require that parents or other relatives be asked for information, such as how a child was named. For this reason, it might be a good idea to send a letter home at the start of the unit explaining the folklore

lesson and asking for help and cooperation when children come home asking questions. Some families may not want to share some of the information asked for, and that's fine—cultural traditions are very personal and often private, especially those connected to religion or other belief systems.

Because some parents may be wary of providing information, and because there are so many non-traditional families, a teacher will need to be flexible in making assignments. Some students may not live with either parent, or many rarely see a parent who works late shift, or may not feel they can talk to a parent, and so will have a hard time with a few of the assignments (how they were named, collecting a family recipe). Alternatives might need to be suggested in these cases, such as having a student write about his or her nicknames rather than a given name, or getting information from another adult like a neighbor or foster parent. If there are no family celebrations, rituals or other traditions among their students; in this case, you might get them to talk about celebrations or traditions in some other group they belong to, such as a club, sports teams, or even the classroom.

1. In small groups, share information gathered from assignment on how they got their name. Questions and Discussions: How did you get your name (have them ask parents or other relatives). Who picked your name: When was it chosen? Is it a family name? How are others in your family named? Do you have any nicknames, and how did they originate? Who class you by nicknames? Children who have family problems may have a hard time with this assignment as given; suggest that they focus on nicknames as an alternative.

2. As a class, share examples of unusual naming traditions, different reasons for naming of two students with the same name, etc. Naming traditions can be based on religious or ethnic heritage (always naming the first son after the father or grandfather; saints' names in Catholic tradition), regional traditions, or individual family traditions (such as giving all the children the same initials). There are also traditional patterns of nicknames, for example when a parent and child have the same name. Relate the discussion back to the characteristics of folklore discussed in lesson one: naming traditions are shared in groups (family, ethnic, etc.), learned informally, passed down in groups, creative, varied, etc. This discussion can easily fill a class session, and lead to other family stories. See the book *A Celebration of American Family Folklore* (in bibliography) for examples and types of stories you can elicit from the kids. *Student Worlds, Student Words* also has a chapter on naming traditions and some activities that can be developed using them.

3. Collect a family recipe. Write it down, along with information on its origin (from another country or part of the U.S.), when it is prepared (special days, holidays), who makes it, and any special ingredients required. Alternatively, the recipe can come from a friend or neighbor, or from the student's own experience outside the family. As a full class, share some of the recipes students have brought in. Relate the discussion back to the characteristics of folklore. Some of the recipes may be posted on the folklore bulletin board, or printed in a class cookbook.

4. Family stories is another example of family folklife. Explain that all families have stories passed on through tradition. Describe some of the topics for family stories telling some of your family's stories to illustrate. Give students the opportunity to relate some of their family's stories. Some topics may include: how and when the family came to the U.S.; eccentricities of family members; stories about daily lore in the past; first meetings and courtships of parents; mischief and punishments non-major childhood accidents; famous or near famous family members; babies first sentences; etc.

Assessment of Outcomes:

Discussions where students share family traditions

Completion of worksheets

Examples of traditions or recipes posted on bulletin board

Extensions and Adaptations:

To learn more about family relationships, customs, hobbies, occupations, events, and stories, have students look through photographs at home. Have them answer the following questions about the photographs. Students may have to ask family members for information about the photos.

Who are the people in the photograph?

What are they doing?

What is the relationship of the people to each other?

What kinds of clothes do they have on?

When was the photo taken?

In small groups of 5 or 6 students, play Family Folklore Card Game (see worksheet that follows). Other questions may be added to this list. These questions also make good short free writing assignments; later they could be used as the basis for an autobiography. As a full class, have each group choose the most interesting story that came up during the game, and share it with the class. Ask the students to relate the examples back to the characteristics of folklore discussed in the first lesson. (Adapted from "4-H FOLKPATTERNS: Family Folklore" produced by the Cooperative Extension Service of Michigan State University) Prepare ahead of time 3-by-5 index cards or pieces of paper with one of the following questions on each. Place the cards face down in the middle of the table. The first player picks a card and chooses a second player to answer the question on the card. After answering the question, the second player picks a card to ask a third player. This continues until all the questions have been answered. The game has no right or wrong answers, and there are no winners or losers. After some of the answers are given, let others share their answers to the same question. By sharing, the players will see that there are many similarities in the ways families traditionally behave.

Resources:

Barbara Allen. "Folklore in Domestic Life." *Folklore in the Classroom*. Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Commission, 1985, pp. 39-44.

Cook Ann, et al. *What Was It Like When Your Grandparents Were Your Age?* New York: Pantheon.

Family Folklore Program of the Festival of American Folklife. *Family Folklore*. Washington DC, Smithsonian Institution, 1976. (Order directly from Smithsonian's Office of Folklife Programs, L'Enfant Plaza Suite 2600, Washington DC 20560.)

Steven Zeitlin, Amy Kotkin, and Holly Cutting Baker. *A Celebration of American Family Folklore*. New York: Pantheon Press, 1982.

Family Folklore Card Game Questions:

What music, songs or musical instruments does your family or other group enjoy?

How did your parents meet and get married?

Do you own anything that is not worth much money, yet is a prized possession you plan to keep? Where do you keep your personal treasures?

Think of a holiday, such as Christmas, Hanukkah, Easter or thanksgiving, and the foods your family prepares for it. What one food would your family be sure to include in the celebration?

Is there anything that has been passed down through the generations in your family? (this could be an object, a story, or a tradition: a hunting rifle, a piece of furniture, jewelry, a picture, a family Bible, etc.)

Did you have any beliefs or fears when you were very young that you no longer believe or fear?

Describe your favorite family photograph.

Can you recall the funniest mistake or worst accident that has happened in your kitchen?

How does your family celebrate Christmas/Hanukkah/birthdays?

Describe a favorite costume or dress-up outfit you have worn.

Have you ever bought or collected a souvenir?

What do you do to get well when you have a cold?

What special privileges does the birthday person in your family have on his or her birthday?

Is there a food your family prepares that others consider delicious?

Can you think of a practical joke or prank that you have pulled or that has been pulled on you?

Do you know the story of your name or nickname?

Have you been to a family reunion, wedding, or anniversary party? How did you celebrate?

Has your family saved any of your baby things such as toys, clothes, or identification bracelets?

Can you tell any of the stories you've heard your family tell again and again?

Does anyone in your family make faces or use gestures when they talk or at other times?

What is your favorite holiday and how does your family celebrate it?

Can you name all the places you have lived since you were born?

What do you remember about bedtime when you were very young?

Were there any rules in your home that you could not break?

How do or did your grandparents earn a living?

Has your family had any unusual good or bad luck?

Tell us about a "first" for you-first time to sleep over with a friend, first pet, first trip alone, first food you cooked, etc.

Is there an eccentric or strange character in your family? Who is it and why?

Do you sing songs or play games on long car or bus trips? What are they?

What do you do for good luck?

What things bring bad luck?

What games do you play in the snow?

How are you disciplined if you do something wrong at home?

Discover Your Own Family Folklife

Discovering You

The following activities are adapted from "Folklore in the Classroom," produced by the Indiana Historical Bureau, State of Indiana, and the Indiana Historical Society; and "4-H Folk Patterns," produced by 4-H Youth Programs, Cooperative Extension Service, and the Michigan State University Museum.



To discover your own family folklife, fill out the exercises on the next five pages. (Or you can photocopy them and then fill in your answers.) You can make a scrapbook by adding newspaper clippings, photographs, and recipes. Have fun!



1. Name, address, age:

2. Where I was born (city, county, state, country):



3. My nicknames:

(a) Now, among my friends:

(b) Now, among my family:

(c) When I was younger:

4. What I do for good luck:



5. The last joke I heard and/or told someone was:



6. How birthdays are celebrated at home:

7. The first song that I remember my grandmother, grandfather, mother, father, or other family member singing to me:



8. Who taught me to (cook, quilt, sew, fish, hunt, or make some craft) and how long it took:

9. Jump-rope rhymes or other games I remember:



10. How we celebrate the Fourth of July and/or Thanksgiving at home:

Illustrations by Shelly Citek

Family Information

What is your name? _____

What was your date of birth? _____ Your place of birth? _____

Family traditions: _____

Q. _____

A. _____

Q. _____

A. _____

Q. _____

A. _____

Collected by: _____