

The folklife information on the following pages has been adapted from "Nevada Folklife Curriculum" written by Andrea Graham and the "Palm Beach County Curriculum" written by Janis Rosenberg. This general information is followed by three lesson plans which are designed to fit into a social studies class, Iowa history in particular, but with very little modification they can be used for U.S. history classes and in English classes with assignments made into writing exercises. A general list of resources precedes the lesson plans. In addition to the lesson plans is more specific folklife information that has not yet be formalized as lesson plans. However, there are some suggested activities that could be tested in the classroom if the teacher has the time and inclination to do so. The general information and lesson plans are intended as a starting point for introducing teachers and students to the field of folklife. Each lesson has some suggestions for including folklife materials in a number of different subjects, from math to vocational education. Once you and your students have a basic understanding of what folklife is, you will see examples of it everywhere. In this way, without a lot of extra time or special lessons, folklore can become a recurring theme in all subject areas, just as it is woven throughout all facets of our lives.

Folklife is all around us, it is part of all of our lives; in fact it is so close that we usually don't see it as a subject worthy of study. Folk culture is everyday culture. But it is precisely because folklife is so integral to who we are that it is so revealing and can teach us so much about our family, our community and our nation. By extension, studying the folk traditions of another person can help us understand their view of the world, too, and help us see that people are not so different in their basic needs and feelings, just in how they express them.

Since everyone, even the youngest schoolchild, has and uses folklore, there is plenty of material for students to draw on. This makes a folklore unit a good starting place in the study of state or national history and culture, and even for the study of other countries. Folklife topics are great for writing assignments because they let students write about themselves and something they are familiar with. And traditional systems and styles of math, science, crafts, and music can be brought in to the classroom as a way of connecting students to the local culture. The following list suggests ways folklife can be used not only in Iowa history or social studies classes but also in other disciplines.

**English:** Have students use their own traditions and stories as subject matter for writing assignments. Asking kids to write about how they were named, or their favorite holiday traditions, will guarantee interest, and no one will say they can't think of what to write. Elizabeth Simons' book *Student Worlds, Student Words* (listed in the bibliography) is an excellent resource for using folklore in writing

classes. Another approach in English classes is to look for elements of folklore in the literature your students are reading. Writers such as Mark Twain incorporate things like jokes, superstitions, local legends, nicknames, and lots of children's lore in their stories. Harper Lee's *To Kill A Mockingbird* is full of examples, as are Laura Ingalls Wilder's "Little House on the Prairie" books.

**Math:** The geometry of quilt patterns, measuring lumber to build a shed, counting cows or sheep being branded or sold, and measuring ingredients for cooking are just a few examples of the ways math is applied in traditional lore. There are math riddles that kids test each other with; and we are always approximating costs, distances and other amounts with traditional formulas.

**Science:** Science classes can explore the scientific basis for such folk practices as dowsing or water witching, the use of plants for medicine, traditional agricultural skills and beliefs, natural materials used in crafts such as willow basketry or buckskin tanning, and the ecology or ranching, farming and hunting.

**Art:** Traditional artists can be used very effectively in the classroom. Demonstrations and hands-on practice in quilting, blacksmithing, Native American willow basketry, beadwork, embroidery, or woodcarving will all expose students to different esthetics and techniques. Students can also see that art and artists are all around them in their community.

**Music:** Traditional fiddlers, accordion players, piano players, singers and dancers can add a lot to a music classroom. As with artists, musicians are all around us and students can see how music can be a part of life even if one is not a professional performer. Traditions of ethnic groups can be presented and compared.

**Vocational Education:** Woodcarvers, musical instrument makers, builders, leatherworkers, farmers, agricultural related occupations, and members of just about any occupational group will have their own traditions and skills that can be shared with students. The skills they have learned on the job and from old-timers in their profession are often the richest and most important, and this is an important idea for students to understand. This should not diminish what is learned formally in school, but just makes us aware that there is more to a job than the routine skills.

**Home Economics:** Traditional cooks from various ethnic groups can share their recipes and skills in cooking classes, and traditional quilting, knitting or embroidery would be wonderful additions to a sewing class.

As you prepare your lessons, draw from your local folklife for examples, and always solicit examples from your students. You can

be your best resource for traditions that exist in Iowa. Once the initial concepts are introduced, you may be delighted with the contributions your students will want to make—from a boy's christening gown to a scary story told on Friday the 13th.

Even though the following folklife lessons were prepared with middle school students in mind, the lessons are adaptable to almost any grade level. Some of the simpler activities, such as making paper airplanes, talking about names, or collecting recipes would work for elementary students, although probably not for the youngest children. Special Education students can also do some of the activities. And there is enough information in the additional lessons, and in bibliographic references, to develop interesting activities for high school students as well. Also, folklore is a subject that older students can teach to younger students, if that happens in your school.

These lessons don't have to be kept in a classroom setting, either—they would make engaging activities for clubs, boy or girl scout troops, and summer camps. In or out of the class-room, a folklore unit is a good way to get a group working together, learning about each other, and ready to be open-minded about other people and places.

The key to developing an exciting unit on Iowa folklife is using real-life examples from students' own lives and their community. You can see how well they respond and learn when their own traditions are used to illustrate points in the lessons. Use that same sense of relevance to broaden their exposure by using local folks to extend their understanding beyond the classroom and family.

A good place to start is with the list of resource people and institutions in the resource section of this curriculum. Some fieldwork in your area may well have already been done, and the resource people can put you in touch with people who would be good sources of information on local traditions and who could visit your classroom. You may know local historical society members, craftspeople or performers. Ask them to help out. The families of your students are also a good source of information. Talk to them about the project and the kinds of people you are looking for; they may have leads in areas of your community you are unfamiliar with. Then broaden your net and approach local businesses, clubs, stores-anyplace that might have a connection to traditional artists.

The following list is to get you started; the kinds of places you will look will of course depend on the size and nature of your community.

Ethnic restaurants and groceries: ethnic traditions including food, music, dance, crafts; history of particular ethnic groups in your area.

- Ethnic museums, clubs and associations: same as above.
- Agricultural extension offices and Agriculture Council: history of farming, local crops and livestock, yearly cycle of planting and harvesting, ag products.
- Churches: especially those with ethnic congregations, such as black, Greek Orthodox, Hispanic Catholic, or Korean, Jewish synagogues, and Mormon congregations. Churches often sponsor cultural events such as festivals, bazaars, and saints' days that incorporate traditional foods, music and beliefs.
- Indian tribal offices and senior centers: many tribes have cultural programs already set up, and can help identify basketmakers, beadworkers, storytellers, musicians, dancers and traditional cooks. Smoke shops and other tribal stores usually sell Indian crafts and may direct you to local makers.
- Fabric and quilt stories: traditional quilters and needleworkers.
- Senior citizens centers.

- Hunting and fishing guide services: guides have an intimate knowledge of the local landscape and wildlife, often learned traditionally.

- Local festivals and celebrations: Indian powwows, ethnic festivals, saints day celebrations, rodeos, county fairs, food festivals, church homecomings, ethnic and religious holidays (Columbus Day, St. Patrick's Day, Chinese New Year, Cinco de Mayo, etc.). These occasions are usually rich in traditional performances, crafts, beliefs, and foods and can provide an opportunity to observe folk culture in action and to talk to outstanding artists and knowledgeable members of a folk community.

- Local museums, historical societies and libraries: don't forget these obvious sources of local history and culture. Often paid or volunteer staff members have an extensive knowledge of the community and can direct you to old-timers with traditional knowledge and skills.

The information you gather can be used in a number of ways. You will have specific examples to use in class lessons on various aspects of Iowa folklife. If you took pictures of people, events, or objects, they can be used to make lessons even more interesting. Tape recordings of music or stories are also good for classroom use.

If you have the time and a capable class, you can have the students themselves conduct tape recorded interviews with tradition bearers, take photographs, and write up articles for publication, either in a local newspaper or in a school publication. The well-known Foxfire cultural journalism program in Georgia does just this with great success. They have been putting out a magazine for 20 years, and have had a dozen bestselling books, all written by high school students.

To really help your students understand local traditions, you can invite a folk artist or performer into your class, or take a field trip to his or her home or shop. You might also want to plan a trip to a local museum with senior citizens, who can talk about the displays and help bring them alive for the students. While traveling, be sure to have students notice the local landscape, buildings, neighborhoods, cemeteries, rural landscapes, and other elements of the area that make it unique.

Bringing a folk artist or tradition bearer into school may be the only way some students can get to see and talk to a traditional artist face to face. Often folk arts are maintained and passed on within a close community and outsiders may never know they even exist. By making students and others aware of the diversity of skills and cultures in their own locale, they can learn to appreciate different traditions and to become more attuned to artistic elements in their own lives. The Department of Cultural Affairs-Iowa Arts Council has an artist-in-residency program that can help you bring an artist, musician, or performer into the classroom.

Arranging for a folk artist to visit your school should not be difficult or complicated, but there are a few things to think about to make the experience pleasant for everyone. The ideal visit will be with one class at a time. Most folk arts are intimate in scale (with the exception of some music and dance traditions) and are not suited to large workshops or assemblies. Students should be able to see what is going on, and should be encouraged to ask questions. They should be prepared ahead of time with background information on the artist and his or her art.

An artist from a performing tradition may also be appropriate for a school assembly, although classroom visits will probably be more beneficial to the students. A musician, singer, or farmer poet, for example, could perform for a larger group as long as he or she is at the school and is willing, so more kids could at least be exposed to their art.

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## Folklife Resources:

American Folklore Society. *Folklore Folklife*. Washington, D.C.: The American Folklore Society, 1984.

Peter Bartis. *Folklife and Fieldwork: A Layman's Introduction to Field Techniques*. Washington, D.C.: American Folklife Center, 1982.

Betty J. Belanus, ed. *Folklore in the Classroom*. Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Commission, 1985.

Jan Brunvand. *The Study of American Folklore: An Introduction*. New York: W. W. Norton, 1968.

Richard M. Dorson, ed. *Folklore and Folklife: An Introduction*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972.

Alan Dundes, ed. *The Study of Folklore*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1965.

Henry H. Glassie. *Pattern in The Material Folk Culture of the Eastern United States*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1969.

Kenneth Goldstein. *A Guide for Fieldworkers in Folklore*. Hatboro, PA: Folklore Associates, 1964.

Wayland D. Hand, et al. *Popular Beliefs and Superstitions: A Compendium of American Folklore from the Ohio Collection of Newbell Niles Puckett*. 3 vols. Boston: G. K. Hall and Company, 1981.

Edward Ives. *The Tape Recorded Interview*. Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1980.

Herbert Knapp and Mary Knapp. *One Potato Two Potato: The Secret Education of American Children*. New York: W. W. Norton, 1968.

Bruno Nettl. *Folk Music in the United States: An Introduction*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1976.

Phillipe Ariès. *Centuries of Childhood*. New York: Vintage, 1962.

Mary Ellen Goodman. *The Culture of Childhood: Child's Eye Views of Society and Culture*. New York: Teachers College Press., 1970.

Johan Huzinga. *Homo Ludens*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1955.

Peter Opie and Iona Opie. *Children's Games in Street and Playground*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1969.

Brian Sutton-Smith, et al. *The Folkstories of Children*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981.

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

Janet Dixon and Dora Flack. *Preserving Your Past: A Painless Guide to Writing Your Autobiography and Family History*. Garden City, NJ: Doubleday and Co., 1977.

Family Folklife Program of the Festival of American Folklife. *Family Folklore*. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1976. (order direct from Smithsonian's Office of Folklife Programs, L'Enfant Plaza Suite 2600, Washington, D.C. 20560).

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

Judith M. Barnet. "Culture's Storehouse: Building Humanities Skills through Folklore," *Intercom* 90/91.

Max Decker. "Local folklore: An Untapped Treasure," *School and Community* 59 (1972): 23.

Rachel Davis DuBois. *Build Together Americans: Adventures in Intercultural Education for the Secondary School*. New York: Hinds, Hayden, and Eldredge, Inc., 1945.

Philip D. Jordan. "Folklore for the School," *Social Education* 15 (1951): 59-63, 74 1951.

Edith W. King. *Teaching Ethnic Awareness: Methods and Materials for the Elementary School*. Santa Monica, CA: Goodyear Publishing Co., 1980.

National Education Association. *Americans All: Studies in Intercultural Education*. Washington, D.C.: NEA, 1942.

Michael G. Pasternak and James Yonts, Jr. *Helping Kids Learn Multicultural Concepts: A Handbook of Strategies*. Champaign, IL: Research Press, 1979.

Bernard Weiss, ed. *American Education and the European Immigrant, 1840-1940*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1982.

David Weitzman. *My Backyard History Book*. Boston: Little Brown, and Co., 1975

Pamela Wood. *You and Aunt Arie: A Guide to Cultural Journalism Based on Foxfire and Its Descendants*. Lakewood, CO: Great American Printing Co., 1975.

Sylvia Yee and Lisa Kokin. *Got Me a Story to Tell, A Multi-Ethnic Book: Five Children Tell About Their Lives*. San Francisco, CA: St. John's Educational Threshold Center, 1977.

Betty J. Belanus, et al. "Folklore in the Classroom." Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Bureau, 1985. Workbook developed for Indiana school teachers; includes definitions and essays on aspects of folklife. Lesson plans, activities, resources. Lots of useful suggestions and background. Available for \$5.00 from Indiana Historical Bureau, 140 North Senate, Indianapolis, IN 46204.

The Foxfire Fund, Inc., Rabun Gap, GA 30568. The Foxfire organization has a teacher outreach program, publishes a newsletter, and helps organize regional networks of teachers using the Foxfire approach to education. This is an excellent resource and a great way to get kids involved in their communities.

Marsha MacDowell, ed. *Folk Art in Education: A Resource Handbook*. East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University, 1987.

Elizabeth Radin Simons. *Student Worlds, Student Words: Teaching Writing Through Folklore*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann Educational Books, 1990.

Randi Sinlutzer and Beth Gildin Watrous, eds. *Drawing from the Well: Oral History and Folk Arts in the Classroom and Community*. Greenfield, MA: Pioneer Valley Folklore Society, 1990.

Eliot Wigginton, ed. *The Foxfire Book*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1972.

Eliot Wigginton. *Sometimes a Shining Moment the Foxfire Experience*. Garden City, NY: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1986.