

Grade Level **5-12**

Class Periods **1-2**

Goals/Objectives/Student Outcomes:

Students will:

- Identify various folk groups they belong to and the folk traditions of those groups.
- Examine local community folklife and traditions.

Materials:

1. Index cards
2. Pencils and colored markers
3. Construction paper
4. Scissors and paste

Background:

Folk groups are composed of people who have something in common, something that binds them together more than superficial (such as being stuck in an airport together for a few hours, or living in the same apartment building). People who are related, who share the same religion, ethnicity or occupation, who live in a particular region of the country or the same community, or who belong to a common organization or meet together regularly, may develop traditions out of that shared experience or heritage.

Procedure:

In small groups, students will list the various folk groups to which they belong. Everyone is a member of numerous groups, and each has its own folklore and traditional culture. Examples include age groups (kids, teenagers, adults), ethnic groups, religious groups, regional groups (Midwest, East Des Moines, southern Iowa, Loess Hills area), occupational groups, the family (whether it is traditional, single-parent, adoptive, extended, etc.), and interest groups (sports teams, Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts, 4-H, band, clubs). As a class, ask several students to list the groups they belong to, and to name a folk tradition they share in each group (a children's joke, a game played only by girls, an ethnic food, a family birthday celebration, a local ghost story, a Girl Scout camp song parody).

Have students write about their favorite group tradition. It can be a

family birthday celebration, an object that has been handed down for generations, a joke that is pulled on new members of a club or team, the way a religious holiday is celebrated, a food from your ethnic group, a legend about your part of the state, etc.

Assessment of Outcomes:

Completion of worksheets

Class discussion about community or group

Extensions and Adaptations:

Several alternative activities are suitable for this lesson. A field trip can be made to local museum or historic site to examine artifacts related to traditional life in the local community. The trip may encompass local history, but should be focused on the traditions of average people (farmers, miners, housewives) and the things they made and did, and probably still do, as part of their everyday life. If possible, have a local storyteller or long-time resident accompany the class to talk about local traditions, legends, occupational practices. Ask students for stories they know about local characters, landmarks, haunted places, etc. If a cemetery is nearby, the class can go there to learn about traditional gravestones and how people personalize them (epitaphs, photographs, engravings of favorite things or pastimes, grave decoration). Graves of famous local people can be used to elicit stories and legends about them, too. Another possibility is a visit to the home or shop of a local traditional artist, such as a quilter, woodcarver, instrument maker or cook, or a trip to a farm, mine, or other location where occupational traditions can be seen. A variation of this idea is to have an artist, performer, dancer or local storyteller come into the classroom and work with students, either demonstrating their skills, teaching the kids and letting them try themselves, or being interviewed by the students. See the sections later in this guide on doing fieldwork to locate local artists, and on arranging for a classroom visit.

In a subject such as English, where field trips are not usually taken, this lesson can be devoted to the oral traditions of the local area. This would be a good time to talk about the difference between history and folklore; the history of a place has to be understood in order to understand its folk traditions, but folklore is very much alive-it is the past actively carried into the present. Students will doubtless know

local legends about lost treasures, interesting characters, haunted places, how certain spots were named, etc. or an assignment can be given to find such a local story and write it down. More than one version will often be told by different students; this can lead to an interesting exercise by looking at what they have in common and how they differ.

A final possible activity is to watch a videotape on some aspect of Iowa traditional life (see resource listing) and discuss the elements of folklore that are shown.

Resources:

"Iowa Folklife." *The Goldfinch* 10 (April 1989).